

SOLDIERS OF CAESAR AND CHRIST: MARTIAL IMAGERY AND THE
ETHOS OF CHURCH AND STATE SERVICE IN LATE ANTIQUITY

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This dissertation examines Greek and Latin letters from the mid-fourth to the mid-fifth century to understand the use of martial imagery in non-military contexts in the later Roman Empire. In a reappraisal of narratives of late antique militarization, I argue that an ethos of quasi-military service reverberated through elite discourse and reinforced the presence of the state in society. Epistolographers imagined bureaucrats as soldiers, dutifully serving the emperor, and represented Christian clerics and ascetics as “soldiers of Christ,” obediently laboring with similar discipline. While this military idiom of state and church service reinforced hierarchical and binary relationships throughout society, churchmen and administrators adopted martial imagery for their own ends, whether to cultivate patronage networks, promote agendas, or criticize rivals.

Both bureaucratic and ecclesiastical models of service were contested. Traditionalists questioned the logic of soldierly administrative language, and entrepreneurial bishops, aware of these objections, exploited similarities between bureaucratic and Christian *militia* to contrast earthly and heavenly service. By taking up an extended form of militarism, writers moved away from traditional modes of social organization, emphasized more distant and abstract hierarchies, and strengthened universalizing rubrics of allegiance.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jonathan H. Warner received a B.A. in Classical Studies and History from The George Washington University in 2012 and an M.A. in Classical Languages from The University of Georgia in 2014.

UXORI CARISSIMAE

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Aside from exceptions listed below, for Latin authors and texts, all abbreviations follow the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (TLL). For Greek authors and texts, all abbreviations follow the *Diccionario Griego-Español* (DGE). For biblical citations, all abbreviations follow the Society for Biblical Literature's *Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. The following is a list of other abbreviations used in the footnotes:

<i>BHG</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca</i>
<i>BHL</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina</i>
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Latina</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>CSL</i>	<i>Comes Sacrarum Largitionum</i>
<i>CRP</i>	<i>Comes Rerum Privatarum</i>
<i>CSCO</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
<i>DRB</i>	<i>De rebus bellicis</i>
<i>EL</i>	Lewis, Charlton T. <i>An Elementary Latin Dictionary</i> . New York: American book company, 1918.
<i>ILS</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i>
<i>Inst. Trai.</i>	Kloft and Kerner, ed. <i>Institutio Traiani</i>
<i>Policr.</i>	John of Salisbury, <i>Policraticus</i>
<i>AL</i>	<i>Augustinus-Lexikon</i>
Lampe	Lampe, G. W. H. <i>A Patristic Greek Lexicon</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.
<i>LSJ</i>	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . Revised and augmented edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

<i>L&S</i>	Lewis, Charlton T., Charles Short, E. A. Andrews, and William Freund. <i>A Latin Dictionary: Lewis and Short</i> . Revised & Enlarged edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
<i>MAMA</i>	<i>Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua</i>
Margoliouth	Margoliouth, Jessie Payne Smith, ed. <i>A Compendious Syriac Dictionary: Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith, D. D.</i> Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1903.
<i>OLD</i>	Glare, P. G. W., ed. <i>Oxford Latin dictionary</i> . 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
<i>PCBE</i>	<i>Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
<i>PLRE</i>	<i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i>
<i>P. Mich.</i>	<i>Michigan Papyrus Collection</i>
<i>PSI</i>	<i>Papiri della Società Italiana</i>
<i>Rabb.</i>	<i>Life of Rabbula of Edessa</i>
<i>RE</i>	<i>Brill's New Pauly</i>
Sophocles	Sophocles, E. A. <i>Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods (from B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100)</i> . Memorial ed. New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1900.
Sokoloff	Sokoloff, Michael. <i>A Syriac Lexicon: A Translation from the Latin, Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum</i> . Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009.
<i>V. Alex.</i>	<i>Vita Alexandri Acoemeti</i>
<i>V. Marcel.</i>	<i>Vita Marcelli</i>
<i>TLL</i>	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i>

INTRODUCTION: MARTIAL IMAGERY IN LATE ANTIQUITY

“All who take the sword will perish by the sword.”¹ Historians can find much truth in this adage. It draws attention to the dangers of war and highlights the destructive and destabilizing militarism of past societies. In a passage characteristic of his universalizing theories of civilizational decline and fall, Toynbee painted a pessimistic portrait of militarism as “by far the commonest cause of the breakdowns of civilizations” by spawning conflicts among members of society:

In this suicidal process the entire social fabric becomes fuel to feed the devouring flame in the brazen bosom of Moloch. This single art of war makes progress at the expense of the diverse arts of peace; and, before this deadly ritual has completed the destruction of all its votaries, they may have become so expert in the use of their implements of slaughter that, if they happen for a moment to pause from their orgy of mutual destruction and to turn their weapons for a season against the breasts of strangers, they are apt to carry all before them.²

Whether one agrees with Toynbee’s old-fashioned categories, his colorful prose speaks to a tension inherent in grand political and military narratives: militarism directed outwards can be a productive endeavor, but militaristic institutions often stultify innovation, breed dissension, and doom a society to prolonged periods of *stasis*.

This two-faced view of militarism is evident in the field of Roman history. In many modern textbooks and historical surveys, the militarism of the republic and early empire drives state-formation, territorial acquisition, and cultural achievement, but the martial institutions and mentalities of the later empire become representative of a worn-

¹ Matt. 26:52 (ESV): “τότε λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ ἰησοῦς, ἀπόστρεψον τὴν μάχαιράν σου εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῆς, πάντες γὰρ οἱ λαβόντες μάχαιραν ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀπολοῦνται.”

² Toynbee 1947, 1:190. See also 4:465-504 for examples of “the suicidalness of militarism.”

out state under siege, a world that survived crisis and instability by adopting a bunker mentality. Despite scholarship showing the shortcomings of this view, the idea of a militarized later empire persists, and the peculiar features of the “fictively militarized” administration of the later empire demand explanation.³ This dissertation seeks to remedy this. By centering focus on the cultural militarism of the later empire, we can see how an imagined martial perspective proliferated in the later empire in both administrative and religious contexts. This quasi-militarized mentality marked off the fourth and fifth centuries from the earlier empire, and its distinct character was a mechanism that reinforced the presence of the state and created a model of service with consequences for the cultural cohesion of the later empire. In this way, I hope to tell a productive story of late Roman militarism, breaking free of structural narratives that evaluate the empire’s martial qualities in terms of territorial and political decline, and to focus instead on how the imagined militarism of the later empire offered a center of gravity for ideals of self-effacing, soldierly service.

The Late Roman Militarization-Thesis and Its Discontents

It was long a commonplace among historians that the empire grew more despotic and militaristic over the course of the third century, and that for the soldier-emperors of the third century this militarization was both a response to external pressures and a reality of internal power dynamics. Gibbon praised the “martial princes” from Illyricum for eliminating foreign and domestic enemies and for re-establishing military discipline

³ Quotation from Callu 1972-2009, 3:183 *ad* Symm. *Epist.* 7.96.1: “...l’administration (laquelle, on le sait, est fictivement militarisée, d’où les mots *militiae* et *castrensis*).”

along the frontiers of the empire.⁴ But this militarism came with a price. Whereas even today historians look to the bellicosity of the republic and early empire as a strength,⁵ the administrative changes of the later empire became burdensome to the state, unable to respond to external pressures and ill-equipped to maintain internal cohesion.⁶ For Mommsen, with his perennial focus on constitutional issues, the selection of emperors by soldiers in the third century was a decisive development, as was the rise of the *generalissimo* in the late fourth century.⁷ “This established the rule of the sword in Italy.”⁸ The division of “spheres of competence” within the bureaucracy followed geographic lines, an outgrowth of the “military sphere,” with the official being “perceived as a thoroughly military figure.”⁹ More often than not, this early scholarship personalized the cruel militarism of the period. For Seeck, the soldier-emperor Valentinian was a “passionate man of blood.”¹⁰ But for the most part, this earlier scholarship did not construct a wholesale theory of militarization for the later Roman Empire. It focused on the supremacy of the barracks, not the permeation of militarism throughout society.

⁴ Gibbon 1900, 1:283 (ch. 11): “It was saved by a series of great princes, who derived their obscure origin from the martial provinces of Illyricum. Within a period of about thirty years, Claudius, Aurelian, Probus, Diocletian, and his colleagues triumphed over the foreign and domestic enemies of the state, re-established, with the military discipline, the strength of the frontiers, and deserved the glorious title of Restorers of the Roman world.”

⁵ Harris 1979; Hoyos 2019, chs. 1, 5, and 6; Scheidel 2019, 51-88.

⁶ As Gibbon put it in ch. 13, “[Diocletian] multiplied the wheels of the machine of government, and rendered its operations less rapid but more secure...” (1900, 1:383). Gibbon’s portrait of government, however, hardly contains the language of militarization that would become prominent in the mid-twentieth century (ch. 17; 2:158-190).

⁷ Mommsen 1996, 319, 421. The modern edition is based on notes on Mommsen’s lectures in the 1880s taken by Sebastian and Paul Hensel.

⁸ Mommsen 1996, 280. This comment on Septimius Severus’ stationing of a legion near Rome elicited a marginal remark by Hensel (“hint! hint!”). Evidently, “he took this to be a veiled reference to militarism in contemporary Prussia” (486n674).

⁹ Mommsen 1996, 322, 324-5.

¹⁰ Seeck 1897, 5:41.

By the mid twentieth century, historians had begun to add more nuance and sweep to this story of late antique militarism. The interpretive framework united two long-running threads of historiography. The first was the idea of a state under siege from without. Still a fixture of the popular imagination and, with greater nuance, some historical narratives, barbarian invasions have long taken center stage in the story of the fall of the Roman Empire. These external pressures merged with a second array of factors, the specter of the third century crisis that brought the empire to the brink of internal collapse and served as midwife for a new era of autocratic militarism. The historian Ferdinand Lot described the so-called “caste-system” of the Later Roman Empire as an embattled and militarized structure: “The watch-word was ‘everyone at his post’ or Roman civilization would perish. It was a state of siege, for life or perpetuity.”¹¹ Rostovtzeff similarly assessed the imperial system that emerged from the third century as peculiarly autocratic and militaristic.¹² In his telling, the joining of the military with the proletariat spelled doom for the empire that survived the third century. Alföldi too connected the despotic terror of the fourth century with “the atmosphere of growing barbarism, when soldiers, ruling with iron fist sat on the throne” aided by imperial servants, “bloodhounds of that scoundrelly despotism.”¹³ When one encounters views such as these, one cannot help but see the echoes of modern totalitarianism. As Bowersock put it, “[Rostovtzeff’s] explanation of the end of the Roman Empire is so

¹¹ Lot 1931, 100.

¹² See Rostovtzeff 1957, 448 ff. for militarization and totalitarian control under the Severans and 512 ff. for the expanded and corrupt bureaucracy of the fourth and fifth centuries.

¹³ Alföldi 1952, 40-1 and 38. Cf. Walbank’s grim assessment of “the authoritarian state” of late antiquity eroding freedoms in reaction to exigent circumstances (1969 (revision of the 1944 edition), 70-80) and especially his description of the *fabricenses* as a “semi-militarized corps”: “Such State employees were thus considerably less independent than even the guildsmen, and Eusebius, without any sense of incongruity, could describe textile hands as ‘slaves of the treasury’” (80).

obviously unsatisfactory that one may well wonder why an acute scholar like Rostovtzeff took it seriously. Clearly he did so because of what he had seen; his own life had convinced him that what he described could actually happen.”¹⁴ That there were contemporary influences behind this articulation of the “militarization thesis” is important to realize; the whole idea of a wide-ranging militarism is inextricable from modern experience, and it can both hinder and inform our attempts at any study of late antique militarism.

This mid twentieth-century view of a totalitarian later empire was energetically expounded in many of Ramsey MacMullen’s works, especially his 1963 monograph, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire*, and his 1988 book, *Corruption and the Decline of the Roman Empire*. Although the military and civil administrations were technically separate, the civilian bureaucracy – greatly expanded from the early empire – struck a more military note: notaries festooned with badges and girt with *cingula* (soldier’s belts) busied themselves with paperwork, serving out their *militia* in just the same way, in theory, as soldiers fighting Rome’s enemies.¹⁵ MacMullen moved beyond a focus on praetorianism colored by oriental despotism and instead painted a chaotic portrait of a militarized society: “civilian turned soldier, soldier turned civilian in a ‘rapprochement’ to a middle ground of waste and confusion.”¹⁶ One key aspect of

¹⁴ Bowersock 1974, 18. A similar assessment may apply to the life and work of Andreas Alföldi, a participant in the First World War, a witness to the Second, and a post-war exile from Hungary. For the impact of the political events on his scholarship before 1947, see Szilágyi 2015, 29-34, and for his exile in Switzerland, see Ruprecht 2015, 37-62, with an impressive array of archival research.

¹⁵ MacMullen 1963. The military organization and titulature of these offices has long been apparent (e.g. Mommsen 1881, 233; Zwicky 1944, 88). See Teitler (1985, 44) for a discussion of militarization from the standpoint of *notarii*.

¹⁶ MacMullen 1963, 152. In his later book, he elaborated on this from the standpoint of the “privatization” of *militia* (1988, 148ff.).

MacMullen's argument was his contention that this militarism was pervasive enough to be reflected beyond the organs of government.¹⁷ The Theodosian Code records draconian punishments, to be meted out by imperial officers in the interest of "public discipline." Tribunes and *agentes in rebus* prowled the empire conducting espionage. Outside of the administration, a military mentality crept into ever more areas, with professionals regimented into jobs and ascetics styling themselves as warriors of Christ. Even architecture became more standardized according to a more martial style. To MacMullen, drawing on the work of modern historians and social scientists, the features of "the military mind" – "a minute obedience to authorized precedent, and a tendency to reduce men to fixed positions, arranged in a careful hierarchy" – had entered the bloodstream of the empire, which became militarized "to some extent."¹⁸

Around the time MacMullen was writing, however, cracks were starting to appear in the totalitarian and militarized picture of late antiquity. In an important article, A.H.M. Jones showed that the putative caste-like system of professional and government service reflected in the *Theodosian Code* was neither complete nor exceptional in the history of the empire.¹⁹ Later research has revealed that the transition to the bureaucratic regime of the fourth century was gradual and its military features largely cosmetic and not reflective of underlying militarization.²⁰ A martial appearance of government should not be mistaken for radical transformation, and the bureaucracy,

¹⁷ MacMullen 1963, 159-177.

¹⁸ MacMullen 1963, 176. For modern parallels of the "military mind," see Janowitz 1960, 51; Vagts 1967, 44; Huntington 1957, 59-79.

¹⁹ Jones, 1970.

²⁰ Carrié 2005; 2015, 184-186; Eich 2007, 512-5. On the cosmetic changes to the bureaucracy, see Speidel 2006. Fuhrmann 2012, 240 stresses the longstanding role of soldiers in administering and policing the earlier empire and acknowledges alternate interpretations of administrative militarization (cf. 244-6 for the later empire).

for all its striking features, remained quite small given the empire's size, even by premodern standards.²¹ From a structural point of view, many posts that had once been military became purely civilian, and there is even some debate about the relative size of the army between the third and fourth centuries.²² Moreover, some historians have highlighted aspects of society that appear to be less militaristic, notably the emergence of pacifistic discourses in Christian circles and the move of senators away from military posts.²³ Overall, a widespread militarism seems less straightforward than it was for an earlier generation of scholars, transfixed by the specter of a totalitarian and caste-based late antiquity, riven by corruption and state violence. The changes in the bureaucracy's configuration, appearance, and role in society were less dramatic, more cosmetic, and less extensive than once thought.

But old ideas die hard. As most scholars have moved away from a story of militarization, a version of the idea still appears in scholarship on such varied topics as imperial administration, frontiers, ceremony, and military equipment.²⁴ I suspect several

²¹ Jones 1964, 2:1057; Hopkins 1991, 139; Whitby, 2016.

²² On the civilianization of offices, see Carrié 2015, 184 and Eich 2007, 515-19. For the size of the army, see Agathias, *Hist.* 5. 13; John Lydus, *De mens.* 1. 27. For a selection of rough estimates, ranging, in rough order, from the rather high (600,000) to the lower (300,000), see the following: Jones 1964, 1:679-86; Heather 2018, 48; Elton 1996, 120 and 128; James 2011, 246; MacMullen 1980, 451-60; Harris 2016, 229-31. I leave this perhaps insoluble question aside for the purposes of this dissertation, which examines the cultural contours of militarism rather than levels of service and the configuration of military structures in society.

²³ See, e.g. Kuefler 2001; Halsall 2004, 22-25. These arguments notwithstanding, (Liebeschuetz 1993, 274: "A process of demilitarization affecting all classes can certainly be observed over the whole imperial period of Roman history") attempts to link institutional changes or the low overall popularity of military service itself (Liebeschuetz 1990, 11-25; Southern and Dixon 2014, 68) to more general changes in masculine identity are not well supported by the evidence or at least require some qualification (see below, ch. 1, *contra* Kuefler 2001, 39: "The refusal of Roman men to fight in the wars they believed had made their people great could not help but have serious consequences for men's identities."). For a recent book dealing with the prominence of the military life in the later Roman Empire, see Stewart 2016.

²⁴ The putative reforms under Gallienus institutionalized the empire's militarization (De Blois 1976, 87, but see also the discussion below). Stephen Williams cast the story of Tetrarchic reorganization as one of militarization growing out of the crisis of the third century and the design of Diocletian (1985, 102-14). Diocletian's militarizing reforms were likely made with an eye to greater control and stability (Drake

reasons for this. First, the lack of an agreed-upon definition of “militarization,” “militarism,” or a “militarized” society has stymied attempts to understand the phenomenon.²⁵ Second, the inertia of older scholarship means that many scholars, especially non-specialists, will still rely on obsolete paradigms when they approach late antiquity. Third, the way in which historical surveys and textbooks narrate the emergence of late-antique institutions often connects their character to the military crises of the third and early-fourth centuries, reproducing elements of the militarization thesis.²⁶ But the most important reason for the enduring story of late antique militarism may be the sources themselves, which so often paint such a vivid picture of a society under arms. Speidel has rightly challenged the idea that *militia inermis* is sufficient to prove late-antique militarization, but, as I argue in my third chapter, a range of sources attest a novel martial vocabulary and accoutrement associated with the bureaucracy of

2002, 119-123). Doyle argues that militarization and bureaucratic expansion combined to reduce the unity of the empire (1986, 100-3). Whittaker notes the important role of military men as landlords along the frontiers (1994, 257-269); McCormick (1990, 90) stresses the military flavor of imperial ceremonial; Sideris notes that “the growth of the importance of the eunuchs of the imperial palace was also promoted by the militarisation of the empire” (2018, 64); James notes the militarization of the bureaucracy, its martial appearance, and its connections to the new *fabricae* of the late empire (2011, 246-8).

²⁵ To take the example of the putative militarization of the frontiers (Whittaker 1994, 222-40 and 260-78), the idea is more localized and focused on actual frontier defense. The concept is, in turn, taken up by Wickham as a “cultural militarization of the frontier region” (2005, 505), followed by a more widespread “militarization of aristocratic lifestyles” (202) and “militarization of the official hierarchy” (200) to explain aristocratic changes in post-Roman Gaul. To Wickham, this “near-consistent pattern to the militarization of aristocratic identity and values” was attached to changes in material culture, particularly the abandonment of villas and cities (202, 476-7, 595), along with a shift away from literary culture (258; cf. Heather 2010b). To be sure, post-Roman militarization is rather different from the “militarization thesis” I have been considering, but that the literature often discusses it with neither a definition of terms nor a reflection on the modalities of putative militarization in the third and fourth centuries reveals a historiographic deficiency. For criticism of the idea of a starkly militarized post-Roman west see Wood 2018, 81-3.

²⁶ Lee tells a version of this story (2013, 3-4), and Mitchell characterizes the whole period of 284-395 as “a military monarchy” (2006, 52-5). Although he refrains from describing the bureaucracy as militarized, the account of the civil administration is preceded by the military (165-80). Mackay likewise pairs Constantine’s military reforms with administrative changes, presenting the bureaucracy as “increasingly assimilated to the soldiery in attire and status” (2004, 312-3). Boatwright et al. likewise stressed the “more military air” of the administrative changes instituted under Diocletian (2012, 449; cf. Le Glay et al. 2009, 488).

the period. These qualitative *indicia* continue to give energy to variations of the militarization thesis.

This historiographic picture illustrates why it is important to tell a new story of late antique militarism, one that can reappraise the distinctive martial qualities of the society without reverting to stale narratives of decay and disintegration. Too often, discussion of militarism hinges on the idea of excess without considering less dramatic yet still meaningful approaches.²⁷ As the historian Alfred Vagts opined in his book, *A History of Militarism*:

Militarism is more, and sometimes less, than the love of war. It covers every system of thinking and valuing and every complex of feelings which rank military institutions and ways above the ways of civilian life, carrying military mentality and modes of acting and decision into the civilian sphere.²⁸

It seems to me that historians have not adequately addressed the different facets of militarism. While a peculiarly militaristic policy or administrative structure seems difficult to impose meaningfully on the later Roman Empire, a less formal and subtler martial sensibility, what one political scientist described as “the attitudinal or ideological” dimension,²⁹ could be a useful frame for understanding the “fictively militarized” language of administrators and ascetics in the period. This appreciation of a cultural militarism in the later Roman Empire parallels a move made in some recent scholarship away from what one might call a formalist approach to militarism, namely

²⁷ On excess as characteristic of “Western, liberal” approaches to militarism, see Skjelsbaek 1979, 215-6.

²⁸ Vagts 1967, 17.

²⁹ Skjelsbaek 1979, with discussion at 220-3. I eschew his more colorful heading, “militarism of the mind,” as an overly psychological phrase. Cf. Andreski 1968, in which he distinguishes several different kinds of militarism, including, notably, his coinage “militolatry” – reverence for military virtues in society – as well as militarism characterized by “the inclination to imitate military demeanour and paraphernalia in the walks of life entirely unconnected with war” (184-186).

the study of the place of the army in the state and society, toward a more wide-ranging kind of militarism that can express itself in everything from children's games to normative models of masculinity.³⁰

Late Antiquity, Continuity, and Change

Alongside this growing skepticism of the militarization thesis, scholars have become more attentive to the cultural and religious dynamics of late antiquity. Although some of his early work took up the idea of militarization in passing,³¹ Peter Brown's focus on the vibrant culture and society of the later empire wrested scholarly attention away from the familiar stories of political collapse and towards narratives of transformation and continuity over the *longue durée*. There have been detractors from this expansive approach to late antiquity. At one level, the revisionist arguments of Bryan Ward-Perkins and Peter Heather allege that the political collapse of the Western Empire in the fifth century, brought on primarily through military events, was indeed a distinct moment of rupture that brought significant social and economic disruption.³² This is not the place to rehearse the arguments for and against such a view; the truth doubtlessly lies somewhere between absolute continuity and complete rupture. At a more methodological level, there is the objection of Andrea Giardina that to stretch late antiquity from Marcus Aurelius to Mohammed, or even further if one adopts Garth

³⁰ Fröhstück 2017; Banister 2018.

³¹ Brown 1978, 46-47.

³² Ward-Perkins, 2005; Heather 2010a.

Fowden's periodization, is to lose sight of the distinct social, economic, and political structures that defined the period.³³

I confess no dogmatic view on the question of periodization. Jean-Michel Carrié may have been right to liken the problem to that of cutting a “puff pastry”: the manifold layers of late antiquity require varying chronologies depending on the nature of the topic under study.³⁴ For this dissertation, which explores the juncture between administrative institutions, ideologies, and social relations, I have chosen to focus on the century stretching from roughly A.D. 350 to 450, as that period saw the precipitation of a mature imperial service visible in epistolary, legal, and literary sources, while contemporaneous experiments of asceticism with their own martial vocabulary expand opportunities to witness overlap between different ideologies and idioms of quasi-militarized service. One of the advantages of this periodization is that it does not presuppose, on the one hand, a narrative based on Tetrarchic or Constantinian reforms or, on the other hand, a teleological development toward post-Chalcedonian monasticism or Justinianic administration. This chronology also enables an in-depth look at a narrow window of time when there was a degree of both cultural and political unity between east and west.

This chronology is manifestly useful for evidentiary reasons, but it is not a purely utilitarian construct. As will emerge over the course of the study, I advocate for the emergence and consolidation of a soldierly ethos of service in the fourth and fifth

³³ For criticism of the “explosion of late antiquity,” see Giardina 1999 (translation, 2013). For an extremely expansive view, see Fowden 2008, 49-91.

³⁴ Carrié 2015, 182. See also Marcone 2008 who observes historians' emphasis on periodization in reaction to the “explosion” of late antiquity. Note especially his remarks relevant to this dissertation's focus on the administration: “it is not by chance that the name of Rostovtzeff is the most often cited, as if to underscore the necessity to bring the discussion back to social dynamics and to the great themes of economic, institutional, demographic, and even political history in order to study the late antique individual and his/her demons within this context” (17-8).

centuries. In this sense, the distinct features of imagined militarism that developed could be interpreted as one of the structures that Giardina argued should characterize a separate period of late antiquity. I do not mean to assert that the year 350 marks off a particularly significant moment of change; the soldierly ethos may have gradually emerged as a socially-accepted ideal over a long period of time, affected by administrative reforms and cultural and religious changes.

Yet in all the ways that the emergence of this imagined martial ethos marked off the society of the fourth century from the earlier empire, we should not see the end-point of my study, the mid-fifth century, as a point of absolute rupture, but rather as a rough starting point of several new paths. The distinctive societies that developed across the Mediterranean continued to tap into the same reservoir of martial imagery and mentalities as the inhabitants of the fourth- and fifth-century empire. In the east, it is easy to see continuity between the serried ranks of the *Notitia dignitatum* and the Byzantine bureaucrats of the sixth century. Likewise, in the west, one finds administrative structures and vocabularies that outlasted imperial authority, manifesting in different permutations depending on the political and social structures of various kingdoms. In this sense, as an instrument of reinforcing the presence of the state, an ethos of soldierly service persisted and remained an element of continuity in the administrative and ascetic spheres, even when the political situation had changed. That political unity had been broken between east and west mattered little to John Lydus, whose view of imperial service rested on the imagined martial traditions and ideals of

an orderly officialdom that stretched back to the regal period.³⁵ That Cassiodorus was serving an Ostrogothic king, not Roman emperors, had no bearing on his choice to describe his own career as *militia*, for the vocabulary and idiom of administration survived the dissolution of the West.³⁶ The story of soldierly service extends beyond the mid-fifth century, down many different regional and social pathways.

Epistolary Evidence and Other Sources

Letter collections constitute a particularly rich source of information for the ancient historian who seeks to understand the social fabric of the Roman Empire. Not only do letters contain many incidental details and telling remarks, but they some elements of their social and literary context can usually be retrieved. Individual missives often provide the identities of the correspondents, the place of composition and receipt, and datable information. Sometimes we even possess both sides of the same conversation. Accordingly, the historian has far greater information about the immediate audience and circumstances of letters than many other ancient sources.

Nevertheless, I approach letters not merely as correspondence to be pillaged for details – the “what” or historical inquiry – but rather as works of literature whose social conventions and formal qualities contribute to their historically understood meaning –

³⁵ To cite a few examples, Lydus consistently used the epithet *στρατεία* to describe his service (e.g. at *Mag.* 3.28), described the still current practice of swearing in bureaucrats in Latin as members of the *legio adiutrix* (3.3.1), and he mentions martial accoutrement of office, such as the baton (*πάβδος*) of the *princeps officii* of the Praetorian Prefecture (2.19.6) and the belt of the prefect (2.13).

³⁶ Although examples can be found throughout the *Variae* (e.g. 1.3.4, 1.10.1, 1.43.3), the preface perhaps exhibits this quasi-militarized view of public service: “But they instead wore me down by this kind of argument: ‘Everyone knows you to be the Praetorian Prefect, on whose office the public services always wait like footmen.’” (pr.6, Barnish, trans.: “Sed illi me potius tali disceptatione fatigabant: esse praefectum te praetorianae sedis omnes noverunt, cui dignitati occupationes publicae velut pedisequae semper assistant”). On the connections between Cassiodorus and the Eastern Empire, see Barnish 1992, xiv-xv.

the “how” of interpretation.³⁷ To borrow a term of literary theory, the “epistolarity” of ancient letters is inseparable from the martial imagery embedded in late antique correspondence.³⁸ I highlight three key aspects of epistolarity especially significant to this historical inquiry: the polyvalence of the literary form which at once produced a sense of vividness and disjuncture, the historically adjacent social acts involved in composition, delivery, receipt, and reply, and the embedding of letters in collections by their authors or by some other editorial hand.

One of the key insights from studies of epistolarity is that letters imagine multiple audiences and frames, at times stressing the spontaneity of composition, at others the distance and delay of delivery, and at still others the juncture between sender and recipient. These nuances of epistolarity have consequences for the historian seeking to use epistolary sources; awareness of these qualities attunes the reader to the rhetorical conventions of a literary genre. Ancient letters, for example, often contrast geographical and temporal separation with the vivid, imagined face-to-face communion enabled by the letter. Rather than extraneous rhetoric, such a conceit must be read as a socially-meaningful element of the “epistolary game.”³⁹ When Theodoret addressed his coreligionists as fellow soldiers of Christ, we must appreciate not only the import of the metaphor within the frame of the letter’s proximate context (*e.g.* date, author, recipient, contents), but also with an eye to the significance of martial imagery in forging a

³⁷ As put by Hatlie 1996, 247: “scholarship stays better informed when it takes account of the nature of the unified collection it is dealing with (where possible) and the peculiar generic properties of letters (where discernible). Not doing so can and does lead to incomplete or mistaken readings.”

³⁸ On epistolarity, see Altman 1982, esp. the summary at 186-7. I avoid an overly formalist approach, on which, see Stowers 1986, 17-26.

³⁹ For the expression “jeux de l’*amicitia* épistolaire,” see Rebillard 1998, 131 and *passim*. Bruggisser’s remark at the beginning of his study of Symmachus’ letters is also instructive: “La lettre de Symmaque n’est pas le support d’une information, mais l’accomplissement d’un rite social et culturel” (1993, 3)

generically-specific literary bond between distant partners. This community-building bond of the ancient letter and its emphasis on constructing a self-image (*ethopoeia*) to compensate for distance and asynchronicity, stands out as an important feature of the “complex social performances which followed specific conventions and expectations.”⁴⁰ Rather than bricks in a Rankeian edifice of a reconstructed past, individual letters amount to enigmatic relics whose historical significance cannot be divorced from the rules and subtleties of epistolary exchange.⁴¹

In addition to this extra context to be gleaned from the conceits of epistolarity, the social acts historically adjacent to the letter must be considered.⁴² These include the technologies and customs of letter composition, delivery, receipt, and reply. Here is not the place to survey the ample literature on these points, but it is sufficient to make a few general remarks about epistolary exchange in antiquity. We usually only possess one side of the conversation, but, like an eavesdropper of a telephone call, the historian can infer much about the overall context from incidental details and off-handed remarks. Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that, although the letter-writer may present himself as a disinterested and amicable member of a two-way conversation, epistolary exchange “was an ongoing and fluid negotiation between the correspondents.”⁴³

But in this historical drama there were more players than just writer and recipient, and more props than just pen and papyrus. These accessories to letter

⁴⁰ Fögen 2018, 71-2, quotation from 71.

⁴¹ See Ceccarelli et al. 2018, 17-18 for a list of “heuristic angles” for approaching ancient letter-writing, some of which apply here.

⁴² Conybeare 2000, 19-20, writes of letters as “historical events” of which only the written traces bear witness to the larger process of exchanging gifts, notes, and spoken words through messengers.

⁴³ Ebbeler 2012, 20. See also p. 23, where Ebbeler dubs letters a “a sophisticated social performance governed by implicit and explicit rules.”

exchange enrich our understanding of the martial imagery embedded in letter-exchange. Messengers could bear spoken messages and valuable or symbolic gifts. Such invisible interactions occasionally appear in our documents.⁴⁴ In one instance, Paulinus' gift of bread, a common symbol of religious communion, became likened to the soldier's rations, joining the imagined martial world with the *realia* of letter-exchange.⁴⁵ The emissaries entrusted with these gifts, messages, and missives had to be relied upon to deliver letters long distances across an empire without a modern postal system.

The closest analogy might be the *cursus publicus*, which imperial officials could use for travel and official correspondence and which bishops were authorized to use to attend councils convoked by the emperor.⁴⁶ Despite ostensible rules against personal use, there is ample evidence that warrants (*evectiones*) could be secured through bribes or favors. For example, Symmachus thanked Ausonius for procuring four warrants for travel, and Melania traveled from Palestine to Constantinople for a bribe of three *solidi*.⁴⁷ On top of this legally dubious appropriation of the *cursus*, the many *agentes in rebus*, soldiers, and other officials who traveled on business throughout the empire carried many a letter for their own private patrons. As a result the fastest and most reliable means of letter delivery would have in most cases been through the hands of a member of the imperial *militia*, whether the upper echelons of the bureaucracy overseeing the *cursus publicus*, the managers of the *cursus*' way-stations (*mansiones*),

⁴⁴ For a basic survey, see McGuire 1960.

⁴⁵ Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 7. See below, ch. 2, for discussion.

⁴⁶ Jones 1964, 2:830-1.

⁴⁷ Symm. *Epist.* 1.21: "Accepi evectiones quattuor inmane quantum commodas in excursus et recursus meorum." The bribe (*sportula* in the Latin, σπορτούλλα in the Greek) extracted by the imperial functionary (named Messala) at Syrian Tripoli was eventually returned in a miraculous episode (*V. Mel.* 52). For further discussion, see Casson 1974, 184-9.

intermediaries on official business, or *bastagarii*, members of the obscure *bastagae* reserved for the *sacrae largitiones* and *res privata*.⁴⁸ Such background connections to imperial administration can only be guessed at in most cases, and very many letters were delivered by purely private means, but many letters make light of the quasi-military bearers by creating an imagined military epistolary context.⁴⁹

But just as these adjacent social acts and literary contexts must be integral to any historical analysis, the editorial hand of a letter collection cannot be ignored. Almost all letters from antiquity come down as pieces of larger literary collections, *tesserae* constituting proverbial epistolary mosaics.⁵⁰ For any given author, only a small fraction of their missives survive, so the *corpus* we are examining is not so much representative of an author's epistolary practice as the public face intended for posterity. Painstaking textual criticism has revealed the strategies of self-representation in the arrangement of letters by Ambrose.⁵¹ Other authors, like Basil and Theodoret,⁵² probably were not preparing their letters for publication, inasmuch as the term has any meaning in an ancient context, and the collections that come down to us due to the proclivities and

⁴⁸ For the splitting of management of the *cursus publicus* between the *magister officiorum* and the praetorian prefects, see Kelly 1998, 170 with notes. For the intermittent role of imperial officials in managing the *mansiones* along the *cursus publicus* (which was itself funded by municipalities and manned by public slaves) see Jones 1964, 2:832, 1347n18. On the *bastagae*, see Kolb 1989, 254-7 and especially *CTh* 10.20.11 for their status within a *militia*.

⁴⁹ To cite three examples, Bas. *Epist.* 3 in which Basil compares the governor Candidianus' letter to a *skytale* (see ch. 1), Lib. *Epist.* 233 in which Libanius notes the "soldier" Ammianus carrying the letter is a philosophic man (see ch. 3), and Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 17 and 22 in which Paulinus castigates the letter carrier Marracinus for his soldierly aspect (see ch. 4).

⁵⁰ Most exceptions would be letters embedded in another narrative, such as those found in Eus. *HE*. On this tradition in classical literature, see the contributions in Hodkinson et al. 2013. For Eusebius' use of imperial antecedents, see DeVore 2014.

⁵¹ For an overview of the different interpretations with a compelling argument for Ambrose's publication of his own collection, see Nauroy 2016.

⁵² Radde-Gallwitz 2016, 70; Schor 2016, 272.

purposes of posthumous compilers. For many authors, like Symmachus and Synesius,⁵³ it is unclear how much of their epistolary collections were of their own design and how much was the plan of later editors. The upshot of all of this is that a letter's configuration in a collection bears implications for what the original author or editor intended to convey to an audience beyond the initial recipient.

Late-antique letter collections are valuable historical sources because they represent the diverse views of participants in the dialectic social acts which produced them. We possess thousands of letters written by men from different religious identities, status groups, occupations, and geographical areas and addressed to an even more varied group of men and even women. The multifaceted nature of this evidence allows a nuanced look at the different situations which called for martial imagery. By examining the common idioms, expressions, and imagery of missives, the scholar can sketch out the "imaginary universes" or "thought-worlds" of ancient writers.⁵⁴ In adopting this approach, I eschew interrogating writers' motives and thoughts, and instead look for patterns in epistolary strategies and representations.⁵⁵

⁵³ On the uncertainties of who organized the corpus, see Rivera 2016, 209–10. Garzya and Roques take the view that the collection is manifestly disorganized (2000, 2:xi), but some scholars argue for a more artful organization (Luchner 2005, Hose 2003). Hose's argument for the programmatic nature of the first four letters emphasizes the themes of law, duty, and propriety. One might consider martial prowess and virtues another motif, intertwined with the others.

It seems, based on the internal divisions of the first book of Symmachus' *Epistulae*, that he had edited that book along with a number of his *Orationes*, perhaps in 385 (Callu 1972-2009, 5:ix). The following eight books, however, were published after his death by Memmius, to judge from the subscription in an early MS, and the tenth, with the *Relationes*, may have been added even later in imitation of Pliny, but there is reason to believe that Symmachus himself was already preparing his correspondence for publication (Sogno 2006, 60-1).

⁵⁴ Berger and Luckmann 1966.

⁵⁵ Much as Ebbeler 2012, 9, "Rather than subject Augustine's personality to psychoanalysis, this book explicates features of his epistolary practice. Since it is not a traditional biography, it does not directly speculate about his motives...Instead, it scrutinizes the letters for evidence of his strategies of long-distance relationship management...My main focus is the elucidation of the complex literary dynamics of Augustine's epistolary relationships..."

I used a combination of vocabulary and prosopographical criteria to engage in the targeted reading of a corpus that could reflect the martial imagery used in elite epistolary discourse. Excepting conciliar letters, which I did not consider, I examined letters drawn from fourteen different letter collections.⁵⁶ First, I culled letters containing words from stems relating to military service and warfare (στρατ-/*milit*-, μαχ-/πολεμ-/*bell*-/*proeli*-), as well as terms relating to military equipment.⁵⁷ I also selected letters based on prosopographical details, namely the professional status of the writer and recipient. These involved letters written from and to soldiers, military officers, and civil officials. Professional status was determined according to the headings of letters, when presented in the MSS, and by the indexes of critical editions and the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, when such information was lacking or misleading.

I have, nevertheless, been attentive to the perils of selection bias, and have consistently endeavored not to overstate the representativity of my examples. When I have encountered a personage in a letter, I have not hesitated to incorporate other relevant epistolary material, even if it did not meet my selection criteria. And, while my argument hinges primarily on epistolary material, I have also employed other sources where supplementary material could buttress or support my main arguments: hagiography, oratory, religious and political tracts, historical texts, and law codes. I

⁵⁶ These are, in alphabetical order, the collections of Ambrose, Augustine, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzus, Isidore of Pelusium, Jerome, John Chrysostom, Julian, Libanius, Paulinus of Nola, Synesius of Cyrene, Symmachus, and Theodoret. I also made use of the probably authentic letter of Pelagius to Demetrias. Critical editions and translations are listed in the bibliography.

⁵⁷ I focused on the following: the soldier's belt (*cingulum*, balteus, ζώνη), the military cloak (*paludamentum*, *chlamys*, *armilaua*, χλαμύς), and common words for weapons (*arma*, *gladius*, *ensis*, *telum*, μάχαιρα, ὄπλον, ξίφος) and shields (*scutum*, *clipeus*, ἀσπίς). To make this selection, I used a combination of databases (*Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense*, *Patrologia Latina Database*, *Library of Latin Texts*) and concordances (Fatouros, Krischer, and Najock 1987, Lomanto 1983).

justify using this complementary evidence because my central claims about martial imagery are not confined to the epistolary world but speak to other modes of expression and social interaction, be they imperial pronouncements or rhetorical displays. But even as we yearn for unmediated historical data, we cannot take any of this evidence at face value any more than letters. Each of these types of evidence has its own shortcomings and caveats, and I have tried to express these where necessary in the flow of the argument.

A Note on Martial Imagery and Terminology

Rich threads of martial imagery run through late antique letters. This imagery includes technical vocabulary with military associations, similes likening bishops and bureaucrats to imagined warriors, and violent metaphors of rhetorical, administrative, and doctrinal disputes. Although the vagueness of the term “imagery” – meaning at different times such varied terms as metaphor, simile, mental picture, or symbol – has troubled some literary theorists,⁵⁸ to the historian, the breadth of the term may in fact be advantageous, for it enables the study of hazy textual worlds, populated by figurative soldiers and imagined conflicts.⁵⁹ It may be difficult to say exactly what martial imagery is, but, to adapt the famous dictum of Justice Stewart, one knows it when one sees it.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Hawthorn 2000, 169, referencing Furbank’s book on the subject (1970).

⁵⁹ For a definition of imagery that captures this breadth, see Murfin and Ray 2009, 238: “A term used to refer to...the use of figurative language, often to express abstract ideas in a vivid and innovative way. Imagery of this third type makes use of figures of speech such as simile, personification, and metonymy...Whether literal or figurative, however, imagery is generally intended to make whatever the author is describing concrete in the reader’s mind, to give it some tangible and real existence rather than a purely intellectual one.”

⁶⁰ *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 197 (Stewart, J., concurring): “I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it, and the motion picture involved in this case is not that.”

For the purposes of this study, I apply a broad definition: language that relates the civilian or spiritual to the military sphere.⁶¹

This relational aspect of martial imagery, its usefulness in imagining connections between the military and non-military, invites the linguistic idea of “semantic fields,” which themselves can be defined as networks of related words. Although examples of semantic fields are often narrow (*e.g.* colors),⁶² the concept is useful in understanding the connections between more abstract concepts and collections of words.⁶³ In this instance, one can think of “martial imagery” as establishing relationships between lexical fields in one socially-determined content domain, warfare, and others, such as ecclesiastical and administrative domains. As summarized Eva Kittay, metaphor can be understood as an apposition of one semantic field upon another, which can be heuristically productive in conveying meaning:

If we understand the content domain of a semantic field to be the conceptual domain articulated by the terms and relations of the semantic field, then semantic fields are reflections of our conceptual schemes specified in a linguistically determinate fashion. If this understanding is correct, then the reordering of the topic field is a reflection of changes which take place in our conceptual schematization of experiential reality by means of metaphorical transfers of meaning. To view metaphorical transfers of meaning as relational shifts, which can be specified as changes in the semantic relations governing semantic fields, allows us to see, in a fairly precise manner, the way in which metaphors have such conceptual import...The apposition of two semantic fields, in even the

⁶¹ “Martial imagery” is exactly the moniker used by Smith 2011 in her study of warlike monastic language in the medieval period, and she likewise views these “metaphors as more than mere words, but mediators between the ideal and the real, and in this sense constitutive of reality” (153n173).

⁶² For a discussion of semantic fields and how they can change diachronically, with reference to the example of colors, see Lyons 1977, 250-6 and 266-9 for general comments on the potential for overlapping fields. Kittay 1987, 214-257 gives a detailed survey of field theory.

⁶³ Lyons 1977, 259 “The truth of the matter seems to be that the determining principles of lexical structure apply equally to both abstract and concrete words.” Geckeler 1971, 162: “as far as its application is concerned, field-theory need not be restricted to particular sections of the vocabulary.”

most transient metaphor, makes us realize new connections and allows us to create new unities which will form, the basis for future thought.⁶⁴

That one can formalize metaphor in terms of semantic fields does not mean that multiple networks of relations cannot be simultaneously activated or that other nonsemantic variables cannot also influence interpretation. Metaphor can become even more complicated if only partially applied to a semantic field or if there is a “blended space” in which the aspects of both domains are combined into a unified whole.⁶⁵

Leaving aside these thorny issues,⁶⁶ I view the basic insight of these linguistic theories of metaphor to be that we can explore the relational character of figurative language. In this study, I examine the use of martial imagery, which brings to bear the structure of military language in other non-military domains, importing the logic and relationships of the former, the “vehicle” or “source” of the metaphor, into the latter, its “topic” or “target.”⁶⁷ When bishops described ascetics as “soldiers of Christ,” a whole host of relations within the military domain fell within the same conceptual field as “soldiers,” relations which were often made explicit and which affected the efficacy of the metaphor. Seen in this way, martial imagery was not merely a convenient bit of rhetoric that became taken for granted; rather, it was generative of meaning, grafting a military logic onto the civilian sphere, even blending the two together.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Kittay 1987, 288-9.

⁶⁵ For a brief description of which, see Verde 2016, 187-8, who applies the insights of cognitive linguistics to military metaphors for love in the *Song of Songs*.

⁶⁶ Stern adopts a more fluid and contextual approach in describing various metaphor according to schemes of exemplification, thematic networks, and inductive networks (2000, 156-176). For criticism of different semantic theories of metaphor, including Kittay’s, see 238-48.

⁶⁷ Although these formal analyses are confined to metaphor, the basic insight applies to my broader notion of imagery: simile, metaphor, allusive terminology, *etc.* I use theories of metaphor as a framework, not because all these literary devices necessarily work the same semantically.

⁶⁸ I will argue in the coming chapters that martial imagery was not taken for granted (*contra* Gero 1970, 288), but even if the metaphor of *militia* became to a degree “dead” through overuse, this need not imply

Within the military domain, I draw a distinction between two related semantic fields – that of the hero and that of the soldier.⁶⁹ “Heroic” martial imagery involved describing one’s self or one’s peers as valiant champions, whose prowess was worthy of esteem and description in classicizing and heroic terms. “Soldierly” martial imagery emphasized the virtues of the obedient and disciplined warrior, dutifully following orders while in the service. Often associated with the technical vocabulary of military service, this imagery focused more closely on the endurance, obedience, and self-denial that became especially characteristic of ascetics and imperial servants. These two semantic fields of martial imagery necessarily overlap and impinge upon one another, as they are external categories of interpretation which I am imposing upon the evidence. Nevertheless, the fields of hero and soldier are useful categories that make sense of the evidence, for they reflect differences in the emphases and linguistic repertoire of late antique discourses.

A few other terms deserve comment. First is my interchangeable use of “bureaucracy” and “administration.” The former term often carries a pejorative connotation, and its place in the modern imagination is closely associated with the vast bureaux of modern states with arbitrary rules, excessive paperwork, and convoluted administrative structures.⁷⁰ W.H. Auden captured this modern pessimism about bureaucracy in a stanza of “The Fall of Rome”:

Caesar's double-bed is warm

that it could not be revived, nor need it imply that the metaphor lost its punch. Kittay notes that “dead” metaphors often arise because no lexical equivalent exists outside of the borrowed field (1987, 298-9), which could suggest that the logic of military service was especially potent in conceiving of state service.

⁶⁹ In describing this basic tension between conceptions of the warrior in the empire, I draw on Carrié’s account of competing “theories of the soldier” in ancient discourse (1993, esp. 104-6).

⁷⁰ As one recent scholar put it, “Though it has more than four letters, ‘bureaucrat’ is a bad word” (Oberfield 2015, 1).

As an unimportant clerk
Writes *I DO NOT LIKE MY WORK*
On a pink official form.⁷¹

I have tried to avoid such anachronistic bureaucratic accoutrement, but I do not think that it is prejudicial to use the word bureaucracy to describe the administration of the later Roman Empire. To be sure, ancient Roman government lacked many common features of modern bureaux (*e.g.* civil service exams, distinct areas of competency, and strict criteria for advancement), and these deficiencies have caused at least one scholar to describe the state as a “protobureaucracy.”⁷² Yet these differences of quality do not make the word bureaucracy entirely useless. Many historians of the late Roman Empire have adopted the term, and while there are pejorative associations of the word, those expectations can be turned on their head depending political convenience. In light of all the options available – ranging from the rather ennobled epithet “civil service” to the conspiratorial idea of a “deep state” – bureaucracy, for all its problems, may best capture the tangled reality involved in ruling an ancient empire.⁷³ The term captures both the efficient capacities of a large, rules-based institution and the follies of imperial authority delegated to thousands of ministers. To write of bureaucracies is to write of “politics without romance”;⁷⁴ these were messy hierarchies of elites pursuing their own

⁷¹ Auden 1951, 32 ll. 17-20.

⁷² Eich 2007, 520 ff.

⁷³ “Bureaucracy is a shifty word” (Riggs 1980). I favor a broad and flexible definition that captures the institutional, cultural, and human elements that constitute a bureaucracy, without losing sight of the social configuration of bureaucracy within society (cf. Bekke et al., 2: “We define civil service systems as mediating institutions that mobilize human resources in the service of the affairs of the state in a given territory... The definition suggests that civil service systems are structures, that is, a combination of rules and authority relationships that act as bridges between the polity or state and specific administrative organizations. The definition implies that the main concern of civil service systems involves human, rather than financial or physical resources.”)

⁷⁴ I borrow this expression from the title of an essay by the economist James Buchanan (2003). Although I do not presume that Buchanan’s negative assessment of bureaucracy in terms of “public choice theory” necessarily holds for the later Roman bureaucracy, the expression does capture the rhetorical ambivalence

individual self-interests within a social framework of self-interested patronage, competition, and honor. That there was no exact equivalent for “bureaucracy” in Latin and Greek stands as a reminder that we are using external categories to conceptualize Roman administration, but it also underscores the importance of *militia* as an ancient concept through which we can catch a glimpse of a late antique ethos of service embedded in extended militarism.

The exact change in the size and scale of this bureaucracy over time is a matter of some debate, but it can hardly be denied that the administration became several times larger and more intrusive. Nevertheless, this should not convey the wrong picture of late antique society. From a comparative perspective, many historians have noted just how small the bureaucracy was for an ancient empire of more than fifty million,⁷⁵ and its interventions in the daily life of the average denizen were constrained by manpower and communications technology. The limits of imperial authority at a local level are well encapsulated by Synesius’ jest that many Cyrenaicans thought Agamemnon was emperor!⁷⁶ But as much as we must reappraise the notion of a late empire overencumbered with the machinery of bureaucracy, we should not lose sight of the cultural and social dimensions of imperial power and the subtle ways in which its presence loomed in Roman subjects’ imaginations.

I aim for when I describe imperial administration. For all its polemics, the insights of public choice theory bring a welcome cynical realism to our assessments of political apparatus.

⁷⁵ Whitby, 2016.

⁷⁶ Synes. *Epist.* 148: “No doubt men know well that there is always an Emperor living, for we are reminded of this every year by those who collect the taxes; but who he is, is not very clear. There are people amongst us who suppose that Agamemnon, the son of Atreus, is still king, the great and good king who went against Troy” (Fitzgerald, trans.).

Writing of the “presence of the Invisible State” is an attempt to move beyond the “totalitarian monster” of older scholarship without losing sight of the ways in which the state could make itself felt across the empire.⁷⁷ Beyond the obvious mechanisms of state intervention, such as taxation, military occupation, and the law, historians have been keen to note the general “atmosphere of intimidation and violence” engendered by imperial rhetoric and punishments.⁷⁸ Acts of imperial intervention could be like lightning, able to strike at any moment across the empire, thundering terror and rumor throughout society.⁷⁹ This study appreciates these direct ways that the state intruded into the lives of its inhabitants,⁸⁰ but it turns its attention to a subtler manifestation of empire, the idea of service to a higher authority that loomed large in the imagination.

I have chosen to write of the state’s “presence” because the term captures the indirect workings of imperial power. Imperial policies and rhetoric could reverberate across the Mediterranean with unintended consequences,⁸¹ and many social actors were unwitting agents in spreading this distinctly late-antique manifestation of the state. This approach builds on the insights of recent work that has noticed elites within the empire who imitated imperial documents and formula to pursue their own agendas.⁸² It also

⁷⁷ The quotations are from Brown 1997, 24-25.

⁷⁸ Matthews 1989, 256-62 (quotation from 256).

⁷⁹ Kelly 1998, 155.

⁸⁰ Kristina Sessa’s recent survey of late antique *Alltagsgeschichte* puts it succinctly: “The late Roman state was hardly a distant entity in the daily lives of its inhabitants” (2018, 157).

⁸¹ Hopkins argued that the military, tax extraction, and the administrative apparatus were critical producers and consumers of literacy (1991, 136-142). Cf. Brown 1997, 25: The empire “preach[ed] its own notions of the social order as persistently as did any Christian bishop.”

⁸² Jill Harries has observed how the petitions of subjects mimicked the language of imperial pronouncements (Harries 1999, 214). This might seem like a simple supplicatory imitation of imperial rhetoric, but other examples show that even attempts at subverting authority involved strategies that took up the tools of empire. Clifford Ando has argued that martyr narratives adopted the formal appearance of forensic *acta* to imbue themselves to the truth-claims of official imperial documents, despite the arguably anti-imperial messaging of such texts (2000, 128-30). Erika Hermanowicz has pointed out how the strategy of the Donatists at the 411 Council at Carthage was aimed at both presenting themselves as the

follows scholars who try to appreciate the rhetorical significance of imperial pronouncements and their connections to contemporary theological and cultural developments.⁸³ Bishops and bureaucrats had their own reasons for adopting the language of *militia*, whether patronage, persuasion, or self-promotion, but by conceiving of state and church service through the lens of martial imagery, they ended up replicating a particular relationship to the state rooted in military allegiance and discipline.

Outline of Argument

I argue that bishops and bureaucrats adopted an ethos of soldierly service that amplified the presence of the state in late antiquity. This ethos valorized strict adherence to rules, long-stinting service, and respect for a lofty hierarchy. Although individual actors had their own peculiar interests and aims in adopting this ethos, in doing so, they unwittingly bought into the state's framework of universal allegiance and reinforced its imagined presence. Without falling into a simplistic narrative of militarism or totalitarianism, this dissertation recasts uses of martial imagery to show the subtle ways that the language of empire percolated into late antique society.

Martial imagery figured prominently in the social fabric of the Roman world. The first chapter explores the long-running proclivity for heroic martial imagery in a variety of contexts. Steeped in Homeric epics, military *exempla*, and biblical narrative,

victims of an unjust persecution (*e.g.* by remaining standing like Jesus before Pilate) and appealing to the legal principles of forensic procedure (2008, 200-11). Robin Whelan has noted how the criticisms of Vandal kings by Nicene Christians engaged with the same models of providential rulership that the Vandals were propounding (2018b, 147).

⁸³ See, *e.g.* Brown 1992, 152-8, on the relationship between Christian and imperial condescension (*synkatabasis*) and Whelan 2018a for the impact of ascetic ideas on state service.

elites used a heroic idiom to communicate with one another, couching letters of praise and petition as missives to champions of myth and history. This shared proclivity for military language even extended to supposedly anti-militarist Christians and civilians who used martial imagery as a rhetorical tool to persuade friends and lambast opponents. Because so many different social actors – government officials, rhetoricians, and bishops – relied on heroicizing language to conceive of civilian pursuits, martial imagery was a vehicle by which entrepreneurial letter-writers could draw together diverse allies against their adversaries.

At the same time, two separate strands of discourse crystalized: churchmen used the image of the “soldier of Christ” (*miles Christi*) to regiment behavior and command influence among ascetic devotees, while others used an idiom of “unarmed service” (*militia inermis*) to manage patronage networks within the bureaucracy. In each case, actors adopted for their own ends a soldierly ethos that defined relationships to abstract, universalizing entities. The second chapter examines the uses of the *militia Christi* motif in Christian epistolography. Like hagiographic texts, which frequently imagined the holy ascetic as a suffering soldier, bishops relied heavily on the ideal of enduring service to God to cultivate pastoral and magisterial influence. At the same time, the specific associations of *militia Christi* reflect a tendency to use soldierly language to regulate ascetics in cenobitic communities and to malign ascetics who deviated from prescribed behavior as “deserters.”

The third chapter examines the parallel use of *militia inermis* within the imperial service. Although the figurative use of *militia* to describe civil service had a long history, it was not until late antiquity that it was widely adopted, a development concurrent with

a significant expansion of the imperial bureaucracy. Bureaucrats like Symmachus used a sophisticated framework of soldierly service to conceive of imperial officials when developing his own patronage network. Letters and documents show that, at least for higher-ups, an ethos of obedience and administrative *esprit de corps* flourished while the model of quasi-literary service even percolated into texts offering advice on imperial policy and statecraft. Like the discourse surrounding *militia Christi*, this model of soldierly service stressed endurance and obedience, and it could also be used to chasten and correct wayward imperial servants.

But elites did not universally accept the ethos of soldierly service. Some expressed dissatisfaction with *militia* as a model of state service, whether due to its servile logic or on account of the harsh realities involved in a long government career. The fourth chapter considers bishops who picked up on these critiques and unfavorably compared earthly to heavenly service, arguing that the imperial service was inherently inferior to God's soldiery. Taken together, these striking passages may appear to undermine the project of the Roman state, but they are better understood as opportunistic attempts to persuade and promote in the language of *militia*. By couching their language in the same martial imagery as the state, they defined their own positions in relation to the categories of empire. Rather than the product of militarization or a vehicle for Christianization, the ethos of soldierly service was salient because it offered a compelling idiom for conceiving of allegiance in late antiquity, and its willing adoption by so many different actors shows how the presence of the state was felt and recursively remade in the words of bishops and bureaucrats.

CHAPTER I:
HEROIC MARTIAL IMAGERY:
DISCOURSE OF PRAISE AND PETITION

To understand the reach of ‘militarization’ in social relations, we must look at the ways that martial imagery rippled through the language of elites, especially in the correspondence preserved in letter collections. The preponderance of martial imagery was built on neither the warrior’s “hideous spirit of fearful obedience to authority”⁸⁴ nor a pacifistic aversion to military culture. Instead, the defending champion became a central motif, a common way of representing one’s allies and enemies. This sort of martial imagery constituted a *koine* of the cultural imagination in the “basically conformist upper-class world” of the fourth and fifth centuries.⁸⁵

This first chapter examines how the image of the military hero was used in a language of praise and petition among the empire’s elite. First, I correct the misconception that Roman society was substantially pacifist or antimilitarist; even for bishops at times critical of military service, heroic martial imagery was an important way of highlighting the virtues of military men. Second, I argue that similar military language was an important way of imagining the role of other high-status figures who did not have an overtly military role, namely imperial servants, local notables, and leaders of the church. Third, I contend that this shared language of martial praise and petition allowed appeals across different areas of society, making ecclesiastical

⁸⁴ MacMullen 1963, 174, quoting Janowitz 1960, 51.

⁸⁵ Quotation from Brown 1995, 36, regarding the society in which the late-antique philosopher was brought up and moved.

divisions consequential for imperial administrators. The parallel use of heroic martial imagery, thus, had real consequences for the discourse of late antiquity.

“Heroic” martial imagery served as a kind of glue in every manner of relationship. It permitted one to ingratiate oneself to friends and reinforce group boundaries against outsiders depicted as enemies. The wide currency of this imagery indicates a shared appreciation of martial *élan* and an imagination of social roles in military terms. This complicates any notion of an emerging pacifistic, Christian masculinity. The embeddedness of the “hero” motif in existing social relationships without any consistent reference to militarized hierarchies does not fit neatly into a simple story of militarization either. Instead, “heroic” imagery had broader and deeper roots than putative militarization or Christian pacifism, drawing on long traditions of status and rulership, combining the traditional esteem of military pursuits, Hellenistic ideals of the cultured and philosophic patron, and Old Testament models of prophets and kings. “Heroic” imagery might be usefully compared to models of “exemplarity” discussed by Matthew Roller and Rebecca Langlands in the context of the late republic and early empire.⁸⁶ Heroic martial imagery was suppler and less embedded in historical or legendary narrative than such *exempla*, but it similarly drew on a shared ethical and cultural framework to build consensus and community.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ For an overview, see Roller 2018, 5-8 who outlines four stages of action, evaluation, commemoration, and norm setting, and Langlands 2018, 29-46 who identifies “three core elements of an exemplum”: the hero, the story, and the moral.

⁸⁷ On this aspect of *exempla*, see Langlands 2018, 128-140, who notes the indeterminacy of their significance even as they functioned “as shared reference points that facilitate discussion across the community and at range of different levels, from basic cognitive learning, to high level philosophical exploration” (130).

It is often asserted that in the third and fourth centuries the Roman Empire became more hierarchical, status-conscious, and regimented. As Richard Lim put it, “the classical Mediterranean model of competitive parity yielded to a more overtly pyramidal and authoritarian pattern of social relationship.”⁸⁸ The dirigiste absolutism of military authority would seem to accord well with a hierarchy increasingly structured around rank, codified in law, and displayed through uniforms.⁸⁹ But there is not a straight vector from imperial ceremonial and bureaucracy to autocratic and militaristic thinking. Ideas and culture do not merely trickle down like rain from heaven; they interface in complex ways with different social situations. My study of martial imagery proposes a system of “heroic” imagery embedded in everyday communications of praise and patronage. This discourse did not accord naturally with the soldierly image of obedience that will constitute the focus of the following two chapters. Rather, “heroic” imagery brought a different military logic to bear that could highlight an individual’s role as a valiant defender rather than a dutiful servant.

To Peter Brown, militarization was:

part of a general unleashing of competitive urges. [...] The ‘pyramidal’ hierarchy of the Later Empire [...] was the natural way in which a governing class, which had been committed for generations to competition in power, honor, and reputation, regrouped itself in an age where the rewards of such competition, for the successful few, appeared greater than ever before.⁹⁰

It is in this sense – a means of regrouping in an age of ambition – that I understand the martial imagery of the Later Empire. The wide currency of the “hero” motif was a means

⁸⁸ Lim 1995, 24.

⁸⁹ On uniforms, see MacMullen 1964b, 435-6.

⁹⁰ Brown 1978, 46-47.

of resolving increased stratification and intensified competition. Group identities could shift or ossify, but, by imagining people as warriors, “heroic” imagery created bonds of comradeship in the face of enemies, mobilizing sentiments and reinforcing identities. This thread ties together the worlds of embattled bishops and dueling rhetoricians; valiantly fighting for others helped people manage relationships upon the shifting sands beneath towering social and administrative hierarchies.

Strategic Censure and Praise: Heroic Imagery in Letters to Military Men

“You have a soul for command,” wrote Isidore of Pelusium to an aptly-named *dux*, Strategios.⁹¹ The Egyptian priest extolled his addressee for his power, reminded him that it was a gift from God, and said that if he was a good steward of it, he might receive still more. In this perfunctory letter, we see no anxiety over the ethics of military service, no expression of “just war” theory: merely prosaic praise of a martial career. In fact, Isidore’s was a typical letter to a military official from our period; no major author consistently expressed an anti-war point of view in such missives. This cuts against scholars who portray Christians as being uniquely pacifistic or antimilitarist. At least in letters to military men, the tendency was to praise the military man as a defender of justice and order against barbaric disorder.

To be sure, several Christian writers questioned the appropriateness of military service, but this was a means of managing individual relationships, just as martial praise

⁹¹ Isid. Pel. *Epist.* 133, “Ἐχεις μὲν ψυχὴν ἀρχικὴν μισῶν τὴν πονηρίαν ἐκ παιδός. Ἐλαβες δὲ καὶ νῦν ἐκ βασιλέως ἡγεμονίαν παρέχουσαν δύναμιν, ἣν ἐξήτει ἡ πρόθεσις. Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν Θεοῦ ἐστὶν ἀμφοτέρω τὰ χαρίσματα χρῆσαι τούτοις εἰς θεραπείαν αὐτοῦ ὅση δύναμις ἵνα καὶ μείζονα δώσῃ ἐξουσίαν, εἰ ταύτην ἴδῃ καθαρῶς διοικουμένην. Οἶδε γὰρ καὶ ποιμαντικὴν μεγάλῃ ψυχῇ, βασιλείαν ποιεῖν πολυδύναμον.” The recipient is otherwise unknown (*PLRE* 2:1033, Strategios 4). Note the closing reference to the shepherd’s skill. All translations of Isidore are my own.

was a way in which bishops could ingratiate themselves to powerful military patrons. In both cases, a heroic image of the warrior, fighting for his community against external foes, proved central to the writers' epistolary aims. The prevalence of such "heroic martial imagery" is a reminder of the centrality of military virtues in the social imagination, virtues which were important in representations of not only military men, but even clergymen who took on military roles, like Synesius.

The Issue of Christian "Pacifism" and "Militarism"

Debate has swirled over the relative "pacifism" or "militarism" of early Christianity, with most of the focus being on the pre-Constantinian period. On one side, scholars like Cadoux, Ramsey, Bainton, Hornus, and, most recently, Kalantzis have emphasized the criticism of violence and murder in the New Testament, along with the critiques of military service found in such texts as Tertullian's *De corona* and in the *Apostolic Constitutions*.⁹² They have also sought to explain away evidence of Christians having served in the army, noting that martyr narratives are rather late and unreliable, and epigraphic evidence is scant. On the other side, Harnack, Helgeland, and Johnson have dismissed seemingly pacifistic statements in early Christian writers as being directed at the religious idolatry of the Roman army rather than military service itself.⁹³ A separate line of argument, recently pursued by John F. Shean, who considers the army a vehicle of Christianization, has been to note evidence for widespread service by Christians in the legions.⁹⁴ Although the evidence of martyr narratives is of dubious historical value for the pre-Diocletianic period, the epigraphic and literary evidence

⁹² Cadoux 1919; Bainton 1946; Ramsey 1961; Windass 1962; Hornus 1960, 1980; Kalantzis 2012.

⁹³ Harnack 1963, 1981; Helgeland, 1974, 1979; Helgeland, Daly, and Patout 1985; Johnson 1991, 1997.

⁹⁴ Shean 2010, 177-215.

convincingly demonstrates that Christian soldiers were not a rarity.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, such an observation does not address the central question of what Christians thought about military service, and a consensus on this point is elusive due to the fragmentary and oblique nature of the evidence. Among ancient sources, the loudest voices on military service can hardly be representative of widely held beliefs, which were perhaps more nuanced and contextual in their views.

For the post-Constantinian period, lamentably understudied relative to both the first three centuries and the volume of extant source material, scholarly opinion has also remained divided on Christian views of military service. Most scholars have treated the conversion of Constantine as either the culmination of a long degradation from pristine pacifism or an abrupt turning point where the faith was transformed and coopted to support the emperor's own military aims.⁹⁶ Shean, for instance, contends that "a new phase of history opened" in which church leaders abandoned an earlier ambivalent position and embraced the message "that Christianity and imperial patriotism are one and the same."⁹⁷ It is clear that Constantine and his successors were keen to use the faith to legitimate their position in wars, whether civil or foreign, but some scholars emphasize a divergent strain of thinking, selecting passages from fourth-century bishops to aver a continued "antimilitarist" trend, at least in the West.⁹⁸ Such arguments echo

⁹⁵ Iosif 2013.

⁹⁶ Hornus 1980, 158-199; Friesen 1986, 144: "For the church after Constantine, pacifism was not a possible dimension of the lay person's expression of Christian ethical life. The progression to that conviction had been lengthy and gradual."

⁹⁷ Shean 2010, 302.

⁹⁸ e.g. Cadoux argued for dissident pacifist elements in the church after Constantine (1919, 259-261). Hornus treats the period as one of compromise in which antimilitarism was possible only for ascetics (1980, 193-195). Kuefler 2001, 108, citing Aug. *Epist.* 189.4 and Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 25: "it is also possible to see a broad path in Christian attitudes – both before and after the year 312 – in which participation in war happened and was permitted and yet not encouraged." He also notes that "the Christian ambivalence

the much older case made by Gibbon that Christianity sapped Rome of its fighting spirit, as new Christians, especially ascetics, were not committed to the defense of empire.⁹⁹

In the face of this bevy of different modern interpretations, it is most reasonable to adopt a conservative position and eschew broad generalizations regarding early Christian views of the military. An emerging consensus of scholars has sensibly noted that different ancient authors, at different times held various viewpoints.¹⁰⁰ Even the terms of the debate over the “pacifism” or “militarism” of the faith are misleading. Neither word has an equivalent in Greek or Latin, and most ancient thinkers, whatever their views of the military, took it for granted that war was a part of human life.¹⁰¹ By using such totalizing categories, modern scholars hearken back to the confessional and intellectual conflicts of the early twentieth century, deeply influenced by the trauma of the First and Second World Wars.

For the purposes of this section, I avoid branding different bishops as “pacifists” or “militarists.” Instead, I endeavor to appreciate the social circumstances that led

toward military service, permitting it but recommending against it, stemmed in part from the reluctant reconciliation of Christian ideology to a militaristic society” (109). Although Kalantzis focuses on pacifism in the first three centuries, he sees it as continuing into the fourth century (2012, 200-202).

⁹⁹ See ch. 4, below, for the weaknesses of this point of view.

¹⁰⁰ This is essentially the conclusion of Iosif’s study of the issue for the first three centuries, well summarized in her introduction (2013, 11). With a slightly later chronological emphasis, Weiss 2019 moves beyond a dichotomy and argues for a “dual-ethic” orientation for Christians in which military actions forbidden of Christians could be licit for non-Christians. An elegant analogy can be drawn to the relationship between the priestly Levites and the other Israelites. I quibble, however, with the argument’s distinction between pre- and post-Constantinian time in Augustine’s thinking (513-5). Markus clearly showed that although Augustine periodically lauded the idea of a Christian empire and came to view religious coercion as acceptable, he ended up assigning no special spiritual significance to the Roman Empire (1970, 22-44), explicitly rejecting the apocalyptic and Eusebian vision of the empire (56). I would argue for a much more contextual approach in practice that better explains the military actions and missives of bishops (see below), even if the contours of a consistent theological position can be made out in Augustine’s writings.

¹⁰¹ “Antimilitarist” is not much better. Dawson (1996, 3) uses the word “bellicist” to describe this, but his comparison of pacifistic sentiments to “complaining about the weather” is probably too harsh. There may not have been a genuine program of pacifism in early Christian authors, but a utopian vision of peace was a powerful ideal.

Christian writers to praise or criticize military individuals and the means by which this was accomplished. Attempts to establish and maintain, often unsuccessfully, a network of powerful contacts could drive church leaders to adopt different poses towards military service, even if such stances did not constitute a systematic viewpoint on war. While some bishops used criticisms of military service as a strategic tool of censure or discipline, in missives of praise and petition a clear pattern of heroic martial imagery emerges, underlining the importance of military language in constructing values and ideals, even for followers of a purported religion of peace.

Censuring Soldiers: Criticism of Military Service as a Rhetorical Tool

Many letters survive which call military men to turn from their profession, and taken in isolation, they might seem to constitute strong evidence of bishops standing against military service, but close study reveals that such letters served narrower purposes than ideological statements about the morality of fighting in the army. These letters must be understood as a particular kind of rebuke or correction – less a criticism of military service *per se* than the use of an ideal of military service to orient the recipient toward a change in lifestyle or belief.¹⁰² In many of these letters, the example of “heroic martial imagery” proved essential to the rhetorical aims of the bishop writing, whether by condemning the present disreputable lifestyle of the soldier as deficient or by promoting an alternate vision of a warrior who stands up for justice and the Christian faith.

¹⁰² We must wipe away from these kinds of letters the notion that the point was to uphold an antimilitarist ideal (*contra* Kuefler 2001, 108: “Sources from the period after 312 confirm this antimilitarist ideal even while permitting Christian soldiering.”). The historical background of recruitment difficulties, especially in the reign of Valens (Lenski 2004), should not be forgotten, but nor should the wider literary context be ignored, as the examples below suggest.

Basil, often cited as an authority opposed to war, wrote an important letter which is instructive of how this type of correction could work. In a letter to a man named Firminus, Basil was disheartened that the man had “deserted the ranks of his blessed forefathers” and became a soldier.¹⁰³ Basil urged him to “bid farewell to military life, arms, and the labors of the camp,” but the context shows that Basil’s concern was more specific than a general disregard for military service.¹⁰⁴ Firminus had apparently made some kind of ascetic commitment, with Basil seeking to know “how your asceticism is and whether you remain by your initial commitment or have changed in some way.”¹⁰⁵ Basil’s careful allusion to Firminus’ desertion from the “ranks of your blessed forefathers” and his call to return to the decurionate, which would be easy given the “lack of opponents,” underscore his eagerness to exploit the rhetorical possibilities of military service to further his own agenda, a call to one of his flock who had gone astray.¹⁰⁶ Rather than being a full-throated critique of militarism, the letter to Firminus sought to manage a particular relationship, much like other letters of Basil offering praise or rebuke. His squeamishness with killing is apparent at times,¹⁰⁷ but it was not a

¹⁰³ Basil. *Epist.* 116: “ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀκούομεν ἃ καὶ λέγειν αἰσχυρόμεθα, καταλιπόντα σε τὴν τῶν μακαρίων προγόνων τάξιν, ἐπὶ τὸν πρὸς πατρός πάππον αὐτομολεῖν καὶ Βρεττάνιον σπουδάζειν γενέσθαι ἀντὶ Φιρμίνου, ἐπιζητοῦμεν αὐτὰ ταῦτα ἀκοῦσαι, 5 καὶ τοὺς λογισμοὺς μαθεῖν καθ’ οὓς ἐπὶ ταύτην ἔλθεῖν τοῦ βίου τὴν ὁδὸν ὑπήχθης.” The next letter in the collection, evidently Firminus’ sent in response, outlined the procedure by which the writer could be excused from service. Ultimately, Firminus failed to secure release from the military (Lenski 2004, 102n52; Lib. *Epist.* 1048).

¹⁰⁴ Basil. *Epist.* 116: “μακρὰ χαίρειν εἰπόντα στρατεία καὶ ὅπλοις καὶ ταῖς ἐπὶ στρατοπέδου ταλαιπωρίαις.”

¹⁰⁵ Basil. *Epist.* 116: “ὅπως δέ σοι τὰ τῆς ἀσκήσεως, καὶ πότερον ἐπιμένεις τοῖς ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐγνωσμένοις ἢ τι καὶ μετεβουλεύσω.”

¹⁰⁶ Basil. *Epist.* 116: “καταλαβεῖν τὴν πατρίδα, ἀρκοῦν πρὸς ἀσφάλειαν βίου καὶ πρὸς πᾶσαν περιφάνειαν τὸ ἐξίσου τοῖς προγόνοις κρατῆσαι τῆς πόλεως ἡγησάμενον: ὅπερ ἀπόνως σοι παραγενήσεσθαι πεπιστεύκαμεν, πρὸς τε τὴν ἐκ φύσεως ἐπιτηδεϊότητα ἀφορῶντες καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἐρημίαν τῶν ἐνισταμένων.”

¹⁰⁷ Basil. *Epist.* 188.8, 13; 217.55. He forbade soldiers who had shed blood from partaking in communion for 3 years. I would not go so far as Helgeland 1974, 154 who dismiss a similar liturgical rule of Cyprian (*Patient.* 14) as an “Old Testament ritual taboo.” The concern was serious enough to warrant mention in

consistent theme of his writing. Elsewhere, he praised soldiers and generals for their military service. In one letter, he noted the importance of faith, regardless of profession, but commended a Christian soldier even more, since he could live righteously “even in military life.”¹⁰⁸ These various missives show more than ambivalence about war; they reflect how the Cappadocian used military service as a tool to manage his relationships in a diverse and far-flung network.

Other bishops took a similar tack. At the prompting of Victor, Paulinus of Nola wrote a letter urging Crispinianus to abandon his life as a soldier and be raised to the rank of *comes Christi*.¹⁰⁹ After some time without a response, the bishop sent another letter:

When I was worried about how you were doing, Victor said to me that by God’s grace even now you are a Christian in aspiration, rather than in fact, always thinking upon eternity, embarking on the path of life that is the way of Christ. But if you do not want to be a *privatus*, realize that you must change your *militia*, not abandon it, to be transformed for the better, as much as God is a greater king than man.¹¹⁰

Basil’s list of canons, but in the thick of epistolary relations, we see Basil adopting various poses towards military service, separate from the question of communion.

¹⁰⁸ e.g. Basil. *Epist.* 106, “For we have come to know a man who proves that *even* in military life one may preserve the perfection of love for God, and that a Christian should be marked, not by the fashion of his clothing, but by the disposition of his soul,” DeFerrari, trans., emphasis my own (ἐγνώμεν γὰρ ἄνδρα δεικνύντα, ὅτι καὶ ἐν τῷ στρατιωτικῷ βίῳ δυνατόν τῆς πρὸς Θεὸν ἀγάπης τὸ τέλειον διασῶσαι, καὶ ὅτι οὐκ ἐν τῇ περιβολῇ τῆς ἐσθῆτος, ἀλλ’ ἐν τῇ διαθέσει τῆς ψυχῆς ὁ Χριστιανὸς ὀφείλει χαρακτηρίζεσθαι). The first καὶ is concessive, indicating an “ascending climax” (Denniston 1966, 293, II.A.1), highlighting the man’s outstanding character.

¹⁰⁹ Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 25.8, “vide ad qualem militiam te invito collegam ut quod homini esse optas hoc tibi deus sit. quem si coeperis sequi, de comitiva incipis militare et finis militiae tuae erit regnum non terrae et temporis, sed aeternitatis et caeli.” For this language, see especially Mratschek-Halfmann 2002, 136-173. On the letter, written between 399 and 405, see “Crispinianus” in *PCBE* 4, 1:532.

¹¹⁰ Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 25*.1, “cum sollicitus essem quid ageres, propitio deo dixit mihi etiam nunc te in voto potius quam in opere christianum esse, semper cogitantem aeternum, arripientem iter vitae id est viam Christi. sed si non vis esse privatus, cogita mutandam tibi, non deponendam esse militiam, ut in tanto melius commutandam, quanto maior est rex deus quam homo.” Translation my own. I accept the potential emendation, suggested in the app. crit. of Hartel (1894, 230) of *christianum* for *christiani*.

Paulinus's wording carefully suggests that it was possible for Crispinianus to maintain his profession so long as he adjusted his priorities. "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's," Paulinus quipped, "so that you may begin to render to God what is God's."¹¹¹ Fundamentally, Paulinus's concern was never primarily with Crispinianus' military service itself. In his first letter, Paulinus urged Crispinianus to join God's army, but he still praised the soldier as a "helper and protector of citizens."¹¹² In his second letter, references to pacifism gave way to a more universal call for holiness and renunciation, with a focus on giving up wealth and status for eternal life. As with Basil's missives to Firminus, Paulinus' critique of military service was specific to Crispinianus' situation, geared towards a call to the Christian life rather than a sweeping criticism of the life of the sword.¹¹³

Isidore of Pelusium echoed this strategic criticism of military service in many of his letters to soldiers. To him, the problem with some *stratiotai* was not that they

¹¹¹ Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 25*.2, "Refunde ergo Caesari quae sunt Caesaris, ut incipias deo reddere quae dei sunt." Translation my own. Note the differences with *Vulg.* Matt 22:21: "tunc ait illis reddite ergo quae sunt Caesaris Caesari et quae sunt Dei Deo." A review of the *Vetus Latina Database* of the Vetus Latina Institute in Beuron yields no results with the verb *refundo*. Cf. *Epist.* 44.4 where the more typical *reddere* is used. I would suggest that *refundere* is a significant choice because, while it could denote one's obligation to pay back a debt in a legal sense, it could also vividly evoke the idea of "pouring back" foreshadowing the eventual focus of the letter on the renunciation of earthly wealth and glory for eternal goods, demonstrated by the parable of the beggar Lazarus and the rich man (*Epist.* 25*.2-3, cf. *Epist.* 13.17 and Luke 16:19-31). See *OLD* s.v. *refundo*, 1.A and 4. Cf. Marcel. *dig.* 36.1.46.(44).1; Ulp. *dig.* 4.4.22, 14.4.5.19; Plin. *Pan.* 40.4.

¹¹² Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 25*.8, "et nunc, ut audio, qui adiutor et tutator es civium, fias comes Christi."

¹¹³ See Iosif 2013, 199 for a similar assessment of Crispinianus' situation as an "exception to the rule" rather than applicable to all soldiers. Cf. Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 37.4 where he praises Victricius, an erstwhile soldier, for his abandoning of "permissible things": "Your sanctity possesses the rich glory of Christian poverty, not only with regards to the abuse of permitted things and the abstinence from visible goods, but, as I have found, even with regards to the multitude of adversaries and your resistance of temptations, because wicked witnesses have risen against you." ("Tua vero sanctitas non solum de abusione licitorum et abstinencia commodorum visibilium Christianae paupertatis divitem gloriam tenet, sed, sicut conperi, etiam de multitudine adversantium et atolerantia temptationum, quoniam insurrexerunt in te testes iniqui...").

wielded the sword but that they stepped outside of what he thought the proper military role. Thus he advised the unfortunately-named Turba:

It is not fitting to bear arms in peace, nor to carry around the equipment of war in the middle of the *agora*, nor to go about armed with a sword in the city, but rather to train in both fear and trials, the likes of which one may find in a war against the enemy. So if you rejoice in warlike array and think yourself worthy of public proclamations and inscriptions, go to the army fighting the barbarians, and do not buy off service there with money and play war while staying at home.¹¹⁴

Again, the problem was not soldiering but a dissolute lifestyle. We see similar moralizing military critiques in letters to the soldiers Isaiah, John, and Quintianus.¹¹⁵ As with Isidore's admonition of Turba, contrasts between disorderly barbarians and legitimate soldiers were particularly effective; "array yourself as a legitimate champion and lawful soldier in battles against the barbarians, or appear as a well-ordered citizen in the town and bear yourself as is appropriate," he wrote to John.¹¹⁶ Such missives fit into a wider constellation of general disciplinary instructions to soldiers, many of which adopt military metaphors or images.¹¹⁷ To Isidore, as to Basil and Paulinus, the critique

¹¹⁴ Isid. Pel. *Epist.* 40, "Οὐκ ἔστιν ὄπλοφορεῖν ἐν εἰρήνῃ, οὐκ ἔστι σχῆμα πολέμου ἐπὶ μέσης ἀγορᾶς περιφέρειν · οὐκ ἔστι ξιφὴρ διάγειν ἐν πόλει, ἀλλὰ καὶ φόβον καὶ πείραν τοιαύτην ἐν πολέμῳ κατὰ ἀντιπάλων γυμνάζειν. Εἰ οὖν σχήματι χαίρεις πολεμικῶ, καὶ ἀναρρήσεων καὶ στηλῶν ἐπιτυχεῖν ἀξιοῖς, εἰς τὸ στρατόπεδον τὸ μαχόμενον τοῖς βαρβάροις κατὰβηθι, καὶ μὴ χρήμασιν ἐξωνούμενος τὴν ἐκεῖθεν φυγὴν, καὶ οἱκοι μένων, ἐνταῦθα παῖζε τὸν ἐκεῖ χρεωστούμενον πόλεμον."

¹¹⁵ Isaiah (78, 167, 482), John (326, 327), Quintianus (thus, Evieux, the *PG* has Quintinianus) (390, where the main criticism is that Quintianus (of uncertain rank) had led a boy away from a Christian *paideia* and into a military career). Other letters to soldiers included more generic advice or exegetical notes (Ammonios (803), Isaiah (unclear whether this is the same as the soldier) (1473, 1477, 1577, 1714, 1715, 1785, 1788, 1926, 1967)).

¹¹⁶ Isid. Pel. *Epist.* 326, "Ἡ ὥς ὀπλίτης νόμιμος, καὶ στρατιώτης ἔνθεσμος, πρὸς τὴν μεγάλην καὶ δυσέκλυτον τῶν βαρβάρων τασσόμενος· ἢ ὥς δημότης εὐτακτος ἐν ᾧ φαινόμενος, καὶ πρεπόντως ἀναστρεφόμενος."

¹¹⁷ Ammonios (12), Isaiah (690, 691, 697, 703, 717, 792, 832, 852, 955, 996, 1107, 1148, 1157, 1158, 1234, 1235, 1578), perhaps different Isaiah (1343, 1474, 1479, 1813). For military metaphors, see *esp.* Isid. Pel. *Epist.* 1235 (where Isaiah is urged to keep up the fight against sin and set up a trophy in victory) and 1578 (where the same soldier is urged to not betray his *symmachia* with Christ).

of military service was an opportunity to exploit the rhetorical contrasts between the ideal warrior and the barbarian.¹¹⁸

Martial Praise for Martial Men: Soldiers, Generals, and Bishops

These military rebukes were primarily aimed at motivating changes in lifestyle rather than total renunciations of martial virtues. The image of the heroic warrior – an important element of the above reprimands – proved especially important in letters to soldiers and generals. Bishops praised military commanders for their service, prayed for victory, and seemed inclined to accept a view of manliness rooted in martial courage. To an extent, this was not a new phenomenon, as Christian writers had long maintained their support for the Roman Empire and its armies, but for such men as Tertullian and Origen, these expressions of support for the military had been primarily in an apologetic context, focused on defending against the charge of being antisocial and subversive.¹¹⁹ But in the fourth century, the letters of bishops give abundant evidence of praise for military men, especially through heroic martial imagery in letters of praise, petition, and recommendation.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ This ostensible subversiveness (Harris 2016, 240) was not purely a western phenomenon as the examples from Basil and Isidore would suggest. I contend that these critiques are rhetorical poses rather than genuine anti-imperial sentiments, *contra* Harris 2016, 238: “Some Christians still seem to have been to a certain degree alienated from the Roman state, even though it was now on their side. Bishop Paulinus of Nola, who had grown up amid extreme privilege, his mind clouded by love of relics and miracles, attempted to persuade a military man to desert (*Letter* 25, about 400), and seems to have believed that prayer could defeat the Gothic enemies of Rome (*Poems* 26.246-68...).” For another example of the rhetorical nature of *militia* in these contexts, see Gr. Naz. *Epist.* 7.3, where imperial service, ambition, and avarice are gathered in a list of rhetorical attacks.

¹¹⁹ Tert. *Apol.* 30.4, 26.2, 32.1, *Anim.* 30, *Carn.* 24.18; Orig. *Cels.* 8.69 (fear that swearing by the Genius of the emperor would help the barbarians), 8.73-74 (prayers as support for military). For the apologetic nature of these comments on military service, see Weiss 2019, 502, 507n40.

¹²⁰ *Contra* Kuefler’s characterization of “the strong antimilitaristic tradition among the earliest Christians in the West” as being dominant (2001, 107). “For it was not the Christian men of the army, but the men who refused to be made soldiers, men like Maximilian, or the soldiers who refused continued service, men like Martin, who were seen as the Christian ideal” (*ibid.*).

Churchmen from across the Mediterranean, both East and West, wrote to and about commanders in glowing terms. Isidore of Pelusium's letter to Strategius has already been mentioned, and he also wrote approvingly to one Gerontios, advising him that he could conquer his enemies by leading the army "with fear of God."¹²¹ Basil, often cited as a leading pacifist voice, wrote to the *dux Scythiae* that he would pray for him because of his faith and his military service, and the Cappadocian gave a glowing eulogy of another general in a letter to his widow.¹²² Augustine, for all his misgivings about the destructiveness of war expressed in *The City of God*, praised Boniface for his stout defense of the province of *Africa consularis* against barbarian opponents,¹²³ and Theodoret offered this rousing missive to Zeno, *magister utriusque militiae per Orientem* and consul of 448:

Your fortitude rouses universal admiration, tempered as it is by gentleness and meekness, and exhibited to your household in kindness, to your foes in boldness. These qualities indicate an admirable general. In a soldier's character the main ornament is bravery, but in a commander prudence takes precedence of bravery; after these come self-control and fairness, whereby a wealth of virtue is gathered. Such wealth is the reward of the soul which reaches after good, and with its eyes fixed on the sweetness of the fruit, deems the toil right pleasant. For to virtue's athletes the God of all, like some great giver of games, has offered prizes, some in this life, and some in that life beyond which has no end. Those in this present life your excellency has already enjoyed, and you have achieved the highest honour. Be it also the lot of your greatness to obtain too those abiding and perpetual blessings, and to receive not only the consul's robe, but also the garment that is indescribable and divine. Of

¹²¹ Isid. Pel. *Epist.* 294, "Εἰ τῶν πολεμίων βούλει κρατεῖν, ἄγε τὸ στρατόπεδον φόβῳ Θεοῦ. Δικαιοσύνη γὰρ φέρει τὴν ἀριστείαν. Ἡ δὲ ἡμῶν ἀδικία, τῶν ἐναντίων ἐστὶ συμμαχία." cf. also *Epist.* 297 criticizing Eulampius for murder, but noting the permissibility of killing in war.

¹²² *Epist.* 152 (to Victor, *strategos*), 155 (The addressee is not provided in the MSS but Julius Soranus, *dux Scythiae*, is the conjecture of the Benedictine editors (DeFerrari 1926-1934, 2:380n1)), 269 ("God fashioned that man as in very truth a unique example of human nature, so that all eyes were turned toward him, and every tongue related his deeds; and painters and sculptors fell short of his true worth; and historians, when narrating his brave exploits in the wars, fall into the incredible fashion of our myths" (DeFerrari, trans.))

¹²³ Aug. *Epist.* 189.5, 220.3.

all them that understand the greatness of that gift this is the common petition.¹²⁴

These encomia stress military service as evidence of a man's quality rather than an incidental detail. Theodoret's consolatory letter to this same Zeno, on the death of his brother, likewise praised the man's generalship.¹²⁵ Synesius, the bishop of Ptolemais, took this idea even further. To him, war was a blessing, a "keen touchstone of the heart's blood" that rendered men nobler and more temperate.¹²⁶

A focus on heroic qualities joined with cultured virtue was characteristic of bishops' praise for military men. This can be seen clearly when we consider Synesius' correspondence. He did not hold back when writing to a new civil governor, perhaps Cledonius, to commend Marcellinus, former *dux Libyarum* and honorary *clarissimus*:¹²⁷

When he arrived here, he found our cities attacked from without by the multitude and rage of the barbarians, from within by the lack of discipline of the troops and the rapacity of their commanders. Marcellinus appeared in our midst as a god. He vanquished the enemy in a single day's fighting, and by his continual alertness he has brought our

¹²⁴ Fl. Zenon 6 *PLRE* II: 1199-1200. Thdt. *Sirm. Epist.* 71, Jackson, trans.: "Τὴν ὑμετέραν ἀνδρείαν θαυμάζουσιν ἅπαντες, ὡς ἡμερότητι καὶ πραότητι κεκραμένην, καὶ τοῖς μὲν οἰκείοις ἡπίως, τοῖς δὲ πολεμίοις ἀνδρείως προσφερομένην. Τὸν ἀξίεπαινον δὲ ταῦτα δείκνυσι στρατηγόν. Στρατιώτην μὲν γὰρ ἡ ἀνδρεία κοσμεῖ, τὸν δὲ στρατηγὸν πρὸ τῆς ἀνδρείας ἡ φρόνησις· καὶ μετὰ τούτων σωφροσύνη καὶ δικαιοσύνη, δι' ὧν ὁ τῆς ἀρετῆς συναθροίζεται πλοῦτος. Συλλέγει δὲ τοῦτον ἡ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ὀρεγομένη ψυχὴ· καὶ ἡδιστον ἡγεῖται τὸν πόνον, εἰς τὸ γλυκὺ τῶν καρπῶν ἀποβλέπουσα. Τοῖς γὰρ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀθληταῖς ἄθλα προτέθεικεν οἷά τις ἀγωνοθέτης φιλότιμος ὁ τῶν ὅλων. ἄθλα προτέθεικεν οἷά τις ἀγωνοθέτης φιλότιμος ὁ τῶν ὅλων Θεός, τὰ μὲν ἐν τῷδε τῷ βίῳ, τὰ δὲ ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ πέρας οὐκ ἔχοντι. Τῶν τῇδε μὲν οὖν τὸ ὑμέτερον ἀπέλαυσε μέγεθος, καὶ τὸ ἀκρότατον ἐδέξατο γέρας· εἴη δὲ καὶ τῶν μονίμων ἐκείνων καὶ διαρκῶν τὴν ὑμετέραν μεγαλοφυΐαν τυχεῖν ἀγαθῶν, καὶ μετὰ τῆς ὑπατικῆς ἀμπεχόνης προσλαβεῖν τὴν ἄρρητον καὶ θεῖαν περιβολήν. Κοινὴ γὰρ πάντων εὐχὴ τῶν ἐκείνης τῆς δωρεᾶς ἐπισταμένων τὸ μέγεθος."

¹²⁵ Thdt. *Sirm. Epist.* 65: "Ὅταν τοῖνυν τὸ κοινὸν τῶν ὁδίνων εἰς νοῦν λαμβάνωμεν, καὶ τὸν μακρὸν τῆς συνηθείας χρόνον, καὶ τὰς λαμπράς στρατηγίας, καὶ τὰς πολυθρυλλήτους ἀριστείας, λογισώμεθα ὡς καὶ ἄνθρωπος ὁ τούτοις κοσμούμενος."

¹²⁶ Synes. *Epist.* 104, "Ὡστε μοι δοκεῖ ταύτην τις δικαίως εἰδέναι τῷ πολέμῳ χάριν ὅτι βάσανός ἐστι τοῦ περὶ τὴν καρδίαν αἵματος ἀκριβῆς καὶ συχνούς ἀλαζόνας παραλαβὼν μετριωτέρους ἡμῖν ἀποδίδωσιν."

¹²⁷ Synes. *Epist.* 62, "...Μαρκελλίνῳ τῷ λαμπροτάτῳ..." (on the title here, see Roques 1987, 138). The letter is addressed to τῷ ἡγεμόνι, which *PLRE* II, 708 takes as a reference to the general Marcellinus 2, but Roos (1991, 98) and Roques (Garzya and Roques 2000, 1:171n2) take as references to the civil governor in Pentapolis (probably Cledonius, Andronicus' successor). The letter is dated by Roques (1989, 231-2) to the beginning of 413.

subjects into line. He has thus out of both calamities brought peace to our cities.¹²⁸

This glowing panegyric portrays Marcellinus as a defender of the *polis*, a decisive man of action, an opponent of barbarian chaos. Other military correspondents of Synesius merited similar *encomia*, sometimes in requests for aid and sometimes in recommendations: Anysius, Simplicius, Diogenes, and Paeonius.¹²⁹ They earned praise as heroic warriors who would oppose the onslaught of barbarians, people who could merge the image of the champion with that of the cultured gentleman. Simplicius was a “στρατιώτης ποιητικός,” a “warrior-poet”; an unnamed *comes* joined *στρατεία* with *παιδεία*, just as Paeonius united *στρατεία* and *φιλοσοφία*.¹³⁰

Although, as these examples have shown, it was not their exclusive prerogative, emperors of course won acclaim for their military deeds.¹³¹ This was a central element of imperial ideology as seen through ceremonial and panegyric, and bishops accordingly wrote high-flying words to extol the emperor’s martial endeavors. Ambrose, for example, made the emperor’s military role a central element of many imperial missives, addressing the emperor with martial epithets and praise in letters on the Callinicum

¹²⁸ Synes. *Epist.* 62, Fitzgerald, trans., “Ὅστις παραλαβὼν πολεμουμένας τὰς πόλεις, ἔξωθεν μὲν ὑπὸ πλήθους καὶ μανίας βαρβαρικῆς, ἔνδοθεν δὲ ὑπὸ στρατιωτικῆς ἀταξίας καὶ τῆς τῶν ταξιαρχῶν πλεονεξίας, ὥσπερ θεὸς ἐπιφανείς, μάχῃ μὲν μὴ τοὺς πολεμίους, ἐπιμελεία δὲ καθημερινῇ τοὺς ὑπηκόους σωφρονεστέρους ἐποίησε καὶ παρεσκεύασεν ἀπ’ ἀμφοῖν τῶν δεινῶν εἰρήνην ταῖς πόλεσιν.” For a rough classical parallel to “ὥσπερ θεός”, cf. Callin. *fr.* 1.19-20 (West), “λαῶ γὰρ σύμπαντι πόθος κρατερόφρονος ἀνδρός / θνήσκοντος, ζῶων δ’ ἄξιος ἡμιθέων / ὥσπερ γάρ μιν πύργον ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ὀρῶσιν.”

¹²⁹ Anysius 1 *PLRE* II: 108 (praise of, *Epist.* 78; *Catast.* 1, 2), Simplicius 2 *PLRE* II: 1013-4 (recommendation of, *Epist.* 134, perhaps *Epist.* 142 commended him to Herculan), Diogenes 2 *PLRE* II: 360 (recommendation of, *Epist.* 131), and Paeonius 1 *PLRE* II: 816-817 (*De dono* offered praise along with the gift of an astrolabe, perhaps *Epist.* 142 commended him to Herculan).

¹³⁰ Synes. *Epist.* 134, 142, *De dono* 2. On the identity of the unnamed *comes* in *Epist.* 142, see section below.

¹³¹ *Contra* Nathan 2015, 21-2, who presents Claudian’s description of Stilicho’s martial valor as a departure from the tendency to confine such virtues to the imperial person.

affair and the massacre at Thessalonica.¹³² Contrariwise, the bishop stressed the illegitimacy of usurpers' military power, especially by tying them to barbarians.¹³³

The impact of rhetorical training in epideictic oratory should not be underestimated as a factor that molded this use of martial imagery in letters, especially since most writers of surviving letter collections had been formally trained in oratory. Rhetorical treatises enjoined the epideictic orator to praise actions of war and peace, sorted according to the relevant virtues and exemplified through references to Homeric heroes.¹³⁴ Such formal concerns to establish a balanced portrait of the *laudandus*, one well-versed in military and non-military deeds, bled into the heroic martial imagery of praise and petition. In his funerary oration for Theodosius, Ambrose's buoyant praise of the man's military endeavors evoked the same themes as his letters to the emperor, especially invincibility on the battlefield and the possession of virtues displayed in war and peace. Hardly the sole preserve of the emperor, this matched the motif of the philosophic warrior, so clearly exhibited in Synesius' commendation of generals who joined *παιδεία/φιλοσοφία* and *στρατεία*.¹³⁵

Another aspect of rhetorical training may have suggested the sorts of military praise that bishops offered: praise built around classical and, increasingly, biblical *exempla*. Epideictic *progymnasmata* involved writing mock-speeches in praise of mythical and historical figures.¹³⁶ For students and teachers alike, the *Iliad* was the

¹³² Ambr. *Epist.* 74 (see below for discussion) and *Epist. ex. coll.* 11.12.

¹³³ Ambr. *Epist.* 30.

¹³⁴ Men. *Rhet.* 2.1.19-28, esp. 19: "You should then divide such deeds into two categories, those performed in peacetime and those performed in war, giving priority to the latter if the honorand is distinguished for them" (Race, trans.).

¹³⁵ But see below for the potential ambiguity of the designation *στρατεία*.

¹³⁶ Such praise was an important component of all sorts of speeches and exercises, as it was necessary in a forensic or deliberative argument to praise or discredit individuals, as Quintilian (*Inst.* 3.7.2) notes.

favorite text for such exercises,¹³⁷ and its martial themes loomed large in the cultural imagination of the empire's elites. Accordingly, military heroes were some of the favorite *exempla* of fourth and fifth century bishops. Following Cicero's *De officiis*, Ambrose's listed military heroes to illustrate *fortitudo*, but he took his paragons (*maiores nostri*) from scripture: Joshua, Gideon, Jerobaal, Samson, David, Jonathan, and the Maccabees.¹³⁸

From all of this, it is clear that praise of military men was both wide-ranging and characterized by "heroic imagery," namely classicizing praise of virtues in war and peace along with favorable comparison to historical or literary heroes. It is perhaps no wonder that such letters are far more often directed to officers rather than soldiers. This is a somewhat imprecise distinction, since the titles which appear in epistolary superscriptions, even when accurate, often imprecisely label the recipient "soldier" (*στρατιώτης/miles*) or "general" (*στρατηγός/dux*), and it is rare to have sufficient prosopographic information to establish a specific rank. While the latter clearly indicates a *dux*, *magister*, or *comes*, the former could as easily describe an infantryman as a middling or even high-level officer.¹³⁹ But the blurring of lines between these categories should not distract from the very real differences in the epistolary evidence. Theodoret's letter to Zeno, cited above, gives a clear example of the distinction between a soldier's raw *ἀνδρεία* and a general's more complex *φρόνησις*. In terms of "heroic"

¹³⁷ Cribiore 2005, 225-6.

¹³⁸ Ambr. *De off.* 1.175, 177, 196-202.

¹³⁹ Ammianus, for his part, described himself as merely "miles quondam et Graecus" (31.16.9), even though he was an officer rather than a humble infantryman. Consider the fact that Augustine saw no need distinguish the commander Boniface from a standard *miles* (*Epist.* 189.4). On the uncertainties of Boniface's career, see Shaw 2015, 50-57.

imagery, a general was more likely to embody the balanced and protective champion, fit for praise and commendation, whereas the lowly soldier was a target for reproachful calls for temperance. This accords with the traditional marginalization of the soldier in the elite world-view.¹⁴⁰ How soldierly imagery played out in late-antique letters will be the focus of later chapters, but for now, it is sufficient to note that the differences in praise and rebuke evident in letters to soldiers and generals were a function of both relative social standing and the easier association of “heroic” imagery with commanders.

This heroic martial role was not completely confined to members of the military. For all the ostensible separation between the military sphere on the one hand, and the civil and religious spheres on the other,¹⁴¹ some individuals crossed such boundaries. Synesius stands out as a glaring example of this, and he made his own personal military service a central element of his self-representation and one that exhibited all the hallmarks of heroic martial imagery that we have been considering: the bishop emphasized his connections to exemplary figures of the past, he stressed his dual role of warrior-priest, and he played up a negative contrast between himself and his opponents.

¹⁴⁰ Alston 1998, 219: “Soldiers and gladiators did not conform to aristocratic ideals of virility. They were not free, even in the limited sense of the imperial period, and were not in control of their own bodies. They were unsuited by education and temperament to hold power, and any power they did have was illegitimate and a danger to the social fabric. Soldiers were more often described by members of the elite as beasts than as *viri*.”

¹⁴¹ For an idealization of the institutional separation between military and civil administration, see Amm. 21.16.2.

During the war against the Ausurians, which broke out in 405, Synesius eagerly took on the mantle of soldier and commander. In a series of letters to his brother, he anticipated a decisive battle:

[The barbarians] told us that they would wait for us, that they wished to know what sort of men we were, who had not hesitated to leave our homes for so long a time, to go out to fight a warlike people, wandering tribes accustomed to live perpetually as we live only when we are making an expedition. I hope, therefore, that tomorrow by the aid of God I may vanquish the enemy, or, that, not to say anything of ill omen, I shall vanquish him in a second attempt. I commend my children to you. You are their uncle, and ought to remember to show favor to them.¹⁴²

The mention of Synesius' children is a touching reminder of the high stakes of war, but it also reminds us that he was presenting himself in the mold of a classical hero, fighting for hearth and home.¹⁴³ By mentioning the defense of "country, altars, laws, and property," Synesius harkened back to such classical exemplars as Tyrtaeus, whose elegies emphasized the virtue of dying on behalf of the *polis*.¹⁴⁴ Such an allusion to immortal *kleos*, framed with reference to the trappings of the community and the memory of the distant past, was often explicit:

I shall fight as if I were at the point of death, and I have no doubt at all that I shall survive. I am a Lacedaemonian by descent, and I remember

¹⁴² Synes. *Epist.* 108, Fitzgerald trans., "Ὁ δὲ ἀγών, ὡς εἰκάσαι, τῆς ὑστεραίας· τοῖς γὰρ σκοποῖς ἡμῶν προεντυχόντες ἔνιοι τῶν πολεμίων, καὶ διώξαντες ἀνὰ κράτος, ὡς ἔγνωσαν κρείττους ὄντας ἢ ἁλῶναι, ἐκέλευσαν ἀγγέλλειν ἡμῖν ἅττα ἥδιστα εἰ μηκέτι δεήσει πλανᾶσθαι ζητοῦντας ἀνθρώπους ἐνδουμένους ἡπείρου πλάτη. Μένειν γὰρ ἔφασαν καὶ ἐθέλιν μαθεῖν οἵτινες ὄντες ἡμερῶν τοσούτων ὁδὸν ἀποσπάσαι τῆς χώρας ἐτολμήσαμεν ἐφ' ᾧ συμμῖξαι πολεμισταῖς ἀνδράσι βίον ζῶσι νομαδικὸν καὶ τὰ εἰς πολιτείαν οὕτω καταστησάμενοις ὥσπερ ἡμεῖς τὰ ἐπὶ στρατιᾷς. Ὡς οὖν αὖριον σὺν τῷ θεῷ τοὺς πολεμίους νικήσων, ἂν μέντοι δέη, πάλιν νικήσων (μηδὲν γὰρ ἀπαίσιον φθελγζαίμην), ἐπισκῆπτω σοι τῶν παιδίων ἐπιμεληθῆναι. Προσῆκει δὲ ὄντι θεῷ εἰς αὐτὰ ἀπομνημονεῦσαι τὴν χάριν."

¹⁴³ For a similar sentiment, see *Epist.* 107, where he stressed his fighting in obedience to the laws for the city's institutions.

¹⁴⁴ *Epist.* 113, "ἡμεῖς δὲ ὑπὲρ χώρας, ὑπὲρ ἱερῶν, ὑπὲρ νόμων, ὑπὲρ κτημάτων, οἷς ἡμᾶς ὁ χρόνος συνηθεστέρους ἐποίησεν, οὐκ ἀφειδήσομεν ἑαυτῶν, ἀλλὰ περιεζόμεθα τῶν ψυχῶν;" Cf. e.g. Tyr. *fr.* 12.23-34 (West).

the letter which the magistrates addressed to Leonidas. "Let them fight as if doomed to die, and they will not die."¹⁴⁵

Synesius' self-presentation as a classical military-hero relied on a contrast between his *ad hoc* role and that of soldiers and generals who should be fighting but are not. In a letter that he was ostensibly dictating "almost on horseback," he could brag to his brother, with more than a hint of irony, that he was fighting for "our wives, children, country, and also, I may add, soldiers, for it will be a fine thing in time of peace to go about saying that we took care of the troops, and that we saved them."¹⁴⁶ In an artfully constructed letter to Simplicius, the *magister utriusque militiae*, Synesius represented the *dux Libyarum*, safe aboard a ship, as incompetent, cowardly shirking his duty: "Instead of being upon the ramparts, like me, Synesius the philosopher, the general keeps himself close to the oar-blade."¹⁴⁷ Despite his protestations to the contrary, Synesius seemed to embrace the role of philosopher-warrior, even likening himself to the poet Archilochus:

I, placed as a sentinel between two towers, am struggling against sleep

To my lance I owe my bread;
To my lance I owe my Ismarian wine;
Leaning on my lance I drink

I do not know if it was more true for Archilochus than for me.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., Fitzgerald trans., "μαχήσομαι γὰρ ὡς ἀποθανούμενος, καὶ εὖ οἶδ' ὅτι περιέσομαι. Λάκων γὰρ ἄνωθέν εἰμι καὶ οἶδα τὴν πρὸς Λεωνίδαν ἐπιστολὴν τῶν τελῶν· 'Μαχέσθων ὡς τεθναζόμενοι, καὶ οὐ τεθνάζονται.'" The quote attributed to Leonidas is otherwise unattested.

¹⁴⁶ Synes., *Epist.* 125, Fitzgerald, trans., modified: "Οὐ σωφρονήσομέν ποτε καὶ γεωργοὺς βωλοκόπους ἀθροίσαντες ὁμόσε χωρήσομεν τοῖς ἐχθροῖς ὑπὲρ παίδων, ὑπὲρ γυναικῶν, ὑπὲρ χώρας, εἰ δὲ βούλει καὶ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν τῶν στρατιωτῶν; Καλὸν γὰρ ἐν εἰρήνῃ λαλεῖσθαι ταῦτα ὡς ἡμεῖς αὐτοὺς τρέφομεν τε καὶ σώζομεν. Ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν μόνον οὐκ ἔποχος ὢν ὑπὸ τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ὑπηγόρευσα· καὶ γὰρ λόχους καὶ λοχαγοὺς ἐκ τῶν παρόντων ἐποίησα."

¹⁴⁷ Synes., *Epist.* 130, Fitzgerald, trans.: "οὐ γὰρ παρ' ἑπαλξιν, ἅπερ ἐγὼ Συνέσιος ὁ φιλόσοφος, ἀλλὰ παρὰ κώπῃν ὁ στρατηγὸς ἵσταται."

¹⁴⁸ Synes., *Epist.* 130, Fitzgerald, trans., "Ἄλλ' ἵπποκροτεῖται μὲν νῦν ἅπαντα καὶ τὴν χώραν ἔχουσιν οἱ πολέμιοι, ἐγὼ δὲ ὑπὸ μεσοπυργίῳ τεταγμένος ὑπνομαχῶ. 'Ἐν δορὶ μὲν μοι μᾶζα μεμαγμένη, ἐν δορὶ δ'

If we accept Cameron and Long's argument that Synesius was an orthodox Christian from birth and that his baptism soon followed upon his return from Constantinople in 400/401, then Synesius identified as a Christian while undertaking his own campaigns against the Ausurians. Lest we think that Synesius thought the priesthood changed the licitness of military action against the barbarians, we need look no further than *Epist.* 122 to his brother. In it he praised the actions of some priests of Axomis who led the charge against barbarians.¹⁴⁹ While the Roman troops themselves failed in their duty, the achievement of these clerics was expressed in classicizing language; the deacon Faustus appears as a Homeric warrior, laying low his enemy and stripping his armor:

The barbarians were about to meet the brave Faustus, the deacon of the church. This man, although unarmed, was the first to meet a warrior, and he landed a blow to the head with a stone in his hand, not by throwing it, but by a leaping blow with his fist. And then stripping his fallen enemy of his arms, he subdues many others on top of him. And whatever other individual seemed brave in that battle, Faustus must be praised for his deeds, both those which he performed and those he ordered at that decisive point.¹⁵⁰

As a bishop, Synesius' rhetoric maintained the same anti-barbarian bent that we see as early as his *De regno* of 397.¹⁵¹ He may no longer have been ranging across field of

οἶνος / Ἰσμαρικός, πίνω δ' ἐν δορὶ κεκλιμένος.' Οὐκ οἶδ' εἰ μᾶλλον Ἀρχιλόχῳ προσήκοντα ἦν ταῦτα εἰπεῖν." The quote is Archil. *fr.* 2 (West).

¹⁴⁹ Synes. *Epist.* 122, "Πολλὰ κάγαθὰ γένοιτο τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν Ἀξωμιτῶν, οἱ τῶν στρατιωτῶν καταδεδουκότων ἐν χηραμοῖς ὀρῶν καὶ ἀξιούντων τὸ αἶμα φρουρεῖν, οἱ δὲ τὸν ἀγροῖκον λεὼν παρακαλέσαντες ἀπὸ τῶν ἱερῶν αὐτῶν τὴν εὐθὺ τῶν πολεμίων ἡγήσαντο, καὶ προσευξάμενοι τρόπαιον ἔστησαν ἐν τῇ Μυρσινίτιδι."

¹⁵⁰ "Ἐμελλον δὲ πονεῖν καὶ μελαμπύγου τεύξεσθαι Φαῦστον τοῦ διακόνου τῶν ἱερῶν. οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ πρῶτος ὑποστὰς ὀπλίτην γυμνός, καὶ παίσας ἐκ χειρὸς λίθῳ κροταφιαίαν πληγὴν, οὐ βαλὼν, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ πύξ ἐν θορόν. πεσόντα δὲ ἤδη περιδύσας τὰ ὄπλα συγχρούς ἐπ' αὐτῷ κατείργασται. καὶ ὅστις δὲ ἕτερος ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς ἔδοξεν ἐν τῷ τότε, Φαῦστον αἰτιατέον τῶν γενομένων καὶ οἷς ἐποίει καὶ οἷς παρὰ τὸν καιρὸν ἐφθέγγετο." Notably, "μελαμπύγου" is an Archilochian word (Archil. *fr.* 178 (West)).

¹⁵¹ Check Cameron and Long 1993, 104 ff. for the date.

battle, whether because he had other pressing responsibilities or because his “old age” prevented him,¹⁵² but he continued to present himself as a man of action and bulwark for the community, standing on the ramparts, doing what needed to be done for his city:

I live, not as a private citizen, in a country which is a prey to war, and I am bound continually to console every one's misfortunes. Often in a month, I have to rush to the ramparts, as if I received a stipend to take part in military service rather than to pray.¹⁵³

To Synesius, the link between military valor and masculinity was explicit. In his *Catastasis*, he remarked that the province had fallen to such a level of disaster that even the women had to fight, quickly following up the loaded observation with his feeling of shame, “I am ashamed, terrified for myself, for the times, and for the polity. Oh for that spirit of the Romans of old!”¹⁵⁴ A similar inversion of womanly bravery and manly cowardice appears in a letter to his brother.¹⁵⁵ For Synesius, fighting bravely for one’s country was the defining quality of a proper man, and he went to great lengths to represent himself accordingly. Continued cowardice might emasculate the people of Cyrenaica, but not Synesius: “At this rate we shall no longer look like men. For my part, just as I am, I must go against these barbarians.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² In *Epist.* 117, Synesius notes that he, too weak to philosophize, at least wants to live up to the example of the *stratiotai* in the *Iliad*. If Roques is correct in dating the letter to 412, this may be an allusion to the war contemporary with Synesius’ stint as bishop, but the letter is quite vague. On the issues surrounding Synesius’ claim to old age, see *Epist.* 41 and 117 with Roques (2000, 2:375-6n8 and 1989, 34-35) and, for a different view, Cameron (1992, 421). The positive *exemplum* of Homeric warriors is more important than any specific biographical information to be gleaned from the letter.

¹⁵³ *Epist.* 89, Fitzgerald trans., “Ζῶ τε γὰρ οὐκ ἰδιώτης ἐν χώρᾳ πολεμουμένη κάμει δέ τι κλάειν ἀεὶ τὴν ἐκάστου συμφορὰν καὶ τοῦ μηνὸς πολλάκις ἐπὶ τὰς ἐπάλξεις πηδᾶν ὡς ἐφ’ ᾧ γε συστρατεύσομαι μεμισθωμένον, οὐκ ἐφ’ ᾧ προσεύξομαι.” To his brother. Fitzgerald, trans. On the role of the bishop as the ultimate refuge see Gaudemet 1958, 350-353 and Roques 1987, 365-383. For a similar presentation of Synesius as a bishop on guard, see *Catast.* 2.8-10.

¹⁵⁴ Synes. *Catast.* 2.3, “Τίς οὐ ζηλοῖ τὸν ἀκίνδυνον πόλεμον; ὑπὲρ ἑμαυτοῦ πεφοβημένος, ὑπὲρ τῶν καιρῶν, ὑπὲρ τῆς πολιτείας αἰσχύνομαι. ὃ τοῦ πάλαι Ῥωμαίων φρονήματος.” Translation my own.

¹⁵⁵ Synes. *Epist.* 132.

¹⁵⁶ Synes. *Epist.* 113, Fitzgerald, trans., “Οὐκ ἄρα δόξομεν ἄνδρες εἶναι. Ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖν ἰτητέον ἐστὶν ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς ὡς ἔχω

The example of Synesius shows that the heroic image that so often suited military men in the letters of bishops could be used as part of a strategy of self-representation, even for a “philosopher-priest” who avowed separation from the affairs of the world.¹⁵⁷ One might object that Synesius was an exceptional bishop, but we should not be too dismissive of his example. Only a handful of letter collections survive from the period, and we know of several other prominent churchmen with military careers.¹⁵⁸ Germanus of Auxerre, after an education in rhetoric and law, served as *dux* in Gaul before being elevated to the episcopate.¹⁵⁹ According to his hagiographer, while on an episcopal mission to Britain in 429, Germanus laid an ambush and routed an army of Picts and Saxons, an episode which, owing to the lack of miraculous elements and its overall plausibility, commands some respect from historians.¹⁶⁰ In fact, local elites seem

¹⁵⁷ See, e.g. *Epist.* 62 for “φιλόσοφος ἱερεὺς.” On Synesius’ unwillingness to involve himself in secular matters while bishop, see esp. *Epist.* 121 where he refuses to interfere on behalf of a *hydromiktes*, a merchant who cut wine with water to increase his profit (on the term, see Borkowski 1976, 75-76).

¹⁵⁸ Both Pachomius and Martin are alleged to have been compelled to serve, and Martin showily renounced his military service. For examples of competition between military and ascetic recruitment, see Lenski 2004, 102-3 with references, especially his following discussion of Chrys. *Adv. oppugn.* 3.12 (*PG* 47:369-70).

¹⁵⁹ The source for his early life, *V. Germ.* 1, is nonspecific as to the nature of the specific office, “quem quidem togae praeconiis praeminentem protinus res publica ad honorum praesumpsit insignia, ducatus culmen et regimen per provincias conferendo.” I find most persuasive the argument that *ducatus* indicates a military office and the reference to plural *provinciae* is unsuited to a mere *praeses* (Duchesne (1900-15, 2:439-445) and *PLRE* (2:504-505), *inter alios*, suggest *dux tractus Armorici et Nervicani*). Regardless of the historicity of the career, Gaudemet (1950, 115-6) considered a military post plausible and unremarkable, at least to the hagiographer (“Constantius fait connaître ce qui paraissait normal dans le développement d’une grande carrière, sinon à la fin du IV^e siècle, lorsque Germain remplit la sienna, du moins vers 480, à l’époque où fut rédigée la *Vita*.”). Thompson (1984, 83-84) thought the post of *dux* “likely, although there is no certainty.” But cf. Borius 1965, 123n1, “Au fond *culmen ducatus*, c’est un *sommet de chefferie*, et *regimen*, c’est une *direction*, une *administration*,” and Wood 1984, 9-12, who takes the *ducatus* as “allegorical.” Whatever the truth of the matter, the uncertainty surrounding Germanus’ position in the text speaks to the blurred distinctions which could exist between the civil and military bureaucracies.

¹⁶⁰ Thompson (1984, 81-3), generally skeptical of Constantius’ sources for Germanus’ expedition to Britain of 439, notes, “of all the passages in the *Vita* which relate to Britain this is the one which to my mind most carries conviction” (p. 39). Chadwick (1955, 257), observes that Constantius does not ascribe victory in the “Hallelujah Battle” to divine intervention. Bachrach (1995, 7-11) argues that there are indications that Germanus used a military handbook such as Vegetius’ *Epitoma rei militaris* as a guide. Barnes (2010, 255), however, considers the episode an invention.

to have become increasingly involved in skirmishes along the frontier in the fourth and fifth centuries as the Roman army found itself stretched thin against multifarious threats.¹⁶¹ In such a context, we should be less surprised by Synesius' use of martial language to depict himself as a Leonidas or Archilochus.¹⁶²

The blurred lines between military and non-military, whether actual or imagined, meant that such formulations had broad appeal. As a result, heroic imagery could be appropriately extended to a variety of non-military positions. In the remainder of this chapter, I explore this wider gambit of martial imagery in three different contexts: appeals to administrators, requests and self-depictions of local notables and rhetoricians, and ecclesiastical disputes. Calling on allies to assist in metaphorical battles enlivened feelings of comradeship for friends and hostility toward enemies. As a result, imagined battles could creep from one sphere to another.

A Fictively Militarized Bureaucracy

The closest point of comparison for the heroic imagery applied to military men is found in epistles to civil officials. To an extent, this shared discourse could be due to the language of the fictively militarized bureaucracy which blurred distinctions between soldier and civilian. This was the insight of MacMullen, who long ago saw militarization as a sweeping and negative development; "civilian turned soldier, soldier turned civilian in a 'rapprochement' to a middle ground of waste and confusion."¹⁶³ While it is clear

¹⁶¹ Whittaker 1994, 262-9.

¹⁶² *Epist.* 113, 130.

¹⁶³ This was the insight of MacMullen (1963, 152), who saw a sweeping and negative development: "civilian turned soldier, soldier turned civilian in a 'rapprochement' to a middle ground of waste and confusion." I reject the sweep of this 'rapprochement' and such a dismal interpretation of its consequences.

that the bureaucracy elided some distinctions between military and civilian, I reject the broad characterization of this ‘rapprochement’ and such a dismal interpretation of its consequences. “Heroic” imagery did not overwhelmingly rely on the titles and vocabulary of the bureaucracy, and it even applied to local elites and persons with more ambiguous statuses. Instead of looking to bureaucratization as an explanation of this prolific discourse of praise and petition, I posit that “heroic” imagery in these letters was due to a deep-seated military ethos, rooted in an imperial ideology of rulership, which was also informed by historical, literary, and, at least for Christian authors, Old Testament *exempla*.¹⁶⁴

Heroic Martial Imagery in the Bureaucracy

To begin with, the ambiguous vocabulary of imperial service can lead to some uncertainty as to whether an individual was in the military or civil administration. The term for the imperial court, for instance, could confusingly overlap with the designation of a military encampment (τὸ στρατοπέδον/*castra*). When confronted with a person who must go “to the camp,” as Basil’s acquaintance Firminus, mentioned above, said he would, it can be difficult to tell whether the writer meant the emperor’s court or a military base.¹⁶⁵ Likewise, the generic term for military service was the same as the term for work on the civil side of the administration (στρατεία/*militia*). Military language was but one aspect of this “fictively militarized” bureaucracy.¹⁶⁶ Military accoutrement – the

¹⁶⁴ On this latter point, I am inspired by Brown 2002, which stresses the “Near Eastern” paradigm of defending the poor over and above classical models, and Dagron 2003, which mostly addresses a later period, but still gives a framework within which OT examples could impact ideals of rulership.

¹⁶⁵ Basil, *Epist.* 117.

¹⁶⁶ Quote from Callu 1972-2009, 3:183 *ad* Symm. *Epist.* 7.96.1: “...l’administration (laquelle, on le sait, est fictivement militarisée, d’où les mots *militiae* et *castrensis*).”

soldierly ζώνη/*cingulum*, the χλαμός/*paludamentum* rather than the civilian *pallium* or *toga*, and various badges of rank and status¹⁶⁷ – were visual reminders of the overlapping verbal imagery of state service.

This blending of military and civilian markers, more than a frivolous antiquarian interest, means that some officials that have been assumed to be military men could in fact have been civil administrators. A good illustration of this can be found in Synesius' *De dono*, a letter sent to one Paeonius to accompany an astrolabe, and in his *Epist.* 142, which commended an unnamed *comes*. In the letter to Paeonius, Synesius enthusiastically extolled his recipient for joining *φιλοσοφία* and *στρατεία*:

So how could I not keep the deepest part of my soul for marvelous Paeonius, who has found a way to elevate and join together philosophy and military service, long walled off by great ramparts, seeing in these pursuits an ancient affinity? For long ago when Italy had students of Pythagoras as rulers of cities, it was called Magna Graecia, and rightfully so...¹⁶⁸

Synesius followed up with a list of renowned men who embodied this ideal: Charondas, Zaleucus, Archytas, Philolaus, Timaeus, Zeno, Xenophon, and Dionysius. This passage has led many to suppose that Paeonius had a military position, perhaps *comes rei militaris* or *comes Aegypti*.¹⁶⁹ Unfortunately, an exact identification is elusive,

¹⁶⁷ On these badges see MacMullen 1964b. Early pictorial representations of such uniforms include the missorium of Theodosius I, the Durostorum (Silistra) tomb paintings, and the Ammon Luxor relief. For further discussion of the importance of martial sartorial imagery, see ch. 3, below.

¹⁶⁸ Synes. *Astrolab.* 2, “Πῶς οὖν οὐ μέλλω τὴν μέσσην ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ χώραν τῷ θαυμαστῷ Παιονίῳ νέμειν, ὃς ἐκ πολλοῦ διατετειχισμένης θριγκοῖς μεγάλῳις φιλοσοφίαν καὶ στρατείαν ἐξεῦρεν ἐπαναγαγεῖν καὶ συνάψαι, παλαιάν τινα ἐνιδὼν τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι τούτοις συγγένειαν; Ἰταλία μὲν γὰρ πάλαι τοὺς αὐτοὺς ἔχουσα Πυθαγόρου τε ἀκουστάς καὶ τῶν πόλεων ἁρμοστάς, Ἑλλάς ἡ μεγάλη προσηγορεύετο, καὶ μάλα ἐν δίκῃ...”

¹⁶⁹ See Paeonius 1 *PLRE* 2:816-817, “Paeonius is certainly identical with an unnamed κόμης at Alexandria mentioned as an acquaintance and correspondent of Synesius there in three letters; Synes. *Epist.* 98, 99, 142... As a military *comes* in Alexandria, Paeonius presumably held the post of *comes Aegypti*; if he still held some position when Synesius sent him the astrolabe, he was probably a *comes rei militaris*.”

particularly because it involves linking the *De dono*'s Paeonius with the unnamed *comes* of *Ep.* 142:

And greet the marvelous *comes*...He is esteemed by me and honored among all as one who alone has united culture and military service, walled off by great ramparts, having found an old-time relationship between these pursuits. High-minded as no soldier ever, he flees from the arrogance which dwells near pride...¹⁷⁰

Despite the strong similarities of language, I join Roques in being skeptical of such a stylistic identification.¹⁷¹ To the dismay of some modern commentators, stock phrases and doublets sometimes appear in recommendations and petitions.¹⁷² The similarities here most likely indicate a commonplace marriage of *φιλοσοφία/παιδεία* and *στρατεία*.¹⁷³

A possibility not hitherto entertained by any scholar is that in one or both of these letters Synesius referred to an officer outside the military bureaucracy, perhaps one with a military background or whose responsibilities merely touched upon military matters (such as a financial *comes* or the *magister officiorum*, who oversaw *fabricae*).¹⁷⁴ Even the list of philosopher-statesmen in the *De dono* included men whose contributions were unmilitary in nature, such as Charondas and Zaleucus, and it concluded with the

¹⁷⁰ Synes. *Epist.* 142, “Τὸν θαυμάσιον κόμητα πρόσειπε...καίτοι παρ’ ἐμοὶ τίμιος ὁ ἀνὴρ καὶ παντὸς ἄξιος, ὃς παιδείαν καὶ στρατείαν διατετειχισμένας θριγκοῖς μεγάλοις τῶν ἐφ’ ἡμῖν μόνος εἰς ταῦτόν ἤγαγε, παλαιάν τινα ἐξευρὼν ἐν τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι τούτοις συγγένειαν. μεγαλόφρων δὲ ὢν ὥς οὐδεὶς πω στρατιώτης, ἐκ γειτόνων τῆς μεγαλοφροσύνης παροικοῦσαν τὴν ἀλαζονείαν ἐκφεύγει.”

¹⁷¹ Although I do not join in his identification of the unnamed *comes* as Simplicius either (see Roques 2000, 3:221n5).

¹⁷² For an example, see Symm. *Epist.* 1.40.1 (dated by Callu (1972-2000, 1:223n6) to 376-377 on the basis of “saeculi beatitudo” being a reference to the beginning of Gratian’s reign) and *Epist.* 9.59.1 (Dated by Callu (4:114n1) to 397-398). For discussion of the two letters, see ch. 3, below. On doublets and their rarity in the Symmachian corpus, see Bruggisser 1993, 320-22 and Salzman and Roberts 2012, 86.

¹⁷³ On this motif, see above and Roques 2000, 3:407n14.

¹⁷⁴ Much as Rapp (2005, 158n12) notes that Fitzgerald’s translation of “military career” for *στρατεία* in Synes. *Epist.* 66 (Garzya 67; Fitzgerald 1926, 151) is overly specific. Given the uncertainty surrounding the date of the letter and the gaps in our knowledge of both Paeonius and the unnamed *comes* of *Epist.* 142, I find both plausible.

summarizing remark: “thus, once upon a time, philosophy and statesmanship (*φιλοσοφία καὶ πολιτεία*) were together and whenever they came together, such things were done.”¹⁷⁵ When writing of civil governors and bureaucrats, Synesius dramatized events with quasi-military language, whether to appeal to the authorities or to deride corruption.¹⁷⁶ I would suggest that the overlapping vocabulary of the military and civil bureaucracies was conducive to parallel language of praise and petition, namely through the depiction of individuals as heroic champions.

Several writers used this overlapping vocabulary playfully, suggesting that they were aware of their ability to use the language of *militia/στρατεία* to portray non-military men as martial heroes. In the ambiguous cases of Paeonius and the *comes* already mentioned, Synesius noted that *φιλοσοφία* and *στρατεία* were “walled off by great ramparts,” a fitting metaphor for a word with military valences, even if the office in question was civil. Symmachus also played with the military vocabulary of the court. He developed an elaborate metaphor to praise Maximilianus’ skill as a writer at court, comparing his words to the weapons of a skirmisher.¹⁷⁷ Likewise, in a salutation to Hephaestio, Symmachus noted the “cohorts of learned men” (*litteratorum cohortes*) who attended the official before highlighting the ease with which his recipient bore the

¹⁷⁵ *De dono*, 8, “οὕτω πάλαι μὲν συνεγίνοντο φιλοσοφία καὶ πολιτεία, καὶ ἐπειδὴν συνέλθοιεν, τοιαῦτα εἰργάζοντο.” Zaleucus and Charondas were lawgivers of Epizephyrian Locri and Catania respectively.

¹⁷⁶ One appeal to the governor, directed through the poet Theotimus, called for intervention against a certain Peter and his comrades who were stirring up commotion and violently threatening the laws (*Epist.* 47). His letter deriding Andronicus is important as it represents the governor as an explicitly military threat (*Epist.* 41: “the chorus leader of them all was Andronicus, a demon of war, gorged with disasters, gloating over the ruins of the city” (χορηγὸς πάντων Ἀνδρόνικος, δαίμων ἀρήμιος, ἄπληστος συμφορῶν, τῆς πόλεως τοῖς λειψάνοις ἐγκείμενος)). Andronicus 1 (*PLRE* 2:89-90) was civil governor from 411-412 (Roques 2000, 1:128n2).

¹⁷⁷ *Epist.* 8.48.1: “Soles in scribendo esse prolixus pro ingenii tui viribus. Postquam te honor aulicus in procinctum vocavit, tu quoque verba succingis, et tanquam levis armaturae miles rorarios aemularis...”

demands of his *militia*.¹⁷⁸ Both Symmachus and Ausonius toyed with the idea of young administrators being “recruits” (*tirones*) and older bureaucrats being “veterans” (*veterani*).¹⁷⁹ Far from empty convention, the military language in letters intimates a rhetorically sophisticated appreciation of the new idiom of government.

Accordingly, many late antique letters valorized imperial service through “heroic” martial imagery, even when the official in question was not a military man and his responsibilities were only tangentially military. Basil praised Aburgius, perhaps *comes* or *praefectus Orientis*,¹⁸⁰ in particularly grandiose terms:

That you are darting hither and yon like a star, arising now here now there in the barbarian land, now furnishing provisions to the army (*σιτηρέσια στρατιωτικά*), and now appearing before the Emperor in resplendent array (*μετὰ λαμπροῦ τοῦ σχήματος*), fame, the messenger of good tidings, does not cease to announce to us.¹⁸¹

Association with the emperor and his army made Aburgius a marvelous figure. More than bald praise, such military connections were useful details when Basil wanted to praise civilian officials. In a letter thick with classicizing allusions, the bishop asked Candidianus, presumably a governor, for help with some ruffians, and before his request, he praised the administrator’s provision for soldiers (*στρατιῶται*):

¹⁷⁸ *Epist.* 5.35. To Hephaestio 2 (PLRE I:416, “He might have been *primicerius notariorum* or *magister* of one of the *scrinia*”). We might also note other potential military references in the short letter, including mention of the “*dignitatis tuae copiis*” and “*subsidia solemnium alimoniarum*.”

¹⁷⁹ *Epist.* 6.53, 1.32.4 (= *Aus. Epist.* 2 in Evelyn-White 1919-1921 = *Epist.* 12 in Green 1991)

¹⁸⁰ *PLRE* 1:5. Van Dam 2002, 59. Although Aburgius could not have become Prefect of the East until 378 and this particular letter is supposed to have been written in 375, there are no details that permit us to securely date it, and given the confused process of compilation behind Basil’s letters, its proximity to other letters of 375 need not imply an early date.

¹⁸¹ Basil. *Epist.* 196 = [G.Naz.,] *Epist.* 241 (DeFerrari trans.), “Διάττειν σε ὡς τοὺς ἀστέρας, ἄλλοτε κατ’ ἄλλο μέρος τῆς βαρβαρικῆς ἀνίσχοντα, νῦν μὲν σιτηρέσια στρατιωτικὰ παρέχοντα, νῦν δὲ βασιλεῖ φαινόμενον μετὰ λαμπροῦ τοῦ σχήματος, ἢ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἄγγελος φήμη ἀγγέλλουσα ἡμῖν οὐ διαλείπει.” Van Dam 2002, 219n4 translates *μετὰ λαμπροῦ τοῦ σχήματος* narrowly as “in dazzling robes.” I prefer DeFerrari’s more ambiguous translation because it captures the multivalence of *σχῆμα* which can denote not only dress (which at any rate would be odd with the preposition *μετά*) but also bearing, appearance, and military formation (*LSJ*, s.v. 3, 4a, 9), befitting the military and astronomical context.

When I opened [your letter] and went through its contents, laughter came upon me, somewhat out of the happiness of learning of nothing strange and somewhat from comparing your situation to that of Demosthenes. When he was leading a chorus of a few dancers and flute-players, he thought it fitting to no longer be called Demosthenes, but rather choregos. But you are the same whether you are choregos or not – although to be sure you provide for countless more *στρατιῶται* than the men he equipped – you who do not write to us from your rank but in the usual way. And you do not give up any of your zeal for letters, but you “withdraw under the shelter of a strong wall in the storm and blast” of affairs, as Plato says, filling your soul with no disturbance.¹⁸²

We could assume *στρατιῶται* were a military force passing through the area whom Candidianus needed to quarter, but it is also possible that they were more permanently attached to the governor, whether as soldiers on secondment or as civil officials staffing the governor’s *officium*.¹⁸³ This effusive and classicizing praise highlighted the quasi-military aspects of his civilian post, whether the support of the army or his authority over his subordinates. We see a similar strategy when Basil wrote to Martinianus, a fellow Cappadocian and a former *consularis* of Sicily and *vicarius* of Africa.¹⁸⁴ The

¹⁸² Basil. Epist. 3: “ἐπεὶ δὲ ἔλυσσα, καὶ πάνθ’ ἕκαστα ἐπεξῆλθον, γελάσαι μοι ἐπῆλθε, τοῦτο μὲν ὑφ’ ἡδονῆς, τοῦ μηδὲν ἀκοῦσαι νεώτερον, τοῦτο δὲ πρὸς τὰ Δημοσθένους τὰ σὰ κρίναντι. ὅτι ὁ μὲν, ἐπειδὴ ὀλίγοις τισὶ χορευταῖς καὶ αὐληταῖς ἐχορήγει, οὐκέτι ἡξίου Δημοσθένους, ἀλλὰ χορηγὸς ὀνομάζεσθαι: σὺ δὲ ὁ αὐτὸς εἶ, καὶ χορηγῶν καὶ μὴ χορηγῶν μέντοι πλείοσι μυριάσι στρατιωτῶν ἢ ὅσοις ἀνδράσιν ἐκεῖνος παρέσχε τὰ ἐπιτήδεα, ὅς γε οὐθ’ ἡμῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ σχήματος ἐπιστέλλεις, ἀλλὰ τὸν εἰωθότα τρόπον: καὶ τῆς περὶ λόγους σπουδῆς οὐδὲν ὑφίεσαι, ἀλλὰ τὸ τοῦ Πλάτωνος, ἐν χειμῶνι καὶ ζάλῃ πραγμάτων, οἷον ὑπὸ τείχει τινὶ καρτερῷ ἀποστάς, οὐδενὸς θορύβου τὴν ψυχὴν ἀναπίμπλασαι.” The reference is to Plat. *Rep.* 496D. The letter begins with another classical quasi-military allusion, comparing Candidianus’ letter to the Laconian *skytale*, which was a device used by the Ephors to communicate specifically with admirals and generals (Plut. *Lys.* 19.5; Suid. s.v. σκυτάλη. For further discussion, see *RE* s.v. σκυτάλη). Given Candidianus’ *paideia* (Fatti 2009, 60) such allusions would be welcome, but their military flavor adds another dimension to Basil’s appeal.

¹⁸³ Soldiers passing through: Fatti 2011, 353. This depends in part on identifying this Candidianus as the recipient of Gr. Naz. *Epist.* 10, which mentions the ἀρχὼν and a στρατιωνικὴ χεῖρ. For a general discussion of the evidence of quartering soldiers and problems arising from it, see Pollard 2000, 104-9. Interpreting the *στρατιῶται* as members of the governor’s *officium* would fit the ambiguous vocabulary of fourth-century administration in which members of the judicial and financial branches were classed as soldiers and enrolled on paper in a cohort (Jones 1964, 1:565-566).

¹⁸⁴ Martinianus 5, *PLRE* 1:564. He would later become *praefectus urbis Romae*. Gr. Naz. *Epit.* 49 gives his career, “ὅς ποτ’ ἔης βασιλῆος ἐν ἔρκεσι κάρτος ὑπάρχων, δουρὶ δὲ Σικανίην κτήσαο καὶ Λιβύην.” Note the emphasis on the spear (δουρὶ) in relation to his role as governor and vicar.

bishop objected to the division of Cappadocia into two provinces, a move that reduced the political and ecclesiastical clout of Caesarea relative to Tarsus, newly elevated to the rank of metropolis.¹⁸⁵ Basil encouraged the ex-governor to stand up to Valens and oppose this injustice like Solon, defiantly equipped in armor to oppose Peisistratus.¹⁸⁶ Even a seemingly prosaic administrative matter could become an imagined martial struggle, pitting justice against injustice.

Isidore stressed the power of administrators to use violence and terror, tempered by clemency,¹⁸⁷ to hinder the enemies of justice. Such officials could fight for or against justice. Isidore, for example, lauded Ausonius, *corrector* of Augustamniaca, for wielding the laws against the wicked.¹⁸⁸ But he could also lambast Cyrenius, another *corrector* of Augustamniaca (431/2)¹⁸⁹ in a letter to Rufinus, the praetorian prefect, for his corruption:

Either the wrongs of the Pelusiotēs or the very important affairs of the Romans which you manage favorably have caused it to escape your notice, most gracious benefactor, that Cyrenius has laid hold of the governorship and is making things here intolerable again. The price of legal services is excessive; poverty is great; injustices are frequent; the church cannot help; justice has departed; the law is not known. There is fear for those who do not cause fear. He wields as a weapon the

¹⁸⁵ On this division of 371 and its significant implications for social status, see Van Dam 2002, 28-36.

¹⁸⁶ *Epist.* 74, cf. Plut., *Sol.* 30 (with a slightly different account) and Diogenes Laertes, 1.49.

¹⁸⁷ Isid. Pel. *Epist.* 1859, for example, argues that the mark of a man of the state is not vanity and pride, but affability and clemency.

¹⁸⁸ Ausonius 2, *PLRE* 2:202-3 was the recipient of many letters from Isidore. Notable among them are Isid. Pel. *Epist.* 1063, “You would govern well, oh most reasonable man, if you are an unswerving guard of justice...” (“Καλῶς ἂν, ὃ ἐλλογιμώτατε, διοικήσεις τὴν ἀρχήν, εἰ τοῦ μὲν δικαίου φύλαξ ἀκλινὴς γένοιτο...”) and *Epist.* 1519, “It befits your valor, equipped with the strength of the laws, to force away from wrongdoing those who try to profit illegally by arming their hands against the weaker.” (Πρέπει τῇ τῶν νόμων ὥπλισμένη ἰσχύϊ, ἀναγκάζειν ἀπέχεσθαι τοῦ ἀδικεῖν τοὺς ὅθεν οὐ χρὴ κερδαίνειν ἐπιχειροῦντας κατὰ τῶν ἀσθενεστέρων ὀπλίζοντας τὴν δεξιάν). Evieux 1997-2017, 2:201n1 thinks this refers to the diversion of alms for the poor by some clerics of Pelusium, but I do not think we can be sure of the context.

¹⁸⁹ *PLRE* 2:333-4.

magnitude of what he does. Either strip him of his power, or know that you will face judgment with him before God.¹⁹⁰

A good leader must be both good and fearsome, submitting himself to the laws just as he enforces those laws on the subjects.¹⁹¹ In this reciprocal need for self-government and good governance we can sense an echo of Isidore's missives to soldiers: fight the good fight, but know your place.

As suggested above, the fictively-militarized vocabulary of the civil bureaucracy could have inspired this description of civil administrators with military language. Still, there are strong reasons to doubt such an elegantly simple explanation. For one thing, most of the examples of "heroic" imagery cited above did not self-consciously play with the technical martial vocabulary of the administration. While I would not go so far as to suggest that the military designations of civil servants "meant very little in practice,"¹⁹² the connection between the martial accoutrement of the bureaucracy and the discourse surrounding it was subtle. Rather than being owed to a straightforward process of militarization, "heroic" martial imagery tapped into a deeper well of ideals that resonated with the language of the administration and appealed to a wide audience.

Deep-seated Militarism

I argue that the pattern of military language that we see ripple through elite discourse is manifestly indebted to several strands of cultural influence, namely a deep-

¹⁹⁰ Isid. Pel. *Epist.* 178, "Ἡ τὰ Πηλουσιωτῶν ἀμαρτήματα, ἧ τὰ Ῥωμαίων μέγιστα πράγματα ἃ διέπεις εὐμενῶς, λαθεῖν σε τὸν παναρκετὴν εὐεργέτην ἐποίησεν, ὅπως Κυρήνιος τῆς ἀρχῆς ἐπελάβετο, καὶ πράττει τὰ ἐνταῦθα πάλιν χαλεπῶς. Αἱ γὰρ πράξεις σφοδραὶ, αἱ πτωχεῖαι πολλαί, αἱ ἀδικίαι συχναί, ἡ Ἐκκλησία οὐχ οἷα βοηθεῖν. Ἀπέβη τὸ δίκαιον, ὁ νόμος ἡγνόνηται · ὁ φόβος τοῖς μὴ παρέχουσι, τὸ μῆκος ὅπλων ἔχει ὦν δρᾷ ἡ παῦσον αὐτὸν τῆς δυνάμεως, ἡ ἴσθι συναπολαύσων αὐτῷ ἐπὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ κρίματος." On this meaning of πράξεις, see *LSJ* s.v. *πρᾶξις*, II, "of legal documents, *contract for farming of taxes, sale, etc.*"

¹⁹¹ *Epist.* 1449 (with Evieux 1997-2017, 2:81n2 on the identification of Timothy as a governor), 1746

¹⁹² Jones 1964, 1:566.

seated warrior ethos, an energetic imperial ideology, and ideals of philosophic rulership expressed in terms of historical, literary, and biblical exemplars. This reading of “heroic” imagery as a phenomenon with deep roots helps us see continuity in the discourse of late antiquity, separate from grandiose narratives of decline or militarization. This broadly-based militaristic ethos constitutes a necessary background to understand other extended uses of martial imagery, upon which the latter half of the chapter will focus. As we will see, the specifics of martial culture and rates of military service waxed and waned over time, but a thread of militarism runs through Roman history, from the republic to the later empire.

Militarism has occupied a central place in the historiography of ancient Rome. W.V. Harris argued that the Roman Republic was uniquely militaristic among ancient states. Its aristocracy prized martial glory, its *cursus honorum* stressed military service, and its rituals hailed conquest and victory as the highest goods. The senatorial aristocracy’s competitive culture fueled a system of imperialism and ferocious warfare; the state engaged in war with such regularity that the phenomenon of republican militarism, with its “dark and irrational roots,” had “a pathological character.”¹⁹³ Noting the comparability of Greek, Persian, Celtic, and Carthaginian warrior cultures, Arthur M. Eckstein has cast doubt on the exceptional character of Roman militarism.¹⁹⁴ Instead, he attributes the militarism of Roman elites to the competitive environment of the Hellenistic Mediterranean, rendering its militarism less “pathological” and more understandable in wider context.

¹⁹³ Harris 1979, 53.

¹⁹⁴ Eckstein 2006, 3.

However unique or typical Roman militarism was, it was sufficiently rooted in aristocratic culture to persist even after shifts in military and political institutions had changed the nature of the game. Hopkins has noted the importance of continuous warfare, alongside other factors, in fueling economic growth in the republic, but another consequence of this dynamic was an eventual reduction in the proportion of the citizen body engaged in warfare.¹⁹⁵ All the while, the militarism of the Roman elite, difficult to measure but nevertheless still vibrant, did not flag alongside the “gradual demilitarisation of the yeomanry.”¹⁹⁶

Nor did the Principate and its redirection of elite careers fundamentally change the militaristic values of the aristocracy. To be sure, the triumph was closed off from all but members of the imperial family, and the system of senatorial and imperial provinces meant that the *princeps* effectively became the gatekeeper for martial ambitions, but the aristocracy’s ethos remained militaristic by any measure throughout the early empire. The prelude to the senatorial *cursus* typically, although not always, involved time spent as a military tribune,¹⁹⁷ and the relative availability of praetorian and consular legionary legateships meant that the most prestigious posts were often military in character, and contrary to the impression of a neutered aristocracy promulgated by such writers as Tacitus, many senators had ample experience in military life.¹⁹⁸ In imperial literature,

¹⁹⁵ Hopkins 1978, 29-31, esp. the table on p. 33 which plots the change in population, absolute army size, and its proportional size. The army’s absolute size increased from 225 to 23 BC, but its size relative to the rest of the population declined.

¹⁹⁶ Hopkins 1978, 37; on the difficulty of finding “adequate criteria of militarism,” see *ibid.* 103-104.

¹⁹⁷ See Birley 1981, 8-12, esp. n17, which surveys the debate and concludes, “it might be reasonable to suggest that not more than thirteen or fourteen *XXviri* each year, on average, became *tribune militum*,” which was, suffice it to say, a majority.

¹⁹⁸ There were around 24 legions that needed *propraetorian* legates (see Birley 1981, 16-17, for the breakdown) and between 7 and 14 consular legates (*ibid.*, 26-32). On the ample experience of some senators in the military, see *ibid.* 34-35.

deeds of martial glory loomed as the acme of a distinguished career, a fact illustrated by the prominence of military themes in historiography and poetry.

The decline in military service by the senate in the third and fourth centuries did not transform the elite's martial values whole cloth. Relying on two remarks in Aurelius Victor, some historians have argued that an edict of Gallienus issued around 262 formally banned senators from military command.¹⁹⁹ But given that Victor is the only source of this edict and that he was quite hostile to Gallienus, it is likely that the historian or his source was exaggerating the nature of the edict, and such a formal law may have never existed.²⁰⁰ Prosopographical studies show that there were changes to the senatorial *cursus* in the third century, including an exclusion from the rank of *tribunus laticlavus* and *legatus legionis*, but this was a long process already underway with the Severans.²⁰¹ Exceptions – uncertain careers, senators in command of provinces with multiple legions, diplomas issued under their auspices, and equestrian commanders adlected into the senate – suggest that there was not a complete cordoning off of the senate from the military.²⁰² In the fourth century, reforms to the composition of the senate further complicate the idea of an ensconced and pacifist clarissime. Seen in context, the decline in numbers of military senators probably had less to do with formal

¹⁹⁹ Aur. Vict., *de Caes.* 33.34, “quia ipse Gallienus, metu socordiae suae ne imperium ad optimos nobilium transferetur, senatum militia vetuit et adire exercitus”; 37.6, “Quippe amissa Gallieni edicto refici militia potuit [senatus]...” The date of 262 is determined not by any detail in Aurelius Victor, but is rather a conjecture based on prosopography (Le Bohec 2004, 124). For an overview of Gallienus' reforms and supposed edict, see De Blois 1976, 37-87.

²⁰⁰ Le Bohec 2004, 132. On Victor, his sources for the reign of Gallienus, and his bias, see Geiger 2013, 36-38.

²⁰¹ Geiger 2013, 359.

²⁰² Le Bohec 2004, 124-128. On the different situations of provincial organization, Christol 1986, 48-53. Birley 1981, 35-36n13, emphasizes that legions in provinces with senatorial governors were kept under separate command, but the line of demarcation between consular and commander was not clear-cut (Le Bohec 2004, 126-127).

political developments than long-term social and tactical changes, namely the increased need for good cavalry commanders, most often drawn from the Illyrian provinces.²⁰³

But even given a reduction in overall military service of the upper-crust of Roman society, there is no need to assume a decline in martial fervor, at least at a cultural level. Guy Halsall argued that as fewer ethnic Romans served in the military, it became a locus for non-Romanness.²⁰⁴ Matthew Kuefler took a different tack and argued that the militarism of the aristocracy became divorced from a demilitarized reality, effectively becoming a form of escapism.²⁰⁵ Interpretations such as these misunderstand the nature of the civilian-military divide. Aristocrats were not really doing much of the fighting, even in the early empire, and in the later empire, administrative realities still burdened bureaucrats, senators, and local decurions with military-adjacent responsibilities and sufficiently martial imagery to avoid a serious disjunction between their imagined militarized service and their civilian lives. Scholars also assume too strong of a relationship between levels of military service and ‘militarization.’ The fetishization of warfare has little to do with relative levels of military service. For example, a smaller portion of Rome’s citizens served in the military in the early empire than in the mid-republic, but the empire’s elite was just as qualitatively ‘militaristic’ as the republic’s. By a number of indicators (popular themes of literature, motifs of imperial panegyric, and depictions in art) a culture of ‘militarism’ persisted in the fourth century and beyond.

²⁰³ Cosme 2007, 97-109.

²⁰⁴ Halsall 2004, 22-23.

²⁰⁵ Kuefler 2001, 45-55.

Local Notables and Rhetoricians Depicted as Heroic Figures

The martial imagery found in missives to imperial administrators, then, evidently owed more to a long-standing military culture than to peculiar features of the fourth century bureaucracy. Accordingly, we find heroic martial imagery in a wider array of contexts than just letters to administrators and soldiers. Letters to decurions, for example, are replete with appeals to heroic qualities and military virtues. For these men the most apposite contexts for such martial imagery were the patron's heroic protection of his client and the advocate's war in the courtroom by means of law and rhetoric.

All this was despite the decurionate's ostensible separation from military responsibilities. Local elites' tasks included sitting on the town council, collecting taxes, outlaying wealth on public infrastructure, and maintaining the *cursus publicus*. These notables did not wear the soldierly *cingulum* or *chlamys*, nor did their titles include bureaucratic markers of military rank. A sharp distinction existed between local notables and imperial administrators, at least in the eyes of the law, which partitioned decurions from the *militia* of soldiers and bureaucrats and presented them as liable to use entry to the army and imperial service to escape local curial duties.²⁰⁶ One might expect that these men were not well-suited for military praise in the same heroic terms as those in the imperial service. But just as the pronouncements of the *Theodosian Code* obscured a more complex reality, so too were the lines between administrators and decurions blurred in the epistolary evidence.

²⁰⁶ Rapp 2005, 282-284.

Local Elites as Rhetorical Warriors

A letter of Augustine indicates some of this functional overlap between the imagined heroic role of an imperial official and that of the local decurion. Writing in 420 to the bishops Alypius and Peregrinus, Augustine complained of a lack of eligible clerics, a crisis brought on because “*defensores* are lacking who will guard the *ordines* from the wickedness of the powerful.”²⁰⁷ To remedy this situation, Augustine called for the appointment of a *defensor civitatis*:

Therefore, our people of Hippo, and I especially, want to have a *defensor*, but we are uncertain whether it is permissible to get a man in the service. If possible, we all want our Ursus, son-in-law of Glycerius, but if we can only have a private person, we judge that one of our sons, either Eusebius or Eleusinus, could fill that post, although people suitable in character and skill can also be found among the decurions themselves, if a rank be given to them with sufficient authority.²⁰⁸

That Augustine would consider a private person (“*privatum*”) – either a Christian (“*unus ex filiis nostris*”) or a decurion (“*in ipsis ordinibus civitatum*”) – an acceptable substitute for an imperial official (“*militantem*”) suggests that the same imagined role of heroic defender could be filled by anyone, provided he be endowed with sufficient legal authority.

²⁰⁷ Aug., *Epist.* 22*.2, “unde autem hoc tempore deficient ordines parum attenditur: quia scilicet defensores desunt qui eos ab improbitate personarum potentiorum, a quibus conteruntur, utcumque tueantur.”

²⁰⁸ Aug., *Epist.* 22*.4, “unde nostri Hipponienses uolunt quidem et me maxime uolente habere defensorem, sed incerti sumus utrum militantem liceat impetrare; quod si licet filium nostrum Vrsum Glycerii generum omnes uolumus; si autem non licet nisi priuatum, unus ex filiis nostris, id est aut Eusebius aut Eleusinus, existimamus quod possit istam implere personam, quamuis et in ipsis ordinibus ciuitatum possint inueniri idonei moribus atque sollertia, si eis detur dignitas, in qua esse sufficiens possit auctoritas.” My translation. I opt for a broader translation of *militantem* as “a man in the service” than Teske, who takes it narrowly as “a military man.” Not only is the meaning of the word ambiguous, but *noster Ursus* was perhaps an *agens in rebus* at the council of Carthage in 411 or *tribunus* and *protector domus regiae* in the same city around 421 (Ursus 2 or 4, *PLRE II*: 1192-3). Eusebius may be the same as the recipient of Aug. *Epist.* 34-35. Eleusinus cannot be the tribune listed at *PLRE II*: 389 and must instead be another individual.

Martial imagery lurks beneath the surface of this letter. Augustine chose language that could complement the military valences of technical vocabulary (*defensorem, militantem*). The church was powerless to “drive away the violence (*vim*)” of imperious officials, who could complain to their superiors that “public necessities” were being impeded; as a result, those unable to flee to the church were “plundered.”²⁰⁹ These legal wranglings and affronts to the people of Hippo became a dramatic struggle, one which called for a valiant defender, even if he was not vested with the trappings of the imperial service.

The example of the *defensor civitatis* is intriguing because it was a position that had transformed in Augustine’s lifetime from a post filled by the praetorian prefect to a local office, selected first by the local curia and then by a mix of curial and clerical elites.²¹⁰ It seems that Augustine was unaware of these technical changes,²¹¹ but he certainly did not misunderstand the figurative importance of the post, especially in the context of the position’s expanded responsibilities in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Augustine’s letter hints at heroic imagery in his enlivened call for a *defensor* to repel the *vis* of the powerful. It is possible that this was due to the martial valences of the term *defensor* or persisting associations with the military language of the bureaucracy. But when we turn to other examples, it becomes clear that dramatizing the defense of the powerless in court was not confined to positions with vaguely military-

²⁰⁹ *Epist.* 22*.3, “nam si eorum uim manu ecclesiastica pellere uoluerimus, queruntur de nobis eis potestatibus a quibus mittuntur, quod per nos impediatur publicae necessitates...ita fit, ut perpauis qui confugiunt ad ecclesiam utcumque solacio uel praesidio esse ualeamus; ceteri uero longe plures homines foris inuenti uel res eorum nobis gementibus et non ualentibus subuenire uastantur.”

²¹⁰ Frakes offers an account of the laws of 387 (*Cod. Theod.* 1.29.6) and 409 (*Cod. Iust.* 1.55.8) which changed selection procedures (2001, 172-174).

²¹¹ Frakes 2001, 191.

sounding names or a bureaucratic pedigree. Many Greek letters to *σχολαστικοί*, a term that could denote an imperial official, a generic legal advocate, or someone with an education in law or rhetoric,²¹² attached weighty military language to local notables. This suggests that the connection between rhetoric, law, and an imagined military sphere was potent in the social imagination across the spectrum of individuals steeped in the trappings of *paideia*.

Isidore's letters provide ample evidence of this. His *σχολαστικοί* were on the front lines of rhetorical battle, as it were, dueling on behalf of justice in court against the wily sophists "whose mouths are filled by the incantations of poets, the maneuvers of rhetors, or the arguments of philosophers" who have not "trained their comportment and regulated their customs."²¹³ The forthright tactics of good *scholastikoi*, evidence of their virtuous character, were contrasted with the deceptive and underhanded tricks of sophists.²¹⁴ Restraint and moderation were the hallmarks of the good rhetor, who would endure slander with equanimity and forbearance.

This standard of behavior was portrayed by Isidore as a kind of turning the other cheek in battle. In a letter to a certain *scholastikos* named Peter, Isidore urged him not

²¹² For the term as a synonym of *defensor civitatis*, see *LSJ* s.v. σχολαστικός, III. The much more general sense of the word as a marker of culture, legal training, or rhetorical education is well studied by Claus 1965 and Loukaki 2016.

²¹³ Isid. Pel. *Epist.* 1880, "τὸν τὸ ἦθος ἐξασκήσαντα καὶ τὸν τρόπον ρυθμίσαντα."

²¹⁴ Isid. Pel. *Epist.* 1361, "do not do violence to the truth in controversies; do not violate it by twisting certain knowledge with sophistic craftiness, but considering all things secondary to the truth, but render your judgment about it without trickery and bias." ("Μὴ τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῖς ἐριστικοῖς λόγοις βιάζου, μηδὲ καθύβριζε αὐτὴν συσκιάζων τέχνη σοφιστικῇ τὴν ἀκριβῆ γνώσιν· ἀλλὰ πάντα δεύτερα τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἡγούμενος, ἀκαπήλευτον καὶ ἀδέκαστον τὴν περὶ αὐτοῦ ψῆφον ἔνεγκον.") Cf. *Epist.* 1409 for "the manners of a mixed barbarian, the tongue unregulated, the temperament of a savage beast, the hostility to virtue, and the alliance with evil" ("τὸ δὲ εἶναι τὸν τρόπον μιζοβάρβαρον, καὶ τὴν γλῶτταν ἀκρατῇ, καὶ τὸν θυμὸν θηριώδη, καὶ τῇ ἀρετῇ πολέμιον, καὶ τῇ κακίᾳ σύμμαχον—τοὺς μὲν γὰρ σπουδαίους ἐξοστρακίζει, τοὺς δὲ φαύλους συγκροτεῖ—τοῦτ' ἀληθῶς παρ' αὐτὸν γίνεται, καὶ πάσης συγγνώμης ἐστὶ μείζον.")

to “battle against shadows, nor hurt himself against those...who love quarreling in the most consequential and timely cases.”²¹⁵ Instead of chasing the approval of the crowd through needless conflict, the good rhetorician should prefer a life of frugality (*αὐτάρκεια*) and welcome the blows of his opponents as a badge of honor:

But if, while you are so disposed [i.e. prizing virtue above acclaim], some who do not do good but envy those who do mistreat you, do not be discouraged, but nobly endure this attack of the enemy, thinking that he would not use this engine to overthrow your well-fortified life, unless the glory of your good reputation had keenly seized him.²¹⁶

Nevertheless, Isidore could be flexible in his advice to *scholastikoi*. He advised one Theodorus to hinder his sharp tongue, but if he could not restrain himself from rhetorical violence, “it should be against your enemies and against your opponents” (the unjust, the stupid, the believers in demons, the heretics, the superstitious Hellenes, the uneducated Jews).²¹⁷ If one should use fictive violence against anyone, in accordance with his calls for militant holiness, Isidore urged the *scholastikos* Nicanor to equip himself for a rhetorical struggle with the wayward:

Arguments are the leaders of character, arrayed to conduct everything within us according to reason. And if we occupy ourselves with these in conflicts and battles, proclaiming them to the ignorant, to train our hostilities more furiously, we will undertake great proofs for the Divine

²¹⁵ Isid. Pel. *Epist.* 1505: “Μὴ σκιομάχει, ὦ φίλος, μηδὲ ὑπὲρ τῶν τυχόντων φιλονεικῶν ἐν τοῖς μεγίστοις καὶ καιρίοις σαυτὸν κατάβλαπτε, μηδὲ ζήλου τοὺς τὴν κάμηλον καταπίνοντας καὶ τὸν κώνωπα δουλίζοντας.” For “battle against shadows,” see Soph. s.v. *σκιαμαχία* (alternate spelling). cf. Philo *De plantatione Noe* 175.2, where the context is slightly different but involves a more developed metaphor (Evieux 1997-2017, 2:173n4 notes that this is the same word and form). The term evidently referred to mock exercises (cf. Cic., *Ad fam.* 11.14.1), a particularly apt application of martial imagery applied to the imagined battlefield of rhetoric.

²¹⁶ Isid. Pel. *Epist.* 1636, “εἰ δὲ οὕτω σου διακειμένου, τινὲς τῶν μηδὲν μὲν ἀγαθὸν πραττόντων, τοῖς δὲ πράττουσι φθονούντων κακηγορῶσι, μὴ δίδου σαυτὸν ἔκδοτον τῇ ἀθυμῖα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ταύτην γενναίως ἔνεγκον τοῦ ἐχθροῦ τὴν προσβολήν, ἐννοῶν ὅτι οὐκ ἂν ταύτη ἐχρήσατο τῇ μηχανῇ πρὸς τὸ καταβαλεῖν σου τὴν πεπυργωμένην πολιτείαν, εἰ μὴ ἄκρως αὐτοῦ καθήψατο τῆς σῆς εὐδοκιμήσεως τὸ κλέος.”

²¹⁷ Isid. Pel. *Epist.* 1386: “Ταυτὸν γὰρ πράξεις οἷον ἂν εἰ μάχαιραν ἔχων ὀξεῖαν κατὰ τῶν ἐπιτηδείων ἐπέφερες, ἢ ῥώμην κατὰ τῶν πολιτῶν, δέον τῇ μὲν κατὰ τῶν πολεμίων, τῇ δὲ κατὰ τῶν ἀντιπάλων χρηθῆναι. Μὴ τοίνυν τὸ φάρμακον δηλητήριον κατασκευάζε, ἀλλὰ δεόντως αὐτῷ κέχρησο.”

Word, not being ashamed of his calling, and having a share of honor in arguments, but trained for conflicts and battles, as is fitting.²¹⁸

Thus, we see the outlines of a rhetorical war take shape in the letters of Isidore. Other bishops employed similar motifs in their letters to *scholastikoi* and local elites.

Theodoret, for instance, wrote to a *scholastikos*:

Lawgivers have written laws to aid the injured, and those pursuing juristic careers train in rhetorical arts to advocate on behalf of those needing justice. Now then, use your skill in rhetoric and legal knowledge as is fitting, dear friend. Assail the guilty with your skill, and protect those harmed by them, deploying the laws like a shield. Let no man who does wrong enjoy your advocacy, even if he be your friend.²¹⁹

The metaphor drew its relevance from the adversarial nature of the juridical sphere, and the main thrust of the image seems to be to bring the legal actions of *scholastikoi* under the kind of critique that was so often brought against wayward soldiers: there are appropriate and inappropriate contexts for physical or verbal violence. To show forbearance and moderation was the mark of a virtuous and well-ordered gentleman, while a lack of moderation reflected a disorderly soul.

Martial Imagery as a Tool of Self-Promotion in Libanius' Writings

The motif of the heroic rhetor, fighting the good fight at the tribunal or public square, was a typical appeal in letters to local notables. This polemical metaphor was not just a useful means of elevating one's addressee and inviting them to maintain the

²¹⁸ Isid. Pel., *Epist.* 412: “Οἱ λόγοι, τῶν ἡθῶν εἰσιν ἡγεμόνες, ἄγειν πάντα τὰ ἐν ἡμῖν λογικῶς τεταγμένοι. Εἰ δὲ τούτους εἰς ἔριδας ἀσχολοῦμεν καὶ μάχας, κιχρῶντες αὐτοὺς τοῖς οὐκ εἰδόσιν, ἐμμανέστερον γυμνάζειν τὰς ἔχθρας· μεγάλας τῷ Θεῷ Λόγῳ τὰς εὐθύνας ὑφέξομεν, μηδὲ τὴν αὐτοῦ κλῆσιν αἰδεσθέντες, καὶ τιμῆς μεταδόντες τοῖς λόγοις, ἀλλ’ εἰς κρίσεις καὶ μάχας, ὥς ἔοικε παιδευθέντες.”

²¹⁹ Thdt., *Sirm. Epist.* 10, “τοὺς νόμους εἰς ἐπικουρίαν τῶν ἀδικουμένων οἱ νομοθέται γεγράφασι, καὶ τὴν ῥητορικὴν ἀσκοῦσι τέχνην οἱ τὸν δικανικὸν ἀσπάζόμενοι βίον, ἵνα τοῖς δικαίαις δεομένοις βοηθείας συνηγορῶσι. Καὶ λόγων τοίνυν ῥητορικῶν, καὶ τῆς τῶν νόμων ἐπιστήμης μεταλαχόν, ὃ φίλη κεφαλὴ, εἰς δέον χρῆσαι τῇ τέχνῃ, καὶ βάλλε τῇ τέχνῃ τοὺς ἀδικοῦντας, καὶ τοῖς ὑπ’ ἐκείνων βαλλομένοις ἐπάμυνε προβαλλόμενος καθάπερ ἀσπίδα τοὺς νόμους. καὶ μηδεὶς ἀδικῶν ἀπολανέτω συνηγορίας, κἂν οἰκειότατος ᾖ.” Translation my own.

right kind of behavior. It was also an important way in which notable rhetoricians built up an ideal self-image that could ennoble their own work while disparaging their opponents'. In this sense, martial imagery constituted a key method of defining the orator as a hero opposed to the deceptive and violent sophist.

The epistolary evidence from the fourth century suggests that martial imagery became an attractive mode of self-presentation for rhetoricians. We can speculate as to why this might be. The larger number of surviving epistolary *corpora* from Late Antiquity compared to the fewer extant collections from earlier, with their differing literary aims (Cicero, Seneca, Pliny, and Fronto), might create a skewed impression of drastic social change, when we may really be dealing with a sampling error. But it is also possible that perceived competition with the numerous military and civil officers of the Later Empire, arrayed as they were in a prestigious hierarchy of militarized posts, led to a kind of discursive mirroring. Orators who moved in the same circles as uniformed bureaucrats and swaggering soldiers might have wanted to dip into the same kind of social cache rooted in martial imagery.

The correspondence and orations of Libanius offer rich evidence of this phenomenon of rhetoricians making martial struggle central to their self-representation. In his so-called “autobiography,” Libanius recounted his career from his earliest education to his later honors. At the remarkably young age of 5, Libanius put away childish things and gladiatorial contests, “where men, whom you would swear to be the pupils of the three hundred at Thermopylae, used to conquer or die.”²²⁰ This remark,

²²⁰ Lib. *Or.* 1.5, Norman trans.: “ὥστε ἡμέληντο μὲν αἱ τῶν ἀγρῶν χάριτες, ἐπέπραντο δὲ περιστεραί, δεινὸν θρέμμα καταδουλώσασθαι νέον, ἄμιλλαι δὲ ἵππων καὶ τὰ τῆς σκηνῆς πάντα ἀπέρριπτο, καὶ ὃ δὴ διαφερόντως ἐξέπληξα καὶ νεότητα καὶ γῆρας, ἀθέατος ἔμεινα μονομαχιῶν ἐκείνων, ἐν αἷς ἐπιπτόν τε καὶ

reminiscent of other moral rigorists who scoffed at the games, establishes an early contrast between martial glory and true *kleos*, which could only be won through philosophy and rhetoric.²²¹ One of the first stories he told was how he arrived in Athens where he was captured as part of a typical initiation ritual. The other students engaged in violent street-fights, and Libanius had once thought these *polemoi* glorious:

From my boyhood, gentlemen, I had heard tales of the fighting between the schools which took place in the heart of Athens: I had heard of the cudgels, the knives and stones they used and of the wounds they inflicted, of the resultant court actions, the pleas of the defence and the verdicts upon the guilty, and of all those deeds of derring-do which students perform to raise the prestige of their teachers. I used to think them noble in their hardihood and no less justified than those who took up arms for their country.²²²

But Libanius had learned better; he alone “took no part in the sallies, skirmishes, martial affrays, and pitched battles.”²²³ Instead, he remained aloof and preferred to train himself for battles of words.

Among the many high points of the orator’s career were his face-offs with other speakers in the public square. Libanius chose to portray these as scenes of battle.²²⁴ A Phoenician rhetorician, upon finding Libanius sick:

ἐνίκων ἄνδρες, οὓς ἔφησθα ἂν μαθητὰς εἶναι τῶν ἐν Πύλαις τριακοσίων.” The heroes of Thermopylae were a proverbial point of reference. For a variation on this motif, see Gr. Nyss. *Epist.* 27.4 to the sophist Stagiris, in which the bishop playfully likened the man’s “parade of Persian declamations” to the soldiers in the battle, presumably the more numerous side (Silvas trans., modified).

²²¹ Another early contrast with military service can be found in Libanius’ reference to his grandfathers who died by the sword during a usurpation.

²²² Lib. *Or.* 1.19, Norman trans.: “Ἀκούων ἔγωγε ἐκ παιδός, ὧ ἄνδρες, τοὺς τῶν χορῶν ἐν μέσαις ταῖς Ἀθήναις πολέμους καὶ ρόπαλά τε καὶ σίδηρον καὶ λίθους καὶ τραύματα γραφάς τε ἐπὶ τούτοις καὶ ἀπολογίας καὶ δίκας ἐπ’ ἐλέγχους πάντα τε τολμώμενα τοῖς νέοις, ὅπως τὰ πράγματα τοῖς ἡγεμόσιν αἰροῖεν, ἀγαθοὺς τε αὐτοὺς <ἐν> τοῖς κινδύνοις ἡγούμην δικαίους τε οὐχ ἥττον τῶν ὑπὲρ τῶν πατρίδων τιθεμένων τὰ ὅπλα.”

²²³ Lib. *Or.* 1.21, Norman trans.: “ἦν οὖν ἀτελής ἐξόδων τε καὶ στρατειῶν καὶ ἀγώνων, ἐφ’ οἷς ἔρχεται Ἄρης...”

²²⁴ On “sophists’ warfare” both real and imagined, see Cribiore 2007, 91-95. Cribiore shows how Libanius massaged his own narrative to make himself seem the victim rather than the instigator of feuds.

expressed his regrets and began hostilities, and, just as though he was not well known already, he gave a speech, sure of success, and after it reproved those who had sent for him. Such were the slights he began to heap upon me, and he tried to trample on me when I was down—he who was always at loggerheads with himself—and he took hold of me and dragged me to the palace, thinking fit to compete against me.²²⁵

That Libanius would unambiguously describe such a contest as “hostilities” (*πολέμουν δὲ ἤρχετο*) and that he would follow it up with violent metaphors (“he tried to trample on me...he took hold of me and dragged me to the palace”), is an example of how the figurative combat of rhetoric could become indistinguishable from descriptions of real fighting. Another opponent, Bemarchius, who lectured as if on the war path, was ready to loose his lightning upon Libanius. But when the Antiochene bested him, Bemarchius turned from figurative to real violence; he took up arms, stirred up trouble, and put the wounded governor to flight behind the walls of the citadel.²²⁶ Other foes threatened the very life of Libanius, charging him armed for battle or plotting his death.²²⁷

But Libanius never portrayed himself as a willing participant or the victim, staying away from such physical violence and not eagerly seeking rhetorical battle. In one passage, Libanius contrasted a heroic self-portrait with a depiction of his belligerent foes:

What affected my position most adversely was the fact that I did not attack at once and put them to rout while they were in disorder. Thus they quietly strengthened their position, while I stayed at home attending to my class of fifteen, most of whom I had brought with me. I did not as yet hold the post of publicly appointed professor, and both my friends and I were full of despondency. Like Achilles, I found idleness burdensome and called myself a burden to the earth, and I reached such

²²⁵ Lib. *Or.* 1.91, Norman trans.: “ἀλγεῖν μὲν ἔφη, πολέμουν δὲ ἤρχετο καὶ ὥς δὴ οὐκ ἐγνωσμένος λέγει τε ὥς περισσόμενος καὶ εἰπὼν ἠτιᾶτο τοὺς μεταπεμγαμένους. τοιαῦτα ἠθέριζε, κειμένῳ δὲ ἐπενέβαινεν, ὃς αἰεὶ ποτε πρὸς αὐτὸν ἤριζε, καὶ ἐπιλαβόμενος εἶλκε πρὸς τὸ βασιλεῖον παλαίειν ἄξιόν.”

²²⁶ Lib. *Or.* 1.39-44.

²²⁷ Lib. *Or.* 1.72.

a pass that I kept my wits only by taking draughts of medicine, since here I was disappointed in my hopes and I could not return to Constantinople without becoming a laughing-stock.²²⁸

Even when he was lying sick in bed, Libanius could portray himself as a heroic figure, who was merely biding his time as his enemies circled around him. All this did not mean that he did not at other times glory in his victories. He likened one affair to the Athenian victory at Marathon, and he compared his own misfortunes to those of “great champions” whose “mishaps seem mere nothings because of the greatness of their achievements.”²²⁹ In his second oration, Libanius bragged of how many sophists he had laid low and triumphed over.²³⁰

A similar mentality, a tendency to depict rhetorical feats as martial deeds, superior to actual violence, colored many of Libanius’ letters to his students. Just as Libanius eschewed the battle-lines of the “town and gown,” he praised those who preferred rhetorical contests to military or bureaucratic pursuits. Libanius commended one Ammianus, perhaps a financial official, as “included among the soldiers in terms of position, but he is a philosopher in what he does, and imitates Socrates with regard to profit.”²³¹ In another interesting letter, Libanius used the picture of the violent rhetors in Athens to encourage one father to send his son Titianus back to him:

²²⁸ Lib. *Or.* 1.101, Norman, trans.: “ὁ δὴ μοι καὶ τὰ πράγματα οὐχ ἥκιστα ἔβλαψε, τὸ μὴ εὐθὺς προσπεσόντα τρέψασθαι τοὺς τεταραγμένους· καθ’ ἡσυχίαν γὰρ τὰ αὐτῶν ἐβεβαιούντο, ἐγὼ δὲ οἴκοι μὲν πεντεκαίδεκα νέοις συνῆν, ὧν ἦκον τὸ πλεόν ἄγων, οὐπω δὲ ἦν ἐν τῷ τοῦ δημοσιεύοντος σχήματι, καὶ κατεῖχε μὲν ἀθυμία τοὺς ἐμούς, κατεῖχε δὲ αὐτὸν ἐμέ, καὶ τῷ ἀργεῖν ὥσπερ ὁ τοῦ Πηλέως ἀχθόμενος ἄχθος τε ἀρούρης ἐμαυτὸν ὀνομάζων εἰς τοῦτο ἀπεφερόμην, ὥστε φαρμάκων πόσει διεσωσάμην τὰς φρένας τοῖς μὲν χείροσι τῶν ἐλπίδων χρώμενος, ἐπὶ δὲ τοὺς οὐκ ἔχων ἄνευ γέλωτος ἐπανελθεῖν.”

²²⁹ Lib. *Or.* 1.67, 60, Norman, trans.: “ὥσπερ αὐ καὶ τοῖς ἀριστεύουσιν ἅ πλήττονται κοῦφα διὰ μέγεθος ὧν δρῶσι.”

²³⁰ Lib. *Or.* 2.14-15.

²³¹ Lib. *Epist.* 233.4 = Cribiore 20, trans. (2007): “πειθέτω δὲ ὑμᾶς χρημάτων καταφρονεῖν ἄνευ τῶν ὑπ’ ἐμοῦ πολλάκις εἰρημένων ὁ τὰ γράμματα φέρων, ὃς ὑπὸ μὲν τοῦ σχήματος εἰς στρατιώτας, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν ἔργων εἰς φιλοσόφους ἐγγέγραπται τὸν Σωκράτην ἐν μέσοις μιμησάμενος κέρδεσιν, ὁ καλὸς Ἀμμιανός.” For a more detailed discussion of this passage, see ch. 3 below.

Some of those teachers because of old age would need to sleep peacefully with their bellies full; others would perhaps need teachers themselves to teach them first to settle things with words and not with weapons. Now however, they hammer out for us soldiers instead of rhetors: I saw many bearing scars and wounds received at the Lyceum. Titianus would probably not be part of them; it is not good for a student to be seen hanging around with those who are in such a frame of mind...In addition to preventing that journey, speed up Titianus's journey back to us.²³²

The notion of the heroic rhetorician, forgoing real violence in favor of battles of words, was a central element of this missive. While he took this tack in his orations to maintain a self-image, he used it in letters to manage epistolary relationships.

The portrait of the battling rhetor was an effective tool of self-promotion and personal appeal because it tapped into the same discourse of heroic martial imagery that we see at work in communication with military and civil officials. At the same time, Libanius and others saw fit to distinguish themselves as explicitly non-violent heroes, in contrast to their more brutish peers. This idealization of an imaginary martial role reflects the longstanding valorization of rhetoric as the quintessential art of peace.²³³ It also shows the kind of mirroring that could take place between separate yet interrelated spheres of the social imagination. When another group who professed non-violence – bishops – took up the image of the heroic militant, they similarly emphasized the figurative nature of their martial virtues.

²³² Lib. *Epist.* 715.3-5 = Cribiore 200, trans. (2007): “τῶν γὰρ αὐτόθι διδασκάλων οἱ μὲν διὰ γῆρας δέονται ἂν τοῦ καθεύδειν μαλακῶς ἐπὶ πλησμονῇ, τοῖς δ’ ἴσως δεῖ διδασκάλων, οἱ τοῦτο πρῶτον αὐτοὺς παιδεύσουσι, λόγους κρίνεσθαι καὶ μὴ ὅπλοις. νῦν δ’ ἡμῖν στρατιώτας ἀντὶ ῥητόρων ἐκκροτοῦσι, καὶ πολλοὺς εἶδον οὐλὰς ἐνηνοχότας ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν Λυκείῳ τραυμάτων. ὧν ἴσως μὲν οὐκ ἂν ἐγένετο Τιτιανός, ἔστι δὲ οὐδὲ συμφοιτητὴν τῶν τὰ τοιαῦτα λογιζομένων δόξαι καλόν. ἀμφοτέροις οὖν ἴσθι βεβοηθηκώς, καὶ ἐμοὶ καὶ ἐκείνοις· ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐκ ἐάσας ἄλλον τοῖς ἐμοῖς κοσμηθῆναι πόνοις· ἐκείνοις δὲ τῷ μὴ πολλὸν αὐτοῖς ἀναλωθῆναι χρόνον ἴσως ὑπὲρ μικρῶν· οὕτω γὰρ εἶπεῖν βέλτιον. πρόσθε δὴ τῷ τὴν ὁδὸν ἐκείνην κωλύσαι τὸ τὴν ὥς ἡμᾶς ἐπεῖξαι.”

²³³ Pernot 2015, 27-28.

Heroes of the Faith: Martial Imagery in the Church

The use of heroic martial imagery in letters to military men, civil officials, local elites, and rhetoricians offers a pattern of praise and petition across various social strata of the later Roman Empire. Because many bishops were decurions or even *clarissimi* who had come from careers in rhetoric, law, or the imperial service, it is unsurprising that their letters would use a similar discourse to describe bishops and other ecclesiastical officials. This speaks to the resonance of military metaphors and logic across the social imagination. The professed ambivalence about military service, discussed above, complicated the degree to which martial imagery proved useful. As a result, the heroic image for the bishop was often qualified as being a metaphorical or spiritual champion rather than a literal warrior. It was nevertheless a prevalent motif in a variety of contexts, especially in ecclesiastical disputes where polemical language was more appropriate.

The discursive mirroring between heroic martial imagery in civil society and that in the church was owed to a variety of factors, including the educational and social backgrounds of bishops, the valorization of Old Testament warriors, and centuries-old Christian military metaphors. As with other kinds of extended military language, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly which influence was most important, but a consequence of this similar military language in different spheres meant that bishops could appeal more effectively to social actors outside the church to intervene in ecclesiastical disputes. The same heroic martial imagery that writers used to praise imperial officials could be adjusted to call for secular aid in spiritual battles. In this sense, widespread military language was significant because it sprang from a shared cultural milieu and offered an

effective, shared discourse that facilitated interaction between different groups in late antiquity.

The Bishop as a Heroic Figure

We have already seen examples of clerics – Synesius, the priests of Axomis, and Germanus – who fought in actual battles. That this kind of military role could be valorized in letters and hagiography speaks to the wide currency of the image of the martial hero among churchmen. Although these attested warrior-priests may have been few for our period, military language was often extended to render other bishops metaphorical fighters, indicating the underlying appeal of an imagined martial role for the cleric, an appeal that was rooted in scriptural metaphors and exemplars as well as other comparable uses of heroic imagery in other spheres, such as the military, bureaucracy, and schools of rhetoric.

The separation of the clergy from the military sphere avowed by most late-antique writers would seem to militate against the frequent use of martial imagery to describe bishops. In several letters to bishop Amphilochius, Basil included a list of canons, one of which forbade priests from taking up arms, even against bandits.²³⁴ Augustine in his letter to Publicola only allowed officials of the state to fight in defense of others.²³⁵ Similarly, Ambrose saw fit to stress clerical abstention from violence. His

²³⁴ Basil. *Epist.* 217.55. The format of this letter, 188, and 199 is somewhat different from that of a typical epistle, gliding from topic to topic in a list. The received enumeration and collocation as a combined set of canons, however, was not original to Basil and was rather the product of the list's reception and distribution (DeFerrari 1926-34, 3:x-xvi). Nevertheless, this peculiar format does not diminish the texts' epistolarity, as they indulge in many of the same conceits as more typical letters, including thanks to the recipient for his request (188), apologies for the delay in sending answer (199), and an earnest wish to be face-to-face in lieu of a letter (217). Rousseau 1994, 152 describes the three as "letters".

²³⁵ Aug. *Epist.* 45.7.

De officiis emphasized the separation of the clergy from “zeal for military matters.”²³⁶ In his epistolary portrayal of the standoff over the basilica of Milan, his weapons were his prayers, and he piously professed that he would willingly die in his commitment to his flock.²³⁷ But even if Synesius and Germanus were exceptional in their personal involvement in warfare, by using extended martial imagery bishops could imagine a spiritual struggle in which they could pursue “victory without combat.”²³⁸ Accordingly, the pose of bishops in this spiritual war was paradoxical. They fought with immaterial weapons: prayers, hymns, and scripture.²³⁹ Even in death they could achieve victory through humility and weakness, as exemplified by the example of Christ and the martyrs. But this imagery kept the same heroic and military flavor that we see in letters to military and civil officials.

This spiritual warfare was not an entirely theoretical proposition. It very much touched upon the military threats of the day. Synesius ended his second *Catastasis* with an impassioned expression of his quasi-military role as priest, taking a last stand at the altar.²⁴⁰ Ambrose wrote to his sister of his stand-off with the empress’s soldiers in heroic terms. Threatened by barbarian soldiers and “harassed by imperial edicts,” Ambrose and his flock stood firm, “fortified by scripture” and reliant on faith in God.²⁴¹ Even the

²³⁶ Ambr. *De off.* 35: “Nunc de fortitudine tractamus quae, velut excelsior ceteris, dividitur in res bellicas et domesticas. Sed bellicarum rerum studium a nostro officio iam alienum.” Heim (1992, 137n13) adds “Le *iam* renvoie probablement à sa carrière de fonctionnaire imperial, à laquelle son election episcopale a mis fin.”

²³⁷ Ambr. *Epist.* 75.13.

²³⁸ This phrase is borrowed from Heim 1974 and 1992, 141.

²³⁹ Ambr. *Epist.* 75.13.

²⁴⁰ Synes. *Catast.* 2.6.3.

²⁴¹ Ambr. *Epist.* 76.17, trans. Liebeschuetz with modification.

henchmen switched sides, with the “soldiers themselves saying that they came for prayer, not for battle.”²⁴²

To the extent that the defense of orthodoxy was coterminous with the Roman Empire, the ideal bishop’s defense of his episcopal station could bleed over into a more general defense of the empire against foreign enemies. This is seen most clearly in the character of Acholius, the bishop of Thessalonica who perished in the winter of 382-3. Acholius, “a veteran of Christ Jesus” summoned a plague, driving away an army of marauding Goths by using the weapons of a bishop, prayer and holiness.²⁴³ Acholius is a model of how Ambrose conceived of the role of the bishop, a man who was to protect his flock as a governor protects his province.²⁴⁴ This heroic and sacrificial example of episcopal service may be rather unique, but it was clearly part of a wider discourse of martial imagery extended to other bishops.²⁴⁵ For his part, Ambrose repeatedly stressed his spiritual labors as a kind of heroic service to the empire. In a letter to Gratian, for instance, he presented his spiritual efforts as an efficacious substitute for military service: “Every day, I was reading about your journey. Weak in merit but steadfast in my affection, posted night and day in your camp in my concerns and thoughts, I was offering the guard of my prayers.”²⁴⁶

²⁴² Ambr. *Epist.* 76, 13: “Ipsi tamen milites se ad orationem venisse non ad proelium loquebantur.” (translation my own). Cf. *Epist.* 76, 20-21 where the Goths who came to occupy the basilica were turned into allies “by the grace of God.”

²⁴³ *Epist.* 51.3, 5, 6: “Sed urgebat et proeliabatur sanctus Acholius, non gladiis sed orationibus, non telis sed meritis.”

²⁴⁴ Viellard 2012, 335.

²⁴⁵ *pace* Viellard 2012, 336, “Il construit une figure d’évêque qui n’avait eu jusque-là aucun antécédent.”

²⁴⁶ Ambr. *Epist. extra coll.* 12: “tuum cottidianum iter legebam, nocte ac die in tuis castris cura et sensu locatus orationum excubias praetendebam, etsi invalidus merito, sed affectu sedulous.” Translation my own. I prefer to take a more literal translation of *orationum excubias* than Beyenka’s “coverlet of prayers.” *in tuis castris* could be translated as “in your court,” but the context suggests that Ambrose is imagining himself as in some sense present with the emperor in spirit.

This heroic ideal of the Christian bishop owed much to Old Testament exemplars, often violent. Even though bishops could be ambivalent towards fighting in the army and ostensibly objected to exemplifying *fortitudo* through wartime service, in both formal treatises and occasional letters, bishops often compared clergymen to wartime heroes of the faith.²⁴⁷ In the above-mentioned letter commending Acholius, Ambrose likened the recently deceased bishop to Elisha, “un prophète thaumaturge” who was able to repel an attack of Syrians by striking them with blindness just as Acholius struck the Goths with a plague.²⁴⁸ Peter, the bishop of Sebasteia, urged Gregory of Nyssa to fight for orthodoxy against Eunomius “like Phineas the zealous” who impaled an Israelite and Midianite engaged in illicit relations; so too should the bishop wield the “sword of the Spirit” to pierce through heresy.²⁴⁹

Comparisons were not always so violent, but they could nevertheless be effective in personal appeals. Basil, for instance, called on Athanasius:

Be a Samuel to the churches! Bear the suffering of the congregation in this war! Raise up prayers of peace! Request grace from the Lord, that he send some memory of peace to the churches! I know that letters are weak with regards to advice of this sort. Why, you do not need encouragement from others any more than the noblest combatants need encouragement from boys! I am not teaching you things you do not know, but I am strengthening your already eager attack!²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ For an objection to bellicose courage, see Ambr. *Off.* 1.175, but the objection is immediately followed by a list of *nostri* who displayed *fortitudo* in the wars of the Old Testament.

²⁴⁸ Quotation from Viellard 2012, 334–35. This was a favorite reference of Ambrose. Only here is Elisha likened to one of Ambrose’s contemporaries (Poirot 1997, 194–200).

²⁴⁹ Gr. Nyss. *Epist.* 30.4: “μίμησαι τὸν γνήσιόν σου πατέρα, ὃς κατὰ τὸν ζηλωτὴν Φινεὲς τῇ μιᾷ πληγῇ τοῦ ἐλέγχου τὸν μαθητὴν τῷ διδασκάλῳ συναπεκέντησεν· οὕτως καὶ σὺ εὐτόνως τῇ χειρὶ τοῦ λόγου δι’ ἀμφοτέρων τῶν αἰρετικῶν βιβλίων ὥσον τὴν τοῦ πνεύματος μάχαιραν, ἵνα μὴ τὴν κεφαλὴν συντεθλασμένος ὁ ὄφης κατὰ τὴν οὐρὰν περισπαίρων τοὺς ἀκεραιότερους φοβῇ.” The reference is to Num 25:7. The “father” referenced is apparently Basil (Maraval 1990, 199n3).

²⁵⁰ Basil. *Epist.* 66: “γενοῦ Σαμουὴλ ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις: πολεμουμένοις τοῖς λαοῖς συγκακοπάθησον: ἀνένεγκε εἰρηνικὰς προσευχάς: αἶτησον χάριν παρὰ τοῦ Κυρίου, εἰρήνης τι μνημόσυνον ἐναφεῖναι ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. οἶδα ὅτι ἀσθενεῖς αἱ ἐπιστολαὶ πρὸς συμβουλὴν τοῦ τοσοῦτου πράγματος. ἀλλ’ οὔτε αὐτὸς τῆς παρ’ ἐτέρων παρακλήσεως χρῆζε, οὐ μᾶλλον γε ἢ τῶν ἀγωνιστῶν οἱ γενναιότατοι τῆς παρὰ τῶν

Theodoret took a similar tack in comparing clergymen to militant heroes of the Old Testament. He urged the presbyter and archimandrite Candidus to endure in the struggle against his ecclesiastical opponents just as Moses had to keep his hands raised in the fight against Amalek.²⁵¹ A similar cluster of images appears in a separate letter of Theodoret exhorting a different presbyter and archimandrite, Job:

The patriarch Abraham won a victory in his old age. The great Moses was now an old man when, so long as he stretched out his hands in prayer, he vanquished Amalek. The divine Samuel was an old man when he put the aliens to flight. These are emulated by your venerable old age. In our wars for true religion's sake you are playing the man, and championing the cause of the gospel doctrines, and putting young men in the shade by the vigour of your spirit.²⁵²

In all of these examples, Old Testament figures engaged in war form the model for the heroic bishop or priest. Although these scriptural paragons did not always themselves partake in violence, their spiritual role in winning victory, through prayer, gesture, or ritual paralleled the more violent examples found in other letters.²⁵³

That priests and warriors from the Old Testament were so prominent in such appeals can be explained as a function of its richer political and military content in comparison to the New Testament.²⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the New Testament offered an

παίδων ὑποφωνήσεως: οὔτε ἡμεῖς ἀγνοοῦντα διδάσκομεν, ἀλλ' ἐσπουδακότε τὴν ὁρμὴν ἐπιτείνομεν.” Translation my own.

²⁵¹ Thdt. *Epist. Sirm.* 129. Cf. *Ex.* 17:8-16. This and the preceding letter were composed by Theodoret while in exile (Azéma 1955-98, 3:106n2).

²⁵² Thdt. *Epist. Sirm.* 128. Jackson, trans. Although the collection was probably not compiled by Theodoret himself (Schor 2016, 274-8), the close proximity of the two letters in the *collectio Sirmondiana* suggests that at least the compiler was aware of the thematic and allusive similarities between these two texts. On the identity of this Job, see Azéma 1955-98, 1:39. He may have signed the condemnation of Eutyches. For Abraham, see Gen 14:13-17 where the already elderly Abram armed 318 of his servants to save Lot from a hostile army; for Moses, see Exod 17:8-16; for Samuel, see 1 Kgdms 7:3-14.

²⁵³ See above. In the examples in this paragraph, the exception would be Abraham, who personally led his force against Kedorlaomer.

²⁵⁴ This profile of scriptural references would seem to be an early instantiation of what Dagron saw as the unique significance of the Old Testament in Byzantium where “the Old Testament had a constitutional

important theological framework of spiritual combat through which heroic martial imagery could be applied to the militant bishop, even if the points of comparison were Israelite judges and prophets. Letters often presented a figurative martial role for the clergyman through explicit or implicit allusions to Pauline epistles. Writing to Ambrose, Basil urged his Milanese comrade to “fight the good fight” in the war against the Arians, a clear allusion to Paul’s use of a similar internal accusative at 2 Timothy 4:7.²⁵⁵ Another key passage was the Letter to the Ephesians’ exhortation to take up the armor of God.²⁵⁶ The text’s emphasis on the immaterial nature of spiritual warfare and its extended military metaphor manifestly influenced much of the martial imagery found in bishops’ letters, such as Isidore’s reference to “spiritual warfare” (*νοητὸν...πόλεμον*), Ambrose’s stress on his spiritual weaponry, and Augustine’s encouragement that fellow churchmen wield the armor of God against the devil.²⁵⁷ In a letter summarizing the contents of Ephesians for a certain Irenaeus, Ambrose prominently featured the motif of a spiritual war, reminding us of martial imagery’s centrality to the text.²⁵⁸

In fact, so close was the association of Paul with this martial imagery,²⁵⁹ that some Christian writers represented the apostle as a Christian general. Jerome, fulminating against the Jovinians, used a military metaphor, “I shall place the apostle

value; it had the same normative role in the political sphere as the New Testament in the moral sphere” (2003, 50). Dagron suggests that this was partly due to the position of Jerusalem and Jewish communities in the east (4), but I am skeptical that this does not apply to the west as well (see the example of Ambrose above).

²⁵⁵ Basil, *Epist.* 290, “ἄγε τοίνυν, ὦ Θεοῦ ἄνθρωπε...ἀγωνίζου τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα, διόρθωσαι τὰ ἀρρωστήματα τοῦ λαοῦ, εἴ τινος ἄρα τὸ πάθος τῆς Ἀρειανῆς μανίας ἦψατο.” Cf. 2 Tim 4:7: “τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα ἠγωνίσμαι, τὸν δρόμον τετέλεκα, τὴν πίστιν τετήρηκα.”

²⁵⁶ Eph 6:10-20.

²⁵⁷ Isid. *Pel. Epist.* 78; Ambr. *Epist.* 75a.33, *Epist. ex. coll.* 14.102-3; Aug. *Epist.* 48.3.

²⁵⁸ Ambr., *Epist.* 16.5, 14.

²⁵⁹ Other important Pauline martial language includes Phil 2:25 (description of Epaphroditus as “my brother, comrade, and fellow soldier” (*τὸν ἀδελφὸν καὶ συνεργὸν καὶ συστρατιώτην μου*)), 1 Thess. 5:8, 2 Cor. 6:7, and above all Eph. 6:12. For a detailed study of military language in Paul, see Pfitzner 1967.

Paul in the front line and shall arm him, as if the bravest general, with his own weapons, namely his arguments.”²⁶⁰ Isidore of Pelusium, likewise, urged a fellow priest, Ischyron, to look to the example of Paul, “the best general” (ὁ ἄριστος στρατηγός):

He did not do violence to the choice of divine election, he exhibited a life competing in grace, he exhorted those who are really waging a holy war, and he did not let them be vainglorious, as if conquered by the reward of crowns. He shouted like a commander, “For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time do not compare to the coming glory which is hidden from us.”²⁶¹

There were many ways in which bishops could imagine warfare. One was to emphasize a pattern of scriptural exemplars who could justify their figurative martial role with immaterial weapons and a profoundly spiritual purpose.

Even so, it would be wrong to treat this predilection for martial imagery as purely the vestige of a scriptural metaphor, devoid of social context. As we have seen, a wide range of elites, including bureaucrats and decurions, defined status and sought the aid of their peers by extending heroic qualities to non-military positions. Historical scholarship has shown that bishops in the fourth and fifth centuries came for the most part from the same social backgrounds as civic and imperial officials.²⁶² In fact, before being elevated to the episcopacy, many bishops had careers in the imperial service, some

²⁶⁰ Hier. *Adv. Iov.* 1.6, “Opponam in prima fronte apostolum Paulum, et quasi fortissimum ducem, suis telis, id est, suis armabo sententiis.” Cf. Thdt. *H.Rel.* pr. 4, “Τοιαύτην γὰρ αὐτοῖς καὶ τὴν παντευχίαν ὁ τῆς φύλαγος αὐτῶν στρατηγὸς καὶ πρόμαχος περιτέθηκε Παῦλος.”

²⁶¹ Is. Pel. *Epist.* 1780, “Παῦλος ὁ ἄριστος στρατηγός, ὁ τῆς θείας χειροτονίας μὴ καθυβρίσας τὴν ψῆφον, ὁ ἀμιλλώμενον τῇ χάριτι τὸν βίον ἐπιδειζάμενος, καὶ προτρέπων ὁμοῦ τοὺς τὸν ἱερὸν ὄντως πολεμοῦντας πόλεμον, καὶ οὐκ ἀφιεῖς μέγα φρονεῖν, ἅτε νικωμένους τῇ τῶν στεφάνων ἀντιδόσει, στρατηγικώτερον ἐβόα · Λογίζομαι γάρ, ὅτι οὐκ ἄξια τὰ παθήματα τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ πρὸς τὴν μέλλουσαν δόξαν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι εἰς ἡμᾶς.” The quotation is from Rom 8:18. Note the internal accusative “πολεμοῦντας πόλεμον,” not a direct quote from Paul, but redolent of the well-known passage cited above (2 Tim 4:7).

²⁶² Rapp 2005, 183-195.

at a very high level.²⁶³ Given these intersecting social contexts, it would seem likely that bishops drew on a concurrent discourse of heroic martial imagery in other non-military contexts.

Such a hypothesis is difficult to test, since most appeals to clergymen as military heroes occur independent of reference to state-service. The specific connections between different spheres of martial imagery and their consequences will be elaborated on in later chapters, but for now it is enough to note that there some letters and treatises established a strong connection between the imagined military service of clergy and that of government officials. Chief among these is Ambrose's *De officiis*, where the bishop compared the service of God to that of the emperor. Writing on the importance of courage, Ambrose urged his reader to fight the good fight, train in godliness, and avoid entanglement with worldly affairs "because you serve God" (*Deo militas*). He continued the contrast:

In fact, if those who serve the emperor are prohibited from taking up lawsuits, making motions in court, and selling merchandise, how much more ought he who is engaged in the service of the faith abstain from all business, content in the fruits of his own land if he has some, in the enjoyment of his own stipend if he does not? But if those who exhort some to take up state service give these precepts, how much more ought we who are called for the duty of the church do such things as are pleasing to God, in order that the valor of Christ may exhibit itself within us and that in this way we may be approved for the service of our emperor, so that our members may be the weapons of justice, not carnal weapons in which sin reigns, but strong weapons for God by which sin is destroyed.²⁶⁴

²⁶³ To give but a handful of examples: Ambrose of Milan, Rabbula of Edessa, Germanus of Auxerre, Paulinus of Nola, and Alypius of Thagaste.

²⁶⁴ Ambr., *De off.* 1.185-6: "Etenim si hi qui imperatori militant, susceptionibus litium, actu negotiorum forensium, venditione mercium prohibentur humanis legibus, quanto magis qui fidei exercet militiam, ab omni usu negotiationis abstinere debet, agelluli sui contentus fructibus si habet, si non habet, stipendiorum suorum fructu? Quod si hi qui ad capessendam rem publicam adhortantur aliquos, haec praecepta dant, quanto magis nos qui ad officium ecclesiae vocamur, talia debemus agere quae placeant Deo, ut praetendat in nobis virtus Christi, et ita simus nostro probati imperatori ut membra nostra arma iustitiae

In Ambrose's conceptual world, the duties of the cleric superseded the responsibilities of secular *militia*. Within the rubric of imperial *militia*, Ambrose included not just the military career but also, significantly, bureaucratic service. We can surmise that Ambrose had this broader meaning of *militia* in mind for two reasons. First, he mentioned injunctions on lawsuits, legal actions, or private business that were applied in the *Theodosian Code* to imperial service in general.²⁶⁵ Second, Ambrose's oblique reference to "those who exhort some to take up state service" points to a corresponding section in Cicero's *De officiis* on *fortitudo* where deeds in peace were made superior to those in war.²⁶⁶ Ambrose made heavenly service superior to both civil and military service and thus asserted the superiority of his ecclesiastical project over his literary predecessor's earthly subject-matter.²⁶⁷

More importantly for our purposes, Ambrose's explicit comparison of heavenly and earthly *militia*, with its crescendo rising to an allusion to the martial imagery of Ephesians 6:11-12,²⁶⁸ suggests that Ambrose explicitly mirrored his own episcopal

sint, arma non carnalia in quibus peccatum regnet, sed arma fortia Deo quibus peccatum destruat.

Translation my own.

²⁶⁵ Davidson, 615; cf. ch. 4 below for a discussion of Ambrose's deployment of expanded *militia* in his imperial missives.

²⁶⁶ Cic., *De off.* 1.74-78.

²⁶⁷ The work is addressed vaguely to Ambrose's "sons" (*De off.* 1.24, "et sicut Tullius ad erudiendum filium, ita ego quoque ad vos informandos filios meos; neque enim minus vos diligo quos in evangelio genui quam si conugio suscepissem" – a play on Cicero's addressing his *De officiis* to his son Marcus (Cic., *De off.* 1.1)). Throughout the work, the emphasis is upon the responsibilities of the clergy (often made explicit, e.g. 1.86, 175, 184-186, 217-218; 2.25), but a number of passages indicate that Ambrose intended the work to apply to the laity as well (e.g. addressing speculation in the grain market (3.37-44), criticizing the expulsion of foreigners during famines (3.45-52), and repudiating fraud in business contracts (3.57-75)). On Ambrose's audience, see Ivor J. Davidson, ed., *Ambrose: De Officiis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15–16.

²⁶⁸ cf. Ambr., *Off.*: "ut membra nostra arma iustitiae sint, arma non carnalia...sed arma fortia Deo" and *Eph* 6:11-12 (*Vulg.*): "induite vos arma Dei...quia non est nobis conluctatio adversus carnem et sanguinem."

martial imagery on the fictively militarized imperial service. This is borne out in the letter collections of several bishops, where contrasts between different soldierly loyalties became a battleground upon which loyalties could be contested. These competing uses of this soldierly martial imagery will be the focus of the four chapter, but, here, the example of Ambrose's *De officiis* and other epistolary evidence reveals that the imagined military role of the bishop could be thought of as parallel to the heroic role of civil service. This, along with circumstantial evidence, such as the similarities of military language and the bureaucratic, military, and aristocratic backgrounds of many bishops, indicates that we should understand the figurative heroic role of clergy as coming out of the same cultural context as other kinds of martial imagery.

Martial Imagery against Religious Foes

As we have seen, the portrait of the bishop as a martial hero was widespread in the epistolary discourse of praise and self-promotion. It drew on scriptural motifs and characters while also tapping into the heroic martial imagery that characterized missives to powerful military and civil officials. Bishops exploited this overlapping rhetoric by calling on their ecclesiastical and secular patrons as military allies in church battles. This suggests that coexisting discourses of heroic martial imagery helped bishops generate feelings of affinity and estrangement across society because military language and metaphors already appealed to so many different people in various contexts.

In the ecclesiastical disputes of the fourth century, episcopal martial imagery could mobilize friends and allies in much the same way that military language

effectively appealed to patrons in a secular context.²⁶⁹ This could involve general calls for fellow bishops to “fight the good fight” or more strident exhortations for an “ally and comrade in arms” to endure.²⁷⁰ In a marriage of rhetorical and heresiological military imagery, Augustine could write to Celestinus of his “books against the Manichaeans” as “training maneuvers (*armaturae*) for defeating that error.”²⁷¹

The effectiveness of this martial imagery in this context was due to the confrontational and divisive nature of religious conflicts. Whether trinitarian and Christological disputes were always as acrimonious as our sources indicate, figurative military language was an apt tool of partisans who sought to dramatize such conflicts, demonize their opponents, and force disinterested parties off the sidelines.

This military language tapped into a long tradition of Christian polemic against heresy and persecution. In his *Panarion*, Epiphanius of Salamis used the leitmotif of a “serpent” of heresy that must be avoided or slain. Accordingly, he ended his descriptions of many sects with “a call to arms against the heretics.”²⁷² The *Elenchos* or *Refutation*

²⁶⁹ See Latham 2012 for the connection between disputed episcopal elections and the militant rhetoric in our sources.

²⁷⁰ Cf. Basil. *Epist.* 290 and 79.

²⁷¹ Aug. *Epist.* 18.1: “misi aduersum Manichaeos libros...peto itaque, ne differatis eos remittere cum rescriptis, quibus nosse cupio, quid de illis geritis uel adhuc ad illum errorem expugnandum quid armaturae uobis opus esse arbitremini.” Translation my own. I have opted to translate *armaturae* as “training maneuvers” here to capture the potential technical valences of the term (cf. Veg. *Mil.* 1.13 with Milner 1996, 13n2).

²⁷² Berzon 2016, 183, citing Epiph. Const. *Haer.* 26.18.4-5, 32.7.7-9, and 34.22.2. More explicit martial depictions of heresy include 33.11.8 (“οὐκοῦν καὶ κατὰ τοῦ Σωτῆρος ἐξοπλίζῃ συκοφαντῶν πάλιν ῥήματα καὶ εἰποὺς ἂν τοῦτον μὴ εἶναι ἀγαθόν”), 44.1.2, 51.32.1 (“οὐκ αἰδοῦνται δὲ πάλιν οἱ τοιοῦτοι κατὰ τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰωάννου ἐρημένων ἐξοπλιζόμενοι...”), 66.10.3 (“τοῦ Ἀρχελαίου ὥσπερ ἀριστεύοντος ὀπλίτου [καὶ] τῇ ἰδίᾳ αὐτοῦ δυνάμει καθαιροῦντος τὰ βέλη τῶν δι’ ἐναντίας...”), 68.11.8 (“ὑπερβήσομαι δὲ καὶ ταύτην τὴν ὑπόθεσιν, ἐπὶ δὲ αὐτὴν τὴν τῶν Ἀρειανῶν αἵρεσιν παρελεύσομαι, θεὸν ἐπικαλούμενος βοηθὸν τῷ φοβερῷ τούτῳ καὶ πολυκεφάλῳ ἐρπετῷ πρὸς μάχην πελάζειν παρερχόμενος”), 69.33.4 (“...ὡς καὶ οὗτοι καθ’ ἑαυτῶν ἐπεστράτευσαν τὴν πλάνην, οὐδὲν δὲ ἐνσκήψουσιν εἰς τοὺς υἱοὺς τῆς ἀληθείας.”), and 73.37.6 (“οὔτινες...οὐ μόνον τὰ Ἀρείου διδάσκουσιν, ἀλλ’ ὑπερμαχοῦσι τῆς αὐτῶν αἱρέσεως καὶ τοῦς ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐχθρίαις καὶ πολέμοις καὶ μαχαίραις παραδιδόντες τοὺς ὀρθῶς πιστεύοντας.”).

of *All Heresies*, generally attributed to Hippolytus, used some of the same metaphors as Basil, likening theological disputes to “combat” (*agon*) in which “some foolhardy and arrogant men have tried to scatter the church, hurling the greatest confusion against all believers throughout the world.”²⁷³ The earliest extant heresiology, Irenaeus’, described how heretics used cunning and deception to “enslave” (*αἰχμαλωτίζουσιν*) their victims.²⁷⁴ His arguments were weapons to “combat and vanquish” purveyors of lies.²⁷⁵ This military discourse surrounding heresy was a natural metaphor for polemic in which the heresiarch took on the “character of false prophet and false teacher” rooted in early Christian texts.²⁷⁶ Military depictions of persecution also appear frequently in Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*. In a particularly striking passage, Eusebius wrote that Licinius had declared war on both Constantine and God.²⁷⁷

To judge from the continuity of this motif in heresiological texts, there had always been a strand of Christian polemic that relied on militarized language. We learn from the epistolary evidence of the fourth and fifth centuries that this polemic was a vibrant element of bishop’s letters meant to motivate ecclesiastical allies and malign

²⁷³ Hippol. *Haer.* 9.1, “Πολλοὺ τοίνυν τοῦ κατὰ πασῶν αἱρέσεων γενομένου ἡμῖν ἀγῶνος, μηθέν γε ἀνεξέλεγκτον κατλιποῦσι, περιλείπεται νῦν ὁ μέγιστος ἀγών, ἐκδιηγῆσασθαι καὶ διελεῖν τὰς ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἐπαναστάσας αἱρέσεις, δι’ ὧν τινες ἀμαθεῖς καὶ τολμηροὶ διασκεδανόμενοι ἐπεχείρησαν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, μέγιστον ταραχὸν κατὰ πάντα τὸν κόσμον [ἐν] πᾶσι τοῖς πιστοῖς ἐμβάλλοντες, δοκεῖ γοῦν ἐπὶ τὴν ἀρχηγὸν τῶν κακῶν γενομένην γνώμην ὁρμήσαντας διελέγειν τίνες αἱ ταύτης ἀρχαί, ὅπως εὐ(γ)ωστοὶ αἱ ἐκφυάδες αὐτῆς ἅπασι γενόμεναι καταφρονηθῶσι.” The author also compares the attack on heresy to the clearing out of a labyrinth, “not by force, but through refutation and the force of truth” (*Ref.* 10.1). The text also adopts some of Basil’s other favorite metaphors, including the comparison of heresy to storms at sea (cf. *Ref.* 7.1 and Basil, *Epist.* 89)

²⁷⁴ Iren. *Lugd. Haer.* 1.pr.

²⁷⁵ Iren. *Lugd. Haer.* 3.pr.

²⁷⁶ Vallée 1981, 94, citing Wisse 1972, 133-143. Cf. Matt. 7:14 and Basil. *Epist.* 263 for the Arians as “sheep in wolves’ clothing.”

²⁷⁷ Eus. *EH* 10.8.8. For other such uses of martial imagery to describe persecution, see 6.41.16, 8.1.8-9, 8.4.2-4, 8.10.12, 8.13.9-13, 8.15, 8.16, 9.1.1, 9.3, 10.1, 10.4.31. For a description of Mani in military terms, see 7.31.1.

opponents, a tangible impact of heresiological tracts on interpersonal correspondence.²⁷⁸ Perhaps more significant is the fact that bishops sought to use this discourse to reach out to government officials beyond the walls of the church. We cannot know whether such letters were always effective, but the frequency with which military appeals appear in letters to bureaucrats suggests that bishops thought such language would have a captive audience. The vigor of military language in different spheres meant that Christian partisans who wanted to make their own group boundaries consequential for others in society had just the rhetoric with which to do it: heroic martial imagery.

In some letters, bishops invited powerful officials to be their allies in a war against heretics. This was a conscious rhetorical strategy. When Basil asked for judicial intervention from the vicar Demosthenes, Basil praised the vicar, a man who was “first a Christian, then upright in character, and a strict guardian (*φύλαξ*) of the laws according to which we regulate human affairs.”²⁷⁹ Only such a guardian could bring “the enemies of peace” to heel. But this was probably the same vicar whom Basil later derided as a “sea-monster” and “muleteer” who “breathed rage and slaughter” as he helped the enemies of the church.²⁸⁰ This sudden switch reveals how contingent martial imagery

²⁷⁸ The paucity of earlier Christian letter collections complicates any attempt to trace this in the second and third centuries. The letters of Cyprian contain a few descriptions of a military opposition between rebellious heretics and orthodox believers (e.g. *Epist.* 3.3.2, 51.1.1). This would suggest that although martial imagery had long been a tool to define group boundaries and demonizing heretics, bishops used it more frequently in the fourth and fifth centuries.

²⁷⁹ *Epist.* 225, “Πολλὴν χάριν ἔχομεν ἀεὶ τῷ Θεῷ, καὶ βασιλεῦσι τοῖς ἐπιμελομένοις ἡμῶν, ὅταν ποτὲ ἴδωμεν τῆς πατρίδος ἡμῶν τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀνδρὶ πιστευθεῖσαν πρῶτον μὲν Χριστιανῷ, ἔπειτα ὀρθῶ τὸν τρόπον, καὶ ἀκριβεῖ τῶν νόμων φύλακι, καθ’ οὓς πολιτευόμεθα τὰ ἀνθρώπινα.”

²⁸⁰ *Epist.* 231, 237 (DeFerrari, trans. modified). On the identity of Demosthenes, see Rousseau 1994, 170n160.

could be. It was a rhetorical tool that could be deployed when a bishop wanted to draw battle-lines.²⁸¹

Sometimes, military language could be deployed to discourage intervention by imperial potentates. In one of two surviving letters to Theodosius II, Isidore of Pelusium implied that imperial involvement in the synod at Ephesus was tantamount to an attack on the very walls of the church:²⁸²

If you take the time to be present in the deliberations at Ephesus, I know well that nothing can be criticized. But if you should permit votes with turbulent passions, who will deliver the synod from outrage? But you will provide aid in these matters, if you stop your representatives from dogmatisms, who have already set themselves at variance across a great chasm, so that they are eager to serve the emperor and God, lest they bring a commotion with force, smashing against the rock of the church with the engines of their disbelief. For [on this rock, the Church] has been fixed and will not be prevailed against even to the gates of hell, as God proclaimed who set it up.²⁸³

In this imperial missive, Isidore injected the vividness of spiritual warfare into the arcane sphere of church controversies.²⁸⁴ Enlisting the aid of potentates in church matters by likening them to real battles was a frequent rhetorical strategy in the letters. In this example, Isidore deftly separates the emperor, who can be an ally, from his underlings (*τοὺς σοὺς διακόνους*) who were threatening the church “with the engines of

²⁸¹ Other so-called persecutors have a mixed treatment in Basil’s letters (*Ep.* 98, 147, 148, 149).

²⁸² *Epist.* 311. The other letter is the perfunctory *Epist.* 35: “If you would lay claim to the kingdom of Christ, which undying permanence crowns and God placed as a prize of the perishable kingdom for those who manage it well, mingle your power with gentleness and lighten the weight of your wealth with appropriate disbursements. For an emperor is not saved through great power, nor does the man sparing of his flowing wealth escape the wickedness of idolatry.”

²⁸³ “Εἰ μὲν αὐτὸς λαμβάνῃ καιροῦ παρῆναι τοῖς κρινομένοις ἐν Ἐφέσῳ, προσέσται τοῦτοις εὖ οἶδα τὸ ἄμεμπτον. Εἰ ὀχλώδει ἀντιπαθεῖα τὰς ψήφους ἐκδόσεως, τίς ἐξαιρήσεται τὴν σύνοδον σκωμμάτων; Παρέξεις δὲ τοῦτοις θεραπείαν, εἰ παύσεως τῶν δογματισμῶν τοὺς σοὺς διακόνους, πρὸς μέγα χάσμα διεστῶτας, βασιλεῖ ὑπηρετεῖσθαι καὶ Θεῷ διαφιλονεικεῖσθαι· μή πως τῷ κράτει σάλον ἐπενέγκωσι, τῇ πέτρᾳ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας προσρηγνύντες τὰ τῆς κακοπιστίας αὐτῶν μηχανήματα. Αὕτη γὰρ ἐρήρεται, καὶ οὔτε ὑπὸ πυλῶν ἄδου κυριεύεται, ὥς ὁ δράσας αὐτὴν Θεὸς ἐπηγγείλατο.”

²⁸⁴ Arcane from the point of view of some (e.g. Amm. 21.16.18), but, of course, Christological controversies were not unimportant side-shows in late antiquity.

their disbelief” (τὰ τῆς κακοπιστίας αὐτῶν μηχανήματα). The emperor, in his capacity as the mightiest of patrons, was to heed Isidore’s call for imperial protection and prevent the metaphorical siege.

Whether or not Isidore’s plea was heeded,²⁸⁵ he at least thought it was the kind of language that could be effective. This was due to not just the prevailing military discourse surrounding enemies of the church, but also the concurrent martial imagery attached to emperors and high officials. We clearly see this juncture of two different spheres of military language in a letter of Ambrose to Theodosius I.²⁸⁶ Although the details are inscrutable as we only have Ambrose’s version of events, in 388 a synagogue at Callinicum was burned down by a certain bishop and his clerics, whom the emperor ordered to pay for the rebuilding. From Ambrose’s complaint, it seems that the Jewish inhabitants of Callinicum had appealed for imperial intervention through the *comes orientis*, a request we can imagine presented their community as the victims of lawless brigandage and called for the mighty protection of imperial authorities.²⁸⁷ But the bishop of Milan turned this story around, rendering the Jewish victims the plotting tricksters against whom the emperor needed to protect the Christians. He had already gotten Theodosius to spare the bishop at fault, and, despite his redundant opening plea, he was asking the emperor to withdraw from the case entirely.²⁸⁸ In the imagined military

²⁸⁵ It is unclear whether the emperor’s representative at the first council of Ephesus, Fl. Candidianus 6 (PLRE 2:257-8), was really instructed to remain neutral or was partial to Nestorius from the beginning (McGuckin 1994, 56). Incidentally, the emperor’s chosen representative was head of his personal bodyguard, *comes domesticorum*, making Isidore’s military language even more apt.

²⁸⁶ Ambr. *Epist.* 74 = *extra coll.* 1a.

²⁸⁷ Ambr. *Epist.* 74.6, “*comes orientis militarium partium*” need not refer to a military commander (Matthews 1975, 232n6) but could rather be Ambrose’s attempt to emphasize the military aspects of the official and the emperor’s response (McLynn 1994, 298n26).

²⁸⁸ Ambr. *Epist.* 74.6-9.

conflict Ambrose depicted, the Jews constituted a threat to the faith, laying ambushes and raising their *tropaeum* over the people of Christ.²⁸⁹ It was no accident that Ambrose chose to unite this polemical picture with a martial portrait of the emperor. He began by reminding Theodosius of his temperance but also his mastery of his military subjects: “nothing is as popular and lovable in *imperatores* than to delight in the frankness of those who have been subjected to you in the obedience of *militia*,” and he concluded by reminding the emperor of his clemency in battle.²⁹⁰ By portraying Theodosius as a mighty and heroic protector against overweening and deceptive enemies of the faith, Ambrose told a story that could unite the martial motifs of imperial appeal with the prevailing discourse of religious demonization.

We cannot, however, take Ambrose’s letter at face value. The letter confusingly combines the Callinicum affair with other issues, including Ambrose’s objection to some curial duties for churchmen and an appeal on behalf of Syrian monks who had destroyed a Valentinian church.²⁹¹ The issue does not appear to have been resolved by this letter, as another sermon preserved in a missive to Ambrose’s sister relates the subsequent confrontation with the emperor.²⁹² In his sermon, Ambrose compared himself to Nathan and Theodosius to David, arguing that the emperor should yield to his prophetic authority, and Theodosius, after some discussion finally relented. Neil McLynn argues that in this incident the emperor got the better of the bishop and that the

²⁸⁹ Ambr. *Epist.* 74.18-20.

²⁹⁰ Ambr. *Epist.* 74.2: “nihil enim in imperatoribus tam populare et tam amabile est quam libertatem etiam in his diligere qui obsequio militiae vobis subditi sunt”; 74.32: “Tu igitur qui armatis pepercisti hostibus et servasti inimicos tuos, ne, quaeso, tanto studio putes vindicandum in Christianos.”

²⁹¹ Ambr. *Epist.* 74.16, 29. For discussion, see McLynn 1999, 301-2.

²⁹² Ambr. *Epist. extra coll.* 1 (=Maur. 41).

first letter was ineffective.²⁹³ Perhaps that is right, but there is no reason why Ambrose's opening gambit, a grandiose call for a militant protector, could not have contributed to changing Theodosius' mind. At any rate, Ambrose got the last word, and it is his account of Callinicum, edited for a more dramatic challenge to the emperor, that survives.²⁹⁴ When Paulinus of Milan, Ambrose's biographer, described the episode, he blended the military language of Ambrose's letter with the confrontation in church:

In the sermon, he took on the *persona* of the Lord, speaking to the emperor, "I made you emperor from the lowest; I handed over the army of your enemy to you; I gave you the forces which he had gathered for his own army against you; I returned your enemy into your power, I established one from your seed upon the throne of your kingdom; I made you triumph without labor; and now you are giving triumphs over me to my enemies?"²⁹⁵

It is this military aspect of Ambrose's appeal which proved most memorable, as it summed up the powerful parallels between the martial role of the emperor and the imagined war with the enemies of the church.²⁹⁶

Conclusion: Magnifying Martial Imagery

This was not simple militarization. Romans did not become regimented automata in a web of bureaucracies and castes. One must think about cultural militarism and its expressions in late antiquity without falling back on older generalizations about

²⁹³ McLynn 1999, 308: "The loser in this unhappy affair was Ambrose...[He] had failed entirely to win the emperor's sympathy."

²⁹⁴ Ambr. *Epist.* 74.33. On this edited ending, see Zelzer 1982, xxii; McLynn 1999, 308-9.

²⁹⁵ Paul. Med. V. *Ambr.* 23, "In quo tractatu introduxit Domini personam loquentis imperatori: "Ego te ex ultimo imperatorem feci, ego tibi exercitum inimici tui tradidi, ego tibi copias, quas ille adversum te exercitui suo paraverat, dedi, ego inimicum tuum in potestatem tuam redegi, ego de semine tuo supra soliu regni constitui, ego te triumphare sine labore feci: et tu de me inimicis meis donas triumphos?"

²⁹⁶ Kuefler 2001, 133, "The presumptive ability to speak on behalf of God, even to an emperor with the military might and political power of Theodosius I, was the cornerstone of Ambrose's episcopal authority."

totalitarian militarization. Much remained the same as it had always been: war was valorized and status distinctions were rigid. But at the same time, there was a dynamic strand of martial mentality in separate but related areas, a palpable willingness to bring military logic to bear across the social spectrum. Heroic martial imagery manifestly colored epistolary discourse, the idea that an individual could be a valiant hero formed bridges among military and civil officials, local elites, rhetoricians, and clergymen.

But this dynamic also enabled the use of military language to draw borders and encourage friends and foes to take sides. Libanius used martial coloring to lambast his opponents and distinguish himself. Bishops portrayed their religious opponents as military enemies. This discourse proved effective because the people on the receiving end often thought in martial terms in other areas of life, valorizing the powerful, demonizing enemies, and promoting a heroic self-image. This was a stable way of reinforcing new or existing divisions and appealing to traditional patrons, but when it came to newer networks of allegiance and hierarchies stretching across the Mediterranean, a different figure was more appropriate. In the following chapters I explore how this played out for ascetics and administrators for whom the dominant image was not the valiant hero but the lowly soldier.

CHAPTER II:
MILITIA CHRISTI:
SOLDIERLY MARTIAL IMAGERY, ASCETIC INFLUENCE, AND
REGULATION

According to the sixth-century *Regula Benedicti*, new members of the monastery were to have the rules read aloud to them before being formally admitted. The prologue began with a military metaphor:

Listen, son, to the precepts of the teacher, and lend the ear of your heart, and willingly take up the admonition of your dutiful father, and fulfil it efficaciously, so that you may return through the labor of obedience to him from whom you had withdrawn through the idleness of disobedience. Therefore, now my speech is directed to you who, renouncing your own desires and ready to fight for Christ the Lord, the true king, take up the mighty and brilliant arms of obedience.²⁹⁷

After the rules were read aloud, the recruit was verbally reminded of his serious commitment:

Behold, the law under which you fight; if you can observe it, advance. If you cannot, leave now as a free man.²⁹⁸

Not only did this martial language frame the seventy-three rules, but many of the jussive precepts nodded at the ascetic's imagined military role. The initial typology of different ascetics referenced cenobitic soldiers and anchoritic battles with the devil; the shared

²⁹⁷ Bened. *Reg. praef.*: "Obsculta, o fili, praecepta magistri, et inclina aurem cordis tui et admonitionem pii patris libenter excipe et efficaciter comple, ut ad eum per oboedientiae laborem redeas, a quo per inoboedientiae desidiam recesseras. Ad te ergo nunc mihi sermo dirigitur, quisquis abrenuntians propriis voluntatibus, Domino Christo vero Regi militaturus oboedientiae fortissima atque praeclara arma sumis." Cf. praef. "Ergo praeparanda sunt corda nostra et corpora sanctae praeceptorum oboedientiae militanda, et quod minus habet in nos natura possibile, rogemus Dominum, ut gratiae suae iubeat nobis adiutorium ministrare." Translation my own.

²⁹⁸ Bened. *Reg.* 58: "Ecce lex sub qua militare vis; si potes observare, ingredere; si vero non potes, liber discede." Translation my own. For a comparison between monastic vows and the soldier's *sacramentum* described by Veg. *Mil.* 2.5, see Dilley 2017, 83.

burden of God's *militia* justified the equality of all *monachi* regardless of social status; guests of good standing were to be welcomed for the edification of all "because everywhere there is service of one Lord, there is fighting for one king."²⁹⁹

Late-antique letters generally imagined a military role for the man of God, but this late text stressed a slightly different aspect of the ascetic. We see the elevation of the obedient and dutiful soldier instead of the glorious and heroic warrior. His weapons were not just weapons of God but *arma oboedientiae*, and his chief virtue was his ability to endure trials with obedience and humility. This separate strand of martial imagery – a different semantic field, as it were – emerged in the latter part of the fourth century as an important means of expressing the ascetic's imagined military role. That it formed a central element of such influential tracts as the Benedictine *Regula* is a testament to the extent to which soldierly martial imagery came to impact the long-term trajectory of asceticism, the details of which are beyond the scope of this chapter.³⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the spread of such language had two important consequences for asceticism in its early stages of development in the fourth and fifth centuries. First, the valorization of the ascetic soldier presented an ideal to which a broad set of people could in theory aspire, be they church officials, provincial elites, or aristocratic women, and therefore it offered

²⁹⁹ Bened. *Reg.* 1; 2; 61: "quia in omni loco uni Domino servitur, uni Regi militatur." Manning 1962, 135-8 has shown that *militare* and *servire* can simply mean "obey" in this text, but, given the internal coherence of the martial vocabulary at some points in the *Regula* (e.g. praef.), we should not discount the importance of the imagined military connotation of this vocabulary (Guevin 1998). For a brief overview of the martial symbolism, see Leclercq 1992, 13-15, and for a relevant discussion of the rule's reception, see Smith 2011, 92-6 and 116.

³⁰⁰ Other *regulae* deployed a similar motif. The *Regula Macarii*, dated by Adalbert de Vogüé (1982, 356) to the late fifth century, begins with an injunction to *milites Christi* (Ps. Macar. *Reg.* 1-2). The *Regula Magistri*, a source for the Benedictine *Regula*, dating perhaps to the late fifth century, includes many references to soldierly ascetics (*ths* 40, 1.2, 1.75, 2.19, 2.35, 7.36, 8.18, 10.123, 11.10, 15.54, 28.5, 33.22, 34.1, 44.19, 82.2, 83.2, 87.9, 90.12, 90.29, 90.46, 92.63.), some of which clearly influenced the military references at Bened. *Reg.* praef., 1, 2 (cf. *Reg. Mag. ths* 40, 1.2, 2.19).

spiritual leaders a rhetorical tool with which they establish and maintain influence. Second, the notion of the ascetic as soldier became a means of regulating the potentially disruptive lifestyles introduced by experiments in ascetic living. In many ways, the dominance of the soldierly ascetic in the discourse of the period resulted from certain well-situated writers, like Augustine and Jerome, who sought to impose their own vision of orderly ascetic communities.

In the first part of this chapter, I trace the development of soldierly ascetic imagery in early texts. From Athanasius' *Life of Antony* to the mid-fifth century *Life of Rabbula*, we see heroic depictions of the holy man locked in battle with evil; these holy men fought demons, destroyed temples, and battled heretics. The soldierly aspects of this martial imagery remains underappreciated, and the obedient infantryman came to predominate as an ideal frame of reference for feats of ascetic endurance.

In the second part of this chapter, I explore how this soldierly ethos took root in letters and treatises, suggesting a broader rhetorical appeal. Although the exact audience of early Christian lives is impossible to ascertain, the popularity of the soldierly ascetic in letters to a wide audience is significant. Christian leaders used the idea of an ascetic soldiery to establish and maintain networks of influence both within and outside the church. By "networks of influence," I mean the kinds of long-distance lines of communication that were cultivated within the boundaries of late-antique epistolary expectations.³⁰¹ Although we cannot grasp the complex historical reality of these social

³⁰¹ On the vibrant networks that developed in late-antiquity, see Bradbury 2004b who uses the evidence of Libanius' letters to argue "that the provincial aristocracies of the Greek East of the fourth century engaged in more travel and expended more effort in the creation and maintenance of extended networks of influence via personal visiting and the exchange of letters than their predecessors of earlier periods of antiquity" (74).

interactions, letters offer momentary “performances” that aimed at encouraging generosity, patronage, and relationships of support.³⁰² As an ascetic-mobilizing image, the lowly soldier might have been more effective than heroic language, for writers could present soldierly obedience and suffering as more accessible, whereas heroic imagery remained confined to the blunter modes of panegyric and petition. At the same time, the idea of the dutiful warrior of Christ had the advantage of asserting ties of comradeship and loyalty while resonating with the ascetic virtues of self-denial and endurance.

The third part of this chapter argues that soldierly ascetic imagery was increasingly used as a means of regulating experiments in ascetic living and bringing them under the purview of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The image of the disciplined soldier was particularly well-suited to fundamental ascetic ideals, and in the writings of several bishops, sexual renunciation became a focal point of this imagery. On the one hand, the mutual support of soldiers rendered the image a rhetorical cudgel to promote a cenobitic ideal of communal living and obedience to an ecclesiastic hierarchy. On the other hand, bishops could use the inverse of that image, the wayward deserter or deviant bandit, to discipline or condemn ascetics whom they perceived to run afoul of their own standards of discipline.

In all this, we see the regulative and disciplinary power of soldierly ascetic imagery, which owed its resonance to the associated virtues of renunciation and obedience. In contrast to heroic imagery, which was better suited to petition and self-promotion within familiar networks of patronage and along pre-existing ecclesiastical fault-lines, the image of the soldier proved a powerful restructuring and revisionist tool.

³⁰² On Theodoret’s written appeals as “social performances,” see Schor 2010, 156-7.

In the following chapter, we will see how a similar kind of soldierly imagery worked inside the bureaucracy to establish parallel hierarchies of obedience, albeit not without running up against other established ideas of state service. These two strands of military language – ascetic and administrative *militia* – flourished in parallel and resulted in a spirited discussion of competing systems of allegiance.

Soldierly Aspects of Ascetic Hagiography

The *Life of Antony* attributed to Athanasius practically inaugurated a sub-genre of ascetic hagiographies recounting the marvelous deeds of great holy men.³⁰³ The popular text spawned Latin, Coptic, and Syriac translations,³⁰⁴ and intertextual references in later lives reveal the *Life of Antony's* lasting influence.³⁰⁵ While there were many historical and literary repercussions of these early hagiographical texts, they seem to have helped develop a soldierly ascetic ethos. To be sure, there were characteristically heroic elements in the stories of the holy men of the desert and their valiant battles with demons and hardship, but for all the martial prowess that we see in these tales, there is another facet of the warrior of Christ, namely his obedience and submission to soldierly

³⁰³ The question of authorship is fraught, but largely settled in favor of Athanasius (Brakke 1994, 53: “no reason to remove the Greek *Life* from the corpus of authentic works by Athanasius). Barnes (2010, 168), on the basis of vocabulary and theological differences with the rest of the Athanasian corpus has tried to revive a version of Tetz’s argument (1982, 1-30) that Athanasius reworked an earlier text by Serapion. Whatever the merits of this argument, for my purposes, it is immaterial who the initial author of the widely translated and circulate *Life* was.

³⁰⁴ Bartelink 1994, 95-101. There were two Latin translations of the Greek text (*BHG* 140) printed in *CCSL* 170: Evagrius of Antioch’s (*BHL* 609) and an anterior anonymous version (*Vers. vet.*; *BHL* 609e). The extant Syriac version dates (*CSCO* 417-8) to the fifth or sixth centuries and itself stems from a Greek-Coptic version. An independent Sahidic MS dates to the ninth century, and an Old Slavic translation dates to the tenth or eleventh.

³⁰⁵ Barnes 2010, 160. See also 270, “Although hagiography was never a literary genre on the strict definition of that term, hagiographical themes and hagiographical material permeate all types of literature from the late fourth century onwards.”

suffering. In these texts' subtle emphasis on soldierly imagery, we see a literary ascetic motif that had real consequences for the promulgation and regulation of different models of holiness.

There are well over a dozen extant hagiographic lives from the mid-fourth to mid-fifth centuries.³⁰⁶ The generic coherence of these lives is less important than their intertextual, thematic, and structural similarities that allow them to be considered together, including their being structured around the life of one individual, proceeding chronologically from birth to death, and focusing on the godly and ascetic qualities of the holy man or woman. Not all these texts relied on martial imagery to depict their subjects, but for a substantial number of them, especially the ones that foreground ascetic themes, military language was an essential feature of their narratological approach and biographical description. I do not exhaustively account for every military detail in each life, but instead I approach the topic thematically, tracing similar martial features through the tales of these austere holy men. Many comparisons between soldiers and ascetics were explicit, and, as the vehicle for metaphor, they activated a logic of military endurance, discipline, and hierarchy.³⁰⁷ Other military connections must be inferred from the text, and many can surely be disputed on interpretive grounds,

³⁰⁶ The term "hagiography" is modern and does not refer to a single set of texts (Burton 2017, 25-40). For my period, I consider the following to fit together as a roughly related cluster: Athanasius' *Life of Antony*; Jerome's *Life of Paul of Thebes*, *Life of Malchus*, and *Life of Hilarion*; Severus' *Life of Martin*; Paulinus' *Life of Ambrose*; Possidius' *Life of Augustine*; Hilary's *Sermo de vita Honorati*; the different versions of the *Life of Pachomius*; the anonymous *Life of Rabbula*; Gerontius' *Life of Melania*; Callinicus' *Life of Hypatius*; Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus* and *Life of Macrina*. Other texts that are comparable, even if they lack the unitary focus of typical biography, are the *Historia Lausiaca* and Theodoret's *Historia religiosa*.

³⁰⁷ See Sulp. Sev. *Dial.* 2.11 for martial imagery described as a "true and rational comparison" (discussed below).

but this implicit martial imagery cooperated with explicit references to convey ascetic virtues along lines recognizable to ancient readers.

Martial Imagery in Hagiographic Prefaces

An important feature of early hagiographical texts was their prologues, which explained the importance of the life and exhorted the reader to follow the example of the subject. These early hagiographers reveled in all the tropes of classical biography, and much ink could be spilt elaborating their many subtleties, but in many of these prefaces, military references stand out, elevating soldierly virtues and foreshadowing quasi-military deeds. Athanasius began his life of his desert hermit by calling his reader to rival the monks of Egypt in “your training for virtue.”³⁰⁸ The word *ἀσκησις*, the typical term for ascetic commitment, can also call to mind physical training, a valence which could be activated by the agonistic vocabulary of the passage. While not explicitly military, this language anticipated the trying battles with demons that Antony would endure in the desert. The preface of Jerome’s *Life of Hilarion* briefly compared the subject of his life to the hero Achilles,³⁰⁹ and he used a military metaphor to portray his literary project as a mock battle in preparation for a larger one.³¹⁰ In his prologue to

³⁰⁸ Athan. *Ant.* pr.1: “Ἀγαθὴν ἄμιλλαν ἐνεστήσασθε πρὸς τοὺς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ μοναχοὺς ἥτοι παρισωθῆναι ἢ καὶ ὑπερβαλέσθαι τούτους προελόμενοι τῇ κατ’ ἀρετὴν ὁμῶν ἀσκήσει.” Translation my own. Cf. *Vers. vet.* pr.: “Bonum certamen constituistis vobis contra monachos qui sunt in Aegypto ut aut similes sitis illis aut, si fieri potest hoc, superaretis studio virtutum vestrarum”; Evagr. *Vita Anton.* pr. 2: “Optimum, fratres, iniistis certamen, aut aequare Aegypti monachos, aut superare nitentes virtutis instantia.”

³⁰⁹ Jerome quotes Alexander who, upon reaching the grave of Achilles exclaimed, “What a happy youth you are who enjoy a great herald of your deeds! (meaning of course Homer)” (Hier. *Hilar.* 1: “Felicem te, ait, iuvenis, qui magno frueris praecone meritorum! Homerum videlicet significans.”) Jerome added that his subject would be the envy of Homer, or even beyond his skill (“Porro mihi tanti ac talis viri conversatio vitaeque dicenda est, ut Homerus quoque si adesset, vel invideret materiae, vel succumberet.”). Sulp. Sev. *Mart.* 1.3 and esp. 26.3 for a similarly favorable comparison between the hagiographer’s task and Homer’s heroic themes. This may be a deliberate reference on the part of Severus to Jerome’s *Life of Hilarion* (Stanclicke 1983, 68).

³¹⁰ Hier. *Malchi* 1: “Qui navali praelio dimicaturi sunt, ante in portu et in tranquillo mari flectunt gubernacula, remos trahunt, ferreas manus, et uncas praeparant, dispositumque per tabulata militem,

his *Life of Hypatius*, Callinicus described his subject as “a new Cornelius” who “fought the good fight,” evidently a reference to the centurion baptized by Peter.³¹¹

Such oblique military references, often interwoven with athletic imagery, colored many hagiographic prefaces, priming the reader for martial themes and metaphors. Such language is also found in hagiographical texts that are not focused on a single life. Theodoret’s *Historia religiosa* began with an agonistic reference much as Athanasius’ *Life of Antony* did: “How fine it is to behold the contests of excellent men, the athletes of virtue, and to draw benefit with the eyes.”³¹² Later in the preface, he made more explicit military references, citing Paul’s “armor of God” as the tools of the ascetic’s struggles with demons.³¹³ But Theodoret’s spiritual war was of greater import than the wars of history and epic, for his pertained to divine things.³¹⁴

Other hagiographic lives employed more explicitly military language. The anonymous Syriac *Life of Rabbula*, bishop of Edessa (d. 435/6), has received little treatment in studies of late antique hagiography, but it partakes in many of the same military motifs that I argue were central to the representation of ascetics across the

pendente gradu, et labente vestigio stare firmiter assuescunt, ut quod in simulacro pugnae didicerint, in vero certamine non pertimiscant. Ita et ego...prius exerceri cupio in parvo opere, et veluti quamdam rubiginem linguae abstergere, ut venire possim ad latiore historiam.” Gray (2015, 40-41, 96-102) compares this opening imagery of naval warfare to similar literary allusions (esp. Ambr. *Off.* 1.10.32-33) and the technical vocabulary of military literature (Veg. *Mil.* 4.31-46). For more examples of Jerome’s use of martial imagery for his work, see Bartelink 1980, 40 and Harendza 1905, 35-6.

³¹¹ Callinic. Mon. *V. Hyp.* prol.1: “Διὰ πόθον τῆς εὐλαβείας σου, φιλόχριστε ἱερεῦ, ὃν σοι ὁ θεὸς ἐνέθηκεν ἄξιόν ἐστι—διὰ γὰρ τῶν πραγμάτων ἐπέισθημεν, ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς ἐποίησέν σε νέον Κορνήλιον.” cf. Acts 10. See also prol.3 for agonistic language calling to mind *V. Ant.* pr.1: “ὅπως εἰς δόξαν Θεοῦ καὶ τιμὴν τῶν ἁγίων τῶν ἀγωνισαμένων τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα καὶ τῷ Θεῷ εὐαρεστησάντων κατὰ δύναμιν σημάνω καὶ τῇ εὐλαβείᾳ ὑμῶν τὴν τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ὑπατίου πολιτείαν.”

³¹² Thdt. *H. Rel.* pr. 1: “Τῶν ἀρίστων ἀνδρῶν καὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀθλητῶν καλὸν μὲν ἰδεῖν τοὺς ἀγῶνας καὶ τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς τὴν ὠφέλειαν ἀρύσασθαι.” Price, trans.

³¹³ Thdt. *H. Rel.* pr. 4-6. There are also clear athletic references (pr. 3; cf. Pallad. *H. Laus.* pr.1-3).

³¹⁴ Thdt. *H. Rel.* pr. 2.

To be sure, the language is at times generically agonistic (e.g. *ḥaṣṣa* *ḥaṣṣa* (“arena of righteousness” cf. Gk. *στάδιον*)), much like the life of Antony’s preface, but the diction (e.g. *ḥaṣṣa* (“model”, lit. “banner”),³¹⁷ *ḥaṣṣa* (“valiant”, lit. “girt”),³¹⁸ *ḥaṣṣa* *ḥaṣṣa* *ḥaṣṣa* *ḥaṣṣa* (“in pitched battles with principalities was found victorious”), *ḥaṣṣa* *ḥaṣṣa* *ḥaṣṣa* *ḥaṣṣa* (“by his warlike strength trampled the power of the Enemy”),³¹⁹ *ḥaṣṣa* *ḥaṣṣa* *ḥaṣṣa* *ḥaṣṣa* (“Satan...he subdued by his fight”), *ḥaṣṣa* *ḥaṣṣa* *ḥaṣṣa* *ḥaṣṣa* (“broke apart by the sharp point of his endurance”)³²⁰) steps into a more explicitly martial register. Further military details, both biographical and metaphorical, appear later in the life, rendering the episcopal warrior a recurring theme.³²¹

The preface to Sulpicius Severus’ *Life of Martin* also partook in heavy martial imagery. Even as the biographer sought to emphasize the civilian qualities of Martin,³²² from the beginning of his *Life*, he used the notion of “heavenly military service” (*caelestis militia*) to present his subject’s ascetic holiness. This he contrasted starkly with the traditionally esteemed virtues of warriors like Hector or philosophers like Socrates. Those who privilege such ephemeral earthly glory, Severus argued, “it is

³¹⁷ A meaning observed by Phenix and Horn (2017, 3n7) as a potential allusion to a synonym *ḥaṣṣa* at 2 Tim 1:13, a translation of Gk. *ὑποτύπωσις* which lacks the potential military valence of *ḥaṣṣa* here.

³¹⁸ See Margoliouth s.v. *ḥaṣṣa*, Part. adj. a, “girt; metaph. strong, strenuous, valiant;...subst. an athlete, a combatant.”

³¹⁹ *ḥaṣṣa*, like Gk. *δυνάμις*, can denote power generically or concretely refer to an army or host (see Sokoloff, s.v. *ḥaṣṣa* and *ḥaṣṣa*).

³²⁰ *ḥaṣṣa* can literally indicate a sharp point (e.g., of a sword), but it can also metaphorically refer to highest or most extreme of something (Sokoloff, s.v. 1# *ḥaṣṣa*), so here, this could also be translated more abstractly as “subdued by the extremity of his endurance.” Phenix and Horn also note the potential agricultural resonances of the point (“plough”) and its consequences for the text. As with many lives, there are different metaphorical levels at work.

³²¹ See Doerfler 2016, 205n46.

³²² Brown 1971b, 124.

stupidity not only to imitate, but even madness not to attack ardently.”³²³ Thus, from the very beginning of the life, Severus was using military language to describe his literary project, in much the same way that Jerome had begun his *Life of Malchus* with an elaborate metaphor likening his authorial endeavor to a mock naval battle.³²⁴ For Severus, the martial-literary motif contrasted with the only path to true glory, found “not by writing, fighting, or philosophizing, but by living piously, holily, and religiously.”³²⁵ Severus hoped his work would be useful if his readers were “spurred to true wisdom, heavenly military service, and divine virtue.”³²⁶

Early historiographers indulged in martial imagery to conceive of their literary projects and to present their subjects as spiritual warriors, worthy of imitation. When we consider the military features of these texts, a pattern seems to emerge, one in which war-like exploits and imagery were circumscribed by soldierly elements. We see this in the emphasis on the fixity of the ascetic’s martial activities (often confined to the wilderness or a fort), on endurance as the defining quality of the ascetic, and on obedience rather than pure prowess. The line between ‘heroic’ and ‘soldierly’ warriors was not clear-cut, but the more we examine hagiographic texts from the period, the more it becomes clear that a somewhat distinct martial mentality was taking root in connection to ascetics: a disciplined soldier was becoming the ideal point of reference.

³²³ Sulp. Sev. *Mart.* 1.3: “cum eos non solum imitari stultitia sit, sed non acerrime etiam impugnare dementia.” Translation my own.

³²⁴ Hier. *Malch.* 1.

³²⁵ Sulp. Sev. *Mart.* 1.4: “siquidem ad solam hominum memoriam se perpetuandos crediderunt, cum hominis officium sit, perennem potius vitam quam perennem memoriam quaerere, non scribendo aut pugnando vel philosophando, sed pie sancte religioseque vivendo.” Translation my own.

³²⁶ Sulp. Sev. *Mart.* 1.6: “unde facturus mihi operae pretium videor, si vitam sanctissimi viri, exemplo aliis mox futuram, perscripsero: quo utique ad veram sapientiam et caelestem militiam divinamque virtutem legentes incitabuntur.”

Soldierly Settings in Hagiography

The anchoretic setting of these lives was key in developing a soldierly image of the ascetic. In nearly every hagiographic text, beginning with Athanasius' *Life of Antony*, the ascetic's withdrawal from society into the wilderness, his *anchoresis*, coincides with rigorous trials and battles with demons. This withdrawal to an eremitic setting was a prerequisite for the imagined military struggle of the ascetic.³²⁷ The desert became a field of battle and test of endurance, and this setting implicitly drew connections to the idea of soldierly service and the associated virtues of discipline, obedience, and austerity.

The importance of the eremitic setting as enemy territory, the locus of demonic activity,³²⁸ can be seen clearly in the *Life of Antony*, whose "imaginative composition inaugurated the fashion of presenting the monastic life as a constant battle against the devil and his army of demons."³²⁹ Subsequent texts continued this motif. In the *Life of Rabbula*, the focus is on the bishop's "heroic deeds" (ܡܝܬܝܬܐ), a word associated with both martyrdom and victory, his vanquishing of the devil, and his help of others.³³⁰ The bishop ranged across the countryside, seeking "to wage battles with fierce pains like the champions in the open country."³³¹ In a memorable episode, he and a fellow ascetic,

³²⁷ Hilarion, comparing himself to Antony, exclaims "I have not yet begun to serve" ("se necdum militare coepisse") before he goes off into the desert for the first time (Hier. *Hilar.* 3).

³²⁸ e.g. Bartelink 1994, 171n1; Brakke 2006, 13.

³²⁹ Barnes 2010, 160.

³³⁰ *Rabb.* 1.

³³¹ *Rabb.* 11, "ܡܝܬܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ" (Phenix and Horn, trans.). See Bitton-Ashkelony 2010 for the significance of travel and pilgrimage in Syriac hagiography: "The *liminal* aspect of Rabbula's pilgrimage – a sort of *rite de passage* that includes an element of self-transformation – served as a hagiographic strategy of representation intended to shape the identity and the charismatic authority of the hero" (354).

Eusebius, go to Baalbek vainly hoping to destroy the temple or be martyred trying.³³² Upon Rabbula's elevation to the episcopacy, the priests of Antioch praise him as a Davidic champion who would lay low the enemies of the truth, and the hagiographer twice called him a second Josiah, the Old Testament king who destroyed the "high places."³³³ The bishop of Edessa was remembered as a warrior most notably in connection to destroying paganism and heresy, whether in his zealous attacks on temples or in his vanquishing of the followers of Arius, Bardaisan, and Nestorius.³³⁴ Other ascetics received similar heroic portraits. In his *Life of Hilarion*, Jerome had Hilarion, "stripped and armed in Christ," scour the countryside, exorcizing demons and protecting the faithful.³³⁵ Likewise, Severus displayed Martin's near-magical ability to defeat attackers and destroy temples in the country, bending the elements to his ends.³³⁶ Jerome's *Life of Malchus*, perhaps the least miraculous of the lives, situated the trials of the holy man in the deserts of Chalcis and concluded by stressing the invincibility of the holy man: "Tell this to posterity so that they may know that amidst swords, deserts, and

³³² *Rabb.* 16.

³³³ *Rabb.* 17, Josiah: *Rabb.* 2, 40. (cf. 2 Kings 22-23).

³³⁴ Destruction of four temples to make way for a *xenodocheion* (*Rabb.* 50). Depending on one's reading of the word "مبلى," they were either destroyed "with authority"/"officially" (Doran 2006, 52/Phenix and Horn 2017, 75), "freely," or "violently." The last translation would accord with the violence of Rabbula attested in other sources (Doerfler 2016, 205-8), but intentional ambiguity on the part of the hagiographer cannot be discounted. Heresies: *Rabb.* 40-5.

³³⁵ Hier. *Hilar.* 3: "Sic nudus, et armatus in Christo, solitudinem...ingressus est."

³³⁶ In this there is a clear connection between Martin's "mentalité militaire" and his missionary expeditions "contre les forteresses sacrées du paganisme rural" (Fontaine 1967, 1:147). Huber-Rebenich 1999, 170-172 makes the case for a transition from *miles christianus* to *imperator Dei*. There is surely more grandiosity to Martin's later exploits, but the word *imperator* does not actually appear in the text, and, as I will note, Martin maintains his soldierly humility up to the end of the life.

beasts, *pudicitia* is never captive and the man given to Christ cannot die or be overcome.”³³⁷

But for all the generically martial tone of these lives, it is salutary to recognize the military elements of this frontier setting and its specific associations with soldiers. Athanasius portrayed Antony in a wilderness fort (*παρεμβολή*, rendered *castra* or *castellum* in Latin translations),³³⁸ calling to mind the fortlets which dotted the frontiers of the later Roman Empire.³³⁹ Hypatius, upon joining with Jonah, the soldier-turned-ascetic, founded the fortified monastery (*καστέλλιον*) of Halmyrissus in the mountains of Thrace, which served to protect them from barbarians:

And as others joined them, they began to organize a plot of land and garden for planting and establishing a monastery, such as could support eighty brothers and be a great fort. For because the Huns were nearby and they easily pillaged the area, they dwelled in forts.³⁴⁰

³³⁷ Hier. *Malchi* 10: “Vos narrate posteris, ut sciant inter gladios, inter deserta et bestias pudicitiam numquam esse captivam et hominem Christo deditum posse mori, non posse superari.” Translation my own.

³³⁸ Athan. *Ant.* 12, “Καὶ παρεμβολὴν ἔρημον καὶ διὰ τὸν χρόνον μεστὴν ἑρπετῶν εὐρὼν εἰς τὸ πέραν τοῦ ποταμοῦ, ἐκεῖ μετέθηκεν ἑαυτόν, καὶ ὤκησεν ἐν αὐτῇ.” Cf. *Vers. vet.* 12: “et castra deserta propter longitudinem temporis et plena repentium invenit trans flumen. In haec se transtulit et mansit in eis, et repentia quidem, quasi a flagello aliquo persequerentur, recesserunt”; Evagr. *Vita Anton.* 12: “...ubi flumine transvadato invenit castellum desertum plenum, ob tempus et solitudinem, venenatorum animalium, in quo se constituens novus hospes habitavit.” Interestingly, the earliest extant Syriac version of the life does not contain a reference to the fort, but the passage is apparently corrupt (Draguet 1980, *ad loc.*). Smith 2011, 80 notes the martial significance of the abandoned “*castrum*” in this early text.

³³⁹ The *terminus ante quem* would seem to be 376 (Jerome, *Paul.* 1), but scholars agree that the text was written soon after the death of Antony in 356 (Bartelink 1994, 27). This would probably put the date of the Greek life several years before the Valentinian projects, for which see Amm. 28.3.7, 29.4 with Lander 1984, 263-293 and Lenski 2002, 130-1. Nevertheless, it is important to note that most of these forts were already in existence and were simply remodeled in the 360s (Lander 1984, 276).

³⁴⁰ Callinic. *Mon. V. Hyp.* 3.10-11: “Καὶ ἄλλων οὖν προσκολλωμένων αὐτοῖς ἤρξαντο φιλοκαλεῖν καὶ κῆπον καὶ χώραν εἰς τὸ σπεῖρειν καὶ ἐπικτίζειν μοναστήριον, ὥς συναχθῆναι ἀδελφοὺς ὀγδοήκοντα καὶ γενέσθαι καστέλλιον μέγα. Διὰ γὰρ τὸ τοὺς Οὐννοὺς γειτνιάζειν καὶ ῥαδίως πραιδεύειν τοὺς τόπους καστέλλια ὠκοδομοῦντο.” Translation my own. For the name, see 7.1. The fortified monastery was briefly attacked by the Goths in 395 (6.1-2 with Bartelink 1971, 92-93n3-4). Note also the episode in which Hypatius’ fortified monastery offered succor to Alexander Acoemetus fleeing from the mob of the bishop of Constantinople that included “*decani* of the *martyria*, beggars, factory-workers, and clerics” (*V. Hyp.* 41.10: “δεκανοὺς τῶν μαρτυρίων καὶ πτωχοὺς καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐργαστρίων τινὰς καὶ κληρικοὺς”).

Such stories of fortified ascetics may be rooted in historical reality,³⁴¹ but at a literary level, withdrawal to a frontier or military setting appears to have been a trope. Sulpicius Severus described Martin's *monasterium* with echoes of a Numidian *castellum* in Sallust's *Jugurthine War*.³⁴² Malchus' trials are preceded and followed with reference to the militarized Roman-Persian frontier, with most of the narrative taking place in the deserts of Chalcis.³⁴³ Jerome's *Life of Hilarion* may be set entirely 'within' the Roman Empire, but his *anachoresis* is still depicted as being among dangerous bandits, despite being only a few miles from his ancestral home of Gaza.³⁴⁴ Paul confined himself to an abandoned mint from the time of Cleopatra and Antony, a setting that could call to mind the imperial mints managed by departments under the *comes sacrarum largitionum*.³⁴⁵

Against the backdrop of these wild, frontier settings with their military associations, hagiographers highlighted interactions between their characters and imperial *milites*. A common scene is the officer's visit of the holy man, perhaps inspired by comparable New Testament episodes, but invariably expressed in the technical language of the later Roman hierarchy. Hilarion drives out a Syriac-speaking demon from a Frankish officer,³⁴⁶ and Antony converts soldiers and healed the daughter of the

³⁴¹ Bartelink 1971, 83n3.

³⁴² Cf. Sulp. Sev. *Mart.* 10.14-5 and Sall. *Iug.* 92. Burton 2017, 200, "There is a loose similarity between Martin and his monks and Jugurtha and his Numidians, whom Sallust presents as tough and abstemious (in implicit contrast to the decadent Romans)."

³⁴³ Hier. *Malchi* 3.2, 10.2.

³⁴⁴ Hier. *Hilar.* 3, 12. Cf. Sulp. Sev. *Mart.* 5 for an encounter with bandits in the Alps.

³⁴⁵ Those in the *officium* of the CSL tasked with managing mints were divided into *aurifices solidorum*, *scrinia argenti*, and *scrinia a miliarensibus* depending on the species of coinage (Jones 1964, 1:428). That the actual *monetarii* were public slaves under the direction of *procuratores* (Jones 1964, 1:435-437) militates against a direct connection to *militia inermis*, but, despite the antiquity of the mint, a connection to the imperial authorities is not out of the question. Weingarten notes that the "reference to the time 'when Antonius was joined with Cleopatra' not only serves to convert the setting to an Egyptian one, but stresses the contrast between the chaste Christian Antony and the licentious pagan hero" (2005, 31).

³⁴⁶ Hier. *Hilar.* 22.

dux Martinianus.³⁴⁷ Other interactions between soldier and ascetic abound. Malchus escapes from his Saracen captors to find succor with the Roman *dux* Sabinianus,³⁴⁸ and Rabbula compels soldiers to respect the dress of the monks.³⁴⁹ Imperial servants also interacted with these men of God like soldiers; in the *Life of Hypatius*, for example, “a *scrinarius* named Egersius serving (*στρατευόμενος*) in the prefecture” came to Hypatius looking for some documents that he had misplaced, promising to become a Christian if the holy man could find them.³⁵⁰ When Egersius found them as Hypatius had predicted, he “not only believed in God and was baptized, but even withdrew from public life” and distributed the property he had received in the course of his *στρατεία*.³⁵¹ These interactions can be interpreted as reflective of real-world frontier interactions between imperial agents and civilians, with countryside fortlets constituting an important site of contact between garrisons, officials, and local peoples, “fixed points” around which society operated.³⁵² Soldiers “were the most influential single group among the clientele

³⁴⁷ Athan. *Ant.* 87 and 48, but cf. 85 where Antony refuses to spend time with a *dux* lest he spend too much time among the secular, like a fish out of water.

³⁴⁸ Hier. *Malch.* 10.2. Sabinianus 3, *PLRE* 1:789.

³⁴⁹ *Rabb.* 36. The Syriac – “ܩܠܒܢܐ ܨܪܝܩܐ” (printed as ܩܠܒܢܐ ܨܪܝܩܐ in Phenix and Horn) – retains the ambiguity of Greek *στρατεία*; it could denote either soldiers or imperial officials (see Sokoloff, *s.v.* ܩܠܒܢܐ). The collocation of the two nouns, one a Greek loanword and the other a construct from the root ܩܠܐ (to labor, work, serve), evokes the same cluster of soldierly qualities that are seen in so much hagiographic literature.

³⁵⁰ Callinic. *Mon. V. Hyp.* 40.27-8: “Ἄλλος τις στρατευόμενος σκρινάριος τῶν ἐπάρχων ὀνόματι Ἐγέρσιος, μέσσην ἡλικίαν ἔχων Ἑλλήν ὑπῆρχεν. Βουλόμενος ὁ Θεὸς σῶσαι αὐτὸν οἰκονομεῖ ἀπολέσαι αὐτὸν χαρτίᾳ.” Translation my own.

³⁵¹ Callinic. *Mon. V. Hyp.* 40.34-6: “Ἐκεῖνος δὲ περιχαρὴς γενόμενος ἀνέκαμψεν πρὸς τὸν Ὑπάτιον εὐχαριστῶν τῷ Κυρίῳ, καὶ οὐ μόνον ἐπίστευσε τῷ Θεῷ καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπετάξατο. Στήσας γὰρ ἴδιον ἄνθρωπον εἰς τὸ σκρίνιον αὐτὸς σεμνὸν βίον καὶ εὐλαβῇ διῆγεν· καὶ γενόμενος ξενοδόχος ἐφ’ ἐκάστης ἡμέρας ἐξενοδόχει καὶ μονάζοντας καὶ πτωχοὺς ἱκανοὺς, τὴν τροφὴν ἀπονέμων ἐξ ὧν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ Θεὸς ἐν τῇ στρατείᾳ.” Translation my own. On this technical meaning of ἀποτάσσεσθαι, see Bartelink 1971, 80-1n3. The connection to τάξις, although not necessary, should not be overlooked when dealing with military or civil *officia*.

³⁵² The ambiguous designation of some fortlets speaks to their administrative importance. *Praetorium*, for instance, could indicate a civil rather than purely military function for some of presumed forts (Isaac 1992, 172 ff.). Bureaucratic regulations have also been found at some forts, such as at Qasr el-Hallabat. It is possible that the list was moved from elsewhere, but Gregory (1997, 2:295) thinks this inconceivable.

of the holy man,” as they both spread word of their deeds and maintained close relationships with their spiritual patrons.³⁵³ Nevertheless, the frequency of these imperial interactions in hagiography, especially in frontier settings, did not merely reflect historical reality, but served the rhetorical purpose of subordinating earthly to heavenly power. The fact that so many of these frontier settings are either abandoned or unpoliced by the military could suggest a more abstract replacement of secular soldiers with spiritual warriors.

With such a substitution in mind, it becomes relevant that the frontier setting drew on a soldierly ideal that emphasized separation from civil society and the disciplined endurance of harsh environments. The Apostle Paul enjoined Timothy to “share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one in the service is implicated in civilian affairs so that he might please the one who enrolled him as a soldier.”³⁵⁴ Contemporary letters echoed this ideal by lauding the separation of soldier and civilian and condemning the lack of discipline that could emerge from mixing military and civil affairs.³⁵⁵ The withdrawal of ascetics to embattled frontiers thus circumscribed them under a more orderly and fixed rubric. As Athanasius put it, “the desert was colonized by *monachoi* who had left behind their private lives and enlisted their citizenship in heaven.”³⁵⁶ Brakke and Caner argue that the *Life of Antony* aimed at sidelining the

I borrow the expression “fixed points” from Kelly 2004, 41-4, where it is used of the regimented bureaucratic hierarchy.

³⁵³ Brown 1982, 114.

³⁵⁴ 2 Tim 2:3-4, “Συνκακοπάθησον ὡς καλὸς στρατιώτης Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ. οὐδεὶς στρατευόμενος ἐμπλέκεται ταῖς τοῦ βίου πραγματείαις, ἵνα τῷ στρατολογήσαντι, ἀρέσῃ.” Translation my own.

³⁵⁵ See, e.g., the many letters of Isidore of Pelusium to soldiers cited in the preceding chapter.

³⁵⁶ Athan. *Ant.* 14.5, “Καὶ οὕτω λοιπὸν γέγονε καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσι μοναστήρια, καὶ ἡ ἔρημος ἐπολίσθη μοναχῶν, ἐξελθόντων ἀπὸ τῶν ἰδίων καὶ ἀπογραψαμένων τὴν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς πολιτείαν.” Translation my own. cf. Lk 18:28, Phil 3:20, Hebr 12:23. The language is not exclusively martial, but the verb ἀπογράφεσθαι can connote enlistment in military service. Cf. *Vers. vet.* 14: “Et sic de cetero facta sunt in

wandering or independent ascetic and binding him to stable place within the ecclesiastical hierarchy.³⁵⁷ I will discuss this regulative aspect of the ascetic soldier further, but for now it is sufficient to note that ascetic discipline harmonized well with the model warrior separated from society in a circumscribed community.

The association of ascetics with frontiers establishes a further military connection by calling to mind the harsh conditions that soldiers were perceived to endure for the good of the state. The author of the *De rebus bellicis* exaggerated the extreme climates that lined the edge of the empire, challenging Rome's soldiers and defending her enemies.³⁵⁸ One of his many prescriptions was the maintenance of a circuit of close-set forts along the frontier that could protect the empire "like a soldier's belt" (*quodam...cingulo*).³⁵⁹ This concern with the defense of empire along treacherous frontiers extended beyond this eclectic anonymous author. When Eusebius described biblical Arnon, the Wadi Mujib in Roman Arabia, he painted a characteristically austere picture of the frontier: "still to this day the place is full of ravines and very treacherous; garrisons of soldiers keep watch from every side due to its terrifying nature."³⁶⁰ Ancient

montibus mansiones monachorum, et desertum repletum est monachis, eorum qui exierunt a propriis et professi sunt caelestem conversationem"; Evagr. *Vita Anton.* 14: "Nec mora plures audientium ad humanarum rerum contemptum haec eius suasit oratio et habitandae eremi istud exordium fuit."

³⁵⁷ Caner 2002, 6-7; Brakke 1995, 203.

³⁵⁸ Anon. *DRB* 6.

³⁵⁹ Anon. *DRB* 20, "Est praeterea inter commodae rei publicae utilis limitum cura ambientium ubique latus imperii; quorum tutelae assidua Melius castella prospicient, ita ut millenis interiecta passibus stabili muro et firmissimis turribus erigantur. Quas quidem munitiones possessorum distribute sollicitudo sine publico sumptu constituat, vigiliis sane in his et agrariis exercendis, ut provinciarum quies circumdata quodam praesidia cingulo inlaesa requiescat."

³⁶⁰ Eus. *Onom.* 10.15-24, "δείκνυται δὲ εἰς ἔτι νῦν τόπος φαραγγώδης σφόδρα χαλεπὸς ὁ Ἀρωνᾶς ὀνομαζόμενος, παρατείνων ἐπὶ τὰ βόρεια τῆς Ἀρεοπόλεως, ἐν ᾧ καὶ φρούρια πανταχόθεν φυλάττει στρατιωτικὰ διὰ τὸ φοβερὸν τοῦ τόπου." *Lat.*: "ostendunt regionis illius accolae locum vallis in praerupta demersae satis horribilem et periculosum, qui a plerisque usque nunc Armonas appellatur extenditurque ad spetentrionem Areopoleos. in quo et militum ex omni parte praesidia distribute plenum sanguinis et formidinis testantur ingressum." Translation my own.

writers perceived harsh wildernesses at the edge of empire, and that was where soldiers had to dwell.

Defining virtues of frontier troops, as envisioned by imperial writers, were their tactical prowess, logistical supremacy, and tenacious discipline, an aspect of the strategic imagination well-described by Susan Mattern.³⁶¹ In-depth representations of soldiers in our sources are often occluded by the agendas of historians and orators, focused more on the decisions and qualities of generals and emperors than the experiences of the army,³⁶² but among extant descriptions of frontier defense, we see clear connections between soldierly virtues and garrisons. In Aelius Aristides' oration on Rome, he lauded the unwalled capital for establishing defenses like city walls "beyond the outermost circle of the inhabited world," the *οἰκουμένη*.³⁶³ These he explicitly compared to a military encampment (*στρατόπεδον*),³⁶⁴ and offered classicizing praise of the troops who manned the frontier, "men who hold out their shields in protection of those walls, not believing in flight, joined to one another with all the instruments of war...In such harmony then have been enclosed the circle of their

³⁶¹ Mattern 1999, 205-7.

³⁶² e.g. Amm. 28.3.7, where the "guards and sentinels" are mere instruments of Valentinian's watchful eye: "instaurabat urbes et praesidiaria, ut diximus, castra limitesque vigiliis tuebatur et praetenturis." cf. 29.4.1 where his frontier defenses are lauded as one of his chief virtues. A full appreciation of the passage is hindered by a lacuna.

³⁶³ Ael. Arist. *Or.* 26.81: "ὕπερ γὰρ τὸν ἐξωτάτω κύκλον τῆς οἰκουμένης ἀτεχνῶς οἷον ἐν τειχισμῷ πόλεως δεύτερον ἀγαγόντες ἕτερον εὐκαμπέστερόν τε καὶ εὐφυλακτότερον, ἐνταῦθα τείχη τε προὔβαλεσθε καὶ πόλεις ἐφορίους ἐδείμασθε, ἄλλας ἐν ἄλλοις μέρεσι πληρώσαντες οἰκητόρων, τέχνας τε ὑπουργοὺς δόντες αὐτοῖς καὶ τᾶλλα κοσμήσαντες." Behr, trans. The oration was delivered in late 155 A.D. (Behr 1968, 88-90).

³⁶⁴ The exact nature of the simile will depend on how one punctuates the passage (cf. Oliver 1953, 904, "An encamped army like a rampart encloses the civilized world in a ring" with Klein 1983, 49, "Wie ein Graben ein Lager ringsherum umgibt, ist es mit dem Umfang dieses Ringes" and Behr 1981, 90, "Just as a trench encircles an army camp, all this can be called the circuit and perimeter of the walls.").

operations and defenses and the circle on the borders of the whole world.”³⁶⁵ The orator supplemented this image of serried ranks with an assertion of their absolute adherence to hierarchy:

Therefore every day they live in the line and no one ever leaves the post assigned to him; but as if in some sort of eternal chorus each man knows and keeps his place, and for this reason the subordinate does not envy his superior, but is in full command over those whom he himself outranks...[W]hen in such great numbers of drafts and races, whose names it is not even easy to discover, you begin with one man, whose authority is all pervasive and who oversees everything, nations, cities, legions, the generals themselves, and end with one man who commands four or two men...and when just as the spinning of thread ever proceeds from a larger to smaller number of strands, so in this way one is ever ranked after another right up to the end, how have you not gone beyond all human organization?³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ Ael. Arist. *Or.* 26.84: “τούτων τῶν τειχῶν προασπίζουσιν ἄνδρες φυγὴν οὐ νομίσαντες, ἡρμοσμένοι πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἀρμονίᾳ, ἥ τοὺς Μυρμιδόνας Ὀμηρός φησι, πρὸς ὃν εἶπον τοῖχον τότε εἰκάζων, πᾶσι τοῖς ὀργάνοις τοῦ πολέμου συνεχῇ μὲν οὕτως, ἀλλήλοις τὰ κράνη, ὥς μὴ εἶναι μέσον οἷσιν διέζεσθαι, ἀσπίδες δὲ ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς ἐξαρθεῖσαι μετώρους ἂν δέχοντο δρόμους, τοσούτω στεροτέρους τῶν κατ’ ἄστρῳ ποιητῶν ὥστε καὶ ἵππεῦσιν ἐξεστὶν ἐπιθεῖν, καὶ τοῦτο δὴ τὸ Εὐριπίδου, κατάχαλκον ὄρᾱν πεδίον τότε φήσεις ἀληθῶς. θώρακες δὲ οὕτως ἀλλήλων ἔχονται ὥστε εἰ καὶ γυμνὸν τάξαις τὸν μέσον, ἀρκεῖν αὐτῷ τὰ ἐκατέρωθεν ἀπαντῆσαι μέχρι τοῦ μέσου: οἱ δὲ ἄκοντες οἷον ἐκ Διὸς περιπίπτοντες ἀλλήλους ἐγκαταλαμβάνουσι. τοιαῦδε ἄρ’ ἀρμονία συγκέκλεινται, ὃ τε τῶν διεξόδων κύκλος τειχῶν τε καὶ ὁ τῆς πάσης ἐφόρος γῆς.” Behr, trans., modified. Keil put *crucēs* around “ὁ τε...ἐφορος γῆς”, and I have accepted his proposed emendation of ἐφόριος. For Behr’s translation of διεξοδοί as “tactical revolutions,” he cites *LSJ* s.v. (mistakenly? “tactical evolutions”), Plato. *Laws*. 813C, C.D. 75.5.5 (cf. Pernot 1997, 102: “le cercle de leurs évolutions”). Oliver, drawing attention to mathematical uses of διέξοδος and its derivatives, took the phrase to mean “the curving line of the loci or individual points” (Oliver 1953, 939). Klein rejected Behr’s “tactical revolutions” as unclear and Oliver’s translation as breaking “das Bild von den Mauern und Durchgängen.” Instead, he translated the sentence, “So eng sind der Befestigungsring der Durchgänge und Mauern und der Ring der Menschen verbunden, welche den ganzen Erdkreis schützen” (1983 ad loc.). Whatever the case, the tactical efficiency and elegance of the military array must be meant, which my translation, “circle of operations and defenses,” attempts to capture.

³⁶⁶ Ael. Arist. *Or.* 26.87-88: “ὥστε καθ’ ἡμέραν ἐκάστην ἐν τάξει ζῆν καὶ μήποτε λιπεῖν μηδένα τὴν προστεταγμένην αὐτῷ, ἀλλ’ οἷον ἐν χορῷ τινὶ αἰωνίῳ ἕκαστον τὴν ἑαυτοῦ χώραν εἰδέναι τε καὶ σῶζειν, καὶ τῷ μὲν ἐντιμωτέρῳ τὸν ἥττω μὴ διὰ τοῦτο φθονεῖν, ὃν δ’ αὐτὸς μείζων ἐστὶν ἀκριβῶς κρατεῖν. ἄχθομαι δ’ ἐγὼγε ἐτέρους φθάσαντας εἰπεῖν ἐπὶ Λακεδαιμονίων ὅτι ἄρα πλὴν ὀλίγων τὸ στρατόπεδον αὐτοῖς ἄρχοντες ἀρχόντων εἰσὶν: ὑμῖν γὰρ ἡρμοττε τετηρηθῆναι καὶ ἐφ’ ὑμῶν πρῶτον εἰρησθαι, ὃ δὲ πρότερον τοῦ δέοντος προεξήνεγκεν αὐτό. ἀλλ’ οὖν τό γε Λακεδαιμονίων στρατόπεδον κινδυνεύει τοσούτους εἶναι, ὅσους οὐδὲν ἀπεικός καὶ πάντας ἄρχοντας εἶναι: τὸ δ’ ἐν τοσούτοις ἀριθμοῖς καταλόγων τε καὶ γενῶν, ὃν οὐδὲ τὰ ὀνόματα ἐξευρεῖν ῥάδιον, ἀρξαμένους ἀπὸ ἐνὸς τοῦ διὰ πάντων διεξιόντος τε καὶ πάντα ἐφορῶντος, ἔθνη, πόλεις, στρατόπεδα, ἡγεμόνας αὐτοὺς τελευτᾶν εἰς ἓνα τεττάρων καὶ δυοῖν ἄρχοντα ἀνδρῶν, τὸ δ’ ἐν μέσῳ πᾶν ἐξελίπομεν, καὶ ὥσπερ νήματος περιστροφὴν ἐκ τῶν πλεόνων εἰς τοὺς ἐλάττους ἀεὶ κατιέναι, καὶ οὕτω διήκειν ἄλλους ἐπ’ ἄλλοις ἀεὶ ταττομένους μέχρι τῆς τελευτῆς, πῶς οὐχ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν ἀνθρωπίνην τάξιν ἐστίν;” Behr, trans. Oliver explicates the metaphor of the spinning

This “eternal chorus” (*χορὸς αἰώνιος*), perfectly harmonized within its own hierarchy bears little relation to historical Roman military organization,³⁶⁷ but the important thing is that the empire’s literary elite could perceive such a nexus between frontier troops and disciplined obedience. Cassius Dio put just such a view into the mouth of Maecenas whom he had propose a viligant soldiery stationed on the edges of empire, continually occupied by military training to keep the empire safe, both from Rome’s enemies and from internal sedition.³⁶⁸ Herodian, too, depicted a circuit of fortified camps which Augustus had cast along the desolate frontier of the empire “in which were posted mercenary soldiers on fixed rations like a bulwark of the Roman Empire.”³⁶⁹

This rhetoric from the “high-empire” is not too different from the idealized picture of the frontier soldiery that appears in fourth-century texts. Themistius’ tenth oration praised Valens for restoring regular order to the empire’s soldiers and keeping out brigands: “From the hinterland to the coast you would think that a wall of adamant had been marked out, with such a defensive bulwark of forts, arms, and soldiers has it been consolidated.”³⁷⁰ And Menander, the fourth century rhetorical theorist, used the

thread and comments on the passage, “The Argument from Design! Aristides sees in it evidence of the Divine Mind (of Rome the Demiurge) at work” (Oliver 1953, 941).

³⁶⁷ Behr 1981-6, 2:378n106. The ellipsis above includes a favorable comparison to Thucydides’ description of Spartan army’s organization at Mantinea (Thuc. 5.66.3-4, cf. also Xen. *Cyr.* 5.3).

³⁶⁸ Dio 52.27.

³⁶⁹ Herod. 2.11.5: “ἐξ οὗ δὲ ἐς τὸν Σεβαστὸν περιήλθεν ἡ μοναρχία, Ἰταλιώτας μὲν πόνων ἀπέπαυσε καὶ τῶν ὀπλῶν ἐγύμνωσε, φρούρια δὲ καὶ στρατόπεδα τῆς ἀρχῆς προβάλετο, μισθοφόρους ἐπὶ ῥητοῖς σιτηρεσίοις στρατιώτας καταστησάμενος ἀντὶ τείχους τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς· ποταμῶν τε μεγέθεσι καὶ τάφρων ἢ ὀρῶν προβλήμασιν ἐρήμῳ τε γῇ καὶ δυσβάτῳ φράξας τὴν ἀρχὴν ὠχυρώσατο.” Translation my own. “The whole of this passage bears the marks of being a rhetorical exercise, as an antithesis to the warlike character of the Pannonians” (Whittaker 1969-70, 1:217n1). I have translated *σιτηρεσία* as “rations,” but it also denotes the *stipendium* (Whittaker 1969-70, 1:309n2). At some point in the third century the *annona militaris* came into vogue, for the significance of which in a hagiographic text, see below.

³⁷⁰ Themist. *Or.* 10.136C, “ἀλλ’ ἄνωθεν θαλάττης δόξαις ἂν τεῖχος ἀδαμάντινον ἐληλάσθαι· τοιοῦτῳ καταπεύκνεται χαρακώματι φρουρίων, ὀπλῶν, στρατιωτῶν.” Heather and Matthews 1991, trans. The

same ‘soldiers-as-walls’ motif when outlining an imperial oration: “we are more firmly fortified by the arms of the emperor than cities by their walls.”³⁷¹ Such impersonal presentations of the frontier soldiery tended to occlude the role of individual *milites*, just as the beautiful illustrations from the pages of the *Notitia Dignitatum* portray idealized castles, rather than actual maps, officials, or servicemen.³⁷² There was assuredly a heroic element in this stylized discourse’s praise of imperial protection,³⁷³ but soldierly aspects – an overwhelming emphasis on discipline, regulation, and unending vigilance – stood out in literary descriptions of frontier defense. Ammianus, for all his focus on the “quite energetic care of the emperor” (*imperatoris vehementior cura*), did not neglect the “labor of the obedient soldiery” (*morigeri militis labor*) in overcoming the physical challenges of fort construction.³⁷⁴ Whether due to familiar literary *topoi* or the realities of military service on the frontier – such as laborious logistical duties, exposure to more extreme weather conditions, or proximity to external enemies –, associations between frontier defense and a disciplined, vigilant, and organized army were commonplace.

orator notes that the lack of arms and clothing among soldiers, as well as the disorderly conduct of officers, invited in the barbarians.

³⁷¹ Men. Rhet. 2.377: “ὄχυρότερον τοῖς βασιλέως ὅπλοις τετειχίσμεθα ἢ τοῖς τείχεσιν αἱ πόλεις.” Translation my own.

³⁷² For these illustrations, see Faleiro 2005, 243-297 (*Oriens*) and 407-479 (*Occidens*). The earliest extant MSS with these illustrations – Bodleian Library, Oxford *Ms. Canon. Misc. 378* and Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris *Ms. lat. 9661* – both date to 1436, and they are based on the lost Carolingian *Codex Spirensis*. Much like the illustrations that accompany the *De rebus bellicis* (Thompson 1952, 15-17), these cannot be taken to be exact copies of the late antique archetype, but they can give us an impression of the kinds of illustrations that accompanied the texts.

³⁷³ Ael. Arist. 26.80-89 is replete with classical citations and comparisons to classical Sparta (Hom. *Il.* 16.212, 16.214ff., 9.379; Eur. *Phoen.* 110; Plut. *Apophth. Lac.* 210E-F, 217E, *Lyc.*, 19). Herodian vividly speaks of the Roman army as “shielding” the empire (6.2.5).

³⁷⁴ Amm. 28.2.4, “Vicit tamen imperatoris vehementior cura, et morigeri militis labor, mento tenus (dum operaretur) saepe demersi: tandem non sine quorundam discrimine, castra praesidiaria, inquietudini ringentis amnis exempta, nunc valida sunt.” Translation my own. Later, “half nude soldiers carrying dirt” while constructing another fort (*milites seminudos, humum etiam tum gestantes*) were slaughtered by barbarians (Amm. 28.2.8).

In the other-worldly outposts of the frontier, Christian writers of late antiquity found an ideal place to imagine their soldierly ascetics.³⁷⁵ For Antony and Hypatius, *castella* at the edge of empire became symbolic bastions of spiritual defense. Rabbula and Malchus ranged across the deserts of Chalcis. Even for ascetics within the interior of the empire like Martin and Hilarion, the setting of a lawless wilderness heightened the stakes of the narrative and offered material parallels to conflicts with demons. The substitution and subordination of imperial soldiers and officials to ascetic warriors was also an important theme, drawing attention to the martial imagery of hagiography. At the same time, the liminal military associations of the frontier called to mind a batch of soldierly virtues found in contemporary panegyric and historiography, chief among them extraordinary endurance and disciplined order, and these virtues were clearly displayed in hagiographic lives. Wilderness fortlets offered a striking setting for the heroes of hagiography, men who waged war on their own flesh for the glory of the heavenly kingdom.

Soldierly Virtues in Hagiography

Whether suffering hunger, withstanding wounds, or persevering through night-long vigils, ascetic warriors exhibited the *patientia* characteristic of good soldiers. Athanasius' Antony exemplified this quality, wielding self-mastery and fear of God as "a weapon" (ὄπλον), or, as one Latin translator put it, "a shield" (*scutum*):

So we must fear God alone and despise demons and pay no attention to them at all. And the more they do these things, let us intensify our training. For the righteous life and faith in God is a great weapon against them. So they fear ascetics' fasting, vigils, prayers, meekness, quietude,

³⁷⁵ I say here "imagine" because although many ascetics assuredly did dwell along the frontier, in reality, the anchoretic holy man "belonged to a world that was not so much antithetical to village life as marginal" (Brown 1982, 112).

lack of avarice, humility, modesty, love of the poor, alms, patience, and, above all, holiness in Christ.³⁷⁶

Rabbula, for all his heroic vanquishing of heretics and pagans, was only able to defeat Satan “by the sharp point of his endurance.”³⁷⁷ Abstention from food and drink often drew comment from hagiographers, keen to establish the holy man’s physical mastery of his most human needs. Occasionally, the vocabulary of diet called to mind military connections, as in Jerome’s *Life of Paul*, where the old hermit likened his meager God-sent food to a soldier’s rations, augmented for his guest Antony:

During these discussions, they noticed a raven landed on the branch of the tree. Then, gently flying down it set a whole loaf before them, marveling at the sight. After its departure, Paul said, “Behold! The Lord, truly loving and merciful, has sent lunch for us. For sixty years I have always received half a loaf, but now at your arrival, Christ has doubled the *annona* for his soldiers!”³⁷⁸

This explicit connection between technical military language and ascetic austerity was not accidental. Just like the location of Antony’s struggles in a remote, frontier fortress, the definition of their meager diet as a kind of soldierly ration called to mind one of the more trying aspects of military service: long deployments without the comforts of

³⁷⁶ Athan. *Ant.* 30.1-2: “Τὸν θεὸν ἄρα μόνον δεῖ φοβεῖσθαι, τούτων δὲ καταφρονεῖν καὶ μὴδ’ ὅλως αὐτοὺς προσποιεῖσθαι. Ἀλλὰ καὶ μᾶλλον ὅσῳ ταῦτα ποιοῦσιν, ἐπιτείνωμεν ἡμεῖς τὴν ἄσκησιν κατ’ αὐτῶν. Μέγα γὰρ ὄπλον ἐστὶ κατ’ αὐτῶν βίος ὀρθὸς καὶ ἡ πρὸς θεὸν πίστις. Φοβοῦνται γοῦν τῶν ἀσκητῶν τὴν νηστείαν, τὴν ἀγρυπνίαν, τὰς εὐχάς, τὸ πρᾶον, τὸ ἥσυχον, τὸ ἀφιλάργυρον, τὸ ἀκενόδοξον, τὴν ταπεινοφροσύνην, τὸ φιλόπτωχον, τὰς ἐλεημοσύνας, τὸ ἀόργητον, καὶ προηγουμένως τὴν εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν εὐσέβειαν.” Cf. *Vers. vet.* 30: “...vita enim recta et fides in Deo per Iesum Christum et Spiritum Sanctum pro magno scuto sunt adversus eos.”; Evagr. *Vita Anton.* 30: “Magna, dilectissimi, adversus daemones arma sunt vita sincera et intemerata ad Deum fides.”

³⁷⁷ *Rabb.* 1, “מלואיבשרא קטיןא פא” (Phenix and Horn, trans.).

³⁷⁸ Hier. *Pauli* 10: “Inter has sermocinationes suspiciunt alitem coruum in ramo arboris consedissee, qui inde leniter subuolans integrum panem ante mirantium ora deposuit. Post cuius abscessum: 'Eia,' inquit Paulus, 'Dominus nobis prandium misit, uere pius, uere misericors. Sexaginta iam anni sunt quod dimidii semper panis fragmen accipio, uerum ad aduentum tuum militibus suis Christus duplicauit annonam.'” Translation my own. For this technical use of *annona*, see *OLD* s.v. *annona*, 2d.

civilization. It was precisely this renunciatory aspect of the soldierly life that hagiographers emphasized when they slipped into a martial register.³⁷⁹

Writers also chose to highlight the soldierly obedience of the holy man; rather than freewheeling warriors, ascetics tend to be portrayed as submissive to external rules or authorities. The archetype of anchoretic adherence to divine precepts was perhaps Christ's temptation by Satan in the wilderness in which each test is answered with a scriptural commandment.³⁸⁰ The spiritual warriors that appear in these hagiographic texts were similarly obedient to God's commands. Antony only decided to sell all he had and adopt an ascetic life after he had heard Christ's command in church,³⁸¹ and later, he fortified himself by quoting scripture, including the Psalm, "Even if an encampment be arrayed against me, my heart will not be afraid."³⁸² Malchus refused to disobey his master due to the precept of Paul, and, in an imagined martyrial and military crisis, he nearly took his own life rather than marry a woman whose husband was still alive.³⁸³

In addition to obedience to God and his commands, these ascetics invariably deferred to spiritual and ecclesiastical authorities. Athanasius was careful to portray

³⁷⁹ I should note that not all hagiographers put the same emphasis on extreme feats of ascetic renunciation as others. The *Life of Martin*, for instance, held up a model of ascetic moderation (Fontaine 1967, 152).

³⁸⁰ Matt 4:1-11 (where Jesus cites Deut 8:3, Deut 6:16, and Deut 6:13); Lk 4:1-13 (with the second and third commands reversed); Mark 1:12-13 (with no details).

³⁸¹ Athan. *Ant.* 2. Brakke notes the ecclesiastical implications of this (2000, 3).

³⁸² Athan. *Ant.* 9.3, "Εἴτα καὶ ἔγαλλεν· 'Εὰν παρατάξῃται ἐπ' ἐμὲ παρεμβολή, οὐ φοβηθήσεται ἡ καρδία μου.'" cf. Ps 26:3. The word for "encampment" (παρεμβολή) is the same as the word for Antony's abandoned fort. Cf. *Vers. vet.* 9: "Deinde psallebat dicens: 'Si exsurrexerit in me castra, non timebit cor meum';" Evagr. *Vita Anton.* 9: "psallebatque 'si constiterint adversum me castra, non timebit cor meum.'"

³⁸³ Hier. *Malchi* 6: Pauline injunction: "sciebam enim apostolum praecepisse dominis sic quasi deo fideliter serviendum" (cf. Eph 6:5-9, Col 3:22-5, and Titus 2:9-10). Martyrdom: "Verte in te gladium!...Ipse mihi ero et persecutor et martyr!" Battle: "Numquam tamen illius nudum corpus intuitus sum, numquam eius carnem attigi timens in pace perdere, quod in proelio servaveram." Gray notes that "this is part of the military imagery which is prominent in the *VM*, especially in chapter 1" (2015, 245).

Antony as drawing his knowledge of ascetic discipline from others.³⁸⁴ The ascetic is also supportive of orthodox leaders against others, even making an exceptional journey to Alexandria to voice his opposition to Arianism.³⁸⁵ Those ascetics who held official positions within the church – Rabbula as bishop of Edessa and Martin as bishop of Tours – were portrayed as accepting their leadership (unwillingly in accordance with hagiographic convention) from established ecclesiastical authorities. Martin first accepts the position of exorcist from Hilary of Poitiers so as not to seem to shun the office as too lowly, and even after becoming bishop, he maintains his unpretentious lifestyle.³⁸⁶ This accords well with the theme of the first phase of the *Life of Martin*, in which Sulpicius highlighted Martin’s soldierly obedience as an anticipation of his clerical humility:³⁸⁷

But when the emperors decreed that the sons of veterans be enrolled in military service, Martin’s father, who resented his blessed deeds, handed him over to the authorities. And so at fifteen years of age, Martin was seized, chained, and bound up in the military oaths, content with just a slave as his companion, whom he, with roles reversed, was serving as master, to the point of often removing his slave’s boots and washing his feet, and often eating together and even serving him food. He was under arms for nearly three years before his baptism, nevertheless untouched by the vices with which the human race tends to be bound up. Great was his kindness towards his fellow-soldiers; marvelous was his charity; his patience and humility exceeded human nature. For one need not praise his frugality which he exhibited so much that one would already think him not a soldier, but a monk. On account of which, he had bound his fellow soldiers to himself to such a degree that they honored him with marvelous affection.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁴ Athan. *Ant.* 4.

³⁸⁵ Athan. *Ant.* 68-9.

³⁸⁶ Sulp. Sev. *Mart.* 5.2, 10. For the low status of *exorcista*, see Burton 2017, 172-3.

³⁸⁷ Fontaine 1967, 1:145, “Martin fit, bien avant Ignace de Loyola, l’expérience des vertus de ‘noviciat’ qui sont celles de la vie militaire. Les vertus naturelles de disponibilité, d’obéissance, de pauvreté y peuvent être le support naturel de la *militia Dei*.”

³⁸⁸ Sulp. Sev. *Mart.* 2.5-7: “Sed cum edictum esset a regibus ut veteranorum filii ad militiam scriberentur, prodente patre qui felicibus eius actibus invidebat, cum esset annorum quindecim, captus et catenatus sacramentis militaribus implicatus est, uno tantum servo comite contentus, cui tamen versa vice dominus

Although an unwilling soldier, Martin exhibited all the best soldierly virtues without any of the vices. Indeed, the celebrated division of his cloak (*simplex militiae vestis, chlamys*) at Amiens occurred while he was still a soldier, and in keeping with his humble station, he forestalled his departure from the service at the request of his commanding officer.³⁸⁹ In contrast to such humbly submissive paragons, it is those overweening characters disobedient to their rightful masters who are the negative *exempla* in these stories, such as Hadrian, the unfaithful follower of Hilarion, or the satanic Anatolius, with his deceptive purple robe.³⁹⁰

Writers like Athanasius, Jerome, and Sulpicius Severus manifestly held up their holy men as paragons of virtue, models that could focalize the ideal spiritual life and “weapons” that could reinforce their own authority.³⁹¹ That so many of these lives portrayed spiritual warriors separated from society, disciplined to endure trials, and obedient to scriptural and ecclesiastical authority points to a discourse connecting ascetic virtues and the image of the soldier. The audience of these texts is impossible to

serviebat, adeo ut plerumque ei et calciamenta ipse detraheret et ipse detergeret, cibum una caperent, hic tamen saepius ministraret. Triennium fere ante baptismum in armis fuit, integer tamen ab his vitiis quibus illud hominum genus implicari solet. Multa illius circa commilitones benignitas mira caritas, patientia vero atque humilitas ultra humanum modum. Nam frugalitatem in eo laudari non est necesse, qua ita usus est, ut iam illo tempore non miles, sed monachus putaretur. Pro quibus rebus ita sibi omnes commilitones devinxerat ut eum miro adfecto venerarentur.” Translation my own. For an analysis of the rich scriptural references in the passage, see Fontaine 1967, 2:453-467.

³⁸⁹ After the famous cloak episode (3.1-2), “he did not renounce his military career at once, being persuaded by the entreaties of his tribune, to whom he acted as *aide de camp*; for he promised to renounce the world once his time as tribune was complete” (3.5, Burton trans.: “nec tamen statim militiae renuntiavit, tribuni sui precibus evictus, cui contubernium familiar praestabat: etenim transact tribunatus sui tempore renuntiaturum se saeculo pollicebatur”). In all this, as well as his respectful integrity in asking for a discharge (4.2), Martin the soldier demonstrates the kind of orderly obedience that he would hold up for his followers (10.5: “Discipuli fere octoginta erant, qui ad exemplum beati magistri instituebantur”).

³⁹⁰ Hier. *Hilar.* 34; Sulp. Sev. *Mart.* 23-4.

³⁹¹ For the *V. Mart.* as a “weapon” with which to “exercise power and protect their leadership,” see Rousseau 1978, 68-76.

know with any degree of certainty. Given anecdotes of the reception of these lives,³⁹² their novelistic elements,³⁹³ their many translations, and their subsequent popularity among copyists, we might think that stories of holy men could appeal to a broad audience among the literate, but this must remain a supposition, and there is no reason to assume consumption by a “popular” audience. Still, we should understand these texts as appearing to have been widely circulated precisely because they indulged in a *sermo humilis* and rhetoric of simplicity and inclusivity that marked so much of Christian discourse from an early date.³⁹⁴ As Averil Cameron put it: “Christian literature...built up its own symbolic universes by exploiting the kinds of stories people liked to hear, and which in their turn provided a mechanism by which society at large and the real lives of individuals might be regulated.”³⁹⁵ The motif of the soldier in stories of ascetic holy men was a means by which Christian writers shaped their own conceptual world, one that could challenge anyone to adhere to a regimented life and subordinate their various interests and identities to spiritual discipline.

Establishing Influence through the Image of the Soldierly Ascetic

Fortunately, we are not in the dark as to the dispersal of this ascetic image of the dutiful soldier. Not only was the motif essential to many hagiographic texts, but it also appeared in the thick of epistolary discourse, where it was a structuring tool for Christian

³⁹² Aug. *Conf.* 8.6.15 provides a suggestive anecdote in which two *agentes in rebus* found a text of the *Vita Antonii*, either the Evagrian (Barnes 2010, 161) or anonymous translation, and read it with great enthusiasm.

³⁹³ Barnes 2010, 176 (Malchus), 178 (Paul), 185-6 and 192 (Hilarion). See also Weingarten 2005, 81-154 for comparisons to the *Golden Ass*.

³⁹⁴ Van Uytenghe 2001, 201-218.

³⁹⁵ Cameron 1991, 93.

writers. It is best not to think of the motif of the soldierly ascetic as a stand-in for the cleric or for any particular mode of life, but rather as a directional model on a spectrum of allegiance and obedience, one that could be deployed strategically by bishops and priests to exhort those in their pastoral care. In understanding the image of the soldierly ascetic in this way, I deviate from some past studies of the language of *militia Christi* in late antiquity which have erred in emphasizing the discrete groups to which the concept was applied: bishops, monks, and believers in general.³⁹⁶ In fact, when we look at the epistolary evidence, it becomes clear that language tended to be much more allusive and imprecise, more of a directional call than a consistent exhortation, one that was widely applied. In the next section, I will outline some of its specific uses in regulating experiments in ascetic living, but here I focus on the appearance of the image of the soldier in letters to a wide spectrum of individuals, ranging from clerics to Roman matrons. Whereas the heroic aspects of martial imagery, which generally ennobled and praised in classicizing terms, remained important, the notion of life as a soldier's struggling service was resonant and emotive, able to be applied flexibly to personal devotion and ascetic practice. In all of this, it is imperative to remember that the epistolary evidence tends to represent only the point of view of dogmatic and rigorist elements within the church, and many of their recipients would have taken a different view of their duties or social roles. Bishops sought to convince such individuals to view themselves as part of an imagined soldiery, which could nudge them towards a more comprehensive package of ascetic practices. In this way, the image of the soldier in

³⁹⁶ Benoît 1994.

letters was an epistolary performance aimed at cultivating influence and reinforcing networks of support and allegiance.³⁹⁷

Establishing Influence within the Church

The ascetic cleric was the most obvious target of soldierly martial imagery in letters and treatises. When bishops wrote to such men, the very language of the church hierarchy may have suggested parallels to the language of the administrative and military apparatus.³⁹⁸ Not only that, a well-established military rhetoric stretched back all the way to the Pauline epistles, and it was often through this idiom that the image of the soldierly ascetic appeared in treatises addressed to clerics. Ambrose's *De officiis* relied on a contrast between heavenly and earthly *militia* to extoll ecclesiastics, Augustine's *De opere monachorum* addressed ascetics as *milites Christi*, and John Cassian's *Institutes* and *Conferences* both used military references to exhort monks.³⁹⁹

This was not merely the rhetoric of religious tracts. In the well-worn context of epistolary exchange, the idea of the ascetic as soldier was an emotive and popular motif that could help establish and secure long-distance relationships. Writing to Sulpicius Severus, Paulinus of Nola layered images from scripture to portray a composite Christian warrior:

³⁹⁷ In conceiving of “ascetic influence,” I loosely rely on Claudia Rapp’s nexus of “spiritual, ascetic, and pragmatic authority” in her study of bishops in late antiquity (2005, 16-8). One possesses such influence when one is recognized as having received spiritual gifts and authority from God and when one is esteemed as a model of abnegation. To seek to establish ascetic influence is to ply language that encourages others to recognize one’s ecclesiastic and magisterial authority and to endeavor to impose a model of behavior that reinforces existing ascetic authority.

³⁹⁸ This connection was neither clear nor straightforward, and Gryson attacked the notion of a straightforward assimilation of titles, *insignia*, or vocabulary (1968, 102-133). But if we stop short of an “assimilation formelle d’un type d’institution à l’autre” (119), there is still plenty of room for impressionistic allusions and analogies in our sources’ rhetoric.

³⁹⁹ Ambr. *De off.* 1.185, 218; Aug. *De op. mon.* 36; e.g. Cass. *Conl.* 7.5 and *Inst.* 1.1.

You are a soldier of Christ. Paul has armed you with the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of justice, the shield of faith, the sword of truth, and the power of the Holy Ghost. Stand unflinching in your heavenly arms, and quench the glowing weapons of the enemy with waters of wisdom and the stream of living water within you. Keep that which is committed to your trust, preserve the faith, pursue justice, keep the charity of Christ, strive after patience, practise yourself in the godliness which is profitable to all things, be sober, labor in all things, fight the good fight, finish the course, so that you may lay hold of that for which you have been chosen.⁴⁰⁰

In another letter to Severus, Paulinus adopted a similar pose.⁴⁰¹ On the one hand, such paraenetic language emphasized the noble and valiant role of the cleric, perhaps unsurprisingly when one considers the martial themes that would later color Severus' *Life of Martin*.⁴⁰² Paulinus himself was praised in the *Life*, and he responded to it enthusiastically. He later responded in kind with a letter on the life of Melania, praising her as a woman who served Christ (*militans*).⁴⁰³ Against this background of friendly epistolary exchange, soldierly imagery served an important function in eliciting feelings of mutual affection and comradeship between imagined comrades-in-arms.

Theodoret was another cleric who managed his ecclesiastical contacts through appeals to a common ascetic *esprit de corps*. This is especially evident in the *collectio*

⁴⁰⁰ Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 1.9: "Tu vero miles Christi armatus ab apostolo galea salutis et lorica iustitiae et scuto fidei et gladio Veritatis et virtute spiritus sancti, sta in armis caelestibus constans et tela inimici candentia fonte sapientiae et flumine aquae in te viventis extingue. Depositum cuistodi, fidem serva, iustitiam sectare, caritatem Christi tene, patientiam aemulare, exerce te ipsum ad pietatem quae ad omnia utilis est, sobrius esto, in omnibus labora, certamen bonum certare, cursum consumma, ut adprehendas in quo adprehensus es." Walsh, trans., modified. Cf. Eph 6:12-17, 1 Tim 6:20, 2 Tim 1:14, 2:22, 1 Tim 4:8, 2 Tim 4:5-8.

⁴⁰¹ *Epist.* 5.7. See also *Epist.* 2.4 for a similar passage addressed to Amandus.

⁴⁰² The date of the text is much debated, but we can presume a *terminus ante quem* of early 397 on the basis of Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 11.11 (Barnes 2010, 208-215, esp. 210n30). Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 1 can be dated to early 395 (Fabre 1948, 22). This would suggest that Paulinus, who had previously met Martin in the 380s (*Epist.* 18.9; Walsh 1966, 1:249-250n39), was communicating with Severus in an idiom that was familiar to both, even if it would go too far to suggest that it inspired the *Life*.

⁴⁰³ Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 29.6. On the importance of the letter to the relationship between Paulinus and Severus, see Trout 1993, 125-6.

Sirmondiana, letters apparently selected to highlight Theodoret's role as a champion of orthodoxy amid church controversies.⁴⁰⁴ In a missive to an otherwise unknown archimandrite named Gerontius, Theodoret represented himself as sleepy and needing assistance, but Gerontius was alert and prepared to rouse Theodoret with prayers.⁴⁰⁵ Writing to Marcellus, the third archimandrite of the Acoemetæ ("the sleepless monks"), Theodoret appealed to a similar idea of clerical comradery:

For this truth when assailed you have bravely fought, not striving to protect it as though it were weak, but showing your godly disposition; for the teaching of our Master Christ is gifted with stability and strength, in accordance with the promise of the same Saviour, that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." It is the loving and bountiful Lord who has thought right that I too should be dishonoured and slain on behalf of this doctrine. For truly we have reckoned dishonour honour, and death life. We have heard the words of the apostle, "For unto us it is given by God not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." But the Lord arose like the sleeper, and stopped the mouths of them that uttered blasphemy against God and injustice against me.⁴⁰⁶

Perhaps playing upon the idea of Marcellus' flock being "sleepless," Theodoret noted that the Lord rose up from sleep in his defense. So too did Theodoret call upon the sleepless watchers: "support me first with your prayers, and then gladden me with a letter, for by God's grace war has been waged on me for the sake of the apostolic

⁴⁰⁴ Schor 2016, 274-8.

⁴⁰⁵ Thdt. *Epist. Sirm.* 50. Although no precise date can be established for the letter, Azéma places the letter between 443 and 448 (1955-65, 2:126n1). For a hypothesis on Gerontius' identity, see Azéma 1955-65, 1:40n3.

⁴⁰⁶ Thdt. *Epist. Sirm.* 142 (141): "Ταύτης δὲ πολεμηθείσης ἐκθύμως ὑπερῆλθισατε, οὐχ ὡς ἀσθενούσης προκινδυνεύοντες, ἀλλὰ τὴν φιλόθεον ἐπιδεικνύντες διάθεσιν. Ἡ γὰρ τοῦ Δεσπότης Χριστοῦ διδασκαλία τὸ σταθερὸν ἔχει καὶ βέβαιον, κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ τοῦ Σωτῆρος ὑπόσχεσιν· Πύλαι γὰρ ἄδου, φησὶν, οὐ κατισχύουσιν αὐτῆς. Ὑπὲρ ταύτης καὶ ἡμᾶς ἀτιμασθῆναι καὶ σφαγῆναι ὁ φιλόανθρωπος καὶ μεγαλόδοτος ἡξίωσε Κύριος. Τὴν γὰρ δὴ ἀτιμίαν τιμὴν, καὶ τὴν σφαγὴν ζωὴν ὑπειλήφαμεν. Ἠκούσαμεν γὰρ τοῦ Ἀποστόλου λέγοντος, ὅτι Ἡμῖν ἀπὸ Θεοῦ ἐχαρίσθη οὐ μόνον τὸ εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεύειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν. Ἀνέστη δὲ τάχιστα ὡς ὁ ὑπνῶν Κύριος, καὶ ἐνέφραξε μὲν τὰ στόματα τὰ λαλοῦντα κατὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ βλασφημίαν, καὶ καθ' ἡμῶν ἀδικίαν· τὰς δὲ τῶν εὐσεβοῦντων γλώττας εἰς τὴν συνήθη ἀποστολὴν τὰ νάματα προχεῖν παρεσκεύασεν." Jackson, trans. Azema 1955-65, 3:153-4n3 dates the letter to the second half of 450.

faith.”⁴⁰⁷ Prompt reply was a focus of ancient epistolography, but it was more than a generic convention. A strong epistolary relationship, demonstrated by the frequent exchange of letters, was just the kind of reciprocal bond of *amicitia* that was imperative for Theodoret writing in the context of the ecclesiastical wranglings of the mid-fifth century.⁴⁰⁸ By calling to mind shared suffering and mutual support through a “common explanatory language,”⁴⁰⁹ the bishop of Cyrrhus used the bonds of an ascetic soldiery to advance his own agenda within the church. We have no indication of Marcellus’ reception of the letter, but circumstantial details in the later *Life of Alexander Acoemetus* hint that Marcellus might have viewed his ascetic troops in quasi-martial terms. According to the text, Alexander, predecessor of Marcellus and founder of the Acoemetae, having aborted his career in the civil service (*στρατεία*), took up a spiritual fight and wielded the psalter as his weapon.⁴¹⁰ He established corps of “noble soldiers of Christ” to proclaim God’s word, and he later organized his heavenly warriors into units under marshalls so that their songs would never cease.⁴¹¹ If such passages of the *Life* represent the early tradition rather than late fifth-century accretions, Marcellus, who

⁴⁰⁷ Thdt. *Epist. Sirm.* 142 (141): “παρακαλοῦμεν πρῶτον μὲν ἡμᾶς ἀνέχειν ταῖς προσευχαῖς, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ γράμμασιν εὐφραίνειν. Διὰ γὰρ τὴν θεῖαν χάριν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀποστολικῶν πεπολεμήμεθα δογμάτων.” Translation my own.

⁴⁰⁸ Schor 2010, 113-116 sketches a “multi-front social strategy” that reached out for distant ecclesiastical allies in reaction to his ecclesiastical opponents (115). On the “reciprocity ethic” of *amicitia* more generally, see Saller 1982, 24-6 and MacMullen 1988, 101-4.

⁴⁰⁹ Schor 2010, 119, on the martial and athletic language of toil in Theodoret’s *HR* and letters aimed at navigating the clashes between different ascetic groups.

⁴¹⁰ Civil service: *V. Alex. Acoem.* 5, with Caner 2002, 253n28: “Alexander joined the staff (*militia*) of either the praetorian prefect or the urban prefect at Constantinople, probably as an entry-level clerk.” Fighting with psalter as weapon: *V. Alex. Acoem.* 2, 6, 20.

⁴¹¹ *V. Alex. Acoem.* 31 (with reference to Eph 6:11-15), and 43, “καὶ τὸν θεμέλιον τοῦ ἀγῶνι τοῦ ὑπέδειξεν αὐτοῖς· κατέστησεν γὰρ αὐτοῖς πεντηκοντάρχους καὶ δεκάρχους ἐν τῷ κανόνι, καὶ ἦσαν κατὰ πᾶσαν ὥραν τῇ δοξολογίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ προσκαρτεροῦντες.”

was portrayed as a second founder, may have welcomed such martial references in letters.⁴¹²

Another series of letters indicates the importance of soldierly representations in establishing relationships between clerics. Writing to Augustine, Paulinus tapped explicitly into the martial register of endurance and suffering when he asked for weapons against the Manichaeans:

So, since you have provided me with sufficient armour against the Manicheans with this Pentateuch, if you have written any defences of the Catholic faith against other enemies as well (for our foe, “who has a thousand means of working harm,” must be encompassed by weapons as varied as the ambushes from which he attacks), I beg you to provide me with the arms of justice from your armoury, and do not refuse to bestow them upon me. For I am a sinner toiling even yet under a great burden, a veteran in the ranks of sinners but a new recruit for the eternal King in spiritual warfare. Up to now I have admired in my wretchedness the world’s wisdom, and in God’s eyes, through my useless writing and depraved sagacity, I have been foolish and dumb. Now that I have grown old amongst my enemies and been vain in my thoughts, I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, looking up to the commands of the law and the gifts of grace, from whence help has come to me from the Lord.⁴¹³

Significantly, this letter of 395 may have been Paulinus’ first to Augustine, an attempt to establish an epistolary relationship.⁴¹⁴ The notion of a common *esprit de corps* among

⁴¹² *V. Marcel*. 12-14. Vööbus 1948, 2-3 articulates a two-step composition; an initial Syriac collection of writings by Alexander’s followers was later compiled and interpolated with the conversion of Rabbula. Caner points out that the discussion of the Acoemetæ’s monastery outside of Constantinople describes prosperity achieved under Marcellus (2002, 250; *V. Alex. Acoem.* 51-3). Even if the *Life* entirely postdates Marcellus, the discussion above demonstrates that martial themes were a common feature of hagiographical discourse in the period.

⁴¹³ Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 4.2 (=Aug. *Epist.* 25): “Ideoque cum hoc Pentateucho tuo contra Manichaeos me satis armaveris, si qua in alios quoque hostes catholicae fidei munimina comparasti, quia hostis noster, cui mille nocendi artes, tam variis expugnandus est telis quam obpugnat insidiis, quaeso promere mihi de armamentario tuo et conferre non abnuas arma iustitiae. Sum enim laboriosus etiam nunc sub magno onere peccator, veteranus in numero peccatorum, sed aeterno regi novus incorporeae tiro militiae. Sapientiam mundi miser hucusque miratus sum et per inutiles litteras reprobatae prudentiam deo stultus et mutus fui. Postquam inveteravi inter inimicos meos et evanui in cogitationibus meis, levavi oculos meos in montes, ad praecepta legis et gratiae dona suspiciens, unde mihi auxilium venit a domino.” Walsh, trans. For the quotation, see Verg. *Aen.* 7.338.

⁴¹⁴ Courcelle 1951, 257; Walsh 1966, 1:217n1.

separate soldiers of Christ clearly animated Paulinus' overture, and, when he failed to receive a prompt reply, he sent another letter, stressing unity in their suffering endeavors despite their separation, an epistolary commonplace.⁴¹⁵ In Augustine's response to the second of Paulinus' letters, he apologized for his inability to visit Nola on account of having recently taken up the "soldier's pack" (*sarcina*) of bishop.⁴¹⁶ These shreds of evidence are but a fraction of the elaborate epistolary rituals that included gift-giving and verbal messages, but the motif of the clerical soldier was clearly a recurring thread. That Paulinus probably never intended to publish his collection⁴¹⁷ should not detract from the meaningful nature of his exchanges with Augustine and Severus. With the wider epistolary context in mind, the soldierly image can be interpreted as a strategy of extending and maintaining an ecclesiastical network.

Establishing Influence among the Laity: Recruiting Elites

Bishops dispersed this kind of ascetic martial imagery to a much larger audience than church officials. In his reply to the first of Paulinus' letters,⁴¹⁸ Augustine recommended Romanianus, a leading citizen of Thagaste:

I commend him to your heart and to your tongue that you may offer yourself to him in as friendly a manner as if you were not now making his acquaintance, but came to know him before with me. For, if he does not hesitate to open himself to your heart, he will be healed by your

⁴¹⁵ Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 6.1-2.

⁴¹⁶ Aug. *Epist.* 31.4: "sed qua ecclesiae cura teneat, ex hoc uestra caritas oportet attendat, quod beatissimus pater Valerius, qui uos nobiscum quantum salutet quantumque sitiat, audietis ex fratribus, nec presbyterum me esse suum passus est, nisi maiorem mihi coepiscopatus sarcinam inponeret." Although the term *sarcina* could apply to any pack, burden, or movable good (*OLD* s.v.), the term became merged with the idea of the soldier of Christ in Augustine's writings, even when a soldier's pack did not fit into the martial metaphor (Poque 1984, 64-5). Augustine used *sarcina* exclusively of the bishop's burden and the burden of life (Jourjon 1955).

⁴¹⁷ Conybeare 2000, 13-15. Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 41.1 suggests that Paulinus did not keep copies of his own letters.

⁴¹⁸ We can be confident that Aug. *Epist.* 27 was a response to Paulinus' first letter on the basis of the shared honey simile (Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 4.1, Aug. *Epist.* 27.1).

tongue either in every respect or to a large extent. I, after all, want him to be more frequently reproved by the words of those who love a friend in a non-worldly manner.⁴¹⁹

Paulinus acceded to Augustine's request and soon wrote to Romanianus and his son, Licentius.⁴²⁰ In his letter to the father, Paulinus rejoiced at Augustine's elevation to the episcopacy and looked forward to the "horn of the church" breaking the "horns of sinners, namely, of the Donatists and the Manichaeans."⁴²¹ Like Augustine, Paulinus expressed his concerns about Licentius' son, whom Paulinus remained confident could be turned from his secular life, "an impious victory" (*mala victoria*), to a triumph in the Christian faith.⁴²² Then, Paulinus concluded the letter with an exhortation for Romanianus:

So that my duty might not seem bereft of brotherly charity, to you and our son Licentius I have sent five loaves of bread from the hard-tack of the Christian campaign, in readiness of which we serve every day for the ration of frugality. For I could not deprive him of a blessing whom I want to join intimately with me in the same grace.⁴²³

In a joking reference to the common practice of sending blessed bread with letters,⁴²⁴

Paulinus joined an act of epistolary comity with the letter's military motifs. *Buccellata*,

⁴¹⁹ Aug. *Epist.* 27.5: "quod iam fecissem iamque illum legeres, nisi profectio fratris inprovisa repente placuisset, quem sic commendo cordi et linguae tuae, ut ita comiter ei te praebeas, quasi non nunc illum, sed mecum ante didiceris. si enim cordi tuo non dubitauerit aperire se ipsum, aut ex omni aut ex magna parte sanabitur per linguam tuam. uolo enim eum numerosius contundi eorum uocibus, qui amicum non saeculariter diligunt." Teske, trans. For Cornelius (?) Romanianus, see *PCBE* 1:994-997.

⁴²⁰ On *Epist.* 8 to Licentius, see discussion below and in ch. 4.

⁴²¹ Paul. *Epist.* 8.2: "et nunc exultavit cornu ecclesiae suae in electis suis, ut cornua peccatorum, sicut per prophetam spondet, hoc est Donatistarum Manichaeorumque confringat." Translation my own.

⁴²² Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 7.3. Walsh, trans.

⁴²³ Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 7.3: "Ne vacuum fraternae humanitatis officium videretur, de buccellato Christianae expeditionis, in cuius procinctu cotidie ad frugalitatis annonam militamus; panes quinque tibi pariter et filio nostro Licentio misimus; non enim potuimus a benedictione secernere quem cupimus eadem nobis gratia penitus annectere." Translation my own.

⁴²⁴ For examples, see Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 3.6, 4.5, 5.21; Aug. *Epist.* 31.8. The practice was discussed in Basil's *Rule* (133). I take *buccellatum* to work as a joke about the staleness of a loaf of bread that had traveled many miles. If, as we are led to believe from these letters, Romanianus was in Rome, that would still put him several days travel by land or sea from Nola. The preservation of bread was clearly a real-

the hard biscuits of soldiers' rations, and the *annona*, the in-kind payment for *militia*, might call to mind the austerity of the Roman serviceman,⁴²⁵ but it also evoked the asceticism of holy men such as Paul and Antony, awaiting their God-sent rations.⁴²⁶ That Paulinus' loaves were five in number alluded to Jesus' feeding of the five-thousand, also conducted with five loaves.⁴²⁷ In this epistolary context, the *buccellatum* was a physical representation⁴²⁸ of both Paulinus' pastoral authority and the bond of soldierly service that he wanted to cultivate with Romanianus.

Again, the wider epistolary context helpfully explicates the significance of Paulinus' language to Romanianus. Licentius was pursuing a career in the imperial service, and Paulinus sent another letter or a supplement to this one in which he enclosed a series of elegiac couplets denouncing the perils of "slippery dangers of hard state service" (*durae lubrica militiae*).⁴²⁹ Seen in this light, Paulinus' exhortation to Licentius' father was a counter-melody of spiritual *militia*. Augustine and Paulinus' correspondence might suggest that Romanianus was an eager participant in turning Licentius from the imperial service, but we cannot know how he truly felt.⁴³⁰ Rather

world problem; Procopius tells the story of hard-tack that spoiled on the voyage to Africa because John the Cappadocian failed to double-bake the bread sufficiently (*Bell.* 3 (= *Vand.* 1).13.12-20).

⁴²⁵ Phang 2008, 256: "Roman military austerity was not simply a pragmatic policy, but was a specific cultural formation, reinforcing military *habitus* and maintaining the military hierarchy."

⁴²⁶ Jones notes that *buccellatum* was a partial substitute for bread while on campaign (1964, 1:628-9), so the association with unstinting service is even stronger.

⁴²⁷ Matt 14:15-21.

⁴²⁸ This should be seen as a Christian permutation of the more general aristocratic habit of epistolary gift exchange (Trout 1989, 274 ff.; cf. Paul. Nol. *Poem.* 1.1.7). Although there may be a eucharistic connection, the loaves "represent a striving for connection, and, through connection, for blessing to the giver" (Conybeare 2000, 26-27).

⁴²⁹ Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 8 l. 12. Most MSS present *Epist.* 8 after the letter to Romanianus without any inscription, while a few give the letter a separate heading (Hartel 1894, 45-46). Walsh interprets this "as an enclosure with Letter 7 to Romanianus" (1966, 1:226n1).

⁴³⁰ Nor do we know what became of him. Brown 1967, 145: "Yet, this news from Italy is the last we hear of Romanianus and his son. They disappear from history, and it is Augustine, Aurelius and Alypius, bishops wielding power in little towns, over little men, who will influence the lives of their fellow-

than preaching to the choir, Paulinus' epistolary strategy could be interpreted as a rearguard action, an attempt to secure Romanianus' spiritual allegiance by inviting him as a comrade-in-arms in a campaign for Licentius' soul. In this letter, Paulinus, not yet a bishop, presented himself as an aristocratic peer writing for a "brother"; both men, as co-equals in the *expeditio Christiana*, could lay claim to the same militant ascetic life.⁴³¹

We see a similar appeal along soldierly lines in a letter of Augustine to Firmus. Augustine had sent along his *City of God* and was tardily responding to three letters of Firmus.⁴³² Although happy that Firmus was interested in his book, Augustine insisted that it would do no good if Firmus did not make a more serious commitment to Christ through baptism.⁴³³ Of interest here is the way that the bishop of Hippo wove in a picture of the Christian life as involving a "soldier's burden" (*sarcina*):

But the *sarcina* of so great a weight, after all, cannot be supported by shoulders that are still weak and have not been strengthened." This, then, is the first reason for your excusing yourself, nor do you notice, you men whoever you are who fear this burden, that you are most easily outdone by women in bearing it, for the Church is made fruitful by a devout multitude of faithful and chaste women. For, if you did notice, you would drive out this needless fear with an inevitable sense of shame. Your wife is one of them, for I certainly ought to believe that she is the sort of woman over whom I already rejoice. After all, I do not fear to offend you

provincials far more intimately than ever Romanianus could have done, with his many lawsuits and his distant ambitions. It is in such ways that all roads no longer ran to Rome." On the other hand, if Romanianus is the Cornelius of Aug. *Epist.* 259, Augustine chastised him many years later (429/30) for his dissolute lifestyle, and Paulinus refused to write a eulogy for his wife (Aug. *Epist.* 259.1). On the identification of Cornelius with Romanianus, based on the letter and an inscription (*CIL VIII Suppl.* 1 No 17226), see Gabillon 1978.

⁴³¹ The conclusion of the letter points in this direction. Paulinus quotes Terent. *Adelph.* 96 ff., only to say: "why should I speak with the words of others, when we can speak of all things from our own supply, and speaking the words of others is not characteristic of a sane mind, which is healthy and sound by the grace of God, since Christ is our head?" (*sed quid alienis loquar, cum de proprio cuncta possimus et aliena loqui non soleat esse sani capitis, quo dei gratia sano et salvo sumus quibus caput Christus est?*). Translation my own. Rather than "antagonism to the distractions of classical literature" (Walsh 1966, 226n16), this effectively amounts to *praeteritio*, ostentatiously calling to mind the trappings of a shared cultural background, only to supersede that with a Christian identity.

⁴³² Aug. *Epist.* 1a*, 2*.1-2.

⁴³³ Aug. *Epist.* 2*.5-11.

when I exhort you by the example of a woman to enter the city of God. For, if it is something difficult, the weaker sex is already there, but if it is something easy, there is no reason that the stronger sex should not be there...And surely, when you enter there, you will not follow her there but she will follow you. For you will precede in *virtus* your wife whom you will follow in time. I believe, after all, that you, even as a catechumen, may still teach her, although she is a believer, some things pertaining to religion that you have read and she has not.⁴³⁴

The connection between faith and war buttresses Augustine's calculating use of a "rhetoric of womanly influence."⁴³⁵ If women, and what is more, Firmus' wife, were already soldiering in God's army, how much more ought Firmus to live up to his manly *virtus* and become baptized! Augustine was interested in presenting the choice as starkly as possible; one bears either "the *sarcina* of new virtues" or the woeful "*sarcina* of sins."⁴³⁶ Although the former was more difficult, it clearly befit Firmus' manliness. He apparently thought gradual initiation into the faith was needed to show reverence, but Augustine again presented the moment as decisive. "Break all delays and secure the fortified camp," wrote Augustine, modifying a line of Virgil, "Not to assault it, but to fight bravely, safe within it against the enemy."⁴³⁷ Just as soldierly language was an

⁴³⁴ Aug. *Epist.* 2*.4, Teske, trans. modified: "at enim tanti ponderis sarcina non potest infirmis adhuc et non corroboratis uiribus sustineri. haec est enim prima causa excusationis tuae; nec attenditis, o uiri quicumque istam sarcinam formidatis, facillime in ea portanda uos a feminis uinci, quarum fidelium atque castarum religiosa multitudo fructifera fecundat ecclesia. nam si attenderetis necessario pudore timorem superfluum pelleretis. earum es una - talem quippe illam credere debeo, de qua iam gaudeo - coniunx tua. non enim metuo ne te offendam, cum exemplo feminae ciuitatem dei te exhortor intrare: nam si res est difficilis, iam ibi est sexus infirmior, si autem facilis, nulla causa est, ut non ibi sit fortior...nec sane cum intraueris, etiam ibi eam secuturus es, sed ipsa te; praeibis enim uirtute quam sequeris tempore. nam credo, quod etiam quamquam fideli catechumenus insinues tamen aliqua ad religionem pertinentia quae legisti et ipsa non legit..."

⁴³⁵ Quotation from Cooper 1992, 160.

⁴³⁶ Aug. *Epist.* 2*.5: "sed uidelicet difficile est sarcinam nouarum sustinere uirtutum et facile est premi ueterum sarcina peccatorum. haec sunt potius onera formidanda quae obruendis et in aeternum mergendis hominibus alligantur nec ullo alio modo nisi in Christo regeneratione soluuntur, ut fiat homo mediatoris capitis membrum qui, cum esset diuina maiestate discretus a nobis, dignatus est fieri humana infirmitate proximus nobis."

⁴³⁷ Aug. *Epist.* 2*.6: "'rumpe moras omnes et munita arripe castra,' non quae tu expugnes, sed ubi tutus contra inimicum fortiter pugnes." Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 9.12-13, in which Iris urges on Turnus: "quid dubitas? nunc tempus equos, nunc poscere currus. / rumpe moras omnis et turbata arripe castra." Note the

important way that Paulinus tried to recruit Romanianus, so too did Augustine use the notion of Christian warfare to shame Firmus into action.

Establishing Influence among Women: The Example of Demetrias

A central aspect of Augustine's rhetorical strategy in his letter to Firmus is his implicit comparison between men and women in Christ's *militia*. In fact, the extension of soldierly martial imagery to women was common. This might seem surprising given the relative lack of military language in the lives of Macrina and Melania,⁴³⁸ but in fourth and fifth-century letters, ascetic women were often depicted as soldiers with certain elements that drew attention to the uniquely gendered dynamic of putting a woman in the manly armor of God.⁴³⁹ This is best seen in a series of letters to Demetrias from Jerome, Pelagius, and Prosper of Aquitaine.⁴⁴⁰ Each missive had its own rhetorical aims, but collectively they reflect the martial coloring of paraenetic language. When

substitution of *munita* for *turbata* which draws an intentional contrast with Turnus, who was moving with aggression against the fort, whereas Firmus was to protect the *castra Dei*. Whether Turnus was causing the commotion or capitalizing on it was unclear to Servius (*ad loc.*: "aut arripe et turba, aut turbata invade, per absentiam Aeneae inordinata.")

⁴³⁸ The closest military language that occurs in the *Life of Macrina* is Macrina's reassuring words to her brother as she lay sick: "Τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα ἡγωνίσμαι καὶ τὸν δρόμον τετέλεκα καὶ τὴν πίστιν τετήρηκα" (Gr. Nyss. *V. Macr.* 19; cf. 2 Tim 4:7-8). Gerontius is slightly more martial in his portrait of Melania, asking in the preface, "with which of her great contests shall I begin?" ("Πόθεν τοίνυν τῶν μεγάλων αὐτῆς ἀγώνων ἄρξομαι;") and having her later encourage her comrades by citing Ephes 6:12 (Geront. *Mel.* 16). "Wounded by love of God, she prepared to confront greater contests" (32), and her voyage to Constantinople is presented as "new contests" (50: ἔτεροι ἀγῶνες). The text concludes with Melania being greeted by the martyrs whose ἀγῶνες she had endured. Nearly all of this "martial" imagery, however, can be read as purely athletic.

⁴³⁹ Kuefler notes that no woman is ever dubbed a *miles Christi* in the sources (2001, 114: Paulinus of Nola is "the only writer that even comes close to doing so" when he labelled Melania *militans Christo* (Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 29.6)), but while this might be technically true, what follows shows how important a soldierly representation of the female ascetic was to such men as Jerome, Pelagius, and Prosper. Cooper 2007 argues for "a specifically female interpretation" of the *miles Christi* tradition (17), which nevertheless vacillated between "masculine and feminine points of identification" (18). For other excellent examples, see Chrys. *Epist. ad Olymp.* 12.1d-e (= *Epist.* 6), in which Olympias' womanly infirmity becomes a reason for even greater praise as a holy warrior and athlete, and Gr. Nyss. *Epist.* 19.6, where Macrina is likened to a fortified bulwark.

⁴⁴⁰ Hier. *Epist.* 130; Pel. *Epist. ad Demetr.*; Ps. Leo M. *Humil.*

writing to women of illustrious background, church writers chose to render their addressees soldiers of God whose domestic and virginal sufferings could be viewed as part of a life-long military struggle.

In 414, while struggling through his *Commentary on Ezekiel*,⁴⁴¹ Jerome received a request from Proba and Juliana to write to their 14-year-old granddaughter and daughter (respectively), Demetrias. These three members of the celebrated Anician family had fled Rome after the sack of Rome, and they sought Jerome's guidance on behalf of their daughter who had evidently decided on a vow of celibacy. At least this is the impression conveyed by the letters we have; we might join Rees in suspecting the influence of family and clerical pressures on the young girl's decision.⁴⁴² At about the same time, Demetrias' mother and grandmother also wrote to Pelagius, a family friend and spiritual writer of perhaps British extraction. Like Jerome, Pelagius obliged and wrote a literary epistle for Demetrias, expounding the virtues and the dangers of the virgin's life. There are enough similarities between the two letters to suggest that one of the authors had read the other's, but Jerome never mentions Pelagius, and we cannot know which direction the influence ran.⁴⁴³ Scholars have tended to view these letters in light of the "Pelagian controversy," but Jerome never mentions him, and his arguments

⁴⁴¹ Hier. *Epist.* 130.2; Kelly 1975, 306 and 312.

⁴⁴² Rees 1991, 30.

⁴⁴³ This position is contrary to a number of scholars: Kelly 1975, 313 notes similarities of Hier. *Epist.* 130.1 and Pel. *Epist. ad Demetr.* 1. Vogüé 1991-2003, 5:320-2 lists more verbal echoes and likewise assumes that Jerome had access to Pelagius' letter; Cain expands upon this argument for Pelagian priority by noting what he views as theological arguments designed for Pelagius (see below) and Jerome's suspicious (in his view) protestations that his praise was based in pure intentions (130.1, 2, 7). But such protestations are a rhetorical trope and perhaps only indicate Jerome's concern to make a good impression on an illustrious *gens*. Contrary to these more recent interpretations, Gonsette suspected that the influence ran the other way and that Pelagius cribbed from Jerome's letter (1933, 795).

only indirectly touch on issues of free will and human nature.⁴⁴⁴ What is more, the notion of “Pelagianism” is a product of the polemical writings of his opponents, a thesis cogently argued by Ali Bonner.⁴⁴⁵ Interestingly, a medieval reader, confronted with both missives in a collection of Jerome’s letters, thought both were Pelagian and should be excised from the collection.⁴⁴⁶ Freed from the fetters of a narrative of theological conflict, we can appreciate these letters as competing attempts at establishing spiritual and magisterial influence. Rather than relics of a church controversy, these were diplomatic overtures aimed at “the Christianity of normal, if perhaps aristocratic, householders.”⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁴ Kelly 1975, 313 explains this away this silence: “naturally Jerome did not mention Pelagius by name; he was well aware that the powerful Anicii were his protectors.” Cain thinks Jerome’s discussion of God’s mercy as a gift is designed to oppose Pelagius’ comments (Cf. *Epist.* 130.12 and *Pel. Epist. ad Demetr.* 2.1), but even Jerome’s gloss on Rom 9:16 (“It depends not on man’s will or exertion, but on God’s mercy”) would not have been entirely objectionable to Pelagius (Kelly 1975, 313). When Jerome makes a point of criticizing a heresy, it is the Origenist doctrine of sin before birth (130.16), which could be seen as a “proxy condemnation of Pelagianism, for Jerome saw the latter ‘heresy’ as arising from the former” (Cain 2009, 165), but references to other heresies springing from Origenism are entirely absent. In contrast to these other scholars who might view any intertextuality as a sign of Pelagius’ priority, I hew to an agnostic view of Jerome’s having read Pelagius’ letter. This is not to say that the two writers independently composed their letters, for the language is in places too remarkably similar for coincidence. But any number of scenarios can be invented to explain these intertextual links; one writer could have heard of the other’s letter’s contents through direct conversation, description by Juliana or Proba, second-hand knowledge (Aug. *Epist.* 188 from a few years later shows he somehow had access to Pelagius’ letter, but was not sure if Juliana had seen it), or hearsay.

⁴⁴⁵ Bonner 2018, xiii-xiv gives a summary of five arguments to discount the historical existence of “Pelagianism”: (1) there is a disjunction between Pelagius’ views in his writings and the characterization of his views by e.g. Augustine, (2) Pelagius’ views were no different from those expressed in ascetic tracts from earlier, including the *Life of Antony* and the writings of Jerome, (3) there was no coherent movement, just a disjointed collection of texts lambasted by Pelagius’ opponents, (4) it is impossible for modern scholars to agree on a definition of “Pelagianism,” and (5) an interactionist reading of the texts shows how “Pelagianism” is an invented fiction, like other comparative cases.

⁴⁴⁶ Bonner 2018, 294. London, British Library, Royal 6.D.i, a 12th c. MS which reproduces an earlier marginal comment: “Lege epistolam Augustini ad Iulianam matrem Demetriadis, et animadvertes hanc epistolam ad Demetriadem et subsequentem non esse Ieronimi, sed Pelagii. Quod et stilus et fides auctoris apertius ostendunt.”

⁴⁴⁷ Quotation from Cooper 2007, 23.

By emphasizing this common context,⁴⁴⁸ we can appreciate similar martial imagery as part of a shared strategy of exhortation and analogous conception of ascetic womanhood. After an obligatory comment of not being equal to the task at hand, both Jerome and Pelagius saw fit to liken their words to those of a general. Jerome wrote that, although Demetrias had already committed to virginity:

Still these words of mine will not be without their use. The speed of racehorses is quickened by the applause of spectators; prize fighters are urged to greater efforts by the cries of their backers; and when armies are drawn up for battle and swords are drawn, the general's speech does much to fire his soldiers' valour. So also is it on the present occasion.⁴⁴⁹

Likewise, Pelagius compared his instruction to Demetrias to a general's battle oration:

Let us then lay this down as the first basis for a holy and spiritual life: the virgin must recognize her own strengths, which she will be able to employ to the full only when she has learned that she possesses them. The best incentive for the mind consists in teaching it that it is possible to do anything which one really wants to do: in war, for example, the kind of exhortation which is most effective and carries most authority is the one which reminds the combatant of his own strengths.⁴⁵⁰

Both authors, then, presented their ascetic paraenesis by way of military simile, Pelagius by mentioning martial harangues typical of historiography⁴⁵¹ and Jerome through a

⁴⁴⁸ An approach taken, for example, by Jacobs 2000.

⁴⁴⁹ Hier. *Epist.* 130.2: "sed et nostra oratio dabit aliquod emolumenti. equorum cursus favore perniciosior fit, pugilum fortitudo clamoribus incitatur, paratas ad proelium acies strictosque mucrones sermo imperatoris accendit: igitur et in opera praesenti." Fremantle, trans. In this case, as in others, there is a collocation of several metaphors. On the one hand, this dilutes the emphasis on the military register although its final position in the tricolon crescens does underscore its importance. On the other hand, the use of martial imagery as part of a wider panoply of rhetorical figures situates the vehicles of the metaphor as being parallel and more aptly speaking to transcendental truths. On late antique ambivalence to metaphor, see Kelly 2004, 237-8 with references.

⁴⁵⁰ Pel. *Epist. ad Demetr.* 2.1: "Haec igitur prima sanctae ac spiritualis vitae fundamenta jaciantur, ut vires suas virgo agnoscat, quas demum bene exercere poterit, cum eas se habere didicerit. Optima enim animi incitamenta sunt, cum docetur aliquis posse quod cupiat. Nam et in bello ea exhortatio maxima est, eaque plurimum auctoritatis habet, quae pugnatores de viribus suis admonet." Rees, trans.

⁴⁵¹ Although pre-battle orations are absent from the division of epideictic oratory in the rhetorical handbooks of late antiquity (but see Ps. D.H. *Rh.* 2-3 for a brief reference to the pre-battle speech), they were a recurring feature of historiography and characteristically included an assessment of the circumstances and topography of battle, the strengths and character of one's forces, and the weaknesses

cluster of agonistic images. Almost as a drill-instructor, Pelagius presented his advisory role as essential, and his authorial voice often breaks through. Enjoined by her mother's command (*matre iubente*), he "must write" for Demetrias, delivering the orders (*mandata*) of God.⁴⁵² This prominent military language ties in with the magisterial and spiritual authority that each writer was cultivating throughout the letter. Jerome portrayed himself as a new Moses, "with limbs girt, feet shod, and staff in hand, on a path through scorpions and snakes, ambushes and poisons" who could lead the young Demetrias, "Christ's little recruit" (*Christi tiruncula*),⁴⁵³ to "the sweet waters of the Jordan, the promised land, and the house of God."⁴⁵⁴

For both men, this prominent military language was connected to another central epistolary theme, namely the subordination of Demetrias' earthly *nobilitas* beneath the glory found in her ascetic regimen.⁴⁵⁵ Writing to a member of the renowned *gens Anicia*, these writers perhaps found this issue unavoidable, as their obligatory protestations of humility and pure intentions might suggest. Jerome and Pelagius both mentioned the virgin's consular ancestors, as did Augustine in his letter congratulating Juliana for her

and duplicity of the enemy (See Burgess 1902, 211-214 for a list of *topoi* and examples). Especially when dueling speeches are given, the degree to which such an oration accurately anticipated the actual events that followed could correspond to victory (e.g. Thuc. 2.86-92).

⁴⁵² Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 1, "Scribendum tamen est ad Demetriadem, virginem Christi, virginem nobilem, virginem divitem, et, quod his majus est, ardore fidei nobilitatem divitiasque calcantem... Scribimus enim petente sancta matre ejus, imo iubente, idque a nobis transmarinis litteris miro cum desiderio animi flagitante." For God's commands, see Ibid. 10.

⁴⁵³ Hier. *Epist.* 130.4, cf. *Epist.* 30.14: "Saluta Blesillam et Eustochium, tirunculas nostras."

⁴⁵⁴ Hier. *Epist.* 130.2, "Nobis electa servanda sunt, et quasi inter scorpiones et colubros incedendum, ut accinctis lumbis, calciatisque pedibus, et adprehensis manu baculis, iter per insidias huius saeculi, et inter venena faciamus possimusque ad dulces Iordanis pervenire aquas, et terram repromissionis intrare, et ad domum Dei ascendere..." Translation my own. For Jerome as a new Moses in the context of treatises on virginity, see Cain 2009, 162 who notes the explicit connection that Jerome draws to his *Epist.* 22 to Eustochium, itself laden with soldierly imagery. Together, these two letters constitute "two bookends of his personal library of ascetic masterpieces" (Cain 2009, 165).

⁴⁵⁵ This theme is considered at some length by Jacobs 2000, but he does not draw a connection between the military qualities of Demetrias' nobility.

daughter's commitment.⁴⁵⁶ The recent sack of Rome (410) and the family's flight from Italy was surely fresh in the mind of Demetrias, and it presented an opportunity to Jerome and Pelagius to compare the eternal rewards of the heavenly kingdom to the dismal state of earthly *imperium*. Although we cannot suppose that Jerome had ever met the young girl, he imagined her pondering the sack of the city as she decided to become "Christ's little recruit":

It is not long since you have trembled in the hands of the barbarians and clung to your grandmother and your mother cowering under their cloaks for safety. You have seen yourself a prisoner and your chastity not in your own power. You have shuddered at the fierce looks of your enemies; you have seen with secret agony the virgins of God ravished. Your city, once the capital of the world, is now the grave of the Roman people; and will you on the shores of Libya, yourself an exile, accept an exile for a husband? Where will you find a matron to be present at your bridal? Whom will you get to escort you home? No tongue but a harsh Punic one will sing for you the wanton Fescennine verses. Away with all hesitations! 'Perfect love' of God 'casts out fear.' Take to yourself the shield of faith, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, and sally forth to battle.⁴⁵⁷

When her decision was made known, it caused not only her mother and grandmother to weep for joy, but it even caused the whole of Italy and the Roman Empire to rejoice and forget its present troubles. "In such a manner," Jerome embellished, "the Roman people did not exult with Marcellus' first victory at Nola, after the battles of Trebia, Trasimene,

⁴⁵⁶ Aug. *Epist.* 150; Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 14.3; Hier. *Epist.* 130.3, 7.

⁴⁵⁷ Hier. *Epist.* 130.5: "Dudum inter barbaras tremuisti manus, aviae matrisque sinu et palliis tegebaris. Vidisti te captivam, et pudicitiam tuam, non tuae potestatis. Horruisti truces hostium vultus, raptas virgines Dei gemitu tacito conspexisti. Urbs tua quondam orbis caput, Romani populi sepulchrum est; et tu in Libyco litore exulem virum, ipsa exul accipies? Quam habitura pronubam? quo deducenda comitatu? Stridor linguae punicae procacia tibi fescennina cantabit. Rumpe moras omnes. 'Perfecta dilectio, foras mittit timorem.' Adsume scutum fidei, loricam iustitiae, galeam salutis, procede ad proelium." Fremantle, trans. Cf. 1 John 4:18, Eph 6:14-17. "Rumpe moras omnes" is a clear Virgilian echo (*Aen.* 9.13, cf. Aug. *Epist.* 2*.6, discussed above) the effect of which is heightened by the Anicii having fled to Africa. "Fescennine verses" is a reference to improvised songs at weddings (e.g. Claudian, *De nuptiis Honorii Augusti*), often lascivious (see Cat. 61.119ff.). See NP s.v. *fescennini versus*.

and Cannae, in which thousands of Roman soldiers were slaughtered.”⁴⁵⁸ Pelagius likewise called attention to recent military disasters to contrast the glories of heavenly *militia* with present failures:

It recently happened, a thing which you heard for yourself, that Rome, master of the world, trembled at the sounding of the shrill war-trumpet and the uproar of the Goths, overwhelmed by despondent fear. Where then was the order of nobility? Where were the fixed and distinct ranks of any honor? Everything was mingled and confused with fear; the same image of death appeared to all. Except that those feared death more for whom life was more pleasing. If we fear mortal enemies and a human band in this way, what will we do when the horn begins to sound from heaven with fearsome noise and the whole world at once resounds at the voice of the Archangel, clearer than any war-trumpet? When we see brandished above us weapons not made by human hands, but even the powers of heaven roused, just as the prophet says...⁴⁵⁹

Thus, Pelagius invited his reader to liken the tumult recently visited upon Rome to the more perilous and consequential destruction which will come at the end of the world. This eschatological comparison differed from Jerome’s use of the sack of Rome, but it similarly heightened the importance of Demetrias’ nobility that could only be found in her ascetic practice.

For both Jerome and Pelagius, this ascetic practice was discussed at some detail, often with reference to martial imagery. This military language accorded well with the

⁴⁵⁸ Hier. *Epist.* 130.6: “Non sic post Trebiam, Trasumenum, et Cannas; in quibus locis Romanorum exercituum caesa sunt milia, Marcelli primum apud Nola praelio, se populus Romanus erexit.” Translation my own. For a similar reflection on Marcellus’ victory as a moment of exultation, see Cic. *Brut.* 12.

⁴⁵⁹ Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 30.1-2: “Recens factum est, et quod ipsa audisti, cum ad stridulae buccinae sonum, Gothorumque clamorem, lugubri oppressa metu domina orbis Roma contremuit. Ubi tunc nobilitatis ordo? ubi certi et distincti ullius dignitatis gradus? Permista omnia et timore confusa; omni domui planctus, et aequalis fuit per cunctos pavor: unum erat servus et nobilis; eadem omnibus imago mortis. Nisi quia magis eam timebant illi, quibus fuerat vita jucundior. Si ita mortales timemus hostes et humanam manum, quid faciemus cum clangore terribili tuba intonare de coelo coeperit, et ad illam Archangeli vocem omni buccina clariorem totus simul remugiet mundus? Cum viderimus super nos non manu facta arma concuti, sed et virtutes coelorum commoveri, sicut propheta dicit.” Translation my own.

unyielding approach to sin and pleasures. Showing off his linguistic repertoire, Jerome noted that “we read in the Book of Job... ‘the life of a man upon the earth is temptation,’ or as it is rendered better in the Hebrew, ‘*militia*,’”⁴⁶⁰ and he urged Demetrias to “always stand under arms and in battle array, ready to engage the foe.”⁴⁶¹ This picture of the ascetic in the lines of battle flowed nicely into more specific discussions of austere practices of scripture-reading and fasting. Culling “choice flowers of the holy scriptures” was a defensive act, a “sufficient reminder to close the chamber of your heart and to fortify your brow with a frequent sign.”⁴⁶² “After you have paid the most careful attention to your thoughts,” Jerome continued, “you must then put on the armor of fasting and sing with David, ‘I chastened my soul with fasting,’ and ‘I have eaten ashes like bread,’ and ‘as for me when they troubled me my clothing was sackcloth.’”⁴⁶³ The discipline and austerity of a soldier was a useful tool to imagine the struggle of an ascetic woman with sin and her ascetic regimen, and Jerome used a similar thread to discuss the importance of cenobitic living and deference to church authorities.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶⁰ Hier. *Epist.* 130.7: “legimus in volumine Iob: adhuc isto loquente venit alius nuntius et in eodem: temptatio – sive, ut melius habetur in Hebraeo, militia – est vita hominis super terram. ad hoc enim laboramus et in saeculi huius periclitamur militia, ut in futuro saeculo coronemur.” Translation my own. Cf. Job 7:1. The Hebrew word that Jerome translates as *militia* (מִלְחָמָה), can mean both “army” and “forced labor” or “hard labor” (Dhorme 1984, 97). The diction indicates not only the difficult and slavish qualities of human life on earth, but also its temporary nature (Seow 2013, 490-493).

⁴⁶¹ Hier. *Epist.* 130.8, Fremantle, trans.

⁴⁶² Hier. *Epist.* 130.9: “Haec cursim quasi de prato pulcherrimo sanctarum Scripturarum, parvos flores carpsisse sufficiat pro commonitione tui; ut et claudas cubiculum pectoris, et crebro signaculo crucis munias frontem tuam, ne exterminator Aegypti in te locum reperiat.” Translation my own. *signaculum* can denote the sign of the cross (*L&S* s.v., I), but we might also think of the military connotations of *signa*.

⁴⁶³ Hier. *Epist.* 130.10: “Post cogitationum diligentissimam cautionem, ieiuniorum tibi arma sumenda sunt, et canendum cum David: ‘Humilavi in ieiunio animam meam.’ Et, ‘cinerem quasi panem manducavi.’ Et, ‘cum molesti essent mihi, induebar cilicio.’” Fremantle, trans., modified. Cf. Ps 34:13, 101:10, 34:13. Following the passage are a list of exemplary and cautionary biblical characters, along with a warning to avoid the “ignita diabolic iacula, quae simul et vulnerant et inflamant.” In the following section, he advises moderation in fasting.

⁴⁶⁴ Hier. *Epist.* 130.17.

Pelagius also used the rhetoric of the ascetic soldier to call Demetrias to a life of holiness under his tutelage, and he elaborates many of the same motifs in his letter: a call to a regimented life, exhortations to read the scriptures, advice on fasting, and encouragement to live in holiness. Much of this specific advice, explored with attention to a theory of human will and buttressed with scriptural examples, was colored in martial terms. After describing his conception of man's ability to choose between good and evil – “a sort of natural sanctity in our minds which, presiding as it were in the mind's citadel, administers judgement equally on the evil and the good”⁴⁶⁵ – Pelagius hailed many examples of good men from the Old Testament, including Job who “fought against the devil to the very end with his body.”⁴⁶⁶ This patriarch, “triumphant in his nakedness” constituted a prototype of the quasi-military ascetic that Pelagius was to construct later in the letter.⁴⁶⁷ Like Jerome, he then turned explicitly to offer Demetrias advice.⁴⁶⁸ Having renounced marriage and accepted the calling to perfection, “you entered the field of battle and thought not so much on the labor of the march as the reward of victory.”⁴⁶⁹ Good conduct required proper knowledge and gradual training, but the spectators of Demetrias' holiness would include God and the *militia angelorum*.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁵ Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 4.2: “Est enim, inquam, in animis nostris naturalis quaedam, ut ita dixerim, sanctitas, quae velut in arce animi praesidens, exercet mali bonique iudicium.” Rees, trans.

⁴⁶⁶ Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 6.1: “...ad ultimum proprio contra diabolum corpore dimicavit.” Rees, trans.

⁴⁶⁷ Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 6.1: “Omnibus prorsus velut indumentis exuitur, ut expeditius et fortius nudus triumphet, et hostem, quem ferendo damna ante superaverat, rursus tolerando supplicia devincat.” Rees, trans. Cf. Hier. *Epist.* 130.7 (cited above) for Jerome's engagement with the person of Job.

⁴⁶⁸ Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 9.1.

⁴⁶⁹ Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 9.3: “Certaminis ingressa campum, non tam laborem cursus quam bravium victoriae cogitasti.” Translation my own. For *bravium*, see *L&S* s.v. *brabeum* (cf. Gk. βραβεῖον).

⁴⁷⁰ Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 13-14: “Deus ipse omnium rector ac Dominus, eum omni Angelorum militia certamen tuum spectat, tibi contra diabolum dimicanti parat aeternitatis coronam, et coeleste praemium incitamentum victoriae facit.” (14.4)

Pelagius pressed this military analogy hard, admonishing Demetrias to heed “the sacred scriptures, the venerable rescripts of God’s precepts”⁴⁷¹:

So, in this great struggle which you are about to undertake let your chief concern, the first object of all your preparation, be to win an overwhelming victory for virtue in this war of extermination, to swear fealty to all God’s commands against the camp of the devil and not simply to shun the things that are forbidden but also to fulfil those which are commanded.⁴⁷²

Like Jerome, advice on fasting and scripture reading stressed moderation and good order.⁴⁷³ Prayer on a regular schedule was best, “to exercise your soul, so to speak, in this gymnasium in which it wrestles spiritually and daily engages in heavenly combat”⁴⁷⁴; flatterers were “enemies” (*inimici*) to be avoided like “darts” (*iacula*);⁴⁷⁵ holiness was a bulwark against the wiles of the devil.⁴⁷⁶ All of this culminated in a vivid

⁴⁷¹ Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 16.2: “Nobis vero Deus ipse, aeterna illa maiestas, ineffabilis atque inestimabilis potestas, sacras litteras, et vere adorandos praeceptorum suorum apices mittit.” Translation my own. For this technical administrative sense of *apices*, see *L&S*, s.v. E. Rees translation, “the writ of his own commandments truly worthy of our worship,” grasps after this same sense, but I prefer “rescript” as it captures the imperial resonances of the passage. For *apices* in reference to the chancellory script, see Matthews 2000, 188-189 and *Cod. Theod.* 9.19.3 for a law of Valentinian attempting to guard the *litterae caelestes* of the emperor: “serenitas nostra prospexit inde caelestium litterarum coepisse imitationem, quod his apicibus tuae gravitatis officium consultationes relationesque complectitur, quibus scrinia nostrae perennitatis utuntur. quam ob rem istius sanctionis auctoritate praecipimus, ut posthac magistra falsorum consuetudo tollatur et communibus litteris universa mandentur, quae vel de provincia fuerint scribenda vel a iudice, ut nemo stili huius exemplum aut privatim sumat aut publice.” An example closer to the date of this letter is the law of 410 (*Cod. Theod.* 7.16.2): “...sacros apices a domino patruo meo Honorio.” Matthews also found an example from the *Theodosian Code* in which, he argues, “an imperial draftsman” added *divini apices* to a letter of Constantine in order to denote the scriptures (2000, 270-274). Cf. Optatus, *Appendix* 10: “Lectores etiam ecclesiae catholicae et hypodiacones...” and *Cod. Theod.* 16.2.7: “Lectores divinatorum apicum et hypodiaconi ceterique clerici...”

⁴⁷² Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 15: “Haec tibi itaque in hoc agone subeundo praecipua cura sit, hic primus accinctus, internecionis bellum virtute devincere, et adversum diaboli castra in omnia praecepta Dei jurare; nec tantummodo declinare vetita, sed iussa complere.” Rees, trans.

⁴⁷³ e.g. Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 21.2 on fasting with a reference to Ps 35:13, the same passage quoted by Jerome.

⁴⁷⁴ Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 23.1: “Optimum est ergo huic operi matutinum deputari tempus, id est meliorem diei partem, et usque ad horam tertiam animam quotidie in coelesti agone certantem, hoc velut spiritualis quodam palaestrae exerceri gymnasio.” Rees, trans.

⁴⁷⁵ Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 21.1.

⁴⁷⁶ Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 24.4.

exhortation to take up Paul's "armor of God."⁴⁷⁷ "And since it is possible even for women to triumph in this war," Pelagius explained, "take up these weapons of Paul's and look forward to certain victory with so great a leader to urge you on."⁴⁷⁸ The tone of such passages is triumphalist, but Pelagius clearly focused on self-denial and endurance.⁴⁷⁹

Another extant letter to Demetrias, the so-called *Epistula ad Demetriadem de vera humilitate*, was probably written in the 330s or 340s, perhaps by Prosper of Aquitaine.⁴⁸⁰ Like Jerome and Pelagius, Prosper presented his letter as a response to a request for spiritual guidance, and we can usefully view him as engaging in an epistolary game of social influence and competition with his literary predecessors. Accordingly, Demetrias' struggles receive similar military portrayals. Struggles with lust and pride are martial in character,⁴⁸¹ and the only defense against such sins is life devoted to Christ:

⁴⁷⁷ Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 25.2: "Qui cum terribiles diaboli potestates principatusque describat, nos nihilominus hortatur ad pugnam, hostiumque vim pandit, ut augeat sollicitudinem militum. Non enim vult nos esse timidos, sed paratos; denique non fugam suadet, sed arma suggerit. Propterea, inquit, accipite arma Dei, ut possitis resistere in die malo, et in omnibus perfecti stare. Ac statim instrumenta singula spiritualis pugnae tradens, addidit et dixit, State ergo succincti lumbos vestros in veritate, et induti lorica iustitiae, et calceati pedes in praeparatione Evangelii pacis; in omnibus assumentes scutum fidei, in quo possitis omnia tela nequissimi ignea exstinguere; et galeam salutis assumite, et gladium spiritus, quod est verbum Dei, per omnem orationem et obsecrationem." Cf. Eph 6:11-18.

⁴⁷⁸ Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 25.3: "Et quoniam de hoc bello licet etiam feminis triumphare, suscipe haec arma Pauli, et tanti hortatione ducis certam praesume victoriam." Rees, trans. James ("beatus quoque Iacobus ille Christi miles emeritus...") also joined Demetrias in the battle.

⁴⁷⁹ Pel. *Epist. ad Dem.* 27.3: "Excitandus est enim spiritualibus stimulis semper animus, et maiore quotidie ardore renovandus. Orationis instantia, illuminatio lectionis, sollicitudo vigiliarum, et diurna et nocturna ejus incitamenta sunt." Cf. 26.3.

⁴⁸⁰ Ps. Leo M. *Humil.* The case for Prosper's authorship is laid out by Krabbe 1965, 47-92 on the basis of the text's similarities to his *De vocatione omnium gentium*, its theology, its use of scripture, and its style and rhythm.

⁴⁸¹ Ps. Leo M. *Humil.* 16: "Si ergo omnia quae ad vitam et pietatem pertinent Deus nobis divina sua virtute donavit, nihil magis fugiendum est quam appetitus huius concupiscentiae quae virtutem negat divini operis amore propriae dignitatis." 17: "Huic autem malo firmissimum bonum humilitatis occurrit, quam ideo diximus veram quia omnium virtutum inexpugnabilis fortitudo et quaedam suorum est vita membrorum."

If every Christian soul ought to be fortified by this steadfast fidelity, because all have received the sacrament of mystical marriage, whatever their vocation in life, how much more should the dignity of your person be armed with the protection of this virtue, because the magnificent gifts which God's grace has bestowed on you afford you manifold matter for glorifying.⁴⁸²

Demetrias must remain vigilant, lest she be overpowered by the power of vainglory. Writing several decades after Jerome and Augustine's fulminations against Pelagius, we can assume that Prosper wanted to situate himself on the "right side" in a perceived epistolary duel, and befitting the martial motifs of his predecessors, he nestled a challenge to Pelagius' doctrines in an excursus on the devil's use of pride. Many ascetics, through their vigilance and steadfastness, had "crucified their flesh with its passions and desires and gained mastery over all enticing allurements."⁴⁸³ But Prosper outlined a new threat:

With what line of attack could the devil assail such staunch firmness and such a sublime resolve? His only hope was to instill the desire for praise in those whom he could not win over to the love of sin, using this temptation as his last resort and drawing it from the same source as his first ruinous deception...Those whom he could not move by direct assault, he brought down by pride. The more illustrious their merits, the more suitable he found them for his snares. He sought out those who were well-established in the paradise of the Church and enjoyed the abundant delights of virtue, inciting them to confidence in their free will, urging them to ascribe their progress to themselves and to extend a presumptuous hand to the forbidden tree of their own liberty...The serpent with his counsels did find some men whom he could pour the poison of his teaching and whose tongues he could equip with the tricks of specious reasoning.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸² Ps. Leo M. *Humil.* 18: "si autem quaelibet anima christiana huius debet continentiae soliditate muniri, quia omnes nuptiale sacramentum in quocumque vocationis suae ordine suceperunt, quanto magis personae tuae dignitatis praesidio huius virtutis aranda est, cui de opulentissimis gratiae Dei donis tam multiplex se ingerit materia gloriandi." Krabbe, trans.

⁴⁸³ Ps. Leo M. *Humil.* 10: "Multi enim servientes Deo et in lege eius die ac nocte meditantes crucifixerunt carnem suam cum desideriis et concupiscentiis, omniumque illecebrarum incentiva domuerunt." Krabbe, trans. modified.

⁴⁸⁴ Ps. Leo M. *Humil.* 10: "Tantam itaque firmitatem et tam sublime propositum qua impugnatione diabolus posset adoriri, nisi ut quibus non potuerat persuadere vitiorum amorem immitteret laudis

The ensuing diatribe against Pelagius' doctrines (or Prosper's depiction of them) bears all the hallmarks of Augustine's fulminations against the heresy that we see in the Bishop of Hippo's later writings, including a letter of 417/8 to Juliana, in which he quoted from Pelagius' letter to Demetrias that "these [spiritual] riches, then, which can only come from you and can only exist in you, are rightly to be praised."⁴⁸⁵ To Augustine (and Alypius), "the expression 'which can only come from you' is entirely poisonous," and they strongly advised that the *perniciēs* of the heresy be avoided.⁴⁸⁶ Through his letter, Augustine – still apparently unsure of whether Pelagius had actually sent the letter to Juliana and Proba – drew the battle-lines of a doctrinal debate that was absent or latent in Jerome and Pelagius' missives.⁴⁸⁷ It is this confrontational view of discourse with Demetrias which seems to have informed Prosper's approach, a fusion of Jerome and Pelagius' martial view of virginal commitment with Augustine's criticism of Pelagius' "poisonous" doctrine, aligning both with the soldierly language of asceticism and the commonplaces of heresiological polemic.

That all three of these missives to Demetrias indulged in military language gives some indication of the applicability of the soldierly motif to ascetic women and the different colorings that it could have to suit different rhetorical purposes. In each case,

cupiditatem, et inde novissima instrueretur tentatio unde nocuit prima deceptio?...et quos impulsione non movit, elation deiecit. Quanto enim clariores erant meritis, tanto eos aptiores suis invenit insidiis. In paradiso namque ecclesiae constitutos et virtutum deliciis abundantes, ad confidentiam liberi incitavit arbitrii, ut proventus suos in se constituerent et ad arborem propriae voluntatis manum praesumptionis extenderent...Sed invenerunt quosdam viperina consilia quibus doctrinae suae virus infunderent et quorum linguas per dolos falsae rationis armarent." Krabbe, trans. modified.

⁴⁸⁵ Aug. *Epist.* 188.4; Pel. *Epist. ad Demetr.* 11: "in his ergo iure laudanda, in his merito ceteris praeferenda es, quae nisi ex te et in te esse non possunt." Teske trans., modified.

⁴⁸⁶ Aug. *Epist.* 188.5: "quod uero ait non nisi ex te, hoc omnino uirus est." Translation my own. Cf. Prosper's *viperina consilia* and Augustine's *virus*.

⁴⁸⁷ On the latency of theory in Jerome's letter in comparison to praxis, see Jacobs 2000, 740.

the male voice of our evidence prevents us from seeing the world through Demetrias' eyes, and we cannot know whether she actually thought of herself as a *tiruncula Christi* who was enduring hardship for heavenly glory or fighting off the *viperina consilia* of heresy. It is nevertheless meaningful that Pelagius, Jerome, and Prosper chose to use a woman to think through these issues and to manage their relationships with a preeminent Roman *gens*.⁴⁸⁸ In their eyes, a young noblewoman was an ideal figure to embody the choice between earthly glory – exemplified through, on the one hand, past Anician consuls and, on the other hand, the military disaster of Rome's capture –, and obedience to a heavenly model of military service. For each writer, this was an opportunity to establish themselves as consequential spiritual counsellors in a highly public way, despite the ostensibly private form of each letter.⁴⁸⁹

Many different Christian writers, irrespective of theological argument or ecclesiastical position, used the image of the soldier to motivate loyalty and cultivate influence among church officials and within aristocratic families. This rhetorical strategy extended to women as well, a fact that illustrates the usefulness of imagining the Christian life as a kind of spiritual campaign. The idea of the soldier could encourage a Demetrias even as it offered a framework within which an instructor could lay down

⁴⁸⁸ See Brown 1988, 153, "Throughout this period, Christian men used women 'to think with' in order to verbalize their own nagging concern with the stance that the Church should take to the world. For ancient men tended to regard women as creatures less clearly defined and less securely bounded by the structures that held men in place in society. The woman was a 'gateway.' She was both a weak link and a bridgehead."

⁴⁸⁹ Jerome actually shifts from speaking of Demetrias in the 3rd person to the 2nd person partway through his letter, suggesting that the letter was meant for Juliana and Proba's eyes, if not a much larger audience (although the 2nd person is peppered throughout, in 130.7 ff. it begins to predominate; Jerome explicitly addresses Demetrias in section 15). Whatever the exact relationship between Jerome and Pelagius' letters (I make a case above that Jerome need not have known Pelagius'), it is clear from Aug. *Epist.* 188 that Pelagius' text was circulated publicly. The *Epistula ad Demetriadem de vera humilitate* was clearly aware of Pelagius and Jerome's letters.

rules and principles for living. As this image proliferated, writers actively used the image of the ascetic soldier to wield that influence more assertively and to regulate these individuals' lifestyles and loyalties.

The Use of Soldierly Imagery to Regulate Ascetics

The image of the ascetic soldier of Christ was a popular theme of both hagiographic texts and epistolary rhetoric. In the previous section, I explored how Christian writers used the idea of *militia Christi* as a rhetorical strategy to elicit feelings of comradery and allegiance from their correspondents. Whether for a Pelagius writing to a noble-woman or a Paulinus writing to a decurion, developing the motif of ascetic militancy was a means by which networks of epistolary influence could be established and maintained. The motif was effective both because it accorded with ascetic virtues and due to the associations of military authority and obedience. In many cases, the soldierly image was used to regulate experiments of ascetic living, especially in calls to abstain from sexual activity, live communally, and adhere to hierarchy. Writing of those who fell outside this ideal, Christian leaders took up an invective of deviant banditry. These military missives were not always successful, but to judge ancient letters by such a standard misses the discursive importance of soldierly martial imagery. I argue that its frequent epistolary use suggests a perception of persuasiveness. Also, the coherent logic of the Christian soldiery and its inverse points to the value of the Christian soldiery in structuring an emerging ascetic ideal that could reinforce a writer's own authority.

Celibate Soldiers: Sexual Renunciation and Ascetic Militancy

Writing to the imperial official Caecilian regarding Marcellinus, the former *tribunus et notarius* who had presided over the council of Carthage in 411, Augustine

extolled the many virtues of his late friend and bureaucrat, but also qualified his eulogy of the man.⁴⁹⁰

The bond of his wife was hindering him from leaving behind all secular affairs and taking up the belt of Christian service. He had begun to desire better things when he was already bound by marriage and not permitted to break with those circumstances, although inferior.⁴⁹¹

Note the stark contrast between the different bonds, arranged to be adjacent (“...cingulum militiae christianae, uinculum praepediebat uxorium...”) and to form a pattern of synchysis with *meliora* and *inferiora*. Why did Augustine choose to pick out the *vinculum uxorium* as the one thing standing in the way of Marcellinus being a true soldier of Christ? It was not just that this was the only blemish on his career. There were surely other foibles that Augustine could have mentioned to Caecilian. A close look at other letters reveals a general tendency to associate soldierly martial imagery with sexual renunciation. This pattern had certain definitional qualities – one could delineate who was and was not a true soldier – that could draw on existing ideals associated with the military sphere and it became a popular tool with which to regulate and constrain those who sought to pursue ascetic lifestyles.

It is often said of the later Roman army that, after the reforms of Septimius Severus and the advent of *limitanei*, a greater number of soldiers kept wives.⁴⁹² While

⁴⁹⁰ See *PLRE* 2:711-2: Fl. Marcellinus 10 and *PLRE* 2:244-6: Caecilianus 1.

⁴⁹¹ Aug. *Epist.* 151.8: “ne relictis omnibus saecularibus actionibus suscipere cingulum militiae christianae, uinculum praepediebat uxorium, quo iam innodatus coeperat concupiscere meliora, quando iam non licebat illa quamvis inferiora disrumpere.” Translation my own. For a parallel to this connection between the *cingulum* and the abstemious ideal, see Aug. *Epist.* 220.3: “accinctus balteo castissimae continentiae et inter arma corporalia spiritalibus armis tutius fortiusque munitus” and Cass. *Inst.* 1.1.1-5 and 1.11.1-3 with Smith 2011, 91.

⁴⁹² Severus’ reform was “more a correction of a legal anomaly than an innovation” (Whittaker 1969-70, 1:309n5) as there was already widespread informal marriage among soldiers, evidenced not only in epigraphic and papyrological evidence, but also in some imperial decisions (e.g. *BGU* 140, with a text

this overstates the degree of change, epigraphic and literary evidence largely confirms the trend.⁴⁹³ More important than the *realia* of military families, however, is the position of soldierly marriage in the elite worldview. Although there was evidently an awareness that such unions existed, to the cultured gentleman, steeped in the antiquarian idealization of the past, unmarried soldiers remained the ideal. On the one hand, this romanticized the restored order of the early principate when soldiers were denied the right to marry; on the other hand, the separation of the soldiery from the female sex remained rooted in misogynistic fear of tainting virility through womanly contact.⁴⁹⁴

This derisive attitude toward married soldiers can be seen throughout elite sources from the third and fourth centuries. Herodian himself, our main witness to Septimius Severus' liberalization of marriage laws, was a harsh critic of the lax discipline this brought to the military:

The soldiers too were given a very substantial sum of money and with this many other privileges that they had not had before, such as an increase in pay (which Severus was the first to give), permission to wear a gold ring and the right to live at home with their wives. All these things are usually considered to be inimical to military discipline and to a state of prompt readiness for action. Severus was certainly the first to undermine the tough austerity of their diet, their obedience in face of hardship and their disciplined respect for commanders, by teaching the men to be greedy for riches and seducing them into a life of luxury.⁴⁹⁵

and translation in Phang 2001, 402-3). For a thorough study of the marriage ban in the first three centuries, see Phang 2001, who shows that the rates of marriage varied depending on time, place, and rank.

⁴⁹³ Shaw 1984, 469 notes the evidence for a more “nuclear family emphasis” in soldiers’ funerary commemoration in the west than in the earlier empire, but it is still a lower proportion of the overall sample of military epitaphs than for the entire population (472). For further literary evidence of military wives, see Lee 2007, 151-2. For a brief survey of the issue, see Whately 2015, 285-7 and Sessa 2018, 131-2.

⁴⁹⁴ For a summary of the *topos* of soldiers’ involvement with women as eroding military discipline and the related theme of sexual inversion, see Phang 2001, 361-72.

⁴⁹⁵ Herod. 3.8.4-5: “τοῖς τε στρατιώταις ἐπέδωκε χρήματα πλεῖστα, ἄλλα τε πολλὰ συνεχώρησεν ἃ μὴ πρό τερον εἶχον· καὶ γὰρ τὸ σιτηρέσιον πρῶτος ἠϋξήσεν αὐτοῖς, καὶ δακτυλίοις χρυσοῖς χρήσασθαι ἐπέτρεψε γυναῖξί τε συνοικεῖν, ἅπερ ἅπαντα σωφροσύνης στρατιωτικῆς καὶ τοῦ πρὸς τὸν πόλεμον ἐτοίμου τε καὶ εὐσταλοῦς ἀλλότρια ἐνομίζετο. καὶ πρῶτός γε ἐκεῖνος τὸ πάνυ αὐτῶν ἐρρωμένον καὶ τὸ

In his second oration, Libanius was characteristically scornful towards military-civilian fraternization; women and children detracted from military readiness, as soldiers' pay was divided up and wasted,⁴⁹⁶ but:

This was not the case in those good old days which I commend. Then the officers hankered after glory, not cash, and no one would rob the soldiery of what was theirs. And the men themselves were sturdy and brave, specialists in warfare, and they remained unmarried: it was ensured that they would even have no need of marriage. And the horses on which the cavalry were mounted were a fine sight for our folk to see, and a fearsome one for the foe, and there was peace, and the barbarians counselled themselves to keep it.⁴⁹⁷

The orator was clearly exaggerating the degeneracy of the army for rhetorical effect.⁴⁹⁸

The entire oration was a defense against the charge that Libanius was wrong to praise the past over the present, and the marriage of soldiers was just another rhetorical cudgel to prove that the ancient army really was better. But this reactionary sentiment was widespread. The antiquarian Vegetius lauded the *antiqua legio* in comparison to the self-indulgent army of the present, and his portrait of the ideal legion left no room for wives or families. Soldiers were to avoid all contact with unseemly social elements, especially those “who handle things pertaining to womanly matters.”⁴⁹⁹ There can be no

σκληρὸν τῆς διαίτης τό τε εὐπειθεὶς πρὸς τοὺς πόνους καὶ εὐτακτον μετ' αἰδοῦς πρὸς ἄρχοντας ἐπ' ἀνέτρεψε, χρημάτων τε ἐπιθυμεῖν διδάξας καὶ μεταγαγὼν ἐς τὸ ἀβροδίατον.” Whittaker, trans.

⁴⁹⁶ Lib. *Or.* 2.37-9.

⁴⁹⁷ Lib. *Or.* 2.40: “ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐν ἐκείνοις τοῖς καιροῖς οὕς ἐπαινῶ, ταῦτα ἦν, ἀλλ' εὐδοξίας μὲν ἀντὶ χρημάτων ἥρων οἱ ἡγούμενοι, τὰ δὲ τῶν στρατιωτῶν οὐδείς ἦν ὁ ἀφαιρησόμενος. οἱ δ' αὐτοὶ καὶ ἰσχυροὶ καὶ ἀνδρεῖοι καὶ τεχνῖται πολέμων καὶ οὐκ ἐγάμουν, ἀλλ' ὅπως μὴδὲ δεῖσονται γάμων, εὖρητο. οἱ δὲ γε ἵπποι φέροντες τοὺς ἱππέας ἡδιστον μὲν <τοῖς> οἰκείους θέαμα, φοβερὸν δὲ τοῖς ἀντιπάλοις, καὶ ἦν εἰρήνη παραινούντων ἑαυτοῖς τῶν βαρβάρων τὴν ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν.” Norman, trans.

⁴⁹⁸ Lee 2007, 149. Cf. Lib. *Or.* 24.5 where he objected to the charge that Julian was defeated because the troops were not sufficiently disciplined or trained.

⁴⁹⁹ Veg. *Mil.* 1.7 provides a list of professions from which soldiers were not to be recruited *or even mingle*: “Piscatores aucupes dulciarios linteones omnesque qui aliquid tractasse uidebuntur ad gynaecea pertinens longe arbitror pellendos a castris; fabros ferrarios carpentarios macellarios et ceruorum aprorumque uenatores conuenit sociare militiae.” (“I judge that fishermen, bird-catchers, confectioners, weavers, and all who seem to handle things pertaining to womanly matters, should be kept far from the camp. Masons,

doubt that Roman soldiers, like most soldiers throughout history, found a wide variety of sexual partners, but at least in elite literary circles, an ideal of separation was common.

The Christian writers of the fourth and fifth centuries who imagined *militia Christi*, then, were steeped in a worldview that idealized a soldiery free from womanly influence. With Paul's famous dictum in mind – “no one in the service is implicated in civilian affairs”⁵⁰⁰ – it is no surprise that these writers described the heavenly soldiery by mirroring attitudes toward secular service that stressed separation from society. We have already seen that hagiographic texts lauded holy men for their withdrawal to the embattled frontiers of the empire to take part in a holy war. By a similar logic, a defining element of the ascetic soldier in these letters was his or her renunciation of any unregulated contact with the opposite sex.

Isidore of Pelusium, himself an ascetic who had withdrawn from social intercourse, extolled the virtues of a heavenly *taxis*, cut off from corrupting sexual influences. In a letter to the *scholastikos* Theodorus regarding marriage and celibacy, the priest refuted the layman's arguments that marriage was natural for man. While it

blacksmiths, carpenters, meat-sellers, and deer and boar hunters it is fitting to associate with military service,” translation my own). I join Charles and Aguilar in taking *gynaecea* to be a reference to womanly professions (Charles 2010, 104-6; Aguilar 2006, 145n34) *contra* scholars who take it to be a reference to state sewing enterprises (Jones 1964, 836; Milner 2011, 7n6; but see also Masterson 2001, 239-240: “the very name of the textile mills provides another effeminizing touch”). I interpret the passage more broadly to indicate the association with these professions (*pellendos a castris...sociare militiae*) rather than merely their recruitment, which is more specifically discussed in the following sentence (“Et hoc est in quo totius reipublicae salus uertitur, ut tirones non tantum corporibus sed etiam animis praestantissimi diligantur”). Although silent on the question of army-wives, in this passage Vegetius excludes *a fortiori* any contamination of the soldiery through spouses. In fact, so free was the ideal soldier to be from social attachments, that Vegetius thought they should give half of their donatives *ad signa*, see Veg. *Mil.* 2.20.

⁵⁰⁰ 2 Tim 2:3-4, “Συνκακοπάθησον ὡς καλὸς στρατιώτης Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ. οὐδεὶς στρατευόμενος ἐμπλέκεται ταῖς τοῦ βίου πραγματείαις, ἵνα τῷ στρατολογήσαντι, ἀρέσῃ.” Translation my own.

may be true that creatures on earth necessarily couple together for reproduction, Isidore argued, this is not the pattern we see among angels:

Indeed those who have embraced this [marriage] both are and are called “worldly” (*κοσμικοὶ*), but the genuine lovers of virginity are enrolled among the worthy battalions of angels (for the Song of Songs says that they are “marvelous like battalions”⁵⁰¹). For among them, nothing is disordered or irregular, but everything is ordered in rank, rhythm, and harmony.⁵⁰²

The association between celibacy and heavenly *taxis* suggests that Isidore saw a connection between his own ascetic practice and the abstract spiritual war which he often described. It was the rigor of the spiritual life that endowed him with authority, not any office or position of power, and this is the position that he explicitly adopted in letters. He urged the *clarissimus* Dorotheus not to “characterize those who live virtuously and attain the very holy life of the priesthood with difficulty and at the price of many struggles the same as those who hurriedly threw themselves into it.”⁵⁰³ Through withdrawal from society, Isidore ironically gained more social clout than he had possessed as a *didaskalos*,⁵⁰⁴ and he depicted the sexual separation of the ascetic soldier as part of a more orderly and prestigious spiritual life.

This military dimension of ascetic continence was manifestly displayed in Jerome’s letter to Eustochium. Written early in his career and hailed as an ascetic handbook in his letter to Demetrias, the letter laid out a picture of the ideal virgin, noble

⁵⁰¹ *Song of Songs* 6:4, “καλὴ εἴ ἡ πλησίον μου ὡς εὐδοκία ὡραία ὡς Ἱερουσαλὴμ θάμβος ὡς τεταγμένοι”

⁵⁰² Is. Pel. *Ep.* 1778, “Κοσμικοὶ γοῦν καὶ εἰσὶ καὶ καλοῦνται οἱ τοῦτον ἀσπασάμενοι, οἱ δὲ τῆς παρθενίας γνήσιοι ἐρασταὶ εἰς τὰς τῶν ἀγγέλων τεταγμένους ἐνεγράφησαν ἀξίας (λέγει γὰρ τὸ Ἄισμα τὸ μυστικὸν θάμβος αὐτοῖς προσεῖναι ὡς τεταγμένοι) · οὐδὲν γὰρ παρ’ ἐκείνοις ἄτακτον οὐδὲ ἀνόμαλον, ἀλλὰ πάντα τάξει καὶ ῥυθμῷ καὶ ἀρμονίᾳ κεκόσμηται.” Translation my own.

⁵⁰³ Is. Pel. *Ep.* 1742, “Μὴ τοὺς μόλις καὶ διὰ μυρίων ἀγώνων ἀρετὴν κατορθώσαντας καὶ εἰς τὴν εὐαγεστάτην ἱερωσύνην τελέσαντας, ἀπὸ τῶν ἐξ ἐπιδρομῆς ἐπιτηδημσάντων αὐτῇ χαρακτῆριζε.” Translation my own.

⁵⁰⁴ Evieux 1998, 153.

and unyielding, starkly contrasted with the dissolute maidens who feigned holiness but lived in sinful luxury.⁵⁰⁵ Like in his letter to Demetrias, Jerome depicted a violent struggle between the virgin and the lusts of the flesh.⁵⁰⁶ The connection between abstinence and martial valor was unmistakable. After extensive discussion of the dangers of food and wine,⁵⁰⁷ Jerome moved on to objections to virginity, and he used the military motif to support his belief that marriage was incompatible with the most holy life:

So also God richly bestowed the gift of virginity on women, because it began with a woman [Mary]...Then Judith, a virgin, beheaded Holofernes. Then Haman...was burned in his own fire. Then James and John left their father, nets, and boat and followed the savior, leaving behind familial affections, earthly bonds, and household cares. Then it was first heard: "He who wants to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." For no soldier goes to battle with a wife.⁵⁰⁸

Here Jerome explicitly applies the principle that the soldier should be separated from spouse to explain the virtues of virginity. Remaining with the one true *sponsus*, Christ, offered the surest path for Eustochium and her comrades to avoid the ambushes of the devil.

This is not to say that writers thought soldiers in the real world were celibate.

The mismatch between the realities and the ideals of soldierly service presented writers

⁵⁰⁵ Hier. *Epist.* 22.13-4.

⁵⁰⁶ Hier. *Epist.* 22.4.

⁵⁰⁷ Hier. *Epist.* 22. 13-8.

⁵⁰⁸ Hier. *Epist.* 22.21: "Ideoque et ditius virginitatis donum fluxit in feminas, quia coepit a femina. Statim ut filius Dei ingressus est super terram, novam sibi familiam instituit, ut qui ab angelis adorabatur in coelo, haberet Angelos et in terris. Tunc Holofernis caput, Judith continens amputavit. Tunc Aman, qui interpretatur iniquitas, suo combustus est igni. Tunc Jacobus et Joannes relicto patre, rete, navicula, secuti sunt Salvatorem; affectum sanguinis et vincula saeculi, et curam domus pariter relinquentes. Tunc primum auditum est: 'Qui vult venire post me, abneget semetipsum: et tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me.' Nemo enim miles cum uxore pergit ad praelium. Discipulo ad sepulturam patris ire cupienti, non permittitur." Translation my own.

with an opportunity to choose features of the martial domain that could suit their rhetorical case. In a rebuke of the monk and former soldier Heliodorus, Jerome contrasted the dissolute lifestyle of a real warrior with the lifelong discipline of a *miles Christi*.⁵⁰⁹ The mismatch of the imagery elevated the target of the metaphor (*militia caelestis*) over its source (*militia armata*). Sulpicius Severus, on the other hand, elided the realities of soldierly cohabitation to make a different point. In one of his *Dialogues*, a man renounced his military service and, along with his wife, swore ascetic *sacramenta militiae*. When the man became bothered that Severus had separated the two of them and prevented their reunion, Severus asked if he had ever seen a woman arrayed in battle. The ex-soldier was chastened and left “giving thanks that he had not been permitted to remain in his error for he was won over not by a harsh criticism but by a true and rational comparison to the character of the soldier.”⁵¹⁰ Unlike Jerome, Severus chose to hold up an aspect of the military sphere devoid of women to serve his didactic point. In this way, the purportedly “true and rational comparison” between ideals of the martial and ascetic spheres could lend internal consistency to the ascetic programs of such writers, even if such comparisons were more rhetorical than realistic.

An Ordered Army: Soldierly Patterns of Communal Living and Obedience

In addition to justifying renunciation and separation from earthly affairs, epitomized through sexual abstinence, the idea of the soldierly ascetic was used in letters to promote a communal life rooted in an egalitarian *esprit de corps* and structured

⁵⁰⁹ Hier. *Epist.* 14.4 with Smith 2011, 83.

⁵¹⁰ Sulp. Sev. *Dial.* 2.11: “Tunc demum miles confusus erubuit, gratias agens, errori suo se non fuisse permissum, nec aspera increpatione verborum, sed vera et rationabili secundum personam militis comparatione correctum.” Translation my own.

around routine work, scriptural study, and adherence to authority. Despite its individualized portrait of the virgin's struggle, Jerome's letter also laid out the virtue of likeminded *comites* and leaders for Eustochium.⁵¹¹ We should not mistake this quasi-martial vision of the ascetic community for an ideal of blind obedience or authoritarian hierarchy.⁵¹² The application of the military metaphor was subtler than that. It reached into notions of how soldiers were to live and work for a common purpose, uniting ideologies of military discipline and soldierly humility.⁵¹³ In adopting this pose, Christian writers like Augustine and Jerome were nuancing the old portrait of the holy man, locked in battle with demons and thoughts, by adding a communal dimension. This brought greater emphasis to the soldierly aspects of the ascetic's life that were always visible in hagiography – separation from society, fixity, regimen, and obedience – and made them the central part of a campaign at ascetic regulation.

Writing in about 412 to a certain Rusticus,⁵¹⁴ an ascetic devotee, Jerome took a harsh stance towards the anchoretic heroes of hagiography:

I want soldiers to march out of monastery training⁵¹⁵ who are of this sort: whom the rudiments do not frighten, who have given proof of their association over a long time, who were the least of all, so that they may become the first of all, whom neither hunger nor satiety has ever overcome, who delight in poverty, whose habit, speech, appearance, and gait is the doctrine of virtues, who do not know, like some foolish men,

⁵¹¹ Hier. *Epist.* 22.29, 35.

⁵¹² Markus 1990, 162-4.

⁵¹³ See, e.g. Rousseau on the routines of the Pachomian *koinonia*: "...the monks in each house lined up to be led away to their place of work by their *praepositi*... The lining up and leading off seems regimental" (1985, 82). See also Kelly 2004, 239.

⁵¹⁴ Kelly 1975, 297n7: "This Rusticus is not the recipient of *Letter* 122...but is probably the one who later became bishop of Narbonne and to whom Leo the Great addressed his *Ep.* 92."

⁵¹⁵ The Latin – *ludo monasteriorum* – clearly calls to mind the ascetic and academic training that Jerome associated with cenobitic regimes (thus, Cain translates "monastic academies" (2009, 157)), but there could also be quasi-military associations of the word, as was for instance the case with the *ludus magnus* near the Colosseum or expressions such as *ludus militaris* (Liv. 7.33.1). Such associations could be activated by the cluster of martial vocabulary at the end of the clause (*egredi milites*) and the choice of *rudimenta* in the next sentence, another word with dual academic and military valences (*L&S* s.v.).

how to invent portents of demons fighting against them in order to make a miracle of themselves among the uneducated rabble and then turn a profit.⁵¹⁶

At first blush, this statement would seem to be at odds with Jerome's other literary projects. Not only were the men of his *Lives* the kind of exaggerated heroes about which he seems to have been complaining,⁵¹⁷ but he elsewhere took pains to stress his own abstemious and lonely forays into the desert. Nevertheless, there was a difference between promoting an ascetic paragon and trying to take on the role of instructor. In this letter to Rusticus, Jerome was advising a recruit of his soldierly duties. Instead of encouraging a solitary struggle, Jerome urged Rusticus to learn in a cenobitic context, "the *contubernium* of the holy," separated from the bothersome city, but still buttressed by the support of other like-minded ascetics.⁵¹⁸ Only by embodying the collective virtues of the *monasterium* could Jerome's pupil become a true soldier. This required a respect for the community:

so that you are not a soldier before a recruit, a teacher before a student. It does not befit my humility and modesty to judge others and speak ill of the ministers of the church. Let them have their own order and rank. If you should ever hold such a position, my book for Nepotianus can teach you how you must live.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁶ Hier. *Epist.* 125.9.3: "Sed de ludo monasteriorum huiusce modi volumus egredi milites, quos rudimenta non terreant, qui specimen conversationis suae multo tempore dederint, qui omnium fuerunt minimi, ut primi omnium fierent, quos nec esuries nec saturitas aliquando superavit, qui paupertate laetantur, quorum habitus, sermo, vultus, incessus, doctrina virtutum est, qui nesciunt secundum quosdam ineptos homines daemonum obpugnantium contra se portenta confingere, ut apud inperitos et vulgi homines miraculum sui faciant et exinde sectentur lucra." Translation my own.

⁵¹⁷ This irony is pointed out by Cain, 157n7: "Jerome's ridiculing of Sulpicius (and Martin) for inventing stories about struggles with demons could easily have been turned around on himself, for in his *V. Hilar.* 4-12 he glamorizes Hilarion's battles with demons."

⁵¹⁸ Hier. *Epist.* 125.9.1: "mihi placet, ut habeas sanctorum contubernium nec ipse te doceas et absque doctore ingrediariis viam, quam numquam ingressus es..." Bothersome city, *Epist.* 125.8: "Mihi oppidum carcer est, et solitudo paradisus. Quid desideramus urbium frequentiam, qui de singularitate censemur? Moyses ut praecisset populo Iudaeorum, quadraginta annis eruditur in heremo."

⁵¹⁹ Hier. *Epist.* 125.8: "ne miles antequam tiro, ne prius magister sis, quam discipulus. Non est humilitatis meae, neque mensurae, iudicare de ceteris, et de ministris ecclesiarum sinistram quippiam dicere. Habeant illi ordinem et gradus suum, quem si tenueris, quomodo tibi in eo vivendum sit, editus ad Nepotianum

If Rusticus disciplined himself according to Jerome's prescriptions – dwelling in a community, separating himself from women and urban luxuries, reading and praying vigilantly, and remaining obedient to a superior⁵²⁰ – Rusticus could one day rise in the ranks. The alternative was perilous. In a parallel passage, Jerome admonished Demetrias to seek communal support rather than a solitary life, for the solitary ascetic might arm her tongue against the clergy and fight for ridiculous ideas.⁵²¹

This image of the soldier suited an ascetic ideal whose fundamental principles were “social isolation and economic self-sufficiency.”⁵²² Augustine promoted a similar ideal in his *De opere monachorum*, a treatise written for the bishop Aurelius around 401 to answer the question of whether monks must work. The bishop of Hippo lambasted the wandering and begging ascetics who did not live cenobitically, and pointedly turned to address monks:

Oh slaves of God, soldiers of Christ, in this way you avoid the ambushes of the most cunning enemy, who has dispersed so many pretend monks seeking to obscure with their own foulness your good repute, the scent of Christ so good that the righteous should say, ‘we will run after the scent of your ointment’ and thus avoid his traps...⁵²³

liber docere te poterit. Nunc monachi incunabula moresque discutimus, et eius monachi, qui liberalibus studiis eruditus in adolescentia, iugum Christi collo suo inposuit.” Translation my own.

⁵²⁰ Hier. *Epist.* 125.15, where the logic of an ordered community with a single head draws on ecclesiastical, nautical, economic, and military examples.

⁵²¹ Hier. *Epist.* 130.17

⁵²² Quotation from Caner 2002, 12.

⁵²³ Aug. *De op. mon.* 36: “o serui dei, milites Christi, itane dissimulatis callidissimi hostis insidias, qui bonam famam uestram, tam bonum Christi odorem, ne dicant animae bonae: ‘post odorem ungentorum tuorum curremus,’ et sic laqueos eius euadant, omni modo cupiens obscurare putoribus suis, tam multos hypocritas sub habitu monachorum usquequaque dispersit...” Translation my own. The reference is to Song 1:3 (see Weber & Gryson 2007, *app. crit. ad loc.*). Unlike Caner 2002, 2n1 and Muldowney 1952, 384, I accept the reading *cupientes* rather than *cupiens*.

One might dismiss this as a passing reference to *militia Christi*, a favored motif of address to ascetics in fourth century authors ranging from Aphrahat to Ambrose,⁵²⁴ but outside of this martial passage, Augustine's treatise is replete with analogies to military service and citations of scripture to reinforce his call to domesticate soldierly monks. Augustine used the model of the soldier to ground his argument for a communitarian ideal of ascetic renunciation. The model was supple enough to support his main arguments without undermining the respectability of a social order where status and hierarchy were still important. All who come to the monastery become one body and share their property like the community of Acts 4, for "there is one polity of all Christians,"⁵²⁵ but the wealthy can, if they like, avoid manual labor and instead, take up the responsibilities of "vigilant administration."⁵²⁶ This distinction was drawn explicitly in terms of *militia christiana*:

But the majority who enter the monastery spent their lives in manual labor before joining that holy community, because they are also the majority of the human race itself. If they do not want to work, they should not eat. You see, in Christian *militia* the rich are not humiliated to piety so that the poor may be raised to pride. For it is not at all fitting that in the life where the senators become laborious, there the workmen should be at leisure, nor is it right that peasants should become luxurious in the same place where former gentleman come having left aside their luxuries.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁴ Aphr. *Dem.* 6 and Ambr. *Off.* 1.218.

⁵²⁵ Aug. *De op. mon.* 33: "omnium enim christianorum una res publica est." Translation my own.

⁵²⁶ Aug. *De op. mon.* 33: "tamen, si et ipsi manibus operentur, ut pigris ex uita humiliore et ob hoc exercitatio uenientibus auferant excusationem, multo misericordius agunt, quam cum omnia sua indigentibus diuiserunt. quod quidem si nolint, quis audeat cogere? quibus tamen inuenienda sunt opera in monasterio etiamsi a corporali functione liberiora, sed uigilanti administratione curanda, ut nec ipsi panem suum, quoniam communis iam factus est, gratis manducent." Translation my own.

⁵²⁷ Aug. *De op. mon.* 33: "illi autem, qui etiam praeter istam sanctam societatem uitam labore corporis transigebant, ex quorum numero plures ad monasteria ueniunt, quia et in ipso humano genere plures sunt, si nolunt operari, nec manducent. neque enim propterea christiana militia ad pietatem diuites humiliantur, ut pauperes ad superbiam extollantur. nullo modo enim decet, ut in ea uita, ubi senatores fiunt laboriosi, ibi fiant opifices otiosi, et quo ueniunt relictis deliciis suis qui fuerant praediorum domini, ibi sint rustici delicati." Translation my own.

In this passage, we can glimpse the tension between radical aspects of cenobitic living and the traditional low regard for manual labor.⁵²⁸ But work could be self-denying, whether manual or spiritual, and Augustine pointed to Timothy, whom Paul called to be “a good soldier of Christ” despite his own weakness, as an example of someone who could serve the church “as a soldier fighting for provincials.”⁵²⁹ Martial metaphor was a way that Augustine could smooth out the disjunction between a status-conscious society and an ascetic community of one mind. Soldierly imagery ennobled ascetic labor, for all were working toward a common goal, even if distinctions continued to exist.

Deviant Deserters: The Inversion of the Soldierly Ascetic

Just as the depiction of the good soldier was essential to attempts to set up a positive ideal with which to regulate ascetic practice, so too could the wayward bandit form the inverse of that image to chastise or castigate opponents. As we have seen, the rhetorical use of *militia Christi* to standardize sexual renunciation and adherence to a fixed routine in a cenobitic context drew on existing soldierly ideals, namely the unwed and disciplined soldier, providing mutual support to his comrades. Likewise the inverse of that image, the deserter or brigand, relied on a complex of social distinctions, a fundamental part of which was connected to the idea of *latrocinium* as a withdrawal beyond the law and society.⁵³⁰ As with other examples of spiritual rebuke – such as the

⁵²⁸ On Augustine’s radical reappraisal of physical labor, see MacCormack 2001, 225-6.

⁵²⁹ Aug. *De op. mon.* 16: “Fecit ita securum castum evangelistam, non ad hoc evangelizantem ut venderet Evangelium, sed tamen huic vitae necessaria suis sibi exhibere manibus non valentem; ut intelligeret, quod necessarium sibi sumebat ab eis quibus tanquam provincialibus militabat, et quos tanquam vineam cultura exercebat vel tanquam gregem pascebat, non esse mendicitatem, sed potestatem.” Cf. 2 Tim 2:3-5, referenced earlier in the passage.

⁵³⁰ Shaw 1984, 50: “As we have attempted to show, the type is embedded in this literature not because it is mindlessly derivative of popular belief or for the sake of public entertainment, but because the image

calls to soldiers to abandon military service which we encountered in the last chapter – this was a carefully deployed epistolary stratagem that did not necessarily correspond to reality. It was, nevertheless, part of a wider debate over the proper ascetic lifestyle in the fourth and fifth centuries. The ideal of the ascetic soldier and its inverse, the deviant deserter, was a way that writers could try to regulate and impose a hegemonic ascetic ideal in the period.

This negative model is most easily seen in ancient typologies of monks that occur in letters and treatises. In Jerome’s celebrated letter to Eustochium, already mentioned, he listed three kinds of monks: cenobites, anchorites, and “remnuoth,” dissolute monks who live in twos or threes.⁵³¹ Jerome positioned these deviants within “towns and fortresses.”⁵³² They often quarrel, worry about outward appearance, and act indulgently. Instead of “remnuoth,” Cassian described “sarabaites” – pretend cenobites who seek luxury but could be driven by necessity –,⁵³³ and he added a fourth unnamed kind of monk, dubbed *gyrovagi* in later texts, who broke away from their masters in cenobitic monasteries.⁵³⁴ While the distinctions of the *genera monachorum* would evolve into an important part of subsequent tradition,⁵³⁵ for each of these writers, the bad type was a dark reflection of the ideal: wicked enough to stand out as a negative *exemplum* while close enough to the cenobitic soldier to make the dangers of falling

of the bandit was a useful one that could be exploited in contrasting just and unjust ideals of power within the ruling class itself.”

⁵³¹ Hier. *Epist.* 22.34.

⁵³² Hier. *Epist.* 22.34, “Habitant autem quam plurimum in urbibus et castellis.”

⁵³³ Cassian. *Conl.* 18.6-7.

⁵³⁴ Cassian. *Conl.* 18.8.

⁵³⁵ *Remnuoth* appears to drop off in later *regulae* as opposed to *sarabaites* (*RE* 27.13-18, *RM* 1, *RB* 1), both of which may originally have come from the same Coptic root, *auāet* (company) (Fry 1981, 318n39). Cassian’s fourth category became glossed as *gyrovagi* (presumably from γῦρος and *vagus*) in these *regulae* as well. For the relationship between the *RE* and *RM*, see Leyser 2000, 108-18.

away seem all the more pressing. While to both Cassian and Jerome the anchoritic life could be righteous, it proceeded from a cenobitic context and was in some sense a subordinate category. Both assigned cenobites priority. Jerome wrote that holy hermits “go from the monasteries into the deserts,” and Cassian asserted that the cenobites came first chronologically.⁵³⁶ For both writers, the communal form of asceticism was the most secure and disciplined community; we might even suspect legionary inspiration in Cassian’s allusions to cohorts and centurions or in Jerome’s orderly portrait of cenobitic decades and centuries.⁵³⁷ The *remnuoth* and *sarabaites*, however, lived in unstructured and irregular units. Although they could be fortified like a Hypatius or Antony, they commingled with women and townspeople under the authority of no superior. The *gyrovagi* deserted their own monasteries for a dissolute path of pleasure, an inversion of the anchoritic warriors who deliberately sallied forth from their communities for a life of struggle in the desert.

⁵³⁶ Hier. *Epist.* 22.36: “qui et de Coenobiis exeuntes, excepto pane et sale, ad deserta nihil perferunt amplius. Hujus vitae auctor Paulus, illustrator Antonius: et ut ad superiora conscendam, princeps Joannes Baptista fuit.” Cassian. *Conl.* 18.5.

⁵³⁷ Cass. *Conl.* 7.5 with Smith 2011, 90-2; Hier. *Epist.* 22.35 presents monks in 10 units of 10 (each with its own head) grouped together under the head of the hundredth: “Divisi sunt per decurias atque centurias, ita ut novem hominibus decimus praesit. Et rursus decem praepositos sub se centesimus habeat.” While we might question Jerome’s knowledge of technical military organization, a decimal organizational scheme might have seemed particularly elegant, and it was not far from Vegetius’ description of current practice, in which a *decanus* or *caput contubernii* was in charge of a group of ten other men (Veg. *Mil.* 2.8). For all his military knowledge, Vegetius’ ahistorical depiction of a legion is a jumble of anachronism, current practice, administrative ranks, and creative etymology (Veg. *Mil.* 2.8-end; Milner 2011, xviii and commentary *ad loc.*; and Baatz 1994, 78 for the unreliability of Vegetius’ numbers), and his *centenarius* at the head of each century was probably Vegetius’ own etymologizing invention (Milner 2011, 41n1). There is also a potential administrative analogy between Jerome’s *decani* and *centesimi* and administrative *decani* and *centenarii*. Whatever the case, Jerome’s monastic units, like Vegetius’ legion or Asclepiodotus’ army (Asclep. 2.7-10), were not historical but drawn up on paper to match a mathematical ideal, one which, in Jerome’s case, was not actually thoroughly executed. His larger unit would have actually required 101 men, not 100, unless we emend the second clause (“et rursus <novem> praepositos sub se centesimus habeat”), which would still require us to assume that the *centesimus* would have had, in addition to his nine *decani*, his own unit of 9 regular monks, a kind of top tier *decuria*.

This emergent taxonomy was not universally accepted,⁵³⁸ and it does not seem that the categories of *remnuoth*, *sarabaites*, and *gyrovagi* were widely used. Still, the image of the wayward ascetic was an important tool of epistolary discourse, a way of chastising and correcting monks, independently from Jerome and Cassian's categories. In a letter to Gregory,⁵³⁹ Basil painted a scandalous picture of his deacon Glycerius who had gathered together a "captive band" (*αἰχμαλωσία*) of virgins:

When he was appointed deacon, he shirked his work as if it did not exist at all, and having gathered together some wretched maidens with his own property and authority, some rushing to join him willingly (I know the temerity of the young in such things) and some unwillingly, he endeavored to lead the band. And taking the name and bearing of 'patriarch', he immediately put on airs, not out of any obedience or piety, but because he preferred this manner of life, as some prefer their own.⁵⁴⁰

The cleric neither bore the burden of his labor, nor did he heed his superiors, but he made himself a huckster, even going so far as "training other young men in his rebellion."⁵⁴¹ The vague sense of organized mutiny in Basil's letter then turns more vivid: "He now contrives a very daring and aberrant thing, having robbed as many virgins from us two as possible and waited for nightfall, he becomes a deserter."⁵⁴²

⁵³⁸ The early fifth-century anonymous *Consultationes Zacchaei et Apollonii* (3.3.1-15) praised monks who dwell in informal groups within cities. Caner uses this example to note the divergent ascetic traditions which he treats in his book (2002, 11-12).

⁵³⁹ Basil. *Epist.* 169. Perhaps to Gregory of Nyssa or, most probably, Nazianzus. *Epist.* 169-171 all date to around 374 (DeFerrari 1926-34, 2:438-9n1; Courtonne 1957-66, 2:104-6).

⁵⁴⁰ Basil. *Epist.* 169: "ἐπεὶ δὲ κατέστη, τοῦ μὲν ἔργου ἡμέλησε τοσοῦτον ὅσον οὐδὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν γεγονότος· παρθένους δὲ ἀθλίας συναγαγὼν κατ' ἰδίαν ἐξουσίαν καὶ αὐθεντίαν, τὰς μὲν ἐκούσας προσδραμούσας αὐτῷ (οἶσθα δὲ τὸ τῶν νέων περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πρόχειρον), τὰς δὲ ἀκούσας ἀγελαρχεῖν ἐπεχείρησε, καὶ πατριαρχίας ὄνομα ἑαυτῷ καὶ σχῆμα περιθεῖς, ἐξαίφνης ἐσοβαρεύσατο, οὐκ ἔκ τινος ἀκολουθίας καὶ εὐσεβείας ἐπὶ τοῦτο ἐλθὼν, ἀλλ' ἀφορμὴν βίου ταύτην ὥσπερ ἄλλος τινὰ προστησάμενος." Translation my own.

⁵⁴¹ Basil. *Epist.* 169: "καὶ γὰρ καὶ τοὺς νέους ἐγύμναζεν εἰς τὴν αὐτὴν ἀπόνοιαν." Translation my own. I have opted to translate *ἀπόνοια* as "rebellion" to capture the psychological and moral valences (desperation, madness, folly) as well as the political and military (*LSJ*, s.v.).

⁵⁴² Basil. *Epist.* 169: "πρᾶγμα διανοεῖται λίαν τολμηρὸν καὶ ἀπάνθρωπον. συλήσας νῶν παρθένων ὅσας ἡδύνατο, καὶ νύκτα τηρήσας, δραπετὴς γίνεται." Translation my own. δραπετὴς can of course also mean

Glycerius and his “band of robbers” (ληστρικὸν σύνταγμα) disrupted and flouted the institutions of both *polis* and *oikos*, interrupting a festival and mocking parents who came looking for their children.

Even as he urged his fellow bishop to bring back Glycerius or depose him from the service (*ὑπηρεσία*), Basil wrote a second missive for Glycerius himself.⁵⁴³ The letter was short and blunt:

How far have you lost all sense of duty, and gone out of your mind, rousing commotion and shaming the common corps of monks? Return, then, trusting in God and us who imitate his mercy. For although I have chastized as a father, I will also forgive as a father. This will also be the case for you, since many others are supplicants on your behalf, especially your priest, whose gray hair and good heart I revere. But if you remain far from us, having fallen completely from your rank, you will also fall away from God, with your songs and trappings with which you lead your maidens, not to God but to damnation.⁵⁴⁴

Here, we learn that Glycerius, or at any rate his followers, were “monks” (μονασταί),⁵⁴⁵ and the language calls to mind the quasi-military ideal of clerical order, “the common corps of monks” (τὸ κοινὸν τάγμα τῶν μοναστῶν) in which Glycerius held a “rank” (βαθμός).⁵⁴⁶ Taken together with the letter to Gregory, this seems to be a strategy of policing a subordinate through a negative monastic ideal. At least initially, he may not

“fugitive” without any specifically martial connotation, but “deserter” more aptly captures the imagined move away from organized society.

⁵⁴³ Basil. *Epist.* 170.

⁵⁴⁴ Basil. *Epist.* 170: “Μέχρι τίνος ἀπονοῇ, καὶ κακῶς μὲν βουλευῇ περὶ σεαυτοῦ, κινεῖς δὲ ἡμᾶς, αἰσχύνεις δὲ τὸ κοινὸν τάγμα τῶν μοναστῶν; ἐπ’ἀνελθε οὖν τῷ Θεῷ θαρρῶν καὶ ἡμῖν, οὗ τὴν φιλανθρωπίαν μιμούμεθα. εἰ γὰρ καὶ πατρικῶς ἐπετιμήσαμεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ συγγνωσόμεθα πατρικῶς. ταῦτά σοι παρ’ ἡμῶν, ἐπειδὴ πολλοὶ τε ἱκετεύουσιν ἄλλοι, καὶ πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων ὁ σὸς πρεσβύτερος, οὗ τὴν πολιὰν αἰδούμεθα καὶ τὴν εὐσπλαγχνίαν. εἰ δὲ μακρύνεις ἄφ’ ἡμῶν, τοῦ βαθμοῦ μὲν πάντως ἐκπέπτωκας, ἐκπεσῇ δὲ καὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ μετὰ τῶν μελῶν σου καὶ τῆς στολῆς, οἷς ἄγεις τὰς νέας, οὐ πρὸς Θεόν, ἀλλ’ εἰς βάραθρον.” Translation my own.

⁵⁴⁵ On the word, see Lampe, s.v. μοναστής.

⁵⁴⁶ For βαθμός, see Lampe, s.v. 3, where the term can refer to ranks in the army or church. Cf. Tim 3:13 for the association between the diaconate and βαθμός: “οἱ γὰρ καλῶς διακονήσαντες βαθμὸν ἑαυτοῖς καλὸν περιποιῶνται καὶ πολλὴν παρρησίαν ἐν πίστει τῇ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.”

have been successful in bringing Glycerius back into the fold, as he sent a second letter to Gregory, once again entreating him to reign in and reunite the wayward band with the body of Christ.⁵⁴⁷

Sometimes, wayward monks vied with earthly soldiers, at least in the pictures painted by epistolographers. In a letter to the deaconess Olympias, John Chrysostom vividly described his encounter at Caesarea with Isaurian brigands and a “rabble of monks – for I must so call them and label their madness with this word.”⁵⁴⁸ So frightening was the mob that even the στρατιῶται of the imperial official (τριβοῦνος) were terrified. Whether these ἐπαρχικοί were soldiers on secondment with the governor of Cappadocia or members of the governor or prefect’s *officium* matters little; the parallel between the ineffectual soldiers of the emperor (real or imagined) and the wild monks is striking. Chrysostom dramatized his daring escape in a litter, and glossed over the end of the story with a reflection on his sins and the praise of God: “does it not seem to you that these sufferings alone, if nothing else had happened, could wipe out many of my sins and furnish for me a great subject for glory?”⁵⁴⁹ Chrysostom was a dutiful soldier of Christ, hiding and sick, and he could describe a successful stand against wayward monks, barbarians, and schemers.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁷ Basil, *Epist.* 171.

⁵⁴⁸ Chrys. *Epist. ad Olymp.* 9.2c (*Epist.* 14): “Ἐν τούτοις τῶν πραγμάτων ὄντων, ἀθρόον ὑπὸ τὴν ἕω δροῦγος μοναζόντων—οὕτω γὰρ δεῖ εἰπεῖν καὶ τῇ λέξει τὴν μανίαν αὐτῶν ἐνδείξασθαι—ἐπέστησαν τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἔνθα ἤμεν, ἀπειλοῦντες αὐτὴν καίειν, ἐμπιμπρᾶν, τὰ ἔσχατα ἡμᾶς διατιθέναι, εἰ μὴ ἐξέλθοιμι.” Translation my own.

⁵⁴⁹ Chrys. *Epist. ad Olymp.* 9.3e (*Epist.* 14): “Οὐ δοκεῖ σοι μόνα ταῦτα τὰ παθήματα, εἰ καὶ μηδὲν μοι ἕτερον συμβεβήκοι, πολλὰ ἡμῶν δύνασθαι διαλύειν τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων καὶ πολλὴν μοι παρέχειν εὐδοκμήσεως.” Translation my own.

⁵⁵⁰ Cf. Chrys. *Ep. Thdr.* 3-4, in which he chastises Theodore for fighting for the wrong master and urges him to consider his mortality with reference to the mortality of the imperial military hierarchy.

Another parallel example from the letters of Augustine shows a similar concern to paint a renegade cleric in a negative light through the negative prototype of the deviant soldier. Following the Council of Carthage in 411, Augustine moved to consolidate Catholic control over Fussala, an outlying town of Hippo, and the events that followed speak both to the difficulty of incorporating Donatist congregations into the church and the violence that could emerge in the process.⁵⁵¹ Augustine gave a dark account of this struggle, in which “the error of the Donatists held the rest of the commoners in great number so wretchedly that in that *castellum* there was not a single Catholic.”⁵⁵² When he sent priests to the town, they were “stripped, cut, maimed, blinded, and slain.”⁵⁵³ In about 415, he summoned his primate and resolved to establish a new bishop over the troubled area, but his first choice declined the invitation, so Augustine turned to Antoninus, a celibate young *lector* who had been raised in this own monastery.⁵⁵⁴ Whether because of Antoninus’ poor character or, as Neil McLynn suggests, due to the difficulties brought on by local notables,⁵⁵⁵ a scandal ensued in which Augustine forced Antoninus to yield his post, but not his rank, and pay restitution to the townspeople, but Antoninus appealed to Boniface, Bishop of Rome. Responding

⁵⁵¹ Aug. *Epist.* 209.2: “Fussala dicitur Hipponiensi territorio confine castellum.” For the Fussala episode as an example of violence following the 411 Council of Carthage, see Hermanowicz 2008, 221.

⁵⁵² Aug. *Epist.* 209.2: “ceteras plebes illic in magna multitudine hominum constitutas Donatistarum error miserabiliter obtinebat ita, ut in eodem castello nullus esset omnino catholicus.”

⁵⁵³ Aug. *Epist.* 209.2: “per quantos labores et pericula nostra, longum est explicare, ita ut ibi presbyteri, qui eis congregandis a nobis primitus constituti sunt, expoliarentur, caederentur, debilitarentur, excaecarentur, occiderentur.”

⁵⁵⁴ Aug. *Epist.* 209.3: “obtuli non petentibus quendam adulescentem Antoninum, qui mecum tunc erat, in monasterio quidem a nobis a paruula aetate nutritum sed praeter lectionis officium nullis clericatus gradibus et laboribus notum”; Aug. *Serm.* 340A.7 (= *Serm. ex coll. Guelf.* 32.7): “denique episcopus uester in nomine Christi, adiutus gratia Christi, filios carnales habere noluit, ut spirituales habeat.” Hill, 301n9: “This, because the lector Antonius was a member of Augustine’s little monastic community of clergy in Hippo Regius.”

⁵⁵⁵ McLynn 2012, 320-1.

to these events, in 422 or 423 Augustine wrote letters appealing to Fabiola, a local woman with influence in Fussala, and Celestine, Boniface's replacement, for aid.⁵⁵⁶

In trying to rally each of these quite different correspondents to his side, in each of these letters Augustine deployed an "image of a bishop/gang-leader,"⁵⁵⁷ a trope clearly related to the inverted martial imagery we have been considering. Not only did Augustine vividly portray the *castellum* of Fussala as a particularly violent place, but he likened the crimes of Antoninus to the abhorrent deeds of a brigand. He recounted to Fabiola the bishop's pillaging and seizure of fields,⁵⁵⁸ and he told Celestine of the accusations of "capital sexual offenses" (*stuprorum crimina capitalia*), "intolerable conquest, rapine, and various grievous seizures"⁵⁵⁹ that precipitated Antoninus' removal. But Antoninus continued, threatening the people with "legal proceedings, public authorities, and military attacks" with more gusto than the emperor's agents punished heretics.⁵⁶⁰

There were more explicit military associations too. In a twist on the soldierly ideal of endurance and self-renunciation, Augustine drew attention to the young man's

⁵⁵⁶ On Fabiola, see Mandouze 1981, 1:380, without reference to the Divjak letter, unpublished at the time.

⁵⁵⁷ Quotation from Lancel 1999, 359 (French) and 2002, 254 (Nevill, trans.): "In a very short time, Antoninus had imposed his features on the figure of *episcopus* or *clericus tyrannicus* that we find outlined in the Church of Africa's conciliar deliberations, also in the image of a bishop/gang-leader ["à l'image aussi l'évêque chef de bande"], equally present in African tradition and illustrated a few years earlier by the Donatist bishop Optat of Timgad."

⁵⁵⁸ Aug. *Epist.* 20*.6: attack and occupation of fields – "quorundam inuadebantur agri et ablatis per aliquot annos fructibus reddebantur; quidam uero eorum usque ad episcopale iudicium retenti atque possessi sunt."

⁵⁵⁹ Aug. *Epist.* 209.4: "...quicquid a castellanis et illius regionis hominibus de intolerabili dominatione, de rapinis et diuersis oppressionibus et contritionibus obiciebatur." Translation my own.

⁵⁶⁰ Aug. *Epist.* 209.9: "iudicia quippe illis et publicas potestates et militares impetus tamquam executuros apostolicae sedis sententiam siue ipse siue rumores creberrimi comminantur, ut miseri homines christiani catholici grauiora formident a catholico episcopo, quam, cum essent haeretici, a catholicorum imperatorum legibus formidabant." Translation my own.

failure to bear his episcopal “soldier’s pack” (*sarcina*).⁵⁶¹ Augustine used this martial metaphor in other letters of chastisement. He called on Maximinus, a Donatist bishop who nevertheless bore the dangerous episcopal *sarcina*, to unite with the Catholics to end “the devil’s triumph,”⁵⁶² and he beseeched Paul, bishop of Cataqua, to honor the bishop’s *sarcina* and reform his life, for “the episcopacy is not the art of living a life of deception.”⁵⁶³ To add to the picture of Antoninus as a fallen soldier, Augustine highlighted his alliance with unseemly renegades:

There was in our monastery a certain former secretary who, much to my distress, did not turn out well. Subjected to a beating by the superior of the monastery because he was found conversing alone with certain nuns at an inappropriate hour, he was considered a scoundrel. He abandoned the monastery, and, as soon as this fellow presented himself to the bishop under discussion, he was ordained a priest by him, without consulting me and without my knowledge...He also created another deacon, following the correct procedure, who was given to him from our monastery, but he was not seen as troublesome until he was a deacon.

⁵⁶¹ Aug. *Epist.* 20*.4: “ingessi ergo tantae sarcinae adolescentem non multo amplius quam uiginti aetatis annos agentem nullis ante gestis clericatus gradibus comprobatum et in his mihi quae de illo prius cognosci oportebat ignotum.” Note how Augustine’s critique of Antoninus’ underlying character is nestled within a self-deprecating admission of error. The conceit of the cleric unready for the burden of the episcopal *sarcina* is found in Augustine’s own letters on his elevation to the episcopacy (*Epist.* 31.4 to Paulinus; cf. *Epist.* 21.1 to Valerius, where his unreadiness is expressed in terms of *militare*: “item nihil esse in hac uita et maxime hoc tempore difficilior, laboriosior, periculosior episcopi aut presbyteri aut diaconi officio, sed apud deum nihil beatius, si eo modo militetur, quo noster imperator iubet.”).

⁵⁶² Aug. *Epist.* 23.5: “si autem placuerit, credimus de misericordia domini, qui timentes sibi displicere et conantes placere numquam deserit, quod inter uos et nos cito pax erit, ne propter honores nostros, de qua sarcina periculosa ratio redditur, miserae plebes credentes in Christum habeant in domibus suis communes cibos et mensam Christi communem habere non possint...hoc tantum scandalum, tantus diaboli triumphus, tanta perniciēs animarum si per tuam modestiam et prudentiam et dilectionem, quam debemus ei, qui pro nobis suum sanguinem fudit, ablata de medio in his regionibus fuerit, quis explicet uerbis, quam tibi palmam praeparet dominus, ut ad cetera membra sananda, quae per totam Africam tabefacta miserabiliter iacent, a te proficiscatur tam imitabile medicinae documentum?” cf. *Epist.* 69.1, in which Augustine says that a Donatist bishop named Maximian gave up his *sarcina*

⁵⁶³ Aug. *Epist.* 85.2: “non est episcopatus artificium transigendae uitae fallacis. docebit te, quod dico, dominus deus, qui tibi interclusit omnes uias, ad quas illo uti uoluisti, ut dirigat te, si intellegas, in illam uiam, propter quam ambulandam tibi tam sancta sarcina inposita est.” Teske, trans. The language in the beginning of the letter presents a grievous alternative to this *sarcina*, one which wounds the church (85.1): “sic enim uulnerasti ecclesiam Hipponiensem, ut, nisi te dominus omnibus curis et sarcinis saecularibus expeditum ad ueram episcopalem uitam uictumque reuocauerit, tale uulnus sanari non possit.” (Teske, trans.: “For you have so wounded the church of Hippo that, unless the Lord delivers you from all your worldly concerns and burdens and calls you back to a genuine episcopal manner of life, such a wound cannot be healed.”)

Anyone whom it would not disgust to read the records can easily learn what evils that town and the surrounding region suffered because of these two clerics, the priest and the deacon, and because of the defender of the church and a certain other man, a former soldier or deserter, to whom he gave orders as friends, and because of those men from the same town whom he made into guards for night watches and whom he used when there was need of a slightly larger number.⁵⁶⁴

This kind of unseemly band of fallen “soldiers,” an *exnotarius* and an *exmiles* or *desertor*, drew an elegant parallel to the inverted soldierly language in the rest of the letter.

Just as in the episode of Basil and Glycerius, we do not know whether Augustine’s missives were successful. The letter to Fabiola indicates the extent of Antoninus’ local support, and, as Henry Chadwick noted, there would have been no need to threaten Celestine with resignation if Augustine had been sure of his position.⁵⁶⁵ That Augustine, writing from this perilous position, was willing to base a critique of a colleague on the image of the deserter shows just how important the image was rhetorically. But it also logically mirrored the importance of endurance and self-denial that were fundamental to the positive image of the ascetic soldier. A version of this idea was the theme of Augustine’s sermon at Antoninus’ ordination in 415, “one of

⁵⁶⁴ Aug. *Epist.* 20*.5-6, Teske, trans.: “erat in monasterio nostro ex notario meo quidam qui me gemente non bonus euaserat et a praeposito monasterii eo quod inuentus fuerit solus hora importuna cum quibusdam sanctimonialibus loquens plagis coercitus contemptibilis habebatur. iste deserto monasterio ad episcopum de quo agimus mox ut se contulit, ab illo presbyter ordinatus est me inconsulto atque nesciente...alium quoque diaconum fecit recto quidem ordine de monasterio sibi datum, sed qui nisi iam diaconus non apparuit inquietus. per hos duos clericos, presbyterum et diaconum, et per ecclesiae defensorem et per quendam alium siue exmitem siue desertorem cui familiaris imperabat et per eos quos eiusdem castelli homines ad nocturnas custodias uigiles fecerat eisque, ubi manu aliqua paulo numerosiore opus fuerat, utebatur, quae mala castellum illud et circumquaque uicina pertulerint, potest utcumque cognoscere quem gesta legere non piguerit.”

⁵⁶⁵ Chadwick 1983, 444. We know nothing of the outcome of the controversy (Lancel 2002, 257), and the fact that Augustine did not resign should of course not be taken as evidence that he prevailed.

Augustine's fullest commentaries on the social role of the bishop as 'slave of the many'" (*servus multorum*).⁵⁶⁶

I mean, I'm not just anyone talking about being a bishop, I'm a bishop talking about it; and the advice and warning I'm giving him I am also afraid of myself, and I call to mind what the holy apostle said about himself: "I do not run as though uncertain where to; I do not fight as though beating the air; but I chastise my body, and bring it into servitude, in case by any chance, while preaching to others, I myself should be found to be disqualified."⁵⁶⁷

The sermon's positive vision of the episcopate contrasts starkly with the bandit-bishop vocabulary that Augustine would later use to restrain Antoninus. Just as a bishop could extoll the virtues of soldierly service, he could also turn to a negative discourse of desertion.

These attempts at epistolary correction relied on an inversion of soldierly language, a rhetorical feature surely related to the unique position of banditry in society, occupying a position in opposition to the legitimate violence of the army and state.⁵⁶⁸ Augustine's portrait of Antoninus and Basil's depiction of Glycerius are not far from the rebukes of soldiers which I handled in the first chapter. When Isidore wanted to malign the wayward soldier Isaiah, he complained that he was "leading a band in the wilderness and bearing arms in the midst of the people" like a false David. "You are not

⁵⁶⁶ Aug. *Serm.* 340A (= *Serm. ex coll. Guelf.* 32). Quotation from McLynn 2012, 319, citing Aug. *Serm.* 340A.1.

⁵⁶⁷ Aug. *Serm.* 340A.2, Hill, trans.: "non enim quicumque de episcopo, sed episcopus loquor; et quod ammoneo, ego ipse timeo, et reuoco in animum, quod ipse sanctus apostolus dixit: 'non sic curro, quasi in incertum: non sic pugno, quasi aerem caedens; sed castigo corpus meum, et in seruitutem subicio, ne forte aliis praedicans ipse reprobis inueniar.'" The quotation is 1 Cor 9:26-27.

⁵⁶⁸ On the opposition between legitimate violence and banditry, see Shaw 1984, 28-30. For the theme of epistolary correction in the letters of Augustine, see Ebbeler 2012, esp. 136-141 with its discussion of Hier. *Epist.* 112 and Aug. *Epist.* 73 in response. The military language there highlights the adversarial nature of epistolary correction and Augustine's attempt to mollify Jerome by reminding him of their common enemy of sin (73.10). In the scenarios I have been presenting, the image of the deserter represents a blunter, less-delicate rhetorical device which was available when it was not a question of *amicitia* between equals but of correction by a superior.

only grievous to your neighbors and aberrant,” Isidore carped, “but even hasten to lay traps for those who are far off.”⁵⁶⁹ Just as bishops used this discourse to police real soldiers, they deployed the image of the deviant deserter to persuade their correspondents to be, in their view, orderly ascetic warriors. That neither Basil nor Augustine may have been successful in the episodes discussed underscores how dicey such epistolary strategies could be, but we can still learn from these failures. Church leaders at least thought such attempts at persuasion might be effective, and their discursive logic was connected to the positive soldierly image used to provide pastoral guidance and promote a cenobitic ascetic model.

Conclusion: Animating Ascetic Soldiers

In his unfinished essay, “The State,” Randolph Bourne penned the memorable refrain: “War is the health of the state.”⁵⁷⁰ In the aftermath of World War I, Bourne clearly intended this aphorism to apply to the intense collective mobilization brought on by modern warfare, producing more powerful centralized institutions and patriotic fervor. But at the foundation of his expression was a belief that military logic had a peculiar, abstract quality that alone could structure and elicit the sentiments of the “herd.”⁵⁷¹ It is through imagining human affairs as an existential military struggle that people often reinforce social bonds and promote loyalty and sacrifice to a higher ideal.

⁵⁶⁹ Isid. Pel. *Epist.* 482: “Τινές σέ φασιν ἐπ’ ἐρημίας ὀχλαγωγεῖν, καὶ ἐν μέσῳ δῆμων ὀπλοφορεῖν, καὶ τῷ Δαβὶδ εὐοικῆναι φαντάζεσθαι, αὐτὸ τοῦτο πᾶσιν ἐμμανῶς ἐγκαλοῦντα...Σὺ δὲ οὐ μόνον τοῖς γείτοσι δυσμενῆς εἶ καὶ ἀπάνθρωπος, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς πόρρῳ ἐπιβουλεύειν σπουδάζεις.” Translation my own. ἀπάνθρωπος is the same word Basil used to describe Glycerius.

⁵⁷⁰ Bourne 1998 (draft found at his death in 1918), 7, 9, 15, 21, 27.

⁵⁷¹ Bourne 1998, 7: “But in general, the nation in wartime attains a uniformity of feeling, a hierarchy of values culminating at the undisputed apex of the State ideal, which could not possibly be produced through any other agency than war.”

Whatever the merits of Bourne's *dicta* as generally applicable in historical analysis,⁵⁷² a similar abstract power of martial imagery can clearly be seen in the letters of the fourth and fifth centuries. To church leaders of the time, imagining the religious life as a soldierly endeavor was a way of valorizing and regulating ascetic devotees.⁵⁷³ Whether in Jerome, Pelagius, and Prosper's overtures to Demetrias or in Augustine and Paulinus' epistolary networks, activating the idea of an ascetic soldiery helped reinforce bonds of comradery and spiritual authority. Cenobitism was not the only possible trajectory for asceticism in this period, but Jerome, Cassian, and Augustine used military metaphors to regulate and domesticate asceticism. There was an internal logic to this thought-world, as evidenced by the acclaim of dutiful *contubernia* and the invective developed around the fallen soldier. The soldierly aspects of martial imagery – vigilant discipline, endurance, and obedience – were favored tools of pastoral and ascetic control.

Nevertheless, it is not always clear whether this imagined soldierly ideal was always successful in effectuating individual writers' programs of ascetic control. Often, we have no answer from the recipient of soldierly martial imagery, and occasionally other letters in our collections suggest that the language was not successful in marshaling the desired response. After playing up his own humble rank in battle with the Manichaeans, Paulinus feared that he had failed to elicit a reply from Augustine, so

⁵⁷² For Bourne's historical perspective, which basically ignores Roman history and instead narrates the rise of the war-making nation-state out of monarchical power, see 27-36. Cf. Tilly 1975, 42: "War made the state, and the state made war." Despite the value of Tilly's work, Bourne's dictum is more relevant here due to his treatment of war and the State at an ideational rather than structural level ("That the State is a mystical conception is something that must never be forgotten" (Bourne 1998, 7)).

⁵⁷³ Fontaine 1980, 149 and Roberts 1993, 50-1n31 for the suggestion that the rise of the cult of military martyrs under Theodosius was connected to the growth of asceticism.

he hurriedly sent another. Basil's letters concerning Glycerius show that the bishop's rhetorical attacks on the supposed monk-bandit were ineffective, at least at first. The image of the soldierly ascetic was not a trump card; epistolary discourse was always a tricky matter.

But there are several reasons to suspect that soldierly martial imagery tended to be an effective metaphor. First, the overall literary picture offers a circumstantial background in which the image was popular and might have been well received. When Theodoret wrote to Marcellus Acoemetus, his call for humble vigilance fell on a group of monks who would later speak of their founder as a soldier of God, and Paulinus' letters to Severus anticipated the military language of the *Life of Martin*.

Second, the fact that soldierly pictures of the ascetic life appear in letters from so many different writers to such diverse contacts speaks to how usefully malleable the imagined universe of *militia christiana* could be. Of course, context mattered. The letters to Eustochium and Demetrias drew attention to the paradox of a womanly soldier of Christ, and the letters to Romanianus and Firmus applied martial imagery alongside clever plays on classical citations and epistolary conventions. But for all their differences, the theme of the dutiful ascetic warrior was chosen by Christian writers trying to persuade a diverse audience.

Finally, the consistent themes of the imagery – sexual renunciation, separation and community, and hard labor under leadership – and its internal logic reveal that the soldierly ascetic ethos was a well-developed and formidable part of the rhetorical toolkit. It could introduce difficult ideas in a form palatable to clerics, aristocrats, and devoted ascetics. This internal coherence and wide application were all the more

meaningful alongside a parallel context to which soldierly imagery was applied: the bureaucracy. Just as the soldierly imagery was well-suited to regulate the Christian life, both for clergy and for the laity, it could be used to construct and enforce hierarchy and determined service within imperial administration. In this sense, we see parallel applications of similar motifs. The next chapter considers this aspect of imagined militarism in late antique letters.

CHAPTER III:
MILITIA INERMIS:
SOLDIERLY IMAGERY IN THE IMPERIAL ADMINISTRATION

Around 340, Marcus Julius Eugenius, a *curialis* from Laodicea, when “about to leave his human life, erected for himself both a platform and a sarcophagus on which he had written” an account of his life.⁵⁷⁴ He recollected that he “served in the unit of the governor of Pisidia (στρατευσ[ά]μενος ἐν τῇ κατὰ Πισιδίαν ἡγεμονικῇ τάξει)...and although having served with distinction (μετ’ ἐπιτε[μ]ίας στρατευσάμενον)” he suffered during the persecution of Maximinus Daia and “hastened to leave the service to defend the Christian faith.”⁵⁷⁵ After a time, he became bishop, where he likewise served “with great distinction” (μετὰ πολ[λ]ῆς ἐπιτεμίας) for twenty-five years.⁵⁷⁶ This, one of the earliest texts to use *στρατεία* to denote government service in general,⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁴ See *PCBE* 3, 281-3, Eugénios 1, and *PLRE* 1:293, M. Iul. Eugenius 7. See also Rapp 2005, 203-4 who uses Eugenius as an example of the high level of permeability between successful civic elite and the episcopacy. Mitchell 1993, 2:102 tentatively identifies Eugenius as a Novatian bishop of the same name. For the inscription, see *MAMA* 1:90, no. 170, ll. 17-19: “[...]λειψόμε[ν]ός τε τὸν τῶν ἀνθρώπων / βίον ἐποίησα ἐμαντῶ πέ[λ]τα τε] καὶ σορὸν ἐν ᾗ τὰ προ[γεγραμμένα] ταῦτα ἐποίησα ἐπιγρ(α)φῖνε / εἰς κόσμον τῆς τε ἐκ[κλησίας κ]ε τοῦ γένους μου.” Translation my own with first person pronouns changed to third for the sake of context.

⁵⁷⁵ *MAMA* 1:90, no. 170, ll. 2-9: “στρατευσ[ά]μενος ἐν τῇ κατὰ Πισιδίαν ἡγεμονικῇ τάξει / ...καὶ μετ’ ἐπιτε[μ]ίας στρατευσάμενον / ἐν δὲ τῷ μεταξὺ χρόνῳ κελεύσεως [φ]οιτησάσης ἐπὶ Μαξιμίνου / τοὺς Χρ[ε]ιστιανοὺς θύειν καὶ μὴ ἀπα[λ]λάσσεσθαι τῆς / στρατεί[α]ς πλείστας δὲ ὅσας βασάνου[ς] ὑπομείνας / ἐπὶ Διογένους ἡγεμόνος σπουδάσας [τ]ε ἀπαλλαγῆναι / τῆς στρατείας τὴν τῶν Χρ[ε]ιστιανῶν πίστιν φυλάσσων.” Translation my own. The participle φυλάσσων, although present, can indicate purpose (Smyth 1956, 458-9, § 2065). Note the implied contrast between heavenly and earthly *στρατεία*, brought out by my translation “to defend the Christian faith” (cf. Rapp 2005, 203: “...while adhering to the faith of the Christians.”).

⁵⁷⁶ *MAMA* 1:90, no. 170, ll. 11-13: “καὶ βουλῆσει τοῦ παντοκράτορος Θεοῦ ἐπίσκοπος / κατασταθ[εῖ]ς καὶ εἴκοσι πέντε ὅλοις ἔτεσιν τὴν ἐπισκοπὴν / μετὰ πολ[λ]ῆς ἐπιτεμίας διοι[κ]ήσας...” Translation my own.

⁵⁷⁷ In addition to *PLRE* and *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, see Batiffol 1911, 27-29 for arguments in favor of a civil office. I would add that there is no known military unit in Pisidia to which Eugenius is likely to have belonged. *Contra* the editor of the inscription, Calder (1908, 384), and Kaufmann, who assume Eugenius to have been a member of the governor’s bodyguard (1917, 249).

suggests a striking symmetry between earthly and heavenly service,⁵⁷⁸ and it gives a taste of the rich dialogue sparked by the parallel martial imagery of church and government.

But before we race ahead to oppositions between *militia Caesaris* and *militia Christi*, we must attempt to understand the nature of secular “military service.” What did Eugenius hope to convey with the word *στρατεία*? To what extent did it draw connections to the military sphere, and what kinds of virtues did it evoke? This chapter uses letters, imperial documents, and political tracts to understand the ways in which a soldierly ethos of government service was conceptualized through martial imagery in the fourth and fifth centuries. I argue that many of the same aspects of military service that were used to valorize and regulate an ascetic vanguard were similarly applied to the bureaucratic sphere. This meant that the picture of the ideal bureaucrat in our sources was often patterned on the ideal soldier exhibiting discipline and obedience.

It is important to recognize the limits of this imagery as well. For this period, we lack the point of view of mid- or low-level bureaucrats, so we must rely on such authors as Symmachus and Libanius to reconstruct the ideal of fictive military service.⁵⁷⁹ To an extent, this soldierly ethos of bureaucracy can be seen as a “top-down” attempt at control, much like the similar ascetic discourse, but it also faced its own limits in the upper-crust of society where aristocratic writers steeped in traditionally heroic visions of their own roles recoiled from the perceived servility of *militia*. This tension limited

⁵⁷⁸ Batiffol notes this verbal echo (1911, 32). Both Batiffol and Calder argue for a high social status on account of his marriage to a senator’s daughter (ll. 3-4).

⁵⁷⁹ I adapt this phrase from Callu 1972-2009, 3:183 on Symm. *Epist.* 7.96.1: “l’administration (laquelle, on le sait, est fictivement militarisée, d’où les mots *militiae* et *castrensis*).”

the ability of a fictive soldiery of imperial service to reach down to the traditional civic structures at the root of Roman society. At the same time, however, writers with misgivings about the idiom of state *militia* adopted and adapted this language when it suited their social interests, a fact which suggests the inescapability of a martial image of society in the late empire.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first deals with the use of martial imagery to conceive of duty and hierarchy in the bureaucracy. After explaining the long-term development of a language of *militia inermis*, I lay out evidence for the chief virtues associated with bureaucratic service, namely endurance and obedience. I also study negative *exempla* of bureaucratic servicemen who exhibit the inverse of positive soldierly qualities. This soldierly ethos was an indispensable tool in managing patronage networks through recommendation, binding officials through petition, and presenting an ideal of the self and the state through official documents and political tracts. In all of this, there were echoes of the ascetic discourse that idealized the Christian as a soldier of Christ.

The second part of the chapter explores the limits of this vocabulary of imagined military service. Aristocratic writers targeted this language at low- and mid-level bureaucrats, but they themselves were sometimes unwilling to depict themselves with the same vocabulary. We do not have much of a non-aristocratic picture of military service, but we can surmise from some harsh realities – long stints of service, limited prospects for promotion, and uncertain remuneration – that such martial imagery likely masked a more complicated reality than the elegant portrayals of regimented officialdom would have us believe. At the same time, passing comments from

aristocratic writers suggest an awareness of these existing critiques of government service and a real anxiety about the perceived servility of its soldierly language. The qualified use of martial imagery in other contexts by those same elite critics reveals a tension between traditional values and an ethos of soldierly service that percolated down into many facets of social life.

Bureaucrats as Soldiers: Imagining Duty and Hierarchy

Notwithstanding some scattered antecedents to the fictively militarized language of the late antique bureaucracy, martial imagery flourished in the administrative vocabulary of the third and fourth centuries. Whether this development constituted “militarization” is unclear. In its bluntest formulation, the notion of dramatically heightened militarism in the period relies on an exaggeration of the rigidity of late-antique society, an underestimation of long-run martial values, and a confusion of superficial and fundamental social changes. Nevertheless, this should not distract from the real ripples of military language across late-antique culture. As I argued in the first chapter, writers imagined political, rhetorical, and religious activities as quasi-military, and they colored their letters of praise and petition with heroic imagery. But just as there could be another, more soldierly aspect to the ascetic martial imagery of the period, so too did writers tend to use a different field of martial imagery to characterize service in the bureaucracy as a grueling and disciplined endeavor. Although Jones averred that the military designation of civil servants “meant very little in practice” and Tomlin

evocatively called it “an amiable sham,”⁵⁸⁰ the self-conscious use of this language sheds light on aristocratic social dynamics, the conceptualization of government service, and the course of administrative conflicts. The soldierly ethos of the bureaucrat emerged as a consistent theme of epistolary rhetoric, parallel to the field of ascetic language.

The Development of Militia Inermis

A central element of the “militarization thesis” involves the adoption of martial terminology by the bureaucracy over the course of the third and fourth centuries. Much was made of this military vocabulary and accoutrement by historians such as Ramsay MacMullen, who memorably wrote that every civil servant from the top to the bottom was a soldier serving out his *militia* and argued that there was a rapprochement between the military and the administration that led to “a middle ground of waste and confusion,” a privatization of *militia* as he would later put it.⁵⁸¹ In other areas, such as imperial ceremony, scholars have noticed a more military style in late antiquity. These observations notwithstanding, Carrié, Eich, and others have noted the shortcomings of a narrative of militarization, especially the gradualness with which the administration grew and the demilitarization of some bureaus (esp. the Praetorian Prefecture).

But this reassessment still leaves unclear the significance of the newly-emerged military vocabulary in the bureaucracy, the “fictively militarized administration.”⁵⁸² Speidel challenges the notion that this vocabulary was either new or especially

⁵⁸⁰ Jones 1964, 1:566; Tomlin 1976, 192; cf. Roda’s summary of the scholarship “il quale ha acutamente messo in evidenza il valore assai più formale che sostanziale della militarizzazione dell’apparato burocratico” (1981, 92-3).

⁵⁸¹ MacMullen 1988, 171-198.

⁵⁸² Callu 1972-2009, 3:183.

important.⁵⁸³ There was a rich history of extended uses of *militia*, especially the *militia amoris* of the elegiac poets, and Cicero himself could speak of Servius' legal work as *militia urbana*.⁵⁸⁴ Writers in the early empire also employed military language to describe civilian administration. Valerius Maximus wrote of Cicero as having engaged in *militia forensis*, and Pliny called his colleagues *contubernales* in his letters.⁵⁸⁵ Speidel concludes that the administrative martial imagery that took hold by the fourth century was not a major break but a continuation of past practice and a historical vestige of the complex development of the civilian administration.

Speidel's observations are a salutary corrective to the more strident claims that the vocabulary of *militia* reflected militarization, but we should not entirely discount the novelty and significance of this language in a late-antique context. Quantitatively, administrative martial imagery was clearly a more robust part of administrative dialogue than it had been in earlier periods. Speidel's examples notwithstanding, it is not until the fourth century that we see frequent use of *militia* as an abstraction for state service in general. Cicero's choice of the phrase *urbana militia* in the *Pro Murena* was suited to a specific forensic context. He sought to juxtapose Murena's military exploits with the juristic experience of Servius (Murena's accuser), and, despite Cicero's protestations that he viewed both military and civil pursuits as equally honorable, the contrast was meant to force a choice between the two men, and to denigrate, possibly even mock, Servius.⁵⁸⁶ Likewise, Valerius Maximus' "militia forensis" was deployed

⁵⁸³ Speidel 2006.

⁵⁸⁴ Prop. 4.1.137, 1.6.30; Hor. *Carm.* 4.1.16; Plaut. *Pers.* 232; Cic. *Mur.* 19.

⁵⁸⁵ Val. Max. 8.5.5; Plin. *Epist.* 10.52.100.

⁵⁸⁶ On Cicero's preference in the *Pro Murena* of military to civil pursuits, see Bianco 2008, *ad loc.*. Cicero protested that he views both men as equally meritorious but forced a choice between the two while pinning

to accentuate the conflict with Clodius that resulted in Cicero's expulsion from Rome, "the very camp of his own eloquence."⁵⁸⁷ Other early examples of an expansive *militia* are uncertain, isolated, or ambiguous. Quotations from jurists in the Justinianic Digest that speak of *militia* in the extended sense may be later interpolations,⁵⁸⁸ but even if Ulpian's mention of *militia armata* is genuine, it does not on its own demonstrate the existence of *militia inermis* as a concept.⁵⁸⁹ Even Tertullian's somewhat strange reference to "another *militia*" probably refers to the use of soldiers on secondment rather than apparitorial work.⁵⁹⁰ To be sure, Pliny and Fronto called administrators by such evocative terms as *contubernales*, but not once in the entire Latin epistolary *corpus* was

it on Servius' bias (*Mur.* 21: "Summa in utroque est honestas, summa dignitas; quam ego, si mihi per Servium liceat, pari atque eadem in laude ponam. Sed non licet: agitat rem militarem, insectatur totam hanc legationem, adsiduitatis et operarum harum cotidianarum putat esse consulatum."). There is a layer of mocking irony beneath his words about Servius (MacDonald 1969, 78, "An ironical comparison of 'military service' in law-courts with Murena's campaigns"; *contra* Adamietz 1989, 124). Whereas Murena fought with valiant distinction under Lucullus, Servius' biggest hardship was having to submit to the judgment and stupidity of his fellow citizens (*Mur.* 19: "Servius hic nobiscum hanc urbanam militiam respondendi, scribendi, cavendi plenam sollicitudinis ac stomachi secutus est; ius civile didicit, multum vigilavit, laboravit, praesto multis fuit, multorum stultitiam perpressus est, adrogantiam pertulit, difficultatem exsorbuisset; vixit ad aliorum arbitrium, non ad suum.").

⁵⁸⁷ Val. Max. 8.5.5: "M. Cicero forensi militia summos honores amplissimumque dignitatis locum adeptus, nonne in ipsis eloquentiae suae castris testis abiectus est, dum P. Clodium Romae apud se fuisse iurat, illo sacrilegum flagitium uno argumento absentiae tuente?" Another example from Valerius Maximus refers to *togata militia*, but the context is clearly word-play on the legal situation of a disinherited soldier returning from war (7.1.1: "Militantis cuiusdam pater, cum de morte filii falsum e castris nuntium accepisset, aliis heredibus scriptis decessit. peractis deinde stipendiis adulescens domum petiit... itaque depositis armis coactus est in foro togatam ingredi militiam.").

⁵⁸⁸ Marchi 1906, 297-301. Harris concurs with this older judgment (2016, 273n32). For a list of putative 2nd and 3rd century references, see *TLL* s.v. cols. 963-4. The problem of interpolation in the Digest is still controversial (Honoré 2010, 81), but the compilers were willing to tweak texts by adding linkages to excerpts (107-8). The editors of the *Cod. Iust.* even made changes to constitutions in the *Cod. Theod.* to add references to *militia* where appropriate to sixth-century practice (cf. *Cod. Iust.* 1.de filiis mil. app.12.47 and *Cod. Theod.* 3.de filiis mil. app.7.22; *Cod. Iust.* 3.de dignit.12.1 and *Cod. Theod.* 3.1.de priv. eor.6.35). By reason of this evidence, in the *Digest*, the addition of a word like *armata* or the substitution of *militia* for an outdated term remains plausible. For a measured approach to "interpolation-hunting," see Johnston 1989, esp. 151-2 for a reminder of the practical aims of Justinian's commission.

⁵⁸⁹ Dig. 42.1.6.pr.: "Miles, qui sub armata militia stipendia meruit, condemnatus eatenus, qua facere potest, cogitur solvere." Mommsen 1899, 153n3; Marchi 1906, 297n4. In any event, *armata militia* could merely be pleonastic and need not imply the existence of *militia inermis*.

⁵⁹⁰ Tert. *de corona* 12.5: "est et alia militia regiarum familiarum. Nam et Castrenses appellantur munificae et ipsae solemnum Caesarianorum."

militia used to mean civil service before the fourth century.⁵⁹¹ Symmachus, on the other hand, used the term in his *Relationes* and *Epistulae* dozens of times with such a meaning.⁵⁹² While *militia* had a long history as a metaphor, early examples are infrequent and fail to show that the concept was a familiar way of describing state service much before the fourth century.⁵⁹³ At best, the above examples were the germ of a later, more widespread usage, which proliferated either as a result of “casual speech” that linked administrative and military spheres or as a deliberate project of imperial control.⁵⁹⁴

Alongside this new martial vocabulary, by the fourth century, the accoutrement of administrators took on a martial tone. The *cingulum* (ζώνη), a belt that had once been indicative of soldiers, and the *paludamentum* or *chlamys* (χλαμύς), a military-style cloak, with a “crossbow fibula”⁵⁹⁵ became indicative of the imperial service. In contrast

⁵⁹¹ I count 8 occurrences of the word in Cicero’s letters (*Ad fam.* 7.8.1, 7.11.2, 7.18.1 (twice); *Ad Att.* 6.2.2, 6.2.5, 10.14.3; *Ad Quint.* 3.8.1, excluding *Ad Att.* 13.22.4, which is corrupt), of which, all indisputably refer to actual military service, except *Ad Att.* 6.2.2.4, which refers to Cicero’s proconsulship in Cilicia, which included limited military activity, as a *peregrinatio* or *militia*. I count 1 occurrence in Pliny’s letters (*Epist.* 7.4.3), used of his own military service in Syria. And I count 3 occurrences in Fronto’s extant letters (Haines 1:290, 2:128), in each instance of military service. In the latter letter to Claudius Julianus, Fronto evocatively compares *militia* to civilian pursuits: “Fac periculum in militiae muneribus, fac periculum in consiliis iudiciariis, fac periculum in litteris, omni denique prudentiae et faciliates usu vel serio vel remisso, semper et ubique eum parem sui invenies.” The verbal form (*mito*, *-are*) does not yield substantially different results.

⁵⁹² I count 34 instances of this word, of which 30 refer to bureaucratic service (Symm. *Epist.* 6.53.1, 4.37.1, 7.53.1, 7.123.1, 7.124.1, 1.60.1, 4.73.1, 3.72.1, 5.39.1, 9.59.1, 9.16.1, 9.1.1, 4.53.1, 1.75.1, 7.63.1, 2.9.1, 3.87.1, 1.40.1, 9.57.1, 5.35.1, 5.74.1, 7.94.1, 2.63.1, 7.96.1, 5.76.1, 2.17.2; *Rel.* 42.1, 38.5, 27.2, 49.4), 2 refer to military service (*Epist.* 9.55 of a member of the otherwise unknown “schola Gallica” and at 3.13.2 of the hero Nestor), and 2 are ambiguous (*Epist.* 3.67.1 (a “domesticus” of Symmachus) and 9.36.1 (an acephalous letter)).

⁵⁹³ Excepting the examples dispensed with above, the earliest literary instance of *milites* to denote imperial servants is in Lactantius (*Mort. pers.* 31.3.4: “officiorum omnium milites vel potius carnifices singulis adhaerebant...frequens super isdem hominibus vel ipsis iudiciis vel militibus iudicum pugna”), and the earliest administrative use of στρατεία is the inscription of Eugenius with which this chapter began.

⁵⁹⁴ For the former, see MacMullen 1963, 50. For the latter, see Harris 2016, 273 who writes: “A more probable explanation is that the emperor and the senior officials wanted their subordinates to be as disciplined as the ideal soldier,” citing *Cod. Iust.* 12.29.1 of 314.

⁵⁹⁵ For examples of the “crossbow brooch”, see Yeroulanou 1999, 52-4, nos. 170-9; Swift 2000, 3-4, 13-88.

to the *cingula* of the early empire, upon which hung both sword and dagger, the newer *cingula* which came into vogue in the third-century, potentially under Partho-Sassanian influence, were distinct from the *baltei* which hung from the right shoulder to the left hip and upon which the sword was hung.⁵⁹⁶ In the third century, representations of soldiers on funerary monuments increasingly focused on the so-called “camp dress” – the *cingula*, *chlamydes*, breeches, and boots – as symbols of soldierly status and identity rather than the panoply of arms and armor.⁵⁹⁷ A popular pose in these depictions was the soldier holding the long ends of the belt in his hand, possibly reflecting a practice of twirling the *cingulum* in public places to advertise one’s military status.⁵⁹⁸ By the fourth century, the *cingulum* had become even broader (2.5 – 4 cm.), and, in accordance with the expanded vocabulary of *militia*, it was borne by members of both the civil and military bureaucracies. A mid-fourth-century tomb-painting from Durostorum (Silistra) depicts an official surrounded by members of his household carrying the trappings of his station: a cloak, pants, and soldierly belt.⁵⁹⁹ Sartorial changes do not map simply onto social developments, but in the case of the late-antique administrators, the military valences of clothing drew an explicit connection to the emperor and bureaucracy.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁶ Partho-Sassanian influence: James 2006, 370-1; *cingulum* vs. *balteus* Hoss 2012, 38-40.

⁵⁹⁷ Speidel 2012, 3-4. James points out the associations of this costume with toil and endurance in contrast to blood and violence (1999, 19).

⁵⁹⁸ Coulston 2004, 151.

⁵⁹⁹ Dimitrov dates the tomb to the latter half of the 4th century based on stylistic similarities to the Missorium of Theodosius and the base of his obelisk from Constantinople (1962, 48). Another recent find, the “Trierer Prunkschild,” offers another colored depiction of an imperial official, as does the scene of Pilate and his officials in the 6th century Rossano Gospel and the depiction of officials in the tetrarchic wall-paintings from Luxor (Gehn 2012, 22, with photos in the appendix).

⁶⁰⁰ Connection to the emperor through the chlamys-costume was explicit (Parani 2007, 501-2; Gehn 2012, 319 “Durch den Militärmantel, die Chlamys, mit dem darauf aufgebracht pupurnen Tablium war sein Träger nicht nur als *miles* gekennzeichnet, sondern weitergehend als Exekutor der kaiserlichen Gerechtigkeit.”). As an example, Chrysostom informs us that no underling dared approach the emperor without his *chlamys* and *cingulum* (Chrys. *Hom. in Ep. I ad Cor.*, PG 61.218).

These belts clearly possessed enormous symbolic importance.⁶⁰¹ Their red-dyed leather and metal fittings would have been ostentatious visual reminders of status and identity.⁶⁰² While the belt's considerable weight may have affected the gait and posture of the wearer, the jingling metal of the leather tips may have produced a striking auditory effect, especially when girt men moved in groups.⁶⁰³

This development of a martial idiom and style of officialdom happened alongside clear structural changes to the imperial bureaucracy. The development of imperial bureaux was a gradual and complicated process rather than the straightforward product of a Diocletianic or Constantinian agenda. "Even if numbers are impossible to quantify,"⁶⁰⁴ by the mid-fourth century historians reckon far more imperial administrators than even the most generous estimates for the early or "high" empire. Extrapolating from figures for different departments, Peter Heather has estimated that by 400 AD there were about 3,000 "good jobs" (perfectissime or clarissime) in each half of the empire, counting some 2,700 in palatine departments plus over a hundred provincial governors, vicars, and prefects. Under vicars and praetorian prefects, Heather reckons 7,600 officials empire-wide, with an additional 10,000 in the staffs of provincial

⁶⁰¹ For the *cingulum* as an important feature of common speech and legal discourse, see Delmaire 2003, 87; Delmaire 2004, 197 and n. 6; MacMullen 1964b, 447-8. Possession of the *vestis* and *cingulum* were the exclusive prerogative of those who held office (*Cod. Theod.* 6.27.17, 6.30.11), while the laying down of the *cingulum* (*discingere*) became a symbolic act of discharge or resignation (*Herod.* 2.13.10), and this formed an important element in the much later accounts of soldier-saints (Woods 1993, 55-60). For the significance of the *cingulum* as a sign of administrative status, see also the discussion in Werner 1998, 189-91.

⁶⁰² For an example of such a belt, see Baratte 1979, 84, a fourth or fifth century golden buckle with an image of Roma.

⁶⁰³ For the association between clothing and posture, see Hoss 2012, 30-1; 2017, 85-7. James' endeavors in experimental archaeology suggest effects on gait and posture (1999, 21).

⁶⁰⁴ Whitby 2016, 138.

governors.⁶⁰⁵ Others have arrived at a much higher total of 35,000 for the same period, and even this number might be pushed upward.⁶⁰⁶

None of these figures include *supernumerarii*, the long waiting-lists that did unpaid, yeoman's work for the salaried officials (*statuti*) above them. We can hazard an extremely rough guess of total officials by using a rescript of 399 to the *comes sacrarum largitionum*. The law sets a limit of 834 officers in the *sacrae largitiones* of the East:

We decree that those be expelled from the palatine office who have been hired thoughtlessly and indiscriminately and that the carefully chosen *statuti* remain at 224 and the *supernumerarii* remain at 610. And in accordance with the attached instructions for your eminence, we decree that the number of *supernumerarii* be limited for the individual *scrinia* and governors. If anyone should wish to be added to the aforementioned *militia*, he shall be enrolled in the palatinate after the reliability of his birth has been investigated and then by the approval of our divinity.⁶⁰⁷

This is one of the only indications of the number of supernumeraries for an imperial bureau in the fourth century. Departments varied greatly depending on time and place,⁶⁰⁸ but if we were to extrapolate from the ratio in the above edict, we could estimate that

⁶⁰⁵ See Heather 1994, 18-20. The total figure for the whole empire comes to about 23,600.

⁶⁰⁶ See Kelly 1998, 163n132; 2004, 111 and 115. Harris 2016, 273n31 criticizes Kelly's supposed lack of clarity and notes that some of his figures are based on sixth century evidence. Jones 1964, 3:341-2n44 estimates 30,900 including some 4,800 officers in the military bureaucracy and excluding supernumeraries, imperial household staff (*cubicularii* and *castrensiani*), and minor officials (*admissionales*, *lampadarii*, and *decani*); cf. Jones 1974, 129-133, which uses the same numbers as part of a wider discussion of expanded government and taxation in the period. Kelly notes that these numbers could be pushed higher if older estimates for the staff of the prefectures are used (Kelly 2004, 268n10, citing Stein 1922, 18, Chastagnol 1960, 228, and Morosi 1977, 138). See also Smith 2007, 180; MacMullen 1988, 144 and 264.

⁶⁰⁷ *Cod. Theod.* 6.30.15: "His abiectis de officio palatino, qui inconsiderate ac vulgo sunt congregati, statutos ducentos viginti quattuor, supernumerarios sesce[n]tos decem electissimos inhaerere praecipimus et [iux]ta instructionem eminentiae tuae, quae adnex[a] est, singulis scriniis vel rectoribus definitum numerum supernumerariorum deputari. Si quis sane ad memoratam militiam accedere voluerit, di[scus]sa generis fide tunc demum adnotatione nostri [nu]minis palatinorum coetui societur." Translation my own.

⁶⁰⁸ The same year, a different decree was issued to the Praetorian Prefect, Messala, in Milan, setting the number of *statuti* in the West at 546, but with no mention of *supernumerarii* (*Cod. Theod.* 6.30.16). *Cod. Iust.* 12.23.7, a reproduction of a fragmentary decree of 384 (*Cod. Theod.* 6.30.7), gives the number of *statuti* in the department at 446, but this could be a sixth-century figure (Delmaire 1989, 146 ff.; Heather 1994, 18n34).

all palatine officials, both *supernumerarii* and *statuti*, numbered at over 6,000.⁶⁰⁹ If anything, this number is probably too conservative, as the law cited above aspired to curtail the existing number of officials.

By modern standards, even the most generous estimates would be a woefully small administrative apparatus for a population of some 50 million souls stretching from Hadrian's wall to the Euphrates,⁶¹⁰ but compared to the number of administrators in the early empire, there had been a significant increase in the number of imperial representatives per capita. As difficult as it is to tabulate the total number of bureaucrats in the late empire, it is even more challenging to estimate the size of the administration in the earlier empire. If we look at just senatorial and equestrian posts, at least 110 different "administrative departments" existed at the end of the second century.⁶¹¹ This number reckons the sundry *procuratores* across the provinces, *praefecti* within Rome, various administrators in Egypt, and the heads of the different palatine departments. If we add to this the various senatorial offices in Rome, the ten senatorial provinces (consuls, proconsuls, praetors, propraeors, etc.), imperial legateships, and lower procuratorships we arrive at a global figure of around 340 high-level positions (160 senatorial, 180 equestrian).⁶¹² Comparing this modest figure to the 6,000 positions in

⁶⁰⁹ The ratio from the law of 399 is 1 *statutus* : 2.72 *supernumerarii*. We have evidence of waiting-lists having existed in the fourth and fifth centuries for *sacrae largitiones*, *agentes in rebus*, and *sacra scrinia*. If the ratio holds for each group, we could modify Heather's numbers of *statuti* – 546 or 224 (averaged to 385, see previous note), 1174 (*Cod. Theod.* 6.27.23), and 130 (*Cod. Iust.* 12.19.10), respectively – to 1432, 4367, and 484, a nearly 4,600 person increase! The *notarii* and *privatiani* are not known to have had *supernumerarii* in this period.

⁶¹⁰ The country of South Korea today has about the same population but nearly twenty times the number of employees in the civil service (about 650,000 according to the most recent data from the Ministry of Personnel Management).

⁶¹¹ Eck 2000d, 251. The inclusion of the *praefecti classium* in this list is not inappropriate given their involvement in various administrative matters (243n19).

⁶¹² Eck 1995-8, 1:15-17. The figure of 160 dates to the reign of Marcus Aurelius and 180 to the reign of Septimius Severus. Cf. Whitby 2016, 138n33: "By contrast, under early emperors, there were probably

the later empire at the level of *perfectissimi* or *clarissimi*, an observer could hardly deny that there was a massive quantitative change in bureaucracy.

One might object that this comparison between high-level positions is inapt in that it could confuse the wider extension of status distinctions with the actual size of the bureaucracy. A better quantitative measure would reckon the many *servi*, *liberti*, and *apparitores* who served beneath these high-level posts and then compare the size of the entire imperial apparatus between both periods. Unfortunately, the poor evidence for these posts means that it is impossible to establish numbers of these posts with a high level of confidence. For the later period, Heather has tabulated an additional 17,500 *cohortales* serving beneath prefects, vicars, and governors, jobs which were filled by *curiales*.⁶¹³ The various slaves, freedmen, and low-status *apparitores* who assisted in these activities must be added.⁶¹⁴ For the early empire, there were many thousand “subalterns,” *servi* and *liberti* in the service of the imperial *familia* and the many higher offices mentioned above.⁶¹⁵ There were also many *apparitores* – scribes, lictors, messengers, and the like, both freeborn and not – organized into panels (*decuriae*) who must be counted. These *apparitores*, brought to the fore in recent scholarship, were of significant “symbolic value” for the magistrates to which they were assigned, and they

only between 100 and 200 high-level (senatorial and equestrian) positions, and only a few hundred formal positions in central and provincial governments.”

⁶¹³ Heather 1994, 21. The *officium* of each governor was supposed to be limited to 100 (*Cod. Iust.* 12.57.9 of 396).

⁶¹⁴ Although it must be noted that the term *apparitor* was extended to the staff of any government official in late antiquity (*RE* 1:894; *Dig.* 4.2.23.3, *Cod. Iust.* 12.52ff., *Amm.* 15.3.8), there clearly were non-salaried attendants, both servile and free, who supported the administration (*Lib. Or.* 18.134).

⁶¹⁵ Eck 2000d, 263: “The number of slaves and freedmen employed in the administration cannot be estimated precisely. In total, in Rome, Italy and the provinces, there may have been many thousands.” Dubbed “subalterns” at 256. Weaver estimated the slaves and freedmen at least at the clerical level at 2000 (pers. comm. cited by Garnsey and Saller 2015, 53).

seem to have been more important to the functioning of the administration than has often been assumed.⁶¹⁶ Both of these categories (*apparitores* and members of the *familia Caesaris*) can hardly be tabulated with any degree of confidence, especially since it is unclear how long each category of attendant existed, how many attended each official, and where the line was between the personal service of the *familia* and the official service of the *officium*.⁶¹⁷ The majority of inscriptions cluster around Rome, a natural consequence of the dynamics of the epigraphic habit and the higher concentration of officeholders in the city, and while these inscriptions provide intriguing evidence for the social mobility of certain persons within the empire,⁶¹⁸ it is hazardous to extrapolate from this dizzying concentration of commemorations to estimate the number of *apparitores*, *liberti*, or *servi* in administrative roles.

Even so, a more specific case might yield some helpful numbers for rough comparison. Two cemeteries for the *familia Caesaris* in Carthage contain *servi* and *liberti* who must have served the provincial procurator or the procurator of the imperial estate under the Flavians and Antonines.⁶¹⁹ Including only clear references to *apparitores*, *servi*, or *liberti Caesaris*, we have evidence of 249 staff commemorated over a roughly 110 year period.⁶²⁰ If we assume that half served the provincial

⁶¹⁶ See Hartmann 2020, 61-2 for this “symbolic value.” See also David 2019 for the important work of *apparitores*.

⁶¹⁷ Millar 1977, 66-9. The distinction between public and private was especially blurred in the case of *accensi*.

⁶¹⁸ Purcell 1983, 160-1.

⁶¹⁹ Boulvert 1970, 193-6; Eck 2000d, 256. *CIL* 8.12590-12875 (suppl. 1) and 8.24681-24861 (suppl. 2), dated to the Flavian and Antonine period. I exclude inscriptions that the editors of *CIL* deemed to date to an earlier period.

⁶²⁰ Only counting adults for whom their title or status was explicit, I reckon 249 staff (20 *adiutores*, 4 *agrimensores*, 1 *cubicularius*, 1 *cursor*, 1 *custos tabulariorum*, 1 *dispensator*, 1 *exercitator cursorum*, 7 *librarii*, 1 *medicus*, 1 *ministrator*, 2 *nomenclatores*, 4 *notarii*, 3 *paedagogi*, 10 *pedisequi*, 2 *principes Augusti*, 1 *saluarius*, 1 *supra iumentis*, 17 *tabellarii*, 2 *tabularii*, and 1 *viator*, as well as unspecified staff: 1 *vicarius*, 4 *libertae*, 16 *liberti*, 32 *servae*, and 115 *servi*).

procurator and half served the procurator of the imperial estate, there would have been at a minimum 34 serving each *procurator* in some capacity at a time.⁶²¹ Taking this as a crude estimate for the staff of the average administrative unit, there may have been at least 4,000 “lower-level” administrators in the second century. When one compares this to the 17,500 *cohortales* of the later empire (a number which does not even factor in the numerous *supernumerarii*, slaves, and freedmen who supported these lower bureaucrats), the bureaucracy seems to have nearly quadrupled in size.

It cannot be reiterated enough how imprecise these numbers are, but they at least give a rough indication of the growth of the bureaucracy, in terms of both the numbers of offices of the highest status and the overall size of the administrative apparatus. But there are a few other complications that make an exact quantitative comparison between the two periods difficult. In the early empire, soldiers on secondment performed many of the same duties that *cohortales* in the civil bureaucracy filled.⁶²² Not only that, there was a substantial “uncosted” dimension of local administration in both periods, but especially in the early empire.⁶²³ Given the small imperial administration, it fell to local elites to administer justice, collect taxes, and provide for public needs through euergetism. Each of the roughly 2,000 relatively autonomous cities of the empire would

⁶²¹ This number relies on assuming an even distribution over the period and average periods of service of 30 years, an optimistic yet reasonable guess, considering the nature of service in the imperial *familia* compared to other servile occupations and owing to the fact that most imperial freedmen died “no later than the age of 55-60” (Weaver 1972, 33) and in a population with life-expectancies at birth of 20-35 years, a majority who lived to 20 lived past 40 (Hopkins 1983, 72, table 2.8). A fine-grain analysis of the ages of death recorded in this epigraphic evidence would not be fruitful due to the “eccentricity of the age data from Africa” (Weaver 1972, 226).

⁶²² Kelly estimates “perhaps up to 10,000” slaves and soldiers on secondment in the early empire serving in the administration (2004, 111), resulting in somewhere between a two and threefold increase in administrative personnel from the early to later empire.

⁶²³ Whitby 2016, 139.

have had its own councilors and magistrates, and it is entirely feasible that these local elites along with the imperial officials and their adjuncts would have narrowed the gap between the numbers of administrators in the earlier and later periods.⁶²⁴ Thus, on account of both the involvement of the military in administrative matters and the “uncosted” administration of the early empire, it would go too far to suggest that late antiquity was a uniquely intrusive age in terms of government.

Still, the figures laid out above, even if they are qualified by such considerations, indicate a distinct change in the nature of the administrative apparatus. The intrusion of local elites into local affairs is one thing; the involvement of imperial officials, answering to higher-ups and aspiring to rise in the ranks of an empire-wide bureaucracy, is quite another. The additional divisions of provinces, dioceses, and prefectures, along with the new intervention of central bureaux into matters of procurement, taxation, and appointment, expanded the range of activities subject to direct imperial control, albeit mediated through the layers of a large bureaucracy. Even if we reject the notion of a significant quantitative difference in the administrative structure, which in any event clearly existed at the level of the imperial center, there were clear structural and qualitative differences between the administrative cultures of the early and later empires. In addition to the emergence of a martial idiom of administration, the backgrounds of administrators were quite different. To the extent that an imperial bureaucracy existed in the early empire, it was in the *familiae* of emperors and governors, informal bodies of slaves, freedmen, *apparitores*, and *amici* working as advisors, complemented by local elites, *publicani*, and, at times, imperial *procuratores*.

⁶²⁴ Garnsey and Saller 2015, 54.

In contrast, the administrative offices of the late empire were filled with local elites from across the empire. This regularized and widened the career horizons for decurions who could seek success in imperial centers like Milan and Antioch rather than merely within parochial or provincial circles.⁶²⁵ This should not be mistaken for a system of upward mobility for middling provincials.⁶²⁶ Even the wealthy elite struggled to advance amid throngs of *supernumerarii*, waiting to replace aging officials who held lucrative sinecures. Yet although some historians downplay the degree to which the bureaucracy of the later empire was radically different from that which preceded it, the size and form of the administration had changed in significant ways.

These changes happened gradually and do not amount to straightforward militarization. What we have, however, is a series of suggestive developments in administrative structure and culture. For all the continuity between the earlier and later period, both real and imagined, the martial imagery that came to color the administration of the fourth century should not be dismissed as merely a surface change, devoid of deeper social significance. In Symmachus' day the bureaucracy was quantitatively and qualitatively of a different sort, much more rigorized and formalized in terms of ranks, uniforms, and military language, but this new way of seeing state service became embedded in long-standing traditions of patronage and self-dealing. In the following sections, I sketch out the significant patterns and associations of administrative martial imagery. When it came to the "fictively-militarized language" of the bureaucracy, there

⁶²⁵ Bradbury 2004b, 74-5.

⁶²⁶ On this point, see Teitler 1985, 34-7, 64-8, who argues that the social mobility of *notarii* has been overestimated, and Skinner 2013.

was a tendency to depict the bureaucrat as a soldierly figure, a dutiful imperial servant who endured long years of obedient service and kept rank within a larger hierarchy.

Endurance and Length of Service

On the surface, there was a vibrant and frequent use of military language in the verbiage of the later Roman administration that would seem to be quantitatively and qualitatively different from preceding centuries. Although we lack the kinds of archival documents that help historians study modern bureaucracies, we possess many letters of recommendation that give an indication of the values most often associated with bureaucratic service. When these dry and formulaic referrals called attention to an administrator's *militia*, it was to highlight his long-stinting and unwavering service, virtues of endurance closely connected to soldierly self-denial.

The letters of Symmachus offer the best, but not the only, examples of this nexus between *militia* and lengthy service. It is important to remember the profoundly literary quality of these letters, replete with archaisms and colloquialisms,⁶²⁷ but the language of the “fictively militarized” administration constituted an important element of this stylized veneer. Two *commendaticiae*, written about twenty years apart, begin almost identically, betraying the formulaic verbiage that could be attached to *militia*:

Symmachus to Ausonius. As a ready recommender I introduce to you my friend the venerable Victor, not new or unknown, but already proven by the trustworthiness and diligence of his *militia*. To this day, no fault in his actions has tainted him, but the presumption of fortune, which sometimes tarnishes the best men, for a little while had shattered his hopes. The blessedness of this age will restore these things to their

⁶²⁷ Haverling 1988, 259-61: “It is an artificial kind of language, which echoes the history of the Latin language as well as the literature that had been written in it” (261).

virtuous state, if you have regard for the integrity of this suppliant with favorable approbation.⁶²⁸

Symmachus to Jovius. As a ready recommender I introduce to you my friend Eusebius, not new or unknown, but already proven by the trustworthiness and length of his *militia*. To this day, no fault in his actions has tainted him, but absence, which often conceals merits, if deserted by the testimony of those present, is said to have brought his position into an uncertain state of fortune. Nevertheless, I trust the fairness of your mind will not allow a situation adverse to the prerogative of his *stipendia*. Therefore, both my request and his reliability look for your judgment. After examining the case, please confirm the due privileges of his former *stipendia*, by which you will offer both security to us, your friends, and honorable amity to your colleagues by the retention of this excellent man.⁶²⁹

Symmachus may have accidentally written similar sentences decades apart, perhaps drawing on a popular expression, but more likely, with access to extensive records, Symmachus simply used letters already composed as a model to write form-letters expeditiously, substituting names and words to suit the context and for the sake of *variatio*.⁶³⁰ Either way, the repetition illustrates the conventional nature of military words in recommendations.⁶³¹

⁶²⁸ Symm. *Epist.* 1.40.1: “SYMMACHUS AUSONIO Non novum vel incognitum, sed compertum iam fide et sedulitate militiae sanctum Victorem amicum meum promptus commendator insinuo: quem ad hoc aevi nulla actuum culpa fuscavit, sed fortunae licentia, quae interdum optimos decolorat, spes eius paulisper infregerat. Quae in integrum saeculi beatitudo restituet, si innocentiam supplicis secundo favore respexeris. Vale.” Dated by Callu (1972-2009, 1:223n6) to 376-377 on the basis of *saeculi beatitudo* being a reference to the beginning of Gratian’s reign.

⁶²⁹ Symm. *Epist.* 9.59.1: “SYMMACHUS IOVIO Non novum vel incognitum, sed compertum iam fide et antiquitate militiae Eusebium amicum meum promptus commendator insinuo: quem ad hoc aevi nulla actuum culpa fuscavit, sed absentia, quae plerisque occulit merita, si testimonio praesentium deseratur, locum eius dicitur in ancipitem statum deduxisse fortunae. Singularis tamen animi tui aequitas non patietur, ut spero, adversum stipendiorum praerogativam casum valere. Et mea igitur hortatio, et ipsius fiducia iudicium tuum respicit. Quaeso ut causa cognita, veterum eius stipendiorum iusta confirmes, praestaturus et nobis amicis securitatem, et honestum collegis de optimi viri retentione consortium. Vale.” Dated by Callu to 397-398 (1972-2009, 4:38 and 114).

⁶³⁰ For substitutions for the sake of *variatio* as characteristic of the period, see MacMullen 1962, 369, and, in the *Cod. Theod.*, see Jones 1957, 88.

⁶³¹ On doublets and their rarity in the Symmachian corpus, see Bruggisser 1993, 320-2. We might guess that such similar letters were actually more common in Symmachus’ total writings but were selectively edited to avoid repetition. On this theory, since the ninth book was collected from family records by a

What is even more significant is the degree to which letters consistently attached to *militia* an ideal of imperial service rooted in endurance and self-abnegation. Even when there was no strong metaphor of rhetorical or administrative skirmishes, there was a specific ethos that could be described as soldierly. Nestled in both of the loquacious referrals cited above is the argument that lengthy and dutiful service – “sedulitate militiae” and “antiquitate militiae” – proved the merits of Symmachus’ recommendee. These flowery abstractions, the long-winded stuff of an administration built on status and patronage, are easy to dismiss as mere ornaments of decadent “bureaucratese,”⁶³² but their repetition in different commendations displays the overwhelming importance of long-stinting labor as an administrative ideal.

In one *relatio*, Symmachus praised a *cornicularius* by the name of Petronianus who had served in Symmachus’ own *officium*:

Petronianus, a former soldier of the urban cohorts [*i.e.* a member of the Urban Prefect’s *officium*], raised to the rank of *cornicularius* by the long duration of his blameless labor, has earned, in accordance with the custom and tradition of our ancestors, a certificate of his military industry, which your judgment has conferred upon others after an honorable period of service, Lord Emperors Valentinian, Theodosius, and Arcadius, famous victors and always triumphant Augusti. Therefore, if the pious visage of your eternity smiles upon us, it befits the divine felicity of your era that the customary prerogative adorn his service which has been completed without fault.⁶³³

later editor, the later editors clumsily or intentionally chose some duplicates (Salzman and Roberts 2012, lviii-lxiv and 85-6).

⁶³² For similar the abstractions and prolixities of this “ample style,” see MacMullen 1962, 370-3.

⁶³³ Symm. *Rel.* 42: “Petronianus urbanarum dudum cohortium miles ad corniculorum gradum inculpati laboris diuturnitate proventus more institutoque maiorum testimonium meruit castrensis industriae, quod ceteris quoque post honestum cursum stipendiorum iudicia detulerunt, ddd. imppp. Valentiniane Theodosi et Arcadi inclyti victores ac triumphatores semper Augusti. dignum est igitur divina temporum vestrorum felicitate, ut peractam sine offensione militiam, si perennitatis vestrae pius vultus adriserit, praerogativa sollemnis exornet.”

Aside, from the extravagant praise of the “*inclyti victores*,” this recommendation stresses the same qualities of soldierly service as those sent to Ausonius and Jovius. Not only do we see an abundance of martial language (*urbanarum...cohortium miles, castrensis industriae, honestum cursum stipendiorum, peractam sine offensione militiam*) reflecting the militarized vocabulary of administration, but Petronianus’ long and painstaking *militia* was the quality most praiseworthy and deserving of a *testimonium*. It was due to the unstinting length of his *labor* that Petronianus reached the rank of *cornicularius*, and so, like others who had completed the course of their service, Symmachus found him deserving of a “certificate of his military diligence,” a document which possessed enormous symbolic value as an index of social status and imperial favor.

In his *epistulae*, Symmachus frequently invoked his recommendees’ *labor* – a word with multivalent connotations of endurance, suffering, and hard-work – to prove their eligibility for promotion after dutiful *militia*.⁶³⁴ Nearly every time Symmachus praised a government official in military terms he stressed the length of their service. This was also a feature of commendations written by other writers. Basil recommended a man because he “bore heavy burdens in public service.”⁶³⁵ Such expressions did not always involve appeal to the value of military service. The letter of Basil depicted public service in the well-worn vocabulary of the liturgy. We should, however, recognize the

⁶³⁴ See Symm. *Epist.* 3.67.1, 3.87.1, 4.43.1, 4.53.1. Cf. *Epist.* 1.40.1 “*sedulitate militiae*” and 2.9.1 “*aetate militiae*”

⁶³⁵ Basil, *Epist.* 311 recommends man who has “borne heavy burdens in public services.” (κεκμηκέναι αὐτοῦ τὸν οἶκον ἐπὶ ταῖς λειτουργίαις) Deferrari trans., modified.

substantial connection between military language and this more widespread ideal of lengthy service.

The traditional idea of suffering for the state in battle has become extended to the world of administration. Likewise, when Symmachus wanted to convince the emperor to intervene on his behalf, he stressed his own endurance and forbearance in the face of his overweening enemies.⁶³⁶ Self-abnegation and endurance as an administrative ideal fit well with virtues that had long been associated with military discipline.⁶³⁷ A characteristic example may be found in a speech of Appius Claudius in Livy's history:

The pursuit and pleasure of hunting pulls men through snow and frost into mountains and forests. Will we not show that same endurance (*patientiam*) in the necessities of war which even sport and pleasure usually elicit? Do we think that the bodies of our soldiers are so effeminate (*effeminata corpora*) and their resolve so soft (*molles animos*), that they cannot endure a single winter in camp away from home? Surely our soldiers would blush with shame if anyone should make these accusations, and they would contend that there is manly endurance (*virilem patientiam*) in their spirits and bodies, and that they can wage wars in winter and summer alike.⁶³⁸

Patientia remained an essential manly virtue in Symmachus' day. This was no doubt rooted to an extent in the grueling realities of military service. A soldier could be discharged honorably after 20 years, and he could only win the prerogatives of a veteran after 24, but some soldiers evidently served much longer, with a few inscriptions

⁶³⁶ Symm. *Rel.* 23.15.

⁶³⁷ As a result it is difficult to identify whether a bureaucratic or military serviceman is being referenced, even when language in a recommendation alludes to bodily *patientia* (e.g., Gr. Naz. *Epist.* 128.3).

⁶³⁸ Liv. 5.6.3-5: "obsecro vos, venandi studium ac voluptas homines per nives ac pruinas in montes silvasque rapit: belli necessitatibus eam patientiam non adhibebimus quam vel lusus ac voluptas elicere solet? adeo effeminata corpora militum nostrorum esse putamus, adeo molles animos, ut hiemem unam durare in castris, abesse ab domo non possint?...erubescant profecto si quis eis haec obiciat, contentantque, et animis et corporibus suis virilem patientiam inesse, et se iuxta hieme atque aestate bella gerere posse."

advertising careers of up to 42 years.⁶³⁹ The valorization of *patientia* also extended to the emperor; Symmachus extolled Valentinian I for his military endurance in harsh environments.⁶⁴⁰ The emperor was equally energetic in peace and war, bringing the same martial virtues to bear in his civil pursuits.⁶⁴¹

Just as such soldiers had to endure the vicissitudes of fortune in war, Symmachus made clear that civil officials also faced their share of misfortunes that could hinder career-advancement in the *militia* of the bureaucracies.⁶⁴² Twice he recommended a certain Benedictus “whom Fortune, rather than any fault, has deprived of the rank and honor of *militia*.”⁶⁴³ Symmachus may have tended to blame a lack of career advancement on the whims of fortune due to the context of surviving *commendaticiae*. Men who faced obstacles in their careers might have required the most help, and letters that advanced the prospects of low level officials offered Symmachus an opportunity to display his rhetorical skill and political clout.⁶⁴⁴ But Symmachus’ consistent focus on the challenges of Fortuna in the career of a bureaucrat could also fit with an administrative ideal of martial *patientia*. This accords with the reality of long careers in the bureaucracy and the long stints spent in individual offices,⁶⁴⁵ but it also fits in with an ideal of self-abnegation. The collocation of martial imagery with *labor* and the

⁶³⁹ Dixon and Southern 2014, 87. *ILS* 2788, 2789, 2796, 9213.

⁶⁴⁰ Sogno 2002. Symm., *Or.* 1.1.

⁶⁴¹ Sogno 2006, 15-6. Symm., *Or.* 2.30.

⁶⁴² e.g. Symm. *Epist.* 4.43.1, 1.60.1, 1.40.1, 7.94.1.

⁶⁴³ Symm. *Epist.* 9.1.1 (A.D. 380/2 to Palladius 12, *PLRE* I:660): “quem gradu atque honore militiae fortuna magis quam culpa privavit.” Cf. 4.53.1 (A.D. 380/2 to Florentinus 2, *PLRE* I: 362): “In eum militiae gradum labore venisti, ut Benedicti amici mei fortunam debeas adjuvare, quem nulli obnoxium crimini fortunae iniquitas loco depulit, et honore privavit.”

⁶⁴⁴ On the reciprocal prestige to be gained through recommendations, see Salzman 2002, 54. Cf. Gr. Naz. *Epist.* 140.3-5 where, in an appeal to the governor Olympius on behalf of the “deserter” Aurelius, the bishop presents himself in glowing terms as receiving a suppliant like an imperial image.

⁶⁴⁵ Heather 1997, 195.

emphasis on the length of *militia* suggests an ethos of suffering service in the administration.

One might wonder whether there were any more specific administrative situations in which soldierly language was used to describe bureaucratic service. For ascetics, military rations could call attention to the need for austerity, and the separation of soldiers from women accorded with ideals of sexual renunciation. In the sphere of imperial service, on the other hand, the soldierly imagery we have thus far seen was mainly confined to generalities about unstinting discipline rather than drawing equations between specific acts and the soldier's life. There are, however, a few telling examples in which martial imagery became attached to administrative culture in telling ways. Often, these had to do with record-keeping, writing, and style. In another letter, Symmachus praised Hephaestio for his culture in military terms:

Cohorts of learned men follow in your train, and as some are accustomed to seek Attic Athens or the *gymnasia* of the Muses, so too do they attend your travels gripped with longing. But I do not think the throngs of *amici* are burdensome to you, rich with the rewards of *militia*. Therefore, nourish cultured men with the reserves of your rank, and expect more guests will soon be present for you, after the obligation of customary payments has been lessened for the teachers of the Roman youth. Farewell.⁶⁴⁶

Aside from the mention of *militia* which Hephaestio bore with equanimity, we might note other oblique military references in the short letter, including mention of “the reserves of your rank” (*dignitatis tuae copiis*) and “cohorts of learned men”

⁶⁴⁶ Symm. *Epist.* 5.35: “Sequuntur abcessum tuum litteratorum cohortes; et ut solent Athenas Atticas aliqui vel gymnasia Musarum petere; ita peregrinationes tuas desiderio trahente comitantur. Nec tibi, ut aestimo, militiae stipendiis affluentem, amicorum conventus onerosus est. Pasce igitur eruditos dignitatis tuae copiis, et spera plures actutum tibi hospites adfuturos, postquam Romanae iuventutis magistris subsidia detracta sunt sollemnis alimoniae. Vale.” Translation my own. To Hephaestio 2 (*PLRE* 1:416, “He might have been *primicerius notariorum* or *magister* of one of the *scrinia*”).

(*litteratorum cohortes*), perhaps a play on the designation of the staff as *cohortales* or *cohortalini*. An air of culture (*Athenas Atticas, gymnasia Musorum*) was interwoven with the military language of the administration. On the one hand, this suited the context. Symmachus seems to be requesting that *magistri* be classified in the bureau of Hephaestio and exempted from the *subsidia sollemnis alimoniae*, so buttering up his addressee with language of *paideia* was appropriate. On the other hand, in epistolographic texts there is often a link between *militia* and *paideia*. On two separate occasions, Synesius lauded imperial officials for both their στρατεία and φιλοσοφία/παιδεία with almost identical phrasing.⁶⁴⁷ Just as the recommendations of Symmachus could hint at formulaic expressions tied to *militia*, so too may the joining of culture and long-stinting militarized service have been a trope of epistolary discourse.⁶⁴⁸

Given the ever-present nature of *paideia* in elite culture, this might seem unexpected, but there could be a more distinctly practical implication of the link between writing and *militia*, namely the importance of writing in the work of administrators. In one letter, Symmachus praised Maximilianus for ranging with words like a skirmisher at court.⁶⁴⁹ Basil wrote to a *notarius* urging attention to his penmanship, and he advised another clerk to write in straighter lines, preserving the

⁶⁴⁷ See above, ch. 1, for discussion. It is unclear whether the officials in question were military or civil officers. I argue that there are no compelling reasons to favor the former over the latter.

⁶⁴⁸ cf. Lib. *Epist.* 1222.2 which references eloquence having conferred the ζώνη of Acacius and Gr. Naz. *Epist.* 224.3 with a link between the martial accoutrement of an official and his virtuous character.

⁶⁴⁹ Symm. *Epist.* 8.48.1: “Soles in scribendo esse prolixus pro ingenii tui viribus. Postquam te honor aulicus in procinctum vocavit, tu quoque verba succingis, et tanquam levis armaturae miles rorarios aemularis...”

τάξις of his words.⁶⁵⁰ In the “papyrasserie” of the Roman administration, written documents were of supreme importance,⁶⁵¹ and it is no wonder that this dependence on paperwork was borne out in links between literary skill and the fictively militarized language of administration. This aspect of bureaucratic ideology draws on “a culture of documentation” embedded in patrimonial traditions and apparitorial practices stretching back to republican traditions.⁶⁵² We might be limited by the nature of our evidence. Perhaps jobs less tied to paperwork, such as managers of imperial *fabricae*, would have produced letters with a greater emphasis on physical labor than literary skill, but these documents, if they ever existed, could be inaccessible to the historian precisely because of their more mundane and less flowery contents.⁶⁵³ At a more fundamental level we are constrained by the fact that the surviving writers who portray self-effacing bureaucrats were well-to-do gentlemen keen to join *militia* with a much wider palette of virtues.

The letter collections of the fourth and fifth centuries, especially the recommendations of Symmachus, color their descriptions of the bureaucrat with an ideal of soldierly endurance, a positive vision of suffering service. This ideal, in many senses parallel to that of the paradigmatic ascetic, ran alongside military exemplars, both that of the common soldier and the lofty emperor. This does not tell us the extent to

⁶⁵⁰ Basil. *Epist.* 333: “...σὺ οὖν, ὦ παῖ, τὰ χαράγματα τέλεια ποίει, καὶ τοὺς τόπους 2 ἀκολούθως κατὰστιζε...”; 334: “...τῶν γὰρ στίχων κειμένων 3 κλιμακηδόν, ἥνικα ἔδει μεταβαίνειν ἐφ’ ἕτερον ἀφ’ ἑτέρου, 4 ἀνάγκη ἦν ἐξορθοῦν πρὸς τὸ τέλος τοῦ προσιόντος. ἐν ᾧ μηδαμοῦ φαινομένης τῆς ἀκολουθίας, ἀνατρέχειν ἔδει πάλιν καὶ τὴν τάξιν ἐπιζητεῖν...” The letter concludes with a reference to yarn with which Theseus led Ariadne out of the Labyrinth.

⁶⁵¹ Quotation from Jones 1964, 1:602, on which see Kelly 1994, 165: “as far as I know, the only joke in the fifteen hundred pages of his *The Later Roman Empire*.”

⁶⁵² See Hartmann 2020, 27-31 for this “culture of documentation.”

⁶⁵³ On the quasi-military status and organization of *fabricae* and *fabricenses*, see James 1988, 275-81 and 2011, 247.

which this vision of the world was salient for rank-and-file bureaucrats; the ideal of the soldierly bureaucrat was the view of a few surviving literary voices. Later in this chapter, I will explore the limits of this exemplary picture. But it is surely significant that Symmachus chose to foreground it in his recommendations, especially the missives contained in his carefully curated first book of letters. The image was valuable for its resonance in the upper-crust of society, among the movers and shakers who used *commendaticiae* to make decisions of benefaction and patronage in the bureaucracy.

The positive view of self-abnegation in the service of the state ties in with traditional conceptions of service within the senatorial *cursus*. In a letter to the proconsul of Asia, Flavianus, Symmachus urges continued service:

Therefore, cast off your thoughts of Baiae and fruitless rest from *virtus*. This *labor* of yours is more fulfilling than all leisure. Let us embrace *militia* under one who loves us, I advise.⁶⁵⁴

Here, Flavianus' dutiful *labor* is sharply contrasted with the allure of *otium*. Symmachus judges that Flavianus, a proconsul of Asia, ought to view his administrative tasks – judging cases, responding to petitions, overseeing his staff – as an arduous, yet nevertheless rewarding, martial struggle.⁶⁵⁵ This juxtaposition of duty and leisure is a *topos* of Latin literature, and a number of scholars have identified it as an important theme of Symmachus' writings.⁶⁵⁶ That this well-known *otium-officium* contrast could

⁶⁵⁴ Symm. *Epist.* 2.17.2: “Quare abice Baianas cogitationes, et virtuti infructuosam quietem. Omni otio labor hic tuus laetior est. Amplectamur moneo sub amante militiam.” To Flavianus 14 (*PLRE* 1:345-346).

⁶⁵⁵ Cf. Symm. *Epist.* 2.19.1: “Sed si accedis sententiae meae; ubi primum patrum animus visu pignoris foveris, utilia antepone jucundis, juvenemque ad civiles fasces contendere dimittere. Quo tibi in castris coram duobus?”; 7.63, “...Tibi honor militiae pariat fructus secundos: sit vita nostra secunda, vestra conspicua.”

⁶⁵⁶ Matthews 1975, 1-31; Salzman 2002, 110-1; Heather 1997, 193 ff.

be couched in the language of *militia* shows how the idea of suffering service fit coherently with Symmachus' senatorial world-view.⁶⁵⁷

In fact, the self-abnegation of government service is a central element of Symmachus' self-promotion and praise of others. When as urban prefect he requested that the deceased Praetextatus be commemorated with statues, Symmachus argued that the emperors should honor the former praetorian prefect "not because he desired earthly rewards, he who spurned the pleasures of the body as transitory, although he lived as a man, but because the imitation of good deeds is roused by adornments and rivalling virtue is nourished by the example of another's honor."⁶⁵⁸

This flexible attitude to status-distinctions in government accords well with recent work on the conservative character of upward mobility in the bureaucracy. Alexander Skinner, for example, has argued that the new civil administration was largely filled by traditional aristocrats and did not offer as significant an outside avenue to political power as was once thought.⁶⁵⁹ If *militia* in central departments provided merely another career track for people who saw themselves as part of the traditional senatorial order, it would make sense that conceptual distinctions between the bureaucracy and the traditional *cursus honorum* were flexible. Accordingly, we see martial imagery emerge in Symmachus' letters as part of a symbolic universe that

⁶⁵⁷ Cf. Lib. *Epist.* 374 which congratulates Aristaenetus but notes his ζώνη bringing burdens of crowds, sleepless nights, etc.

⁶⁵⁸ Symm. *Rel.* 12: "non quod ille praemia terrena desideret, qui gaudia corporis, etiam cum hominem ageret, ut caduca calcavit, sed quia ornamentis bonorum incitatur imitatio et virtus aemula alitur exemplo honoris alieni."

⁶⁵⁹ Skinner 2013.

connected the self-sacrificing *labor* of *milites* to the honors and distinctions of senators in a traditional framework of patronage and *amicitia*.

The language of suffering *militia* was a marker of social cachet that could express a positive vision of imperial servants, the serried ranks of pencil-pushers who “compiled, collated and controlled [an image of empire] through the written word.”⁶⁶⁰ In many of the examples studied thus far, military vocabulary was embedded in considerations of patronage and culture, reflective of the realities of an administration based on recommendations and paperwork. It also belies the notion of militarization as an instrumentally-rational force of bureaucratization in a Weberian sense. The effect of a notion like *militia inermis* seems to have been to valorize long careers in mundane, administrative posts, but in late-antique letters, it remained tied to the patrimonial and traditional modes of advancement in society based on culture and commendation.

Obedience and Administrative Esprit de Corps

Another soldierly aspect of the bureaucratic imagery was the valorization of comradery and obedience. This may seem like an obvious quality of bureaucracies, with a stemmatic vertical hierarchy among the many fundamental aspects of administration mapped out in Weber’s ideal type. Yet the bureaucracy of the later Roman Empire need not have been portrayed in epistolary sources as structured around a hierarchy of orderly obedience. I argue that the emphasis on soldierly obedience that colored letters to and about administrators point to the salience of obedience and comradery in the fictively militarized bureaucracy of the fourth and fifth centuries. The use of martial imagery

⁶⁶⁰ Kelly 1994, 164.

suggests that upper-crust writers like Symmachus tried to enforce a vision of subservience to administrative *mandata* similar to that promulgated by imperial pronouncements and the *Notitia Dignitatum*, but whereas such documents offer an official imperial perspective, refracted through an editorial process, the martial imagery in epistolary collections offers a window into how elites worked as willing participants in reproducing a discourse of bureaucratic service predicated according to a soldierly logic.

The notion of a quasi-military hierarchy of offices receives support from other non-literary sources. Chief among these is the *Notitia Dignitatum*, a register of the civil and military offices for both eastern and western halves of the empire. While the *pars Occidens* cannot be pinned down as a reliable source for any specific period, the *pars Oriens* can be dated to the period 386-394 with a high degree of confidence.⁶⁶¹ The document may have been intended to help its possessor, the *primicerius notariorum*, issue commissions to different officials throughout the empire.⁶⁶² Beyond this practical internal function, at an ideological level, various scholars have argued that the text was meant to project an air of unity, whether for Theodosius before his campaign against Eugenius or, more dubiously, for Valentinian III.⁶⁶³ While such an idea of imperial

⁶⁶¹ For the date and composition of the *Not. dign.*, see Kulikowski 2000, Zuckermann 1998, Brennan 1996, and Mann 1991. I agree with Kulikowski's dating and consider the suggestions of dates for the western portion highly speculative.

⁶⁶² This suggestion regarding the *laterculum maius* and *minus* was first put forth by Bury (1920, 131-3), supported by Mann (1976, 1), and more recently revived by Brennan (1996, 150-3). Kulikowski approves but notes that this does not tell us about earlier or later *latercula* (2000, 372-3). The *primicerius notariorum* is averred as the possessor of the *laterculum maius* in the illustration accompanying *Not. dign. or.* 18: "Sub dispositione viri spectabilis primicerii notariorum / Omnis dignitatum et amministrationum notitia, tam militarium, quam civilium," for which see Faleiro 2005, 211-2 and 504-5n1.

⁶⁶³ The former is asserted by Kulikowski 2000, 360. The latter is argued by Brennan 1996, 166ff, who also notes the text's "discourse of power" (157-8).

control has received much attention, tied up as it is in the fraught question of dating, other ideological messages have gotten relatively little attention.⁶⁶⁴

Principal among these is a message of *esprit de corps* within an orderly and obedient hierarchy. An elegant portrait of administration is created through the symmetrical presentation of bureaucracies east and west, civil and military.⁶⁶⁵ Order is also conveyed by the similar tripartite presentation of each sub-list within the *ND*, what Brennan called sectional lists, consisting of (1) a visual illustration of the office's sphere and accoutrement, (2) a list of functions and officials under the official's *dispositio*, and (3) a register of his *officium*.⁶⁶⁶ The list of subordinate officials integrates each of the higher entries (e.g. *praefecti* and *vicarii*) with subsequent lower officials (e.g. governors), while the descriptions of *officia* render lower officials an integral part of each node of this administrative constellation. A typical entry is reproduced below:

Under the jurisdiction of the *consularis* of Palestine, *vir clarissimus*:

The Province of Palestine

Also, he has the following *officium*:

Princeps from the same *officium*⁶⁶⁷

Cornicularius

Commentariensis

Adiutor

Numerarius

Ab actis

A libellis

⁶⁶⁴ Gencheva-Mikami 2005, for example, stressed the panegyric and performative impact of the document, especially in connection with the provincial status of Achaëa.

⁶⁶⁵ The order differs between the initial list (sometimes anachronistically called the index) and the subsequent sectional lists, a feature of the extant text occluded by Seeck's zealous textual criticism (Mann 1976, 5-6). This confusing macro-structure should not, however, detract from the orderly picture of administration conveyed in the thick of the text.

⁶⁶⁶ Brennan 1998, 34.

⁶⁶⁷ This phrase – "*principem de eodem officio*" – specifies the procedure for advancement within the *consularis*' *officium*, as opposed to other officials who were drawn from different bureaus, interpreted by O'Hara as "a system of checks and balances" to constrain the power of chief officers in the bureaucracy (2013, 16-17).

Exceptores and other *cohortalini*, for whom it is not allowed to cross into any other *militia* without the express approval of the Clemency of the Emperor.⁶⁶⁸

The text creates an impression of quasi-military order, not only through the hierarchical presentation of titles by rank, many with military origins and overtones (*cornicularius*, *commentariensis*, and *cohortalinus*), but also through the concluding remark tying the staff of the *officium* to their assigned *militia*.⁶⁶⁹ The *insignia* of individual civil offices further supported this martial portrait of ordered officialdom. The illustrations accompanying the *comes rei privatae* and *comes sacrarum largitionum* ostentatiously depict the fittings of *cingula* alongside the tax revenues which they collected, while the *magister officiorum*, a civil officer, has assorted weapons and armor beneath the word “*fabricae*,” foregrounding his responsibilities tangential to military affairs.⁶⁷⁰

One can question how much should be read into as laconic a document as the *Notitia Dignitatum*. It offers precious little information about its purpose, and we still know relatively little about its original audience and context, but if the most popular view is correct – that the *primicerius notariorum* used it to draft *codicilli* for individual

⁶⁶⁸ *ND.Or.43*: “Sub dispositione viri clarissimi consularis Palaestinae: / Provincia Palaestina / Officium autem habet ita: Principem de eodem officio / Cornicularium / Commentariensem / Adiutorem / Numerarium / Ab actis / A libellis / Exceptores et ceteros cohortalinos, quibus non licet ad aliam transire militiam sine annotatione clementiae principalis. Ceteri omnes consulares ad similitudinem consularis Palaestinae officium habent.” Translation my own. The final sentence reinforces the sense that the entry was paradigmatic. *Cohortalini* (the MSS have the garbled *cortinalios*) is apparently a synonym of *cohortales*.

⁶⁶⁹ On the internal structure of the *officium* by rank, see Brennan 1996, 156-7. On the forbidding of a change in *militia*, cf. *Not. dign. occ.* 43-45. Also cf. the oath taken by soldiers not to desert their *militia*, discussed below, Veg. *Mil.* 2.5: “Iurant autem milites omnia se strenue facturos, quae praeceperit imperator, numquam deserturos militiam nec mortem recusaturos pro Romana re publica.”

⁶⁷⁰ For these observations, see Tomlin 1976, 195-199. The illustrations were not later additions but appear to have been instrumental to the fourth century text such as we have it (Brennan 1998, 36; Berger 1981, 142 ff.). See the illustrations at *Not. dign. or.* 11, 13, and 14 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Canon. Misc. 378), reproduced by Faleiro 2005, 193, 201, and 205. Cf. MacMullen on insignia in the Roman legion: “The obscurity of particular insignia does not obscure what is doubtless their chief significance: they expressed a soldier’s claim on the society he lived in for that society’s esteem” (1984, 447).

officers – it offers a taste of the internal memoranda of appointment that were so central to the careers of imperial servants. Just as recommendations of civil officials playfully highlighted the quasi-military idiom of government, so too may commissions have laid emphasis on the martial titles, accoutrement, and responsibilities entrusted to bureaucrats, all the while positioning them within an extensive hierarchy of *militia*.

We have some indications that elites within the administration could use the rhetoric of *militia* to express their *amicitia* in ways that suggest a sense of shared experience and *esprit de corps*. An important aspect of elite relationships were the favors that bound *amici*, the support that each rendered his own and his comrade's networks of clients. Martial imagery was an important way of reinforcing these relationships by imagining shared experiences in the administrative structure. When Symmachus wrote to Ausonius and Jovius, he could use the same commonplaces of long-stinting soldierly service to commend bureaucrats whose careers needed a boost. By helping officials advance in their stalled careers, Symmachus' friends could help "restore things to their virtuous state" and "offer security to us, your friends, and honorable amity to your colleagues."⁶⁷¹ Martial imagery was part of the glue of elite relationships. The sender and recipient of such a request could both hail their service to the wider good and their mastery over a soldierly subordinate.

⁶⁷¹ Symm. *Epist.* 1.40: "Quae in integrum saeculi beatitudo restituet, si innocentiam supplicis secundo favore respexeris"; ibid. 9.59: "Quaesio ut causa cognita, veterum eius stipendiorum iusta confirmes, praestaturus et nobis amicis securitatem, et honestum collegis de optimi viri retentione consortium." Translation my own.

But elites exchanging letters were also bound by mutual bonds of martial comradery. In a letter Ausonius wrote to Symmachus, the Gallic rhetorician and official reflected upon his first meeting with the Roman senator:

My good friend Symmachus, I do not fear that these words seem to you more pleasing than true. You experienced my reliability of intellect and words when we both, unequal in age, spent time at court, when you earned the rewards of long service as a recruit, and I, already the age of a veteran, went on my first campaign. At court, I was truthful to you, do not think that I now spread made up stories about you. At court, I say, a place which reveals men's faces yet conceals their thoughts, you sensed that I was a parent and friend to you and even dearer, if anything is dearer.⁶⁷²

Not only does Ausonius' wording cleverly play upon the trope of long-stinting service ("ego tirocinium iam veteranus exercui"), but it stresses the comradery that the two men could find in one another ("Et expertus es fidem meam mentis atque dictorum"). This use of military language to emphasize shared experience parallels the emphasis on the shared suffering of *milites Christi* found in the letters of writers like Paulinus of Nola and Augustine. But whereas such church writers pointed to an ideal of suffering for God, the language of Ausonius depended on service at the imperial court.

Martial imagery – whether found in imperial commissions, used in letters of recommendation, or seen in the garb of the bureaucrat – was a means by which comradery and identity within a larger structure. Kelly has used John Lydus' biography to illustrate how "well-defined hierarchies and career paths helped to promote a sense

⁶⁷² Symm. *Epist.* 1.32.4: "Haec, domine mi fili Symmache, non vereor ne in te blandius dicta videantur esse quam verius. Et expertus es fidem meam mentis atque dictorum, dum in comitatu degimus ambo aevo dispari, ubi tu veteris militiae praemia tiro meruisti, ego tirocinium iam veteranus exercui. In comitatu tibi verus fui, nedum me peregre existimes conposita fabulari; in comitatu, inquam, qui frontes hominum aperit, mentes tegit, me tibi et parentem et amicum et, si quid utroque carius est, cariorem fuisse sensisti."

of solidarity and corporate identity” within the bureaucracy.⁶⁷³ The evidence laid out here suggests the importance of military language in driving that process in an earlier period. Whether in the *Notitia Dignitatum* or in the letters of Symmachus and Ausonius, an implication of obedience to imperial authority lies beneath these orderly pictures of soldierly comity. The exact nature of this ideal becomes clearer when we move from texts that stress the positives of *militia* and consider negative examples of administrators who failed to live up to martial standards.

Negative Examples of Disobedient Imperial Servants

Just as writers found the deviant deserter a useful inversion of the ideal ascetic, so too did a motif of the wayward bureaucrat emerge in epistolary appeals and rebukes. In this section, I describe two main episodes from the letters of Augustine and *relationes* of Symmachus to illustrate this. Upset by the imperial bureaucracy, each man wrote missives criticizing functionaries who had, supposedly, deviated from their administrative responsibilities. In both scenarios, each writer sought to achieve his aims by portraying the wayward official as an inversion of the ideal soldierly bureaucratic.

Between 409 and 423, a certain Faventius, “manager of an estate at Paratianis” (*Paratianensis saltus conductor*) fled to the church of Hippo out of some fear of the owner of the estate.⁶⁷⁴ Despite his claim to asylum, the man was seized and taken away

⁶⁷³ Kelly 2004, 111. Cf. Whately 2017 who discusses ritualized behavior in the Roman army as part of a “melting pot” dynamic of bottom-up identity formation.

⁶⁷⁴ Aug. *Epist.* 115: “Faventium bene novit sanctitas tua, qui Paratianensis saltus conductor fuit. Is cum ab eiusdem possessionis domino nescio quid sibi metueret, ad Hipponiensem confugit ecclesiam...” In none of the relevant letters (113-116) is Augustine any clearer on the nature of Faventius’ alleged wrongdoing. For the *terminus post quem*, see the constitution of Honorius of January 21, 409 (*Cod. Theod.* 9.2.6) which appears to be cited by Augustine (*Epist.* 113: “...quod imperatoris lege praecipitur, ut eum apud acta municipalia interrogari faciat, utrum sibi velit dies triginta concedere, quibus agat sub moderata custodia in ea civitate, in qua detentus est, ut sua ordinet sumptusque provideat.”).

by representatives of Florentinus, an official under the *comes* (of Africa?).⁶⁷⁵ Augustine reacted by sending a flurry of letters, first to the tribune of the harbor at Hippo, Cresconius (*Epist.* 113), then to Florentinus himself (114), then to the bishop of Cirta, Fortunatus, (115), and finally to the *consularis* of Numidia, Generosus (116).⁶⁷⁶ As with so many appeals to imperial officials, we do not know the ultimate outcome of this affair, but the epistolary strategies of Augustine shed light on the ways that military language colored his interactions with and appeals concerning imperial officials.

Each of the missives makes strategic sense from Augustine's point of view. By writing first to Cresconius, he must have hoped to intercept Faventius in custody and head off a direct confrontation with Florentinus. When that failed, he dispatched a priest (Caelestinus or Coelestius) to appeal to Florentinus, but the emissary was not even allowed to see Faventius, and Augustine's subsequent letter did not achieve the desired result, so Augustine turned to the civil governor of Numidia at Cirta, Generosus, a man who presumably had jurisdiction over this inter-provincial legal conflict.⁶⁷⁷ But an appeal to the governor of another province would require local influence to be effectual. Despite the picture conveyed by an uncritical reading of Augustine's letters, the bishop of Hippo did not have much success interfacing with imperial officials.⁶⁷⁸ It was a

⁶⁷⁵ He is called an *officialis comitis* in *Epist.* 115 and an *apparitor* in *Epist.* 113. The *comes* could be the *CSL* or *CRP*, but it could also be a lesser official or simply a casual, non-technical appellation.

⁶⁷⁶ See *PLRE* 2:329 (Cresconius 2), 2:501 (Generosus 1). The sequence of letters is laid out in *Epist.* 115. *Epist.* 116 contains a request that Fortunatus read *Epist.* 115 to Generosus.

⁶⁷⁷ Although the church of asylum was in Hippo, the case fell to Generosus probably due to the fact that *Paratianensis saltus*, just slightly west of Hippo, was in Numidia. It is simply taken as a given that Faventius be taken to Cirta (*Epist.* 115: "...sed metus est, ne forte ad consularis perductus officium mali aliquid patiatur."). For the provincial boundaries see Lepelley, *LA* s.v. Africa, cols. 188-93 (1986).

⁶⁷⁸ Shaw 2015.

shrewd move, then, to write to the bishop of Cirta, a man who presumably had more influence over the governor, and to ask that he deliver Augustine's appeal.⁶⁷⁹

Aside from the typical flowery rhetoric of epistolary appeal, there are some features of this dossier of letters that show how important it was to invert the standard ideal of the bureaucratic soldier. Augustine made a point of portraying Florentinus as having used illegitimate and unlawful force to arrest Faventius. In his extant letter to Cresconius, Augustine does not even name Florentinus: "If I ignore this case, concerning which I am now again writing to your piety, not only your eminence but also that man, whoever he is, because of whom Faventius was thus seized, will rightly hold me responsible and scorn me."⁶⁸⁰ By ostentatiously refusing to name the *officialis* – Augustine later refers to him simply as the "apparitor" – he made Florentinus out to be a lowly actor. In the letter to Fortunatus, the content of which was also related to the *consularis Numidia*, Generosus, Augustine was even more dismissive of the official's authority. Whereas Cresconius responsibly sent his dutiful subordinates to aid Augustine, Florentinus' henchmen ambushed Faventius like robbers:

When, as often happens, he grew less and less worried and felt safe as though his enemy withdrew, he was leaving a dinner with his friend and they say that he was suddenly seized by a gang of armed men, as large

⁶⁷⁹ Aug. *Epist.* 115: "Ne quid tamen apud officium pecunia praevaleat, peto sanctitatem tuam, domine dilectissime et venerabilis frater, ut honorabili nobisque carissimo consulari digneris tradere litteras meas et has ei legere" Generosus apparently had Catholic sympathies, as he had forwarded Augustine, Alypius, and Fortunatus a letter from a Donatist trying to convert him (Aug. *Epist.* 52).

⁶⁸⁰ Aug. *Epist.* 113: "si ab ista causa dissimulaero, de qua tuae religioni ecce iterum scribo, non solum eximietas tua sed etiam ipse, quisquis ille est, in cuius causa Faventius sic raptus est, merito me culpabit et recte reprehendet..." Translation my own. It is possible that this unnamed person was the *dominus* who had an interest in the case, but I view Florentinus as more likely on account of his being involved in the violation of the amnesty (*Epist.* 115). It is also possible that Augustine refrained from naming him because he did not yet know who he was (see *Epist.* 115), but this was not the first letter sent to Cresconius, and Augustine could have other reasons not to accuse bluntly an imperial official without more substantial evidence, and in the end he thought it more tactful to say that Cresconius had it within his power to find out he was responsible (*Epist.* 113: "rogo itaque benignitatem tuam, quoniam difficile et incredibile est, ut non iam uel noueris uel nosse possis, in qua causa detentus sit").

as seemed necessary for this deed, working for a certain Florentinus, an official of the *comes*. When this had been related to me and when I did not yet know by whom he had been seized but still suspected that man whom [Faventius] feared and against whom he was being guarded, I immediately sent for the tribune [Cresconius] who was appointed for defending the harbor. He sent officers. Nobody could be found.⁶⁸¹

The contrast between Florentinus' *armatorum manus* and Cresconius' *militares* is strong, and it ties in with the underlying thrust of Augustine's letters. Unlike Cresconius and Generosus, Florentinus was a rogue. Augustine did not presume to assume Faventius' innocence, but he clearly portrayed Florentinus as failing in his imperial service.

Augustine also achieved this negative depiction of Florentinus by emphasizing his disobedience to imperial authority. In his letter to Cresconius, Augustine was sure to spell out the criteria upon which Faventius was entitled to temporary release:

So I beseech your benevolence...deign to bolster my petition before the *apparitor* who is holding him, because it is decreed in a *lex* of the emperor that he should be asked in municipal court whether he wants to be given thirty days during which he can put his affairs in order and take care of his expenses while under a modest guard in the city in which he is detained. If, with the approval of your benevolence, we can resolve his case through a friendly discussion within this period, we will be grateful.⁶⁸²

⁶⁸¹ Aug. *Epist.* 115: "qui, ut saepe fit, per dies singulos minus minusque sollicitus et quasi aduersario cessante securus cum ab amico suo de cena egrederetur, subito raptus est a Florentino quodam, ut dicunt, comitis officiali per armatorum manum, quanta eis ad hoc factum sufficere uisa est. quod cum mihi nuntiatum esset et adhuc, quo uel a quibus raptus fuerit, nesciretur, suspicio tamen esset de illo, quem metuens se per ecclesiam tuebatur, continuo misi ad tribunum, qui custodiendo litori constitutus est. misit militares; nemo potuit reperiri." Translation my own.

⁶⁸² Aug. *Epist.* 113: "rogo itaque benignitatem tuam, quoniam difficile et incredibile est, ut non iam uel noueris uel nosse possis, in qua causa detentus sit, hoc interim apud apparitorem, qui eum tenet, petitionem meam adiuuare digneris ut faciat, quod imperatoris lege praecipitur, ut eum apud acta municipalia interrogari faciat, utrum sibi uelit dies triginta concedi, quibus agat sub moderata custodia in ea ciuitate, in qua detentus est, ut sua ordinet sumptusque provideat. quorum dierum spatio tua nobis adnitente beniuolentia si eius causam amica disceptatione finire potuerimus, gratulabimur." Translation my own.

In much of his phrasing Augustine came quite close to an imperial decree of January 21, 409 addressed to the Praetorian Prefect of Italy and Illyricum, Caecilianus.⁶⁸³ The same lawyerly wording appears in his letters to Florentinus and Fortunatus.⁶⁸⁴ In the former, Augustine pointedly criticized Florentinus for not doing his administrative duty in obedience to the laws:

You yourself should see to the question of by what writ of authority you have seized Faventius. I know this, that every power established under the command of the emperor serves his laws. So although I have already sent through my brother and fellow priest Caelestinus the *lex*, which at any rate you ought not to have been ignorant of before I sent it, in which it is granted to those who are ordered by some power to be arraigned that they be brought to a municipal court and asked whether they want thirty days in the city in which they are held to see to it under a modest guard that they procure their own funds and put their property in order, as may be necessary. This law, as the aforementioned priest related, was read to your piety.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸³ In the subsequent letter to Florentinus (*Epist.* 114), Augustine claims to have a text of the statute, but even in this letter, there are striking similarities. Both describe the *custodia* as *moderata*, speak of *ordo domus/ordinare sua*, and use the terms *sumptus* and *civitas*. Cf. *Cod. Theod.* 9.2.6: “Si quos praecepto iudicum praemisso inscriptionis vinculo reos factos adminiculum curiae propriae dirigere iussum fuerit, municipalibus actis interrogentur, an velint iuxta praeceptum triumphalis patris nostri XXX diebus sibi concessis sub moderata et diligenti custodia propter ordinationem domus propriae parandosque sibi sumptus in civitate residere. Quod si fieri voluerint, hoc genus beneficii cupientibus non negetur: si vero dirigi velint, mox reos cum suis accusatoribus mittant nec ad arbitrium adversariorum in civitatibus retineri patiantur.” Other segments of the missive addressed to Caecilianus are *Cod. Theod.* 9.2.5, 9.31.1, 9.36.2, 11.8.3, 11.39.13, and *Cod. Iust.* 1.55.8. For his career, see Caecilianus 1, *PLRE* 2:244-6. Augustine wrote a letter to a Caecilianus in about 413/4 in which he described him as a “vetus amicus” (*Epist.* 151), and it cannot be ruled out that Augustine learned of the imperial rescript directly from the former prefect. Still, Shaw thinks this was “almost certainly not the same” Caecilianus, since Augustine thought his Caecilianus was going to depart from Africa soon after September 413 (*Epist.* 151.5) and *Cod. Theod.* 7.4.33 (March 3, 414) makes clear that our Caecilianus was supervising the *annona* there in 414 (Shaw 2015, 44-7). But Augustine’s knowledge of an imperial official’s itinerary need not be exhaustive, and he could have been ignorant of the imperial order of 414 dispatching Caecilianus to Africa.

⁶⁸⁴ Subtle changes, e.g. *fructus* for *sumptus*, *tenere* for *detinere*, and *res* for *domus*, are owed to stylistic *variatio* or recollection from memory. The letter to Florentinus (114) actually precedes the letter to Crescentius (113). For the chronology, see Folliet 1984, 243.

⁶⁸⁵ Aug. *Epist.* 114: “cuius potestatis iussione Faventium rapueris, ipse uideris: hoc autem scio, quod omnis potestas sub imperio constituta imperatoris sui legibus seruit. quamuis ergo iam per fratrem et compresbyterum meum Caelestinum miserim legem, quam quidem et ante, quam mitterem, ignorare utique non deberes, qua concessum est eis, qui praecipuntur ab aliqua potestate iudicii exhiberi, ut ad gesta municipalia perducantur atque illic interrogentur, utrum uelint triginta dies in ea ciuitate, ubi tenentur. agere sub moderata custodia ad parandos sibi fructus uel rem suam, sicut necesse fuerit, ordinandam, quae lex, sicut mihi memoratus presbyter renuntiavit, tuae religioni recitata est.” Translation my own.

In this forceful reminder that all imperial officials serve (*servire*) the statutes of the emperor, Augustine framed almost the very words of the *lex* with reminders that Florentinus cannot claim ignorance. If he continued to contravene the emperor's decree, he would be out of order. "In response to my intervention and appeal," Augustine ended the letter, "do not hesitate to do what the *lex* of the emperor orders, whose state you serve (*militas*)."⁶⁸⁶ This final punch draws together the strong message of the letter with the imagined military allegiances of Florentinus. We may not know his exact position or his reasons for seizing Faventius,⁶⁸⁷ but Augustine was asserting a loftier vertical hierarchy, a *militia* bound to the abstract *res publica* and the concrete *leges* of the *imperator*.

In seeking to resolve an administrative conflict in his favor, Augustine summoned martial language to remind an official of his soldierly duty and to push others to view his opponent as a bureaucratic brigand. Others used similar strategies to malign administrative adversaries. Basil portrayed a vicar as a muleteer and sea monster, and Synesius blasted the civil governor of Libya for bringing chaos of war to the city.⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁶ Aug. *Epist.* 114: "quod lex imperatoris iubet, cuius rei publicae militas, meo quoque interuentu et deprecatione accedente facere non graueris."

⁶⁸⁷ Aug. *Epist.* 115 describes him as an *officialis comitis* and *Epist.* 113 calls him simply an *apparitor*. I identify three possibilities. First, Florentinus could have been a member of the officium of the *comes Africae*, the military governor in whose remit fell both Hippo and Paratianis. In this scenario, Florentinus was enlisted by the *dominus* to bring Faventius before the *consularis* of Numidia (Generosus). Second, Florentinus could have been a representative of Generosus, and Augustine was merely imprecise when he referred to an agent of the *consularis Numidia* as *officialis comitis* (as implied by Folliet 1984, 242: "...le *comes consularis* alors en charge, un dénommé Generosus."). Third, Florentinus could have been a representative of some lesser *comes*. We know of generous extensions of the title to local elites, including in one instance the head of a butchers' *collegia* (Jones 1964, 1:528, 544) (for a similar argument regarding the *comes* Classicianus, see Shaw 2015, 33n2; *PCBE* 1, 210; *PLRE* 2:298). Whatever the case, the use of martial language in an administrative dispute is noteworthy.

⁶⁸⁸ Bas. *Epist.* 231, with DeFerrari 1926-34, 3:361nn4-6; Synes. *Epist.* 41. This Andronicus was the *praeses Libyae* (*PLRE* 2:89-90, Andronicus 1).

There are other cases where the military language of the bureaucracy was inverted to the advantage of the epistolographer. Symmachus sometimes used martial imagery to call on his allies and brand his enemies as traitors.

Relatio 23 offers such a case. In a complex series of disputes between Symmachus, officials in his own department, and the Vicariate, Symmachus decided to detain a member of the urban prefecture by the name of Felix, but as the man was walking through the city under light guard – for Symmachus had assumed that “the city was at peace” (*ut in urbe pacata*) – chaos broke out:

By the order of Fulgentius, *clarissimus vir*, through the actions of Gaudentius and Victor, *agentes in rebus*, and Boniface, a palatine who had until that time been in the *militia* of my department, Felix was violently seized and led off.⁶⁸⁹

Fulgentius – “the author of this outrage” – “fled” to court to explain his side of the story.⁶⁹⁰ Symmachus, prudently in his view, decided to exercise moderation and hand over the case to the emperor, but before he could do so, the Vicar claimed jurisdiction.

Symmachus’ second-in-command rushed into action:

When my *princeps officii* discovers this, he runs out, attended (*comitatus*) by a few men. He seizes Felix in a crowded place in the city but does not snatch him up. So Fulgentius, who feigns having been beaten, fought back against the laws with a stronger gang. Meanwhile, Felix is led off by servicemen of the Vicariate, and my *princeps officii* is seized by force in view of the Roman people.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁸⁹ Symm. *Rel.* 23.8: “iussu Fulgentii c.v. per Gaudentium et Victorem agentes in rebus et Bonifatium palatinum, qui hactenus in officio urbano militavit, violenter adreptus deducitur in eius aedes, de cuius mandatis fuerat audiendus.” This Victor may have already been recommended by Symmachus at an earlier date (*Epist.* 1.40, Salzman and Roberts 2012, 86n3)

⁶⁹⁰ Symm. *Rel.* 23.8: “Fulgentius v.c. auctor contumeliae meae invidiosum putaret, ad circi secretarium convolvit facti illiciti volens praestare rationem, quod sibi metum fuisse dicebat, ne officii subornaretur impulsu.”

⁶⁹¹ Symm. *Rel.* 23.11, with Seeck’s emendation: “hoc ubi princeps officii conperit, paucis comitatus excurrit; retinet Felicem celebri urbis loco nec tamen eripit; ita Fulgentius, qui se simulat verberatum, manu validiore legibus repugnavit. interea Felix a militibus vicariae potestatis abducitur, et vi princeps officii mei sub conspectu Romanae plebis avellitur.” I have followed Barrow in translating *militibus* as

While Symmachus could have given a colorless account of this encounter to the emperor, he chose to emphasize the deceptive and violent Fulgentius, fighting the laws with a posse (*manu validiore legibus repugnavit*) and calling in the *milites Vicariae* to arrest his opponents. Fulgentius, complaining of mistreatment and conspiring with members of the Vicariate to fabricate a story, then fled:

After this, he appropriated the *cursus publicus*, neglected the legal proceedings, and, conscious of his brash action, fled, so that he might preempt the just complaints of the urban prefecture, not knowing it is the case that the parents of the human race are moved more by justice than hostility.⁶⁹²

Thus ended Symmachus' retelling of a bureaucratic controversy. He appealed to the emperor to correct the injustices which "good men think should be avenged for the strength of the age."⁶⁹³ Although Symmachus claimed to have told the tale "without any skillful embellishment,"⁶⁹⁴ one cannot help but notice the vivid way he wove his partial story: heightening the action with historical presents, juxtaposing military-administrative terminology and violent language, characterizing Fulgentius as an impudent deserter opposed to the law, and presenting himself as a dutiful official, restrained in the face of chaos. Symmachus may have avoided direct criticism of these

servicemen, for it captures the ambiguity of the term, it being unclear whether these were actual soldiers or government officials.

⁶⁹² Symm. *Rel.* 23.14: "post haec usurpato cursu publico neglectoque iudicio audacis facti conscius evolavit, ut praefecturae iustas querimonias praeveniret, ignarus, ut res est, parentes generis humani magis iustitia quam invidia commoveri."

⁶⁹³ Symm. *Rel.* 23.15: "cum omnibus iniuriis cederetur, quas boni quique praesumunt pro vigore saeculi vindicandas."

⁶⁹⁴ Symm. *Rel.* 23.15: "haec ita esse gesta nec ulla arte fucari, instruction subiecta testabitur" (Barrow, trans.).

officials out of fear of the emperor,⁶⁹⁵ but he nevertheless painted a picture of order and moderation pitted against hostile and slanderous forces.

This could reflect an underlying nexus between administrators' fictively military positions and their struggle against disorder and lawlessness. In such an imagined world, *milites* opposed to the law had to be branded as illegitimate, as seen in the example of Fulgentius. In another *relatio*, a *strator* by the name of Venantius had ejected a certain Marcellus from his property. Venantius confessed, but it turned out he was not a legitimate "soldier" of the emperor – "When Marcellus alleged that the *militia* of Venantius was seized illegally (*"inlicitam usurpatamque militiam"*), because he had entered the imperial court against the laws (*"adversum leges ad palatina castra"*) although enrolled as a decurion, as the proceedings showed, I could not keep silent."⁶⁹⁶ This negative use of martial language enabled a writer like Symmachus to define appropriate and inappropriate *militia*. Just as fictive military service could win honor for a Roman, Symmachus could use its inverse to delegitimize his opponents.

In these examples, we have seen both Augustine the bishop and Symmachus the bureaucrat paint a negative portrait of the wayward bureaucrat to navigate administrative controversies. Regardless of the outcomes of these disputes, the image of the deviant imperial servant provides additional evidence of the salience of soldierly imagery in imagining state service. A corollary of the logic of *militia* – self-denial, duty, and obedience – was the notion that some imperial servants strayed from the ideal and

⁶⁹⁵ Barrow 1973, 122.

⁶⁹⁶ e.g. Symm. *Rel.* 38.5: "cum Venantii stratoris inlicitam usurpatamque militiam Marcellus argueret, quod decurionum adscriptus albo, ut gesta docuerunt, adversum leges ad palatina castra transisset, non debui obiecta reticere." For legislation of the same year on decurions illegally claiming *militia* see *Cod. Theod.* 12.1.94 ("...furtivam militiam et fraudes varias dignitatum..."), 95, 100.

needed to be corrected. This could take the form of a direct challenge to the aberrant *miles*, as in Augustine's letter to Florentinus, or an appeal to a third-party, either in a missive to a bishop or governor or, for a powerfully-situated official like Symmachus, in a *relatio* to the emperor himself. This phenomenon suggestively parallels the use of soldierly imagery to correct ascetics.

Statecraft and Militia: Imperial Service in Political Tracts

Letters of praise and petition contain ample soldierly martial imagery to conceive of bureaucratic service. I have argued that these examples exhibited some consistent features: a concern with dutiful adherence to hierarchy and rules, a focus on self-effacing labor, and a stress on lengthy service. The register of the *Notitia dignitatum* and the pronouncements of the *Codex Theodosianus* offer evidence that this way of seeing bureaucracy was, as it were, the official imperial position, and the letters of men like Symmachus and Augustine reveal that this language was a useful means of managing letters of patronage. But we also have other, more unique sources that give expression to the very same idea of a soldierly ethos within the administration. Vegetius' *Epitoma rei militaris*, the anonymous *De rebus bellicis*, and the so-called *Institutio Traiani* each used variations on soldierly martial imagery to conceive of state service. This cluster of texts suggests that the ideal of a dutiful administration extended beyond elite missives, internal documents, and rescripts; an ethos of soldierly service also percolated into ruminations and advice on imperial policy and statecraft.

Dating to sometime between 383 and 450, Vegetius' tract on military science presents itself as a text for the emperor.⁶⁹⁷ That the emperor actually read the text is uncertain, but given the author's possible role in the administration and the text's reception in Constantinople in the centuries after its composition, it is not unreasonable to read it as a testament to an administrative view of the later empire refracted through the antiquarian interests of a conservative elite.⁶⁹⁸ Vegetius consistently portrayed the empire as needing discipline and reinvigoration, a feat to be achieved through his own idiosyncratic blend of past practice and modern innovation. Although the emphasis naturally fell on the administration of the military, the theme of the treatise, the civil bureaucracy did not escape comment. When Vegetius wrote of the *sacramenta militiae* to be sworn by all being enrolled as soldiers, he included the admonition that "every man, whether civilian or *militans* serves God when he faithfully loves him who rules by God's will."⁶⁹⁹ Vegetius' expansive rubric, *vel privatus vel militans*, reflects an ideal of

⁶⁹⁷ The *terminus post quem* comes from the mention of *divus Gratianus* (Veg. 1.20), and the *terminus ante quem* derives from the subscription of one Eutropius (Reeve 2000, 246). Much ink has been spilt on the question of Vegetius' dedicatee. A majority of scholars support Theodosius I (Barnes 1979; Milner 1996, xxxvii–xli; Lenski 1997, 147–148; Richardot 1998), but there is also a strong case for Valentinian III (Goffart 1977 and Charles 2007). The debate may never be resolved, as arguments tend to hinge on aesthetic judgments and inferences about the appropriateness of different passages against the background of different historical circumstances.

⁶⁹⁸ For Vegetius' antiquarianism, see Milner 1996, xvii and xxviii. On the significance of the perceived ability to write to the emperor, see Rapp 2005, 261–2. For a Constantinopolitan or administrative context behind Vegetius' text, see Warner 2020, 207.

⁶⁹⁹ Veg. *Mil.* 2.5: "Nam uicturis in cute punctis milites scripti, cum matriculis inseruntur, iurare solent; et ideo militiae sacramenta dicuntur. Iurant autem per Deum et Christum et sanctum Spiritum et per maiestatem imperatoris, quae secundum Deum generi humano diligenda est et colenda. Nam imperator cum Augusti nomen accepit, tamquam praesenti et corporali Deo fidelis est praestanda deuotio, impendendus peruigil famulatus. Deo enim uel priuatus uel militans seruit, cum fideliter eum diligit qui Deo regnat auctore. Iurant autem milites omnia se strenue facturos, quae praeceperit imperator, numquam deserturos militiam nec mortem recusaturos pro Romana republica." On the passage, see Milner 1996, 35n3. Cf. references to similar oaths at Zos. 4.26.1 (oath of Scythians to Valens: "...συμμάχων τε καὶ ὑπηκόων πληρώσοντας χρεῖαν, ὑπηρετησομένους δὲ πᾶσιν οἷς ἂν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐπιτάξειεν."), 4.33.3 (oath of Scythians to Theodosius); Amm. 21.5.10, 26.7.9; as well as the much earlier Republican oath described in Liv. 22.38.1–5 and Gell. 16.4.2–5 (quoting L. Cincius Alimentus, *De re militari*).

state service that covered every denizen of empire, and although the section begins referring to the recruitment of new legions, one could be forgiven for thinking of *militans* expansively in opposition to *privatus*, embracing the civil service as well as the army. An incoming bureaucrat, before receiving his *probatoria* and being enrolled in the fictive *Legio I Adiutrix*,⁷⁰⁰ must have made a pledge of fealty like Vegetius’:⁷⁰¹

I swear by God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and by the emperor’s majesty...I will vigorously perform all that the emperor commands. I

⁷⁰⁰ Jones 1964, 1:566. Although this practice persisted into the sixth century (Ioh. Lyd. *Mag.* 3.3), the *Codex Iustinianus* preserves a law of 444 that shows fictive enrollment in the legion at least as early as the fifth century; *Cod. Iust.* 12.36.6: “Ius castrensis peculii tam scrinarios quam exceptores ceterosque, qui in officio tui culminis merendi licentiam habere noscuntur, ac si in legione prima adiutrice nostra militent, inviolatum habere praecipimus”; *Cod. Iust.* 12.52.3.2: “Scriniariis autem exceptoribus ceterisque, qui in officio tui culminis merent, cum in legione prima adiutrice nostra militent, audientiam tantummodo in causis in quibus pulsantur tuae celsitudinis deputamus.” On the issuance of *probatoria* by the *scrinia*, see Jones 1964, 1:368, 2:1144n4.

⁷⁰¹ Piganiol is unclear on this point: “Le serment de fidélité, qui, sous le Haut-Empire, fait de tous les sujets les clients du prince, semble, au Bas-Empire, limité au serment des troupes” (1972, 336), but later: “Les employés prêtent serment à leur entrée en fonctions et sont placés sous la juridiction de leurs chefs” (349). Whatever distinction may have existed between a military and civil oath of *militia*, however plausible, is not explicit in the evidence.

The earliest and most explicit evidence that I can find for the swearing of a *sacramentum* by members of the civil service is a decree of early 439 (14 kal. Feb.) from Theodosius II and Valentinian III to the Praetorian Prefect of the East at the time, Fl. Florentius 7 (*PLRE* 2:478-80). The *novella* begins with the vague statement that “oaths of *militia* are made that public necessities be cared for, but we have learned by the report of your illustriousness that some men acquire a post in such a way that they can become substantial leaseholders of other men’s estates.” (*Novell. Theod.* 7.1: “Iuratur in militiae sacramenta, ut necessitates publicae procurentur; sed suggestionem culminis tui comperimus, quosdam ideo tantum sortiri militiam, ut alienorum praediorum idonei possint fieri conductores.”) The law proceeds to list positions for whom such self-dealing is contrary to the oath of service, ordering that “all *domestici*, *agentes in rebus*, and whatever other dignity of *militia* is extended, respond regarding their public responsibilities under the governors of the provinces, with no valid prescription of forum, if those who are examined with respect to their public obligations try to use this right.” (“omnes omnino domesticos, agentes in rebus, et quaecumque alia praetenditur militiae dignitas, sub moderatoribus provinciarum functionibus publicis respondere, nulla fori praescriptione valitura, si hac, qui exiguntur debita publica, uti tentaverint.” (Translation my own)).

An oath of governors is registered in a separate law, also promulgated in late 439, but there is no mention of *militia* in the excerpt preserved (*Cod. Iust.* 9.27.6). Of note, however, is the use of religious language to frame the oath (specifically 9.27.6.1: “et licet neminem divini timoris contemnendo iureiurando arbitramur immemorem...”). Justinian’s revision of this oath expanded the religious language binding his underlings (including not just God, but also Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Mary, the gospels, and Michael and Gabriel (*Nov. Just.* 8 *iur.* [89.45-90.8 Schöll-Kroll])). Also noteworthy is the additional language of servitude (“γνησία δουλεία”) on which, see Pazdernik 2009. Karl Werner, using some of the same evidence, argued that *militia inermis* must have involved an oath similar to that of the soldiers (1998, 191-2), which Tac. *Hist.* 1.55 informs us was an annual oath (*solemne calendarum januarium sacramentum*).

will never abandon my *militia* and will not refuse death for the Roman state.⁷⁰²

Whether this was the actual oath given or Vegetius' own version, by including it,⁷⁰³ Vegetius expressed enthusiasm for the semi-permanent bonds of *militia*, formalized in an oath invoking religious and secular hierarchy. Such an oath "fastened the soldier's allegiance to the Emperor as an institution" while still engaging with his personal sense of duty and propriety.⁷⁰⁴ To be discharged was to be absolved of the oath, whether honorably or dishonorably.⁷⁰⁵ Pledging fealty was an expression of governmental compact that bore significant legal and ideological consequences and could apply to any representative of the state.⁷⁰⁶

In the values of the oath, there may even be a programmatic connection to Vegetius' literary project. He presented his own text as a kind of service to the emperor,

⁷⁰² Veg. *Mil.* 2.5. Translation my own, changed from Latin indirect statement to English first person.

⁷⁰³ Rowell states without much argument that Vegetius' *sacramentum militare* with its stress on the Christian trinity must have been a fifth century innovation (1967, 304). Charles is more circumspect in noting that Vegetius' oath may describe ideal rather than actual practice, but he is skeptical that Theodosius could have had troops swear by God in the religiously diverse 4th c. West (2007, 27-8). Papyrological finds confirm the integration of the Holy Trinity into various oaths as early as 439, but swearing in some form by "God almighty and the holiness of the always victorious emperors" ("Θεὸν τὸν παντοκράτορα καὶ τὴν εὐσέβειαν τῶν τὰ πάντα νικόντων δεσποτῶν") may have been practice as early as 388 (Worp 1982, 206-7, 217, citing *PSI* VIII 951.10, *P. Mich.* XI 613.7, and *PSI* VI 689.6). In light of this evidence, I remain unconvinced that Vegetius, whatever the date of his text (see note above), could not have been approximately describing a fourth-century oath, especially considering the malleability and usefulness of Christian martial ideology as early as the reign of Constantine (Shean 2010, 31-70).

⁷⁰⁴ Rowell 1967, 304-5.

⁷⁰⁵ Amm. 30.7.3: "honeste sacramento solutus," 28.29: "sacramento exutus."

⁷⁰⁶ The sacramentum drew on religious and hierarchical aspects of Roman society (Brice 2011, 47-9). On the legal consequences, see Rüpke 2019, 90: "Evidently, the swearing of the sacramentum had enormous legal consequences. It is also undisputed that, as an oath – a frequent element of initiation rites – it dips from the pool of religious forms, and is itself a ritual. And yet, at least for the Republic, we should refrain from using the label *rite of passage*." In this early period, the soldier's status was like that of *filius familiae in potestate* who "lacks *de facto* the status of a person *sui iuris*" (93). Rüpke argues for a new distinction in the late empire when "entry into the military no longer leads into society but in a quasi-definitive manner out of it," enabling the trappings of *militia* to take on "a new, initiatory function: no longer, though, in relation to society, but relating solely to the military realm" (96). We might think of the development of the *peculium castrense* and *quasi castrense* as new legal categories to formalize the perceived separateness of imperial soldiers and (later) bureaucrats.

a document produced by “diligent and faithful labor...for Rome’s benefit.”⁷⁰⁷ It was, of course, a traditional rhetorical posture to present a literary project as more lasting than deeds of valor,⁷⁰⁸ but for all the pretense, Vegetius’ self-presentation reflected that of a bureaucratic serviceman, laboring for the state and emperor with soldierly obedience. After writing the first book of the *Epitoma* on his own initiative, Vegetius was apparently commanded to produce a sequel:

For what could be bolder than to offer to the lord and prince of the human race, the master of all barbarian peoples, something about the practice and discipline of warfare, unless he perhaps ordered done something which he himself had accomplished. And yet, to disobey the orders of such an *imperator* seemed full of sacrilege and peril. So, marvelously, I have been made bold in obeying, while I fear to seem bolder if I had refused. The indulgence of your eternity has gone before and roused me to this rashness. For I offered my booklet about the selection and training of troops like a servant, yet I did not escape blame. And I am not afraid to undertake this ordered work, which escaped punishment when it was undertaken on my initiative.⁷⁰⁹

It could be sacrilegious to challenge an emperor’s pronouncements which were considered to bear the weight of oracular utterances, and imperial representatives were expected to adhere to them.⁷¹⁰ Vegetius made a show of his own quasi-soldierly position

⁷⁰⁷ Veg. *Mil.* 1.pr.: “licet in hoc opusculo nec uerborum concinnitas sit necessaria nec acumen ingenii, sed labor diligens ac fidelis, ut, quae apud diuersos historicos uel armorum disciplinam docentes dispersa et inuoluta celantur, pro utilitate Romana proferantur in medium.” Cf. 4.pr.: “Ad complementum igitur operis maiestatis uestrae praeceptione suscepti rationes...nec laboris pigebit, cum omnibus profutura condantur.”

⁷⁰⁸ Veg. *Mil.* 2.3.7: “Nam unius aetatis sunt quae fortiter fiunt; quae uero pro utilitate rei publicae scribuntur aeterna sunt.” Variations on this contrast of word and deed appear in Sall. *Cat.* 3.1; Plin. *Epist.* 16.3; Cic. *Off.*, 1.75, 156.

⁷⁰⁹ Veg. *Mil.* 2.pr.: “Quid enim audacius, quam domino ac principi generis humani, domitori omnium gentium barbararum, aliquid de usu ac disciplina insinuare bellorum, nisi forte iussisset fieri, quod ipse gessisset? et rursus tanti imperatoris non oboedire mandatis plenum sacrilegii uidebatur atque periculi. Miro itaque more in parendo audax factus sum, dum metuo uideri audacior, si negassem. Ad quam temeritatem praecedens me indulgentia uestrae perennitatis animauit. Nam libellum de dilectu atque exercitatione tironum dudum tamquam famulus optuli; non tamen culpatus abscessi. Nec formido iussum adgredi opus, quod spontaneum cessit impune.” Translation my own.

⁷¹⁰ C.Th. 1.6.9, “sacrilegii enim instar est dubitare, an is dingus sit, quem elegerit imperator.” Kelly 1994, 168n27.

beneath the commands of the emperor, a move which fit with long-standing *topoi* and the ideal of the dutiful official.

The *De rebus bellicis* echoes this soldierly vision of bureaucratic service in a related way. Probably writing between 368 and 369, the anonymous author dedicated his text to the emperor,⁷¹¹ but he does not appear to have been among the emperor's closest advisors (*proximi vestrae clementiae*). Rather, he claimed to be writing as an interested gentleman, free in his *otium* to undertake a task in the service of the empire.⁷¹² This does not mean, however, that he separated his undertaking from the bureaucratic mentality which colored Vegetius' *Epitoma*. To the contrary, the writer believed that "divine providence" (*providentia divinitatis*) inspired his ideas in service of the emperor, just as all members of society, whether members of the service (*militia*) or civilians, "rejoice in the felicity of the age."⁷¹³ More than their florid style, this shared mindset betrays an approach to literary dedication closely related to the obligations of *milites* to their emperor.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹¹ The text has a firm *terminus post quem* of 337, for the author wrote of "Constantini temporibus" in the past tense (*DRB* 2.1), and the lack of internal references to Adrianople and the suggestion that Rome's enemies were beyond the Danube (*DRB* 18.5) could suggest a *terminus ante quem* of 378. The narrower range of 368-369 is suggested by the reference to plural emperors, sons, and usurpers, a potential reference to the Isaurian revolt of 368, and proposals for fortifications (Alan Cameron 1979; *DRB* pr.8, 2.6, 6.2, 20.1). For a thorough overview of arguments surrounding the date, see Fleury 2017, xxviii-liii, who, although unconvinced by some of Cameron's arguments, dates the text less narrowly to 366-370.

⁷¹² *DRB* pr.15-16: "...quae quidem non ignota sunt proximis vestrae clementiae, quos alia plura sollicitant a nobis aliena. Verum quia illos multa occupatos effugiunt, otio persuasus, non adeo a rerum commoditatibus peregrinus, utilia vestrae felicitati undique redacta conferre gestivi."

⁷¹³ *DRB* pr.8-9: "Quamobrem, clementissimi principes, qui gloriam bonae opinionis perpetua felicitate diligitis, qui Romano nomini debitos affectus propagatis in filios respicere dignemini quae nostris sensibus commoda providentia divinitatis intulerit. Universis igitur seu militiam clementiae vestrae tractantibus, seu otio private contentis, vel terrae cultoribus, sive negotiatoribus mercium lucra tractantibus, pro saeculi vestri felicitate gaudentibus, consequemini ex hoc opere commoda singulorum, quorum species diversis titulis opportunis quibusque locis oratio subiecta testabitur."

⁷¹⁴ In Vegetius and the *De rebus bellicis*, MacMullen identified what he called "bureaucratess," the stilted and florid prose of functionaries in a difficult position under "the constitutional theory, fostered by flattery, that the emperor is omniscient (yet ignorant), omnipotent (yet his rule must be strengthened)" (1962, 376). Although I am inclined to agree that each author may have written with an administrative

This quasi-martial view of officialdom was central to the author's interpretation of problems in civil society and their resolution. Not only did he begin by pointing out the close nexus between financial and military affairs,⁷¹⁵ but he consistently portrayed economic and social maladies in vivid martial terms. Poverty led to brigandage, wars, and usurpations;⁷¹⁶ the cupidity of governors and other officials was akin to pillaging;⁷¹⁷ the laws themselves were in conflict and in need of pacification.⁷¹⁸ His solution to graft was to isolate the mint on an island almost like a fortress, secluded from external threats of commercial corruption and likely to serve with integrity.⁷¹⁹ His solution for the budget deficit was portrayed as a necessary restraint on the overweening imperial soldiery, perhaps including bureaucratic servicemen.⁷²⁰ The peculiar text presents the problems of empire as solvable by material means, implemented by the administration with military efficiency.

milieu in mind and been impacted by the difficulties of addressing an emperor at the apex of the bureaucracy, I prefer to highlight the soldierly ethos of each author rather than focusing on the sycophantic ornaments of their prose. For Vegetius the bureaucrat, see Warner 2020, 207, and on the "fragile mais possible" hypothesis that the DRB's author was a former low- or mid-level official, see Fleury 2017, vii-xviii.

⁷¹⁵ DRB 1.1.

⁷¹⁶ DRB 2.6.

⁷¹⁷ DRB 4.

⁷¹⁸ DRB 21.

⁷¹⁹ DRB 3. The language is not explicitly military. The *opifices monetae*, blamed for their cunning and venality ("...fraudulenta calliditas et vendentis damnosa necessitas..."), were slaves under the supervision of *procuratores* and representatives of the *comes sacrarum largitionum* (Jones 1:428, 435-7). We might surmise a loose allusion to austere *milites Christi* in the anonymous' description of these officials, entirely blameless and free from human intercourse: "Ergo huic quoque parti maiestatis vestrae es tut in omnibus adhibenda correctio, ita ut opifices monetae redacti undique in unam insulam congregentur, nummariis et solidorum usibus profuturi, a societate videlicet in perpetuum contiguae tgerae prohibiti, ne commixtionis licentia opportuna integritatem publicae utilitatis obfuscet."

⁷²⁰ DRB 5.1-5. Although he eventually clarified that he was speaking primarily to *militia armata* (5.4-5), his initial solution to the problem, fixed retirement dates and the orderly promotion and recruitment of *milites* along a predictable hierarchy, could be applied without much difficulty to the administrative apparatus which faced similar problems of slow promotions (*tarditas stipendiorum*) and too many supernumeraries (*numerosior miles de sequentibus scholis*). Perhaps the author was suggesting such a relationship when he wrote, "let us come to the enormous expenditures on *milites* which must be dealt with by the same logic" (5.1: "...ad enormia militum alimenta ratione non incongrua prohibenda veniamus...").

The Pseudo-Plutarchan *Institutio Traiani* gives another late-antique portrait of a soldierly bureaucracy. The text comes down in fragments preserved in the twelfth-century *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury, who claimed to transmit the text of a “letter of Plutarch instructing Trajan.”⁷²¹ The text was clearly not written in the high empire – anachronisms and the total lack of *testimonia* to such a document preclude such a possibility – but there are indications that, even if the original text is obscured by some medieval additions and modifications, it could be a pseudepigraphical late-antique work.⁷²² In its orientation to the historical and literary past, the text mirrored other fourth- and fifth-century texts which idealized Trajan⁷²³ and regarded Plutarch as a

⁷²¹ *Inst. Trai.* fr. 1 (= Iohann. Saresb. *Policr.* 5.pr., 539B): “Extat epistola Plutarchi Traianum instruētis, quae cuiusdam politicae constitutionis exprimit sensum. Ea dicitur esse huiusmodi.” All fragments follow Kloft and Kerner 1992, unless otherwise noted.

⁷²² For arguments in favor of an early date, see Desideri 1958; Kloft and Kerner 1992, 106-17; Kerner 1994, 203-6; Brucker 2006, 40-46. Liebeschütz maintained that the entire text was John of Salisbury’s fabrication (1943), but Momigliano noted apparent independent references in Petrarch’s works (1949). Martin argued that John was unreliable in his relating of classical material and that “there is good reason to suspect that the so-called *Institutio Traiani*... was invented by John as a pseudo-classical authority and framework for the political ideas he wanted to recommend to his contemporaries” (1994, 194). Although her other examples show the modifications that John could make to ancient texts, the fabrication of an entire text would be an entirely different exercise than embellishing or expanding details in an epitome or stratagem collection (*contra* *ibid.* 196, “These efforts are on a small scale, to be sure, but they are of the same kind as the *Institutio Traiani*.”). Moreover, the instances of modification cited by Martin differ in that they are not explicit references by John but rather uncited adapted passages. The *Institutio Traiani*, on the other hand, is set apart by an initial citation in which John proclaims his source (see preceding note). Finally, neither Martin nor Liebeschütz’ arguments adequately explain how John, who in other things showed a proclivity for epitomes and summaries (Martin 1994, 185), managed to fabricate such a text with such an intimate knowledge of late antique administrative terminology (Struve 1984, 305: “But it is made evident alone by the manner in which the *Institutio Traiani* was inserted into the thematic context of the *Policraticus* that John must have used a text in which the *official* of the late Roman Empire had been compared to the members of the human body.”).

On balance, I agree with the moderate position of Kloft and Kerner who maintain that the *Institutio* presented by John is probably colored by some medieval layers, perhaps even some personal touches by John, but that the overall kernel of the text is late antique.

⁷²³ Ammianus began his history with Nerva followed by Trajan whom he held up as an exemplary character to be compared with Julian (16.1.4); Vegetius imagined Frontinus as having written for Trajan despite the *Strategemata* having actually been written under Domitian (*Mil.* 2.3); a spurious letter in the *Historia Augusta*, purportedly from Valerian to Aurelian, praised Trajan’s military deeds as worthy of imitation (*Hist. Aug. Aurel.* 11.7); Julian hailed Trajan as among the greatest Caesars (*Caes.* 311C, 317B, 328B, 335D); Claudian repeatedly used Trajan as a model in *De Quarto Consulatu* (Paschoud 1967, 150); Ps. Aurelius Victor compared Theodosius and Trajan (*Epit.* 48.8); even Orosius, who decried Trajan as a

literary authority.⁷²⁴ Although we lack the original context, like Vegetius' *Epitoma* or the *De rebus bellicis*, the text purports to offer advice on statecraft to an emperor, in this case a former one. It is difficult to separate the early layers of the text from later additions, but if we focus on a segment whose administrative terminology closely matches the vocabulary of the later empire, we can observe a way of thinking about empire that matches a martial conception of imperial service.

The author described the *res publica* as “a kind of body” (*quoddam corpus*).⁷²⁵ The ruler is the head, the priests the soul, the senate the heart, the governors the eyes, ears, and tongue, and the farmers the feet.⁷²⁶ In a unique twist on the militarized imagery of the later empire, soldiers and bureaucrats become the two hands of the body politic:

One of the hands of the state is armed and the other is unarmed. The armed hand exercises the *militia* which is at camp and sheds blood. The unarmed hand seeks justice and serves the *militia* of law while free from arms. For not only do they serve the state who, protected by helms and corselets, wield their swords and other weapons against enemies, but also the guardians of cases who, reliant on the bulwark of their glorious voice, raise the fallen and refresh the weary...Both the financial clerks and the governors' officials serve the state. For just as some offices are of peace and others are of war, so too is it necessary for each kind to be undertaken by its own set of officials.⁷²⁷

persecutor, still admired his character and martial feats (7.11-12). For further discussion of Trajan as an exemplar in late antiquity, see Charles 2007, 91-4, and Thienes 2015.

⁷²⁴ On Plutarch's popularity in the fourth and fifth centuries, see Pade 2014, 534-5. Latin authors do not often mention Plutarch, but he was an important source for Macrobius (Alan Cameron 2011, 583). An interesting *comparandum* may be the Syriac text transmitted under Plutarch's name titled “On Practice” (ܦܪܬܝܩܐ) (text in de Lagarde 1858, 186-95; translation in Rigolio 2018, 9-19). Probably translated in the fifth or early sixth centuries (Brock 2003, 9-28), the text may be spurious or modified, to judge from certain erroneous historical references (Rigolio 2018, 4-7), but whatever the case, it speaks to the same late-antique interest in translating and circulating Plutarchan texts of questionable provenance.

⁷²⁵ *Inst. Trai.* fr. 2 (= Iohann. Saresb. *Policr.* 5.2, 540A): “Est autem res publica, sicut Plutarco placet, corpus quoddam quod divini muneris beneficio animatur et summae aequitatis agitur nutu et regitur quodam moderamine rationis.”

⁷²⁶ *Inst. Trai.* fr. 2 (= Iohann. Saresb. *Policr.* 5.2, 540B-C).

⁷²⁷ *Inst. Trai.* fr. 9a (= Iohann. Saresb. *Policr.* 6.1, 589A-B): “Manus itaque reipublicae aut armata est aut inermis. Armata quidem est quae castrensem et cruentam exercet militiam; inermis quae iustitiam expedit et ab armis feriendo iuris militiae servit. Neque enim rei publicae militant soli illi qui galeis toracibusque muniti in hostes exercent gladios aut tela quaelibet, sed et patroni causarum qui gloriosae vocis confisi

This valorization of administrators fits with the long-standing tradition of applying heroic imagery to a host of non-military pursuits, but the author goes on to portray the imagined military domain as requiring exceptional discipline and forbearance. The hands properly protect the head of the state, and unless they are “self-controlled” (*continentes*), the *princeps* himself will be “insufficiently self-controlled.”⁷²⁸ “In fact,” the writer continued, “the unarmed hand must be more tightly confined, because, while armed men are commanded to abstain from extortion and pillage, the unarmed is forbidden even from gifts.”⁷²⁹ With greater latitude to act “under the pretext of official responsibility,” civil officials must be punished all the more seriously when they contravene their duty.⁷³⁰ In imagining advice to the *optimus princeps*, the author of the *Institutio* reproduced a martial image of state service with which his readers would be familiar.

To be sure, each of these texts ruminates differently on administrative service: Vegetius stretched the oath of soldiers to imply a universal framework of allegiance,

munimine lapsa erigunt, fatigata reparant; nec minus provident humano generi quam si laborantium vitam, spem posterosque armorum praesidiio ab hostibus tuerentur. Militant et publicani apparitores et officiales omnium iudicum. Sicut enim alia sunt officia pacis, alia belli, ita eadem necesse est per alios et alios expediri.”

⁷²⁸ *Inst. Trai.* fr. 9a (= Iohann. Saresb. *Politr.* 6.1, 589B-C): “Usus quoque manuum capitis sui protestatur imaginem...Oportet, inquit Pericles collegam Sophoclem arguens, praetorem non modo manus sed oculos habere continentis. Est autem praesidentium continentia illa laudabilis, cum ab exactionibus et iniuriis continent manus suas et cohibent alienas. Manus tamen utriusque militiae, armata videlicet et inermis, manus principis est; et nisi utramque cohibeat, parum continens est.”

⁷²⁹ *Inst. Trai.* Desideri fr. 9 (= Iohann. Saresb. *Politr.* 6.1, 589C): “Et quidem arctius est compescenda inermis, eo quod cum armati praecipiantur abstinere ab exactionibus et rapinis, inermis etiam a muneribus arcetur.” This and the following passage are taken by Kloft and Kerner to be the work of John on account of the legalistic argumentation (1992, 79: “von seiner stark rechtlichen Argumentationsweise”), but the similarities to the soldierly discourse outlined above is suggestive of a late-antique source for this material (see Callu and Desideri).

⁷³⁰ Iohann. Saresb. *Politr.* 6.1, 589D: “Quia vero officialium licentia maior est, dum sub praetextu officii spoliare possunt aut vexare privatos, quod contra officium praesumunt poena feriendum est graviore.”

one which also included his own writing; the *De rebus bellicis* blended military and civilian problems facing the empire; and the *Institutio Traiani* developed a metaphor of a body politic with warring hands, armed and unarmed. But significantly, all three betray a similar ethos of soldierly service, suggesting the theme was appropriate for treatises imparting wisdom to an emperor. This does not merely indicate that the ethos could be effective in fawning imperial addresses; it also shows how the image of the soldier was a popular form of authorial expression in a rhetorical literary form. That the soldierly ethos would penetrate even these texts suggests that the writers steeped in the literary culture of the bureaucracy used a martial framework of service to display their own erudition and statecraft.

Soldierly Servility: The Limits of Martial Imagery

In the above examples, we have seen the importance of soldierly martial imagery in constructing and enforcing an ideal of self-effacing and obedient state service. There were several limits on the extent to which this language can be said to have defined the world of state service. One such constraint is endemic to the nature of our evidence; as mentioned earlier, we lack epistolography from the point of view of lower-level government officials. I have tried to buttress the epistolary evidence with a handful of intriguing political tracts, but given uncertainties surrounding authorship, only tenuous connections can be drawn to a bureaucratic milieu. Some of the martial imagery of imperial constitutions and high-level epistolography was perhaps internalized by the average *notarius* or *agens in rebus*, as outward displays of quasi-military status might suggest, but at best we can only surmise that the language used in surviving letters spoke to the identity of the average bureaucrat.

Despite these evidentiary limits, we can perceive some constraints on the social impact of administrative martial imagery, namely the degree to which our extant sources disapproved of the soldierly ethos. While the line between imperial *militia* and traditional *dignitas* was not as stark as it has been characterized by some scholars, writers like Symmachus and Libanius seem to have had reservations about the soldierly logic of state *militia*. Symmachus, despite his position within the imperial administration, refrained from describing himself as a *miles*, and his ideal of senatorial *otium* contrasted strongly with his portrait of soldierly *officium*, a tension which to a large degree remained unresolved in his writings. This attitude to the rhetoric of state service could be understood as rooted in the exacting realities of state service: long waiting lists, uncertain career advancement, and insufficient remuneration. This dissatisfaction with the ideal of *militia* was also reflected in the letters of Libanius, who disparaged soldierly service as a servile profession, unbecoming of a learned gentleman. But as much as such men were holdouts in their conservative views, they still to a large extent embraced the terms of a martial imperial apparatus when it suited their social needs. Ultimately, this tension between the soldierly ethos of the administration on the one hand and the patrimonial and traditional formulation of a man's role in society mirrored the tension present in Christian views of state service.

The Limited Application of Soldierly Imagery

Many modern descriptions of the late-antique aristocracy have contrasted the newer career paths available to men outside the traditional senatorial elite with the traditional *cursus honorum*, albeit significantly modified from the republican and early-imperial framework. Peter Heather characterized the former as *militia* and the latter as

dignitas, and Michelle Salzman’s prosopographical study has emphasized the separateness of the two career paths.⁷³¹ To an extent, epistolary evidence confirms this picture. Symmachus never explicitly described his own career as a *militia* or himself as a *miles*, but the *apparitores* and other officials beneath him did receive such appellations. In *relationes* reporting changes to the rolls of senators, he refrains from any of the militarized titles or vocabulary that could earn entry to the senate.⁷³²

Nor was Symmachus unaware of the contrast between the life of a senator and that of a civil-servant. Symmachus even joked that he was used to the toga, while, Decius, one of his recipients, was spending time *in castris*.⁷³³ The very first letter of his collection, carefully and programmatically chosen,⁷³⁴ contains an even more intriguing comment on Symmachus’ social role and its perceived contrast with the bureaucracy. Writing to his father, Symmachus included a poem as if delivered by the *persona* of Septimius Acindynus, the former owner of the *villa*, a painting of whom graced the walls:⁷³⁵

The Attic *palla* covers my father-in-law, the *toga picta* my father:
The former oversaw sacrifices, the latter pronounced the laws of the
Romans,
but as for me, because the brooch clasps my military cloak,

⁷³¹ Heather 1997, 195. Kuhoff 1983, 255 offers a “mixed career path.” Salzman acknowledges the existence of such crossovers but sticks to a framework that sharply distinguishes civic and bureaucratic careers (2002, 111-2). On the distinctions between *dignitas* and *militia*, see Jones 1964, 1:377-8, where he distinguishes the narrow technical sense from the more “loosely styled *militia*.” *Dignitas*, too, could be flexible (2:1151-2n29).

⁷³² Symm. *Rel.* 45-46.

⁷³³ Symm. *Epist.* 7.38.1: “Iocari mihi visus es, cum te scriberes obvia militum arma timuisse. Credo ne tuum iter in Campaniae longinqua sequeremur. Nam si ipse diu versatus in castris, nonnihil timoris expertus es; ego togae assuetus, quid amaritudinis incidissem? Sed non patior, ut tibi ad moram prosit aemulata trepidatio.” To Decius 10 (*PLRE* 1:35-36), but see below for uncertainty regarding his office.

⁷³⁴ Sogno 2017, 178-182 offers a succinct summary of the many different views of the promulgation of Symmachus’ edition. Even if he died while editing books 2-7, as Sogno argues, the first book still bears clear marks of his authorial mind (Salzman and Roberts 2012, lviii).

⁷³⁵ Septimius Acindynus was Praetorian Prefect of the East in 338-340 and consul in 340 (Acindynus 2, *PLRE* 1:11; Salzman and Roberts 2012, 10n13).

I govern the people in the emperors' Praetorian Prefecture of the East,
but the painting is silent about my *fascēs*. Look to the *fasti*.⁷³⁶

Symmachus used the martial garb of Acindynus – the *fibula vestis militaris* presumably being a reference to the *paludamentum* and crossbow fibula – to point out the man's bureaucratic station. But Symmachus thought the painting inappropriate to the man's consular status, as it had left out the *fascēs*, so he performed edits of some sort.⁷³⁷ Consular status trumps service within the praetorian prefecture. A similar concern with the old *cursus honorum* is borne out in his subsequent praise of his own proconsulship of Africa, modestly expressed in another embedded poem:

Hortensius,⁷³⁸ fortunate in wealth, dwelled in this hall,
he who opposed the Arpinian in rhetoric.
Here the consul Acindynus spent his distinguished age
and Orfitus⁷³⁹ who gave laws to the descendants of Aeneas.
Among these, the glory of your youth, but with your elderly honor
distinguished, you, Symmachus, are renowned with a dozen *fascēs*.
But not yet does the relaxed leisure of Bauli seek you;
May public service ever keep you a vigilant young man.⁷⁴⁰

In each of the above poems, Symmachus positioned himself in a long line of landed officeholders stretching all the way back to Hortensius. There was no outright derision

⁷³⁶ Symm. *Epist.* 1.1.3: “Attica palla tegit socerum, toga picta parentem: / praefuit iste sacris, hic dixit iura Quiritis; / at mihi castrensem quod mordet fibula vestem, / Aurorae in populis regum praetoria rexi, / sed fascēs pictura tacet: tu respice fastus.” Translation. For the *toga picta*, see Bruggisser 1993, 82-6 and Salzman 1990, 34-5. For *fastus*, -uum = *fasti*, -orum, see Gaffiot s.v. *fastus* (3) and Prisc. *Gramm.* 6.72.

⁷³⁷ Symm. *Epist.* 1.1.2: “Ibi Acindyno conditori eiusque maioribus emmetra verba libavi et picturae licentiam, quae vestitum disparem singulis tribuit, in rationem coegi.” For the custom of maintaining ancestral portraits in general, see Plin. *Nat.* 35.6 and Flower 1996, 40-47. On this passage, see Salzman and Roberts 2012, 9-10n12.

⁷³⁸ Renowned orator and consul of 69 BC, Quintus Hortensius Hortalus was the eponymous interlocutor of Cicero's lost dialogue.

⁷³⁹ Symmachus' father-in-law, Memmius Vitrasius Orfitus signo Honorius (*PLRE* 1:651-3).

⁷⁴⁰ Symm. *Epist.* 1.1.5: “Hanc celebravit opum felix Hortensius aulam, / contra Arpinatem qui stetit eloquio. / Hic consul clarum produxit Acindynus aevum / quique dedit leges Orfitus Aeneadis. / Hos inter iuvenile decus, sed honore senili, / bis seno celsus, Symmache, fasce cluis. / Sed te Baulorum necdum lenta otia quaerunt; / cura habeat iuvenem publica pervigilem.” Translation my own. The paradox of young old age is a late Roman convention (Curtius 1953, 98-101; Bruggisser 1993, 80-1).

for the trappings of the bureaucracy, but in the first poem, the garb of *militia* were subordinate to the consular *fascēs* and *fasti*. Blue-blooded senator that he was, Symmachus saw himself first and foremost as engaged in traditional *cura publica*, even though he had already held several imperial offices and been raised to the rank of *comes tertii ordinis*.⁷⁴¹ We might even suppose a certain element of aristocratic chauvinism underlying his choice of words, but such an argument from silence remains outside the scope of the evidence. Anyway, there are numerous indications that a sharp distinction between the *dignitates* of men like Symmachus and the bureaucratic world of *militia* never existed.

Symmachus was anxious to depict himself as a traditional senator, more of a cultured consular than an industrious administrator. Accordingly, he hardly used soldierly martial imagery to portray his public role. But how should we interpret this aversion to *militia*, this evidentiary silence in Symmachus' letters? Although it should not be taken to indicate a sharp divide between bureaucratic *militia* and senatorial *dignitas*, it does constitute meaningful apophasis. Symmachus was happy to describe others, particularly his own subordinates and clients, along a soldierly rubric, but when it came to himself, the role of quintessential senator rather than imperial servant was the more salient part of his identity.⁷⁴²

⁷⁴¹ The letter was written in 375 while Symmachus was proconsul of Africa (Callu 1972-2009, 1:213n1). For Symmachus' other early offices (*quaestor*, *pontifex maior*, *praetor*, *corrector Lucaniae et Brittiorum*), several of which would have entitled him to write in terms of *militia*, see Symmachus 4, *PLRE* 1:865-6.

⁷⁴² The closest exception I can find is his mention in a letter to Ausonius in which he remarks that he saw the Moselle first-hand when he "accompanied the standards of the eternal emperors" (*Epist.* 1.14.3: "...cum aeternorum principum iam pridem signa comitarer." Translation my own). This does not assimilate the role of Symmachus with that of a soldier of the emperor; it is purely descriptive of his embassy. For the possibility of Symmachus' having viewed the river, see Salzman and Roberts 2012, 46n2.

For one thing, Symmachus occasionally used military language to describe the non-military tasks of fellow senators, and there is no hint of disapproval in any of this. In the already mentioned letters to the senator Flavianus, Symmachus characterized the work of the proconsul as being a *militia*, long before Flavianus would spend any time in the praetorian prefecture.⁷⁴³ Not only that, Symmachus' use of the first-person plural – “amplectamur...militiam” – seems to include his own post as urban prefect within the same military realm.⁷⁴⁴ Likewise, the official mentioned above who spent time *in castris* is only attested as a governor of Numidia and proconsul of Campania, so Symmachus' distinction between his togate status and Decius' military position may have more to do with being away from the city than serving in some imperial bureau, as some have assumed.⁷⁴⁵ The *honor militiae* is conferred upon not just low level *apparitores* and *agentes in rebus* but also high government officials who came from senatorial stock, including *comites sacrarum largitionum*, *magistri*, and *praefecti praetoriani*. The letter of Ausonius cited above used the language of *militia* to characterize his and Symmachus' first encounter at the imperial court.⁷⁴⁶ That Ausonius could use language such as *militia* to describe Symmachus' early senatorial career shows that the symbolic universe of militarized civil service could be stretched to include aspects of ‘traditional’

⁷⁴³ Callu 1972-2009, 1:234, n. 1.

⁷⁴⁴ Symm. *Epist.* 2.17.2. Nicomachus Flavianus' proconsulship of Asia (383) coincides with Symmachus' urban prefecture.

⁷⁴⁵ Seeck 1883, clxxxii and *PLRE* 1:35-6 favor service in a nominal military office, perhaps a tribune or *notarius*. Bonney 1975, 364 takes Symmachus' “*diu versatus in castris*” (7.38) as an ironic reference to Decius' epigraphically attested governorship of Numidia rather than a separate post, while Callu 1972-2009, *ad loc.* refrains from naming an office. For the familiar contrast between *domi* and *militiae*, see *Epist.* 2.9: “*Agnosceis enim de septem montibus virum; et domi cognitum bonitate generis, et foris aetate militiae.*”

⁷⁴⁶ Symm. *Epist.* 1.32.4. Although written by Ausonius, that Symmachus included the letter in the first book of his collection – widely considered to have been carefully organized by Symmachus himself (Salzman, Sogno, Cameron) – suggests a favorable view of this figure of speech by Symmachus.

careers, the *dignitates* that are often considered entirely separate from the new bureaucracy. In the letters of Symmachus, civil martial imagery implied no explicit derision, and it was malleable enough to be attached to senators. Nevertheless, his reticence to use it to describe his own role suggests a limit on the appeal of martial imagery.

Symmachus' letters speak to the contested, if hazy, distinctions between civil and senatorial office. When one turns to consider the self-presentation of other members of the *clarissime*, Symmachus' conservatism appears less representative of the empire's aristocracy. In his study of late Roman honorific statues, Ulrich Gehn identifies a gulf between the garb of emperors and senators in the early fourth century, but by the late fourth century this gulf had largely disappeared with an emerging "senatorial class-consciousness cutting across the *clarissimi* of birth and the *clarissimi* of function."⁷⁴⁷ There is perhaps some echo of Symmachus' views in the popularity of the older toga type in the city of Rome, but this was also eclipsed by the *chlamys* and new toga in the early fifth century.⁷⁴⁸

More challenging is the interpretation of the significance of the spread of the so-called *chlamys*-costume. An in-depth evaluation of different styles of clothing is beyond the scope of this inquiry, but there do seem to be problems with direct associations between different costumes, insignia, and individual offices. Some individual statues

⁷⁴⁷ Gehn 2012, 128-9: "Positiv gefasst, erweisen die Stadttorsarkophage ein die Geburtsclarissimi [*sic*] und Funktionsclarissimi übergreifendes senatorisches Standesbewusstsein in theodosianischer Zeit, das sich an die kaiserliche Kunst der neuen Hauptstadt anschließt, und das mit einer Verzögerung von fast einem Jahrhundert die seit tetrarchischer Zeit entwickelten Standesgewänder der *militia inermis* in die eigene Grabrepräsentation übernimmt."

⁷⁴⁸ Gehn 2012, 186-9.

defy strict categories, such as “the wise Eupethius” from Aphrodisias, who wears a *chlamys* but does not appear to have held office,⁷⁴⁹ or the togate Pytheas, also from Aphrodisias, who seems to have been a private citizen but nevertheless possessed insignia that are typically associated with officeholding.⁷⁵⁰ Just as some letters of Symmachus challenge the distinction between *dignitas* and *militia*, it would seem that the corpus of honorary statuary “strain[s] against interpretive strategies that it may have outgrown.”⁷⁵¹ The colored patches and *segmenta* that may have indicated specific ranks or statuses are inaccessible to the modern historian.⁷⁵² Likewise, the presence or absence of a *cingulum* cannot be taken as a straightforward indicator of office.⁷⁵³ The vagaries of the evidence militate against a simple correspondence between apparel and status, but the iconographic evidence clearly suggests an openness among some members of the clarissime to new self-representations that could include the trappings of the imperial service.

Symmachus’ studied avoidance of the trappings of the imperial service, then, was at odds with the preferences of many other elites from across the Mediterranean, parts of which were becoming increasingly open to defining status in the terms of the imperial service. This inconcinnity – between the styles of elite presentation and the ambivalent sensibility found in Symmachus’ own epistles – speaks to the contested nature of the soldierly ethos of state service. A rescript of January 382 from Theodosius,

⁷⁴⁹ Smith 1999, 177.

⁷⁵⁰ Gehn 2012, 204-6.

⁷⁵¹ Anderson 2012.

⁷⁵² Smith 1999, 176-7.

⁷⁵³ Horster 1998, 45.

Gratian, and Valentinian to Pancratius, Urban Prefect of Constantinople, aptly reflects this tension:

Even during the morning, so long as within the walls of the city, no senator shall claim the military garb for himself, but with the terror of the *chlamys* set aside, let him don the peaceful garments of the *colobos* and *paenula*. But when either a meeting of the white-garbed order or some public inquiry of a senator under a judge is being held, we order that the same senator should be present in the *toga*. Also, officials, by whom statutes are fulfilled and necessary business completed, we order to wear the *paenula* but to keep their *cingula* binding their inner garment so that, by covering up their bodies with cloaks of different colors, they may testify the obligations of their position from recognition of this sort of clothing. Of course, we permit slaves whose masters are not bound by the concern of *militia* to wear either woolen cloaks or cowls. If anyone of the senators should neglect these rules, he shall be stripped of his position's honor and the right of entering the senate. But officials and slaves, who are not able to sustain the loss of shame, shall be ordered to undergo the punishment of exile. A fine of 20 pounds of gold shall be exacted upon the office of censor if it should suppress culpability of usurpation of office by deception or reduce it by paying a bribe.⁷⁵⁴

This law complicates any simplistic interpretation of soldierly accoutrement as an index of imperial control. Here, we have an emperor trying to compel senators, some of whom evidently favored the *habitus militaris*, to wear the *toga* in contrast to the imperial

⁷⁵⁴ *Cod. Theod.* 14.10.1: “(pr.) Imppp. gratianus, valentinianus et theodosius aaa. ad pancratium praefectum urbi. sine exceptione temporis matutini, dumtaxat intra moenia constitutus, nullus senatorum habitum sibi vindicet militarem, sed chlamydis terrore deposito quieti coloborum ac paenularum induat vestimenta. cum autem vel conventus ordinis candidati coeperit agitari vel negotium eius sub publica iudicis sessione cognosci, togatum eundem interesse mandamus. (1) Officiales quoque, per quos statuta complentur ac necessaria peraguntur, uti quidem paenulis iubemus, verum interiorem vestem ad modum cingulis observare, ita tamen, ut discoloribus quoque palliis pectora contegentes condicionis suae necessitatem ex huiusmodi agnitione testentur. (2) Servos sane omnium, quorum tamen dominos sollicitudine constat militiae non teneri, aut byrris uti permittimus aut cucullis. (3) Si quis de senatoribus statuta neglexerit, proprii auctoritate honoris exutus ingrediendi senatum iam non habeat potestatem. Officiales vero, sed et servi, qui pudoris non possunt dispendium sustinere, exilii poenam subire iubeantur: officio censuali viginti librarum auri non inmerito dispendiis subiugando, si culpam usurpationis huiusce aut dissimulatione subpresserit aut accepta pretii mercede subtraxerit. dat. prid. id. ianuar. constantinopoli antonio et syagrio consss.” Translation my own. For the prefect’s career, see Pancratius 4, *PLRE* 1:664. The substitution of the *chlamys* for the *paenula* may be significant as the *paenula* did not include the iconic crossbow brooch and was worn by many different status groups (Croom 2000, 52-4; Parani 2007, 518-9).

servants girt with *cingula*. Whether the imperial authorities were trying to “maintain the semblance of continuity with the earlier Roman past” and reacting “against the encroachment of non-Roman, ‘barbaric’ fashions and the increasing militarization of male civilian dress in non-military settings,” as Maria Parani has argued, is unclear.⁷⁵⁵ On the other hand, it may be that a focus on barbarization misses the bureaucratic and social background. By implementing these measures, the emperor may have been seeking to symbolize the unity of the senatorial aristocracies from both halves of empire.⁷⁵⁶ The mention of the distinct recognizability of imperial officials (“...condicionis suae necessitatem ex huiusmodi agnitione testentur”) might also implicate the emperor’s desire to distinguish members of the bureaucratic hierarchy as his representatives from the senators with their more parochial interests.

Amidst these many possible interpretations, it is important to consider the potential context of the legislation. Most imperial laws emerged in reaction to appeals and contingent circumstances. Perhaps the Urban Prefect or some other senator had requested imperial intervention, or maybe some other conflict drove Theodosius to adopt sartorial rules that might bring order to the body or quell a dispute that had emerged. Whatever the case, it is probably best to read this law as a testament to the unstable situation within the aristocracy rather than some grand project of imperial image-making. The very promulgation of the law speaks to how contested the categories

⁷⁵⁵ Parani 2007, 506-8. She pairs the law of 382 with an injunction against wearing breeches at Rome (*Cod. Theod.* 14.10.2, cf. Delmaire 2004, 201-2).

⁷⁵⁶ Gehn 2012, 228.

of *candidati* and *chlamydati* could be, sartorial distinctions that speak to complex transformations of status in late Roman society.⁷⁵⁷

As background to Symmachus' letters, such wrangling over status definitions indicates not only the importance of the ethos of soldierly service but also its limitations. Senators were all too happy to display their *chlamydes* and *cingula* when they were an index of the high status they had achieved. Men like Symmachus were inclined to use the idiom of *militia* to portray their recommendees as dutiful members of a long-serving hierarchy, and they could playfully imagine their peers as laboring *in castris* even while holding civil posts. But misgivings about the category of soldier seem to have persisted. The emperor, who may have wanted to maintain uniform categories and quell ambitious social climbers, sought to distinguish his *milites* from senators. The image-conscious Symmachus, who preferred traditional senatorial trappings to novel markers of imperial status, eschewed soldierly self-representation. As the category of soldier was in turn imagined, applied, revised, and rejected, senatorial elites saw the world in terms of competing roles and bonds of totalizing allegiance. This was not simple imitation of courtly imagery or imperial ideology,⁷⁵⁸ but it was rather a process of negotiation around the structures and customs of a Mediterranean aristocracy reliant on patronage and bureaucratic favors. This understanding of an ethos of soldierly service moves the emperor to the side and instead centers the role of imperial servants and their patrons who were evidently not always enthusiastic about martial imagery, but nevertheless adapted and contested it to their own ends.

⁷⁵⁷ Von Rummel 2007; Rothe 2019, 153-7.

⁷⁵⁸ Gehn 2012, 188.

Perceptions and Criticisms from the Outside

Reservations concerning the soldierly model of state service can be found in other quarters, not merely in the letters of an administrative insider such as Symmachus. The writings of Libanius offer one conservative's disgruntled attitude to imperial administrators. A teacher of rhetoric from Antioch, he resented losing students to more technical careers in law and administration. In some of his letters, he betrayed a distaste for the martial ethos of the administration, and he savaged civil servants for low-birth, servility, and venality. The letters of Libanius can hardly be taken as representative of elites across the empire, and there is much to suggest that even Libanius' sharp jabs at bureaucrats were contingent on his own patronage interests and personal prejudices. But there are indications that others shared his misgivings about the "soldiers" of the civil service.

Some of Libanius' misgivings about *militia* are so subtly expressed as to escape all but the most careful reader. In one letter to students, he praised an Ammianus who had acted as his courier:

Besides what I have often told you, the man delivering this letter must persuade you to despise wealth. The good Ammianus is included among the soldiers in terms of position, but he is a philosopher in what he does, and imitates Socrates with regard to profit.⁷⁵⁹

Although "among the soldiers in terms of position" (ὕπὸ μὲν τοῦ σχήματος εἰς στρατιώτας), "the good Ammianus" (ὁ καλὸς Ἀμμιανός) cannot have been an actual soldier, for Libanius is unlikely to have used one as a letter carrier. Instead, this

⁷⁵⁹ Lib. *Epist.* 233.4 = Cribiore 20, trans. (2007): "πειθέτω δὲ ὑμᾶς χρημάτων καταφρονεῖν ἄνευ τῶν ὑπ' ἐμοῦ πολλάκις εἰρημένων ὁ τὰ γράμματα φέρων, ὃς ὑπὸ μὲν τοῦ σχήματος εἰς στρατιώτας, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν ἔργων εἰς φιλοσόφους ἐγγέγραπται τὸν Σωκράτην ἐν μέσοις μιμησάμενος κέρδεσιν, ὁ καλὸς Ἀμμιανός."

Ammianus has been assumed to be an imperial official of some sort, perhaps one in charge of financial matters or an *agens in rebus*.⁷⁶⁰ Most interesting is Libanius' preference for a philosophical over a soldierly Ammianus, accentuated through a variation on a typical words-deeds contrast framed in a μέν/δέ construction.⁷⁶¹ The additional remark about the man's Socratic contempt for material possessions ties in with Libanius' aim of convincing his recipients, two former students, to remunerate their new teacher. The comment also implies that there was something about Ammianus' character that Libanius thought atypical of his position as a bureaucratic "soldier."

One should not read too much into an offhanded remark such as this, but there are other indications in the letters of Libanius that the rhetor disliked the idea of his friends and allies bearing soldierly monikers. When Libanius wrote to the Praetorian Prefect Anatolius of Spectatus' eloquence in an embassy to the Persians, he explicitly deviated from the title *στρατιώτης*.⁷⁶² Spectatus was Libanius' cousin, and despite occasional friction between the two, Libanius relied on the *tribunus et notarius* for his contacts with court officials.⁷⁶³ While praising Spectatus for his eloquence, Libanius argued that his cousin stood above the other speakers:

Others said beautiful things, but you yourself will determine that they were fine when you hear about them. But the words of the soldier, as you would say, or the rhetor, as my opinion holds, showed that he was seeking justice not from those he was accusing but from these men. For one group of people had seized the land, while someone else was being

⁷⁶⁰ Financial official (Cribiore 2007, 218); *agens in rebus* ? (Ammianus 2, *PLRE* 1:54).

⁷⁶¹ “ὅς ὑπὸ μὲν τοῦ σχήματος εἰς στρατιώτας, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν ἔργων εἰς φιλοσόφους ἐγγέγραπται.” Note also the choice of ἐγγράφειν to contrast Ammianus' administrative enrollment with his imagined philosophical allegiance.

⁷⁶² In reality, the embassy, which also included the *comes* Prosper and the philosopher Eustathius, was unsuccessful in staying off war with the Sassanids (Amm. 17.5.15, 17.14.1-2).

⁷⁶³ Bradbury 2004a, 32; 2004b, 78.

treated as an enemy. And it was terrible if someone should call ‘ancestral’ things which didn’t come to him from his ancestor, and should persuade another fellow to give up things which are part of his ancestral inheritance.⁷⁶⁴

Libanius called attention to his choice of *ρήτωρ* instead of the more technical *στρατιώτης*, a preference appropriate because it highlighted Spectatus’ oratorical skill and his peacemaking abilities. But this was not because Libanius shunned martial metaphor, but rather because the position of soldier was beneath the ideal of the cultured orator which he wanted to promote for himself, his friends, and his family.⁷⁶⁵ Even in this letter to Anatolius, Libanius could conclude with a jab at the Praetorian Prefect: “Oh how few you let go into private life, and how many your torrent of codicils leads to the imperial feeding trough!”⁷⁶⁶ Beneath the veneer of this friendly joke, there was a cutting edge. Libanius’ ideal gentleman was a free-wheeling and well-rounded orator, not a bureaucratic servant of the emperor.

In each of the examples considered above, Libanius ostentatiously conceded the soldierly status of bureaucrats whom he then praised in cultured terms. That he would signal the deficiencies of the soldier even in an encomium of a favored family-member

⁷⁶⁴ Lib. *Epist.* 333.4: “καλὰ μὲν οὖν καὶ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων, ψηφίῃ δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς εἶναι καλὰ πυθόμενος ἅττα ἦν· τὰ δὲ δὴ τοῦ στρατιώτου μὲν, ὡς ἂν σὺ φαίης, ῥήτορος δέ, ὡς οὐμὸς λόγος, ἐπεδείκνυνεν αὐτὸν οὐχ οἷς ἐγκαλεῖ, παρὰ τούτων ζητοῦντα δίκην. ἄλλους μὲν γὰρ εἶναι τοὺς ἀφηρημένους τὴν γῆν, ἄλλον δὲ τὸν πολεμούμενον. καὶ εἶναι δεινόν, εἰ ὁ μὲν προσερεῖ πατρῷα ἃ μὴ γέγονεν αὐτῷ παρ’ ἐκείνου, τὸν δ’ ἀποστῆναι πείσει τούτων ἃ τοῦ πατρῷου κλήρου μέρος ἐστί.” Translation Bradbury (2004, #6), modified. On the obscurity of the negotiations, see Bradbury 34n22 and Lib. *Epist.* 331 (= Norman 35). Bradbury notes that Libanius’ comment about Spectatus’ status might have been meant to anticipate “Anatolius’ retort that the man was a mere ‘bureaucrat’ (στρατιώτης), not a genuine ‘orator’ (ρήτωρ)” (34n21).

⁷⁶⁵ For martial metaphor in Libanius’ self-promotion, see above, chapter 1. This very letter begins by describing the peace negotiations with antagonistic imagery (Lib. *Epist.* 333.1-2): “...καὶ παρὰ τὴν τοῦδε γλῶτταν οὐκ ἐκρατήθημεν ἐν λόγοις Ἕλληνας ὑπὸ βαρβάρων. εἶπω δὴ τὴν ῥητορείαν, ἣ κατεπάλαψε τὸν Πέρσην ἐν τοῖς ἐκείνου βασιλείοις...”

⁷⁶⁶ Lib. *Epist.* 333.5: “...ὃ πᾶν δὴ τινὰς ὀλίγους ιδιώτας ἀφείς· ὡς ἡ τῶν δέλτων ἐπομβρία πολλοὺς ἐπὶ τὴν βασιλικὴν εἰσάγει φάτνην.” Translation my own. The “codicils” (*δέλτοι*, Lat. *codicilli*) are the letters of commission which every imperial official required.

or client reveals a prejudice against the martial logic of the administration. When he entered an invective mode in other writings, his bias against the administration shone through even more. Libanius railed against bureaucrats, especially *notarii* (Gk. ὑπογραφεῖς), for their shunning of rhetoric.⁷⁶⁷ His complaints were self-interested, exaggerated, and inconsistent, but this does not mean that his concerns were disingenuous.⁷⁶⁸ In fact they followed a pattern of caustic polemic, the main thrust of which was against the servility and venality of a career as a bureaucratic pencil-pusher.

The *notarii* whom Julian expelled “plied a τέχνη characteristic of slaves, yet deigned to keep the prefects beneath them.”⁷⁶⁹ Empowered by their official authority, they pillaged and extorted, and together with their slaves, they “wore the belt of office (ζώνη) that made street, fortress and city tremble before them.”⁷⁷⁰ Libanius alleged that other *notarii* of barbarian stock had even risen to governorships, while others were the children of fullers, sausage-makers, cloakroom attendants, and other menial professions.⁷⁷¹ This stock invective, dripping with hyperbole, mirrors other negative portrayals of wayward bureaucrats, discussed above. What Libanius’ writings add to this picture, however, is his overriding concern about the menial and servile nature of jobs within the bureaucracy. To the rhetor, writing quickly was merely a manual skill,

⁷⁶⁷ Lib. *Or.* 2.44. He also criticized *agentes in rebus* (*Or.* 14.14).

⁷⁶⁸ He complained of parents preferring stenographers to teachers of oratory (*Or.* 31.28-33, 18.160). In other moments, Libanius praised other *notarii* (Petit 1955, 363; *PLRE* 1, Datianus 1, Dulcitus 5, Honoratus 3).

⁷⁶⁹ Lib. *Or.* 18.131: “συνεξέωσε δὲ καὶ τοὺς πολλοὺς ὑπογραφέας, οἱ τέχνην ἔχοντες τὴν τῶν οἰκετῶν ὑφ’ ἐαυτοῖς ἔχειν τοὺς ὑπάρχους ἡξίουσιν...” Translation my own. The passage does not suggest that Libanius thought only slaves were stenographers (Teitler 1985, 32), especially since the slaves of the ὑπογραφεῖς themselves subsequently appear.

⁷⁷⁰ Lib. *Or.* 18.134: “καὶ ζώνην εἶχον μετὰ τῶν κεκτημένων φρίττειν ἀναγκάζουσιν καὶ στενωπὸν καὶ φυλακὴν καὶ πόλιν...” Norman, trans.

⁷⁷¹ Barbarians: Lib. *Or.* 18.158, 42.23-4, with Skinner 2013, 22-8.

one which he neither taught nor especially respected.⁷⁷² The most honorable avenue to success could only be found through careful pursuit of education in classical rhetoric.

This disjunction between soldierly service and a traditional career recurs again and again in the letters of Libanius. Writing to Acacius, *consularis* of Bithynia, Libanius urged the *comes* to send his son Marcus back to study with Palladius, a Cappadocian rhetor:

I beg you, let Marcus train his mind there, diverting his eyes for a while from the belt of office (I mean his own belt), and let him look instead to your belt and let him reckon with the fact that it is the fruit of eloquence, and, moreover, over and above that belt he himself possesses, the fruit of hereditary eloquence. If he should contemplate that, he too will be able to look towards his own belt.⁷⁷³

Writing to a high member of the administration, Libanius' objection was not with the ζώνη *per se*, but rather with Marcus' lowly and menial rank within the bureaucracy, which afforded him no opportunity to rise to his family's traditional nobility.⁷⁷⁴ Tellingly, here, Libanius does not wholly reject the soldierly ethos but incorporates it into an ideal of nobility and rhetoric.

⁷⁷² He explicitly pointed out that he could not personally vouch for Hierocles' (one of his students) skill in tachygraphy – “τὸν δ' Ἱεροκλέα σοι τρέφομεν ἀμείνω μὲν ἥκιστα τοῦ πατρός, ἴσον δὲ ἴσως τῷ πατρί. καίτοι σχίζεται γὰρ ἡ σπουδὴ τῷ νέῳ περὶ τὴν γλῶτταν καὶ τὸ τῆς χειρὸς ἔργον, ἀλλ' ὅμως ἐστὶν ὁξὺς ἀμφοτέρω, ὃν τὸ μὲν ἄλλοις ἐγὼ λέγω, τὸ δὲ παρ' ἄλλων ἀκούω” (Lib. *Epist.* 324.2) –, and *notarii* appear in another letter, amusingly sharpening their hands for rapid praise (Lib. *Epist.* 1224.6).

⁷⁷³ Lib. *Epist.* 1222.3 (= Bradbury #103, trans.): “ἐνταῦθα ἡμῖν ὁ Μάρκος ἀσκέει τὴν γνώμην μικρὸν ἀπαγαγὼν τῆς ζώνης τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς, τῆς αὐτοῦ λέγω, πρὸς δὲ γὰρ τὴν σὴν ὁράτῳ καὶ λογιζέσθῳ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὡς αὕτη μέντοι λόγων καρπὸς καὶ πρὸς ἐκείνη γὰρ, ἣν αὐτὸς ἔχει, λόγων πατρῶων καρπὸς· ὃ εἰ λογιζοίτο, καὶ πρὸς τὴν αὐτοῦ βλέπειν ἐξέσται.”

⁷⁷⁴ Bradbury suggests that Marcus travelled with his uncle, who was “probably an imperial official,” and then joined the *officium* of a provincial office (2004, 142). Libanius implies that Marcus' administrative post was a substitute for his lack of self-control while studying in Antioch: “αἴτιος δὲ αὐτός, μᾶλλον δέ, ὁ θεῖος, ἴσως δὲ οὐδέτερος, ἀλλ' ὁ σὸς νόμος, δι' ὃν εἶπετο τῷ θεῷ γῆν ἐπιόντι πολλήν, ὡς οὐκ ἐνὸν ἄλλως σωφρονεῖν” (Lib. *Epist.* 1222.1).

In a letter to Modestus, the *comes Orientis* (358-62), Libanius attempted to ply influence on behalf of one of his favorite students. The letter is interesting because it suggests that Libanius' derisive use of administrative martial imagery was not unique:

May none of your affairs remain unfulfilled. So let Hyperechius neither be nor be called a 'half-soldier.' For people who know to what degree matters have advanced mockingly call him with such names. Therefore, to stop these jabs and allow a good outcome for him, write to the governor of Galatia, the noble Acacius, what things you think fitting to write about him, since I did not dare to show your previous letter to Ecdicius [Acacius' predecessor] because I feared breaking my hull out at sea. For he delighted in doing such things, and he was clearly going to inflict a wound on him [Hyperechius]. But not the man now governing the province! On the contrary, in pursuing justice and pleasing you without at all deviating from the truth, he will give a means of bringing this issue to a conclusion.⁷⁷⁵

The same rhetor who elsewhere seemed averse to the title of στρατιώτης as a descriptor of his students here takes issue with the mocking term “ἡμισυ στρατιώτου.” The expression has been taken to be a jab at the lowliness of Hyperechius' position, possibly as a *supernumerarius* of the governor.⁷⁷⁶ Libanius indicates that, in addition to the unnamed critics, the sardonic epithet “half-soldier” came from the former governor himself. Implicit in the partitive genitive is the idea that some members of the administration were not fully vested with the honor of *militia* (“half of a soldier”), but

⁷⁷⁵ Lib. *Epist.* 308: “Μηδὲν ἔστω τῶν σῶν ἀτελές. μὴ τοίνυν μηδ’ Ὑπερέχιος ἡμισυ στρατιώτου μήτε ἔστω μήτε καλείσθω. τοιαῦτα γὰρ ἐπισκώπτοντες ὀνομάζουσιν αὐτὸν οἱ μέχρι τίνος προὔβη τὸ πρᾶγμα εἰδότες. ἴν’ οὖν ἐκείνους τε παύσωμεν τῶν σκωμμάτων καὶ τούτῳ τι γένηται τέλειον ἀγαθόν, γράφε πρὸς τὸν ἄρχοντα Γαλατῶν, τὸν χρηστὸν Ἀκάκιον, ᾧ σὲ περὶ τούτου γράφειν εἰκός· ὥς τὴν προτέραν ἐπιστολὴν οὐκ ἐτολήσαμεν Ἐκδικίῳ δεῖξαι δείσαντες μὴ περὶ τὴν ὕψαλον ῥαγῇ τὸ σκάφος. πολλὰ γὰρ ἐκεῖνος τοιαῦτα ποιῶν ὑψοφραίνετο καὶ δὴ καὶ τούτῳ δηλὸς ἦν ποιήσων ἔλκος. ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὁ νῦν ἄγων τὸ ἔθνος, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ δικαίου λόγον καὶ τοῦ σοὶ χαρίζεσθαι ποιούμενος οὐδὲν διαστρέψας τῆς ἀληθείας δώσει τὰς ἀφορμὰς τῷ τέλει.” Translation my own. To Modestus 2, *PLRE* 1:605-8.

⁷⁷⁶ This is only a guess, however, and the possibility remains that Hyperechius was simply a lowly *statutus*. for Hyperechius as a ἡμισυ στρατιώτου, i.e. *supernumerarius* MacMullen, 1964, 313-4n17. See also, Pack 1951, 187-188; Hyperechius *PLRE* 1:449-50; Bradbury 2004a, 249-250; Petit 1956, 162-165; Jones 1964, 1:571.

read alongside Libanius' other criticisms of soldiers, one could read both elements of the epithet as derisive, implying an almost servile relationship to imperial authority.

With only Libanius' letter, we might wonder whether such twists on administrative martial imagery were common-fare for officials who scorned their unpaid underlings, but another source suggests a similar view came from other quarters. A few years later in 366, Hyperechius again appears in the record, this time in the history of Ammianus as a supporter of the imperial claimant Procopius:

When Arintheus reached Dadastana, where, as I said, Jovian perished, He saw Hyperechius suddenly opposed to him with a force, previously an *apparitor* of the imperial quartermaster, that is a servant of the stomach and throat. Because he was a friend, Procopius entrusted auxiliaries to his command. Not deigning to overcome this despicable man in battle, Arintheus, reliant on his authority and lofty stature, ordered his enemies themselves to imprison their own commander, and so this armchair general was seized by the hands of his own.⁷⁷⁷

This reference to Hyperechius as an *apparitor cellae castrensis* gives an indication of the man's career trajectory after Libanius' efforts of promotion;⁷⁷⁸ he apparently became a staff-member of the court major-domo after serving as a *supernumerarius* of the governor of Galatia.⁷⁷⁹ The lowliness of this post and his overall disappointing career may have driven Hyperechius to throw in his lot with a usurper,⁷⁸⁰ but ambition was not the only consideration. Only a few years after Julian's purges, Hyperechius had to

⁷⁷⁷ Amm. 26.8.5: "qui ubi Dadastanam tetigit, in qua statione perisse diximus Iouianum, Hyperechium sibi oppositum repente uidit cum copiis antehac cellae castrensis apparitorem, id est uentris ministrum et gutturis, cui ut amico Procopius auxilia ductanda commisit. et dedignatus hominem superare certamine despicabilem auctoritatis et celsi fiducia corporis ipsis hostibus iussit suum uincire rectorem; atque ita turmarum antesignanus umbratilis comprehensus suorum est manibus." Translation my own. The reference to Arintheus' "lofty stature" accords with Basil's consolatory letter to the general's widow (*Epist.* 269.2).

⁷⁷⁸ See Lib. *Epist.* 791. For his career *PLRE* 1:449-50.

⁷⁷⁹ On the *castrensis*, see Jones 1964, 567 and Demandt 1989, 242.

⁷⁸⁰ Pack 1951, 200-1.

consider his own personal safety, and Procopius' control of the capital must have weighed on his decision.

But in addition to filling in our picture of Hyperechius' difficult position, Ammianus' narrative offers further examples of the barbs hurled at bureaucrats intimidated by Libanius' letter. To the historian, Hyperechius was a "ventris ministrum et gutturis," a clever turn of phrase that conveyed the man's servility as he worked for the imperial quartermaster.⁷⁸¹ Ammianus added more insulting language, calling him an "hominem...despicabilem" not even worthy of real battle, a "turmarum antesignanus umbratilis" who could not even keep his own auxiliaries in line.⁷⁸² This was a cutting reminder that a *miles* of the civil administration was ill-suited for the rigors of battle, and Ammianus, "miles quondam et Graecus," was perhaps showing his colors in looking down his nose at lowly bureaucrats who styled themselves as soldiers of the emperor.⁷⁸³ That Libanius likely knew of the Antiochene historian and probably wrote approvingly of his work adds an intriguing dimension to their shared derisive use of administrative martial language.⁷⁸⁴ The rhetor may not have agreed with Ammianus' characterization of his former student, if he had even read the passage when he wrote to

⁷⁸¹ Den Boeft 2008, ad loc.: "the words id...gutturis seem quite apt, as Amm. is creating a satirical caricature of Hyperechius."

⁷⁸² Rolfe's translation of "turmarum antesignanus umbratilis" as "shadow of a commander" is wanting. *Umbratilis* refers to a person at leisure or rest (*OLD* s.v. *umbratilis*), and so "armchair general" is a more apt rendering of the expression. cf. Cic. Or. 1.157 for a usage that contrasts domestic inaction with a quasi-military pursuit: "educenda...dictio est ex hac domestica exercitatione et umbratili...in aciem forensem."

⁷⁸³ Den Boeft 2008, ad loc.: "Such a person, who lacked any experience as a soldier, was given a military command by Procopius for the mere reason that he was a friend of his! One senses the former military professional's disdain for this form of amateurism." For the "mutual antipathy" between members of the civil and military services, see also Tomlin 1976, 192-3.

⁷⁸⁴ Lib. *Epist.* 1063. On the identification of the letter's Marcellinus with our historian and his Antiochene origins, see Matthews 1994, summarized at 269: "the identification of Libanius' correspondent as Ammianus Marcellinus is intrinsically satisfactory, and still preferable to any other suggestion."

Ammianus in 392, but, even so, both authors offer independent evidence of such negative soldierly imagery having been attached to the same individual.⁷⁸⁵

Another of Libanius' correspondents gives an indication that the Antiochene teacher was not alone in scoffing at bureaucrats. In January of 381, Gregory of Nyssa expressed a remarkably similar sentiment in one of his letters to Libanius regarding the student Cynegius:

But I beg this benefit from you for the common life: that you will not contemplate any longer what you threatened to us in dark hints at the end of your letter. For I do not consider it a fair judgment, that if some err by deserting the Greek language for the barbarian, becoming mercenary soldiers and choosing a soldier's rations instead of the renown of eloquence—you should therefore condemn eloquence and sentence us to an inarticulate life. For who will utter anything if you carry out this severe threat against eloquence?⁷⁸⁶

Gregory reflects the same concerns as Libanius in his choice of words. To him, a career in the imperial service was not just an alternative to a life of learning, it was grasping and mercenary (“μισθοφόροι στρατιῶται”). The choice of meager rations over the “renown of eloquence” (“τὸ στρατιωτικὸν σιτηρέσιον ἀντὶ τῆς ἐν τῷ λέγειν δόξης”)

⁷⁸⁵ Lib. *Epist.* 1063.2: “ἦν μὲν οὖν δὴ σοι μέγα καὶ τὸ μετὰ σιγῆς ἐν τῇ τοιαύτῃ διάγειν καὶ τὸ λόγους ὑπ’ ἄλλων λεγομένους δέχεσθαι—πολλοὺς δὲ ἡ Ῥώμη τρέφει ῥήτορας πατράσιν ἀκολουθοῦντας— νῦν δ’, ὥς ἔστιν ἀκούειν τῶν ἐκεῖθεν ἀφικνουμένων, αὐτὸς ἡμῖν ἐν ἐπιδείξει ταῖς μὲν γέγονας, ταῖς δὲ ἔση τῆς συγγραφῆς εἰς πολλὰ τετμημένης καὶ τοῦ φανέντος ἐπαινεθέντος μέρος ἕτερον εἰσκαλοῦντος.” The last clause could mean that Libanius awaits a (final?) division of the work, possibly books 26-31 (“the praise of the portion that has appeared invites another” (Matthews 1994, 253)), or it could be merely rhetorical (“each published portion wins approval and invites another,” Norman, trans.). Book 26 was finished after 390 (the consulship of Neoterius is mentioned at 26.5.14), meaning Libanius may have had access to it in 393.

⁷⁸⁶ Gr. Nyss. *Epist.* 14.6: “Αἰτοῦμαι δὲ χάριν ὑπὲρ τοῦ βίου κοινήν, ὅσα δι’ αἰνίγματος ἡμῖν τὰ τελευταῖα τῆς ἐπιστολῆς ὑπηπείλησας, μηκέτι διανοεῖσθαι· οὐδὲ γὰρ καλῶς ἔχειν φημί κρίσεως, εἴ τινες ἀμαρτάνουσι πρὸς τὴν βάρβαρον γλῶσσαν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἑλληνίδος αὐτομολοῦντες καὶ μισθοφόροι στρατιῶται γινόμενοι καὶ τὸ στρατιωτικὸν σιτηρέσιον ἀντὶ τῆς ἐν τῷ λέγειν δόξης αἰρούμενοι, διὰ τοῦτο σε καταδικάζειν τῶν λόγων καὶ ἀφωνίαν τοῦ βίου καταψηφίζεσθαι· τίς γὰρ ὁ φθεγγόμενος, εἰ σὺ τὴν βαρεῖαν ταύτην ἀπειλὴν κατὰ τῶν λόγων κυρώσεις;” (Silvas, trans.). Dated to Jan. 381 by Silvas 2007, 156. See Maraval 1990, 204-5n2 for “le thème polémique souvent développé à l’époque qui assimile le fonctionnaire à un soldat.”

reflects the same kind of criticism of bureaucrats of which Libanius was fond. But Gregory used the moment of agreement to urge patience and kindness in dealing with his wayward student. Libanius was by no means a Christian, but Gregory could still urge him to love one who had wronged him so as to bring him back into the fold.⁷⁸⁷

This evidence reveals an elite uneasiness, coming from many different quarters, regarding service in the bureaucracy. That such derision was so often expressed in terms of the quasi-military language of the bureaucracy suggests that the soldierly logic of state service was at the core of the critique. The widespread use of heroic imagery laid out in the first chapter did not suffer from the same limits, but for the practical and social reasons explored above, the bureaucratic martial language could be contested. Significantly, this did not amount to an outright rejection of an imperial ethos of soldierly service, even for a professorial curmudgeon like Libanius or a proud military man like Ammianus. Libanius grafted his own predilection for philosophy and rhetoric onto bureaucratic imagery, and Ammianus and Ecdicius inverted the idiom of the administrative soldier to castigate their opponents within the bureaucracy. By manipulating the ethos of administration in such ways, these men showed both the malleability and the inescapability of the imperial service in late antiquity.

Harsh Realities

We have strong reasons to presume that some elites had social and ideological reasons to disdain the pervasive ethos of *milites Caesaris*. There may have been additional practical considerations that colored this attitude. In this section, I consider

⁷⁸⁷ Gr. Nyss. *Epist.* 14.7. The allusion is to Matt 5:43-5, but he does not cite verbatim (Maraval 1990, 206n1).

harsh realities within the imperial service – long lines, uncertain prospects, poor remuneration, challenging responsibilities, power politics, and conflicts with other bureaus – that may have influenced abstract representations and attitudes towards *militia inermis*. These harsh realities offered a foundation for much of the criticism of the idea of the imperial servant as a dutiful soldier. Again, many of our sources are a few steps removed from administrative *realia*, but they represent our best chance of rescuing a picture of how elites used martial imagery to imagine administrative service.

There is necessarily a bias within our evidence toward glowing representations of *militia*. Petitions in letter collections, presumably selected to advertise the clout of the writer, laud governors and prefects for their nobility and lofty majesty, often in heroic language. Stone inscriptions tend to record the achievements of the most successful and omit unflattering details. Letters of commendation offer words of praise, and when they slip into a field of soldierly language, they still remind the recipient of the bureaucrat's reliable virtue and character. In light of such evidence, a credulous historian might view *militia* as a series of honors won, to be sure, through hard service, but inevitably conferring the coveted titles and accoutrement of high status. This may have been the ideal picture of soldierly service conveyed by surviving epistolography, but it ignores some facts on the ground which tell a rather different story.

Reading “against the grain” of these same texts, we catch a glimpse of the harsh realities confronting the average bureaucrat. We should hold no misconceptions about the status of the empire's administrators. Despite some exceptional cases, most men who rose through the imperial service were drawn from the cadre of local elites.⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸⁸ Skinner 2013.

These *honestiores* were wealthier, more educated, better fed, and freer from coercion than most denizens of the empire. But this does not mean that these same privileged few did not face peculiar challenges within the system of the imperial service. Frequently in the commendations of Symmachus, the distinguished senator felt the need to recognize the harsh blows of *Fortuna* that his commendees had to endure. Their long and self-effacing service was a soldierly virtue in such a context, but beneath such formulaic expressions of an official ideology of state service, we catch a glimpse of difficulties that many administrators must have borne.

The first of these challenges, and one that naturally appears in a variety of texts about the administration, is that of long service with uncertain prospects. In the hands of a clever writer such as Symmachus, these difficulties became virtues, but one must wonder how a lowly *supernumerarius* would have felt to know that his *aetas militiae* was proof of his honor.⁷⁸⁹ The long lines of *supernumerarii* have already been mentioned to show the difficulty of calculating the size of the administration. If a law of 399 pertaining to the *sacrae largitiones* can be taken as representative of the period, they outnumbered regular posts (*statuti*) by more than 2.5 to 1, and this may even be a low figure.⁷⁹⁰ Like modern-day interns, entry-level *supernumerarii* remained unpaid despite their indispensable labor.⁷⁹¹ So long were the lines in some departments that

⁷⁸⁹ Symm. *Epist.* 2.9.1.

⁷⁹⁰ *Cod. Theod.* 6.30.15, which prescribes 224 *statutus* to 610 *supernumerarii*. For further discussion, see above.

⁷⁹¹ No emolument: *Cod. Theod.* 6.30.11 (386).

fathers signed their sons up for palatine posts, a phenomenon Heather compared to parents registering their children for Eton.⁷⁹²

The fact that individuals were willing to wait in such long lines itself speaks to the potential rewards of a successful career, both financially and in terms of status. But as a simple matter of arithmetic, the average career must have taken some time to come to fruition. This may be the reason for the resounding emphasis on the length of service in commendations of imperial servants. The odds of climbing the administrative hierarchy, barring a powerful patron, were not good,⁷⁹³ but once one had advanced sufficiently, the social and financial rewards could be considerable. In the sixth century, John Lydus, “the complete bureaucrat,” records receiving a *solidus* for every line of a poem he wrote for Zoticus, his administrative patron, who also helped him find a wife with a dowry of 100 pounds.⁷⁹⁴ We should not, however, expect that this was typical of the many *notarii*, *exceptores*, and *agentes in rebus* who never rose so high. *Supernumerarii* received no regular salary, and even those above them had to rely on relatively small sums of money. The additional fees charged for administrative services have been rehabilitated by Christopher Kelly as a quasi-price system necessary to control access in a resource-constrained bureaucracy.⁷⁹⁵ This charitable interpretation is an improvement upon dismal narratives that use fees as evidence of rampant corruption.⁷⁹⁶ Anecdotal graft is no more proof of growing corruption than stories of

⁷⁹² See Lib. *Epist.* 358-9 and 365-6, 362, and 875-6 for children enrolled in the palatini. For the Eton comparison, see Heather 1994, 19n36. At *Epist.* 365, Honoratus’ father Quirinus had enrolled him as a *notarius*, but tried to waive the requirement of appearance because his son was in school and sick.

⁷⁹³ Advancement without patronage was by strict seniority (Jones 1949, 50; *Cod. Theod.* 6.26.6, 11, 17; 6.30, 3, 14),

⁷⁹⁴ Jones 1949, 52; Ioh. Lyd. *Mag.* 3.26-8.

⁷⁹⁵ Kelly 2004, 181-5; Whitby 2016, 139-140.

⁷⁹⁶ MacMullen, 1988; Jones 1964, 2:1045-58.

gruesome murders are of widespread violent crime.⁷⁹⁷ Passages of the *Theodosian Code* that cap fees or forbid exorbitant salaries do not necessarily demonstrate bribery, which at any rate is a legally and socially defined category of behavior that cannot easily be applied to the ancient world. These many regulations do, however, suggest that bureaucrats must have faced a high degree of uncertainty over the amount of funds they could extract from the citizenry.

In addition to the uncertain career and financial prospects of a life in the civil service, the specter of power politics always loomed. Different bureaux had conflicting spheres of influence, perhaps by design, and lower grade officials checked the arbitrary power of their higher ups.⁷⁹⁸ These competing agendas of powerful officials could produce conflict. As Urban Prefect, Symmachus faced off against a *tribunus et notarius* and two *agentes in rebus*, and the Vicar himself.⁷⁹⁹ His only recourse was appeal to the emperor. This was a classic example of the contradictions of a bureaucratic system in which the emperor delegated authority to plenipotentiaries, but, for fear of isolating himself, installed a degree of ambiguity and conflict into the very same system.⁸⁰⁰ In another *relatio* to the emperor, Symmachus questioned the reliability of certain appointments to the Urban Prefecture, only to be harshly rebuked by Valentinian II in an imperial rescript: “It is not right to question an imperial judgment, for it is a mark of sacrilege to doubt whether the one whom the emperor has chosen is worthy.”⁸⁰¹ It is no

⁷⁹⁷ See Watson 2010 for an interpretation of the rhetoric of corruption in terms of creating group identity among imperial elites.

⁷⁹⁸ Jones 1949, 53.

⁷⁹⁹ Symm. *Rel.* 23. For a summary of the episode, see above.

⁸⁰⁰ This dynamic has aptly been described as a “double pressure” by Kelly (2004, 191).

⁸⁰¹ Symm. *Rel.* 17; *Cod. Theod.* 1.6.9: “Disputari de principali iudicio non oportet: sacrilegii enim instar est dubitare, an is dignus sit, quem elegerit imperator.” See Kelly 2004, 204; Vera 1981, 131-3.

wonder Symmachus hesitated to intervene in other controversies in which he might have ratify or invalidate imperial commissions of dubious validity.⁸⁰²

The most perilous of all administrative uncertainties were those surrounding the imperial succession. As great as the rewards of backing a successful claimant to the throne could be, so too were the perils of falling in with a usurper. The *apparitor* Hyperechius was imprisoned for his support of Procopius, himself a long-serving *notarius*.⁸⁰³ Valens had Theodorus, *secundicerius notariorum* in the East, killed merely because an oracle seemed to predict him as the emperor's successor.⁸⁰⁴ The brothers Marcellinus and Apringius were executed on suspicion of having aided Heraclianus in his failed rebellion. Given this parade of unlucky ministers, one might wonder why an imperial official would ever take the risk of supporting a 'usurper,' but without the benefit of hindsight, imperial officials could not presage the winner in moments of uncertainty. Upon the death of Constantius II, the officials who had supported the late Augustus had to answer to Julian as their new emperor. In the purges that followed, they paid mightily for their former loyalties.⁸⁰⁵ Likewise, when Julian died on his Persian campaign, Julian's palatine ministers had little choice but to support the army's choice of Jovian as the new emperor whatever the future might hold. In such unstable circumstances, having a reliable patron was all the more important, as one Alexander

⁸⁰² Symm. *Rel.* 22, 44. For analysis see Kelly 2004, 216-19.

⁸⁰³ Amm. 26.8.5, and see below for discussion of his career.

⁸⁰⁴ Amm. 29.1.8-9. On the predicting the future in Ammianus, see Hanaghan 2019, esp. 244-7 for post-Julianic emperors. cf. Amm. 29.1.29-35 for the ouiji board-like device, with Den Boeft et al 2013: 49-50.

⁸⁰⁵ Amm. 22.3. It is noteworthy that only one military official, Saturninus (*cura palatii*), was punished, and only with exile (Tomlin 1976, 206n50). In addition to the executions mentioned in that section, some of which Ammianus viewed as justified, he described the expulsion of palace attendants, ostensibly for moralistic reasons (22.4).

found when his *militia* was forestalled due to his hapless support for Maximus, and he was forced to turn to Symmachus for a recommendation.⁸⁰⁶

The serried titles and honors that grace the prosopographies of the empire reinforce the impression of ordered and disciplined *militia* conveyed by legal and epistolary sources. The realities of a life within the imperial service seem to have been more mixed. Marked by long service, unclear rewards, and uncertain prospects, a career was not always the fabulous distinction found in *commendaticiae*. To be sure, it was precisely these challenges of lengthy service that made the image of the soldier an attractive point of reference in the first place, but they also may have limited its appeal. I have already shown that Libanius and Symmachus each had ideological and social misgivings about submitting themselves and sometimes others to the martial logic of the bureaucracy. The harsh realities of government service might offer a partial explanation for these misgivings.

Conclusion: Martial Bureaucracy within Society

This chapter has demonstrated that the fictively militarized language of the bureaucracy had momentous consequences for conceptions of state service.⁸⁰⁷ Scholars have often noted the far-reaching implications of the bureaucracy on political and social history of the later empire. Not only has it been suggested as a factor in narratives of decline and fall,⁸⁰⁸ but it has also been averred as a force of social change in more recent

⁸⁰⁶ Symm. *Epist.* 5.39: “Hunc licet noveris honorum desiderio non moveri, communis tamen verecundia non sinit testimonio carere militiae, cum illi tribuni ac notarii dignitatem dominus noster Valentinianus Augustus ante irruptionem tyrannicam sponte detulerit.” Alexander 11, *PLRE* 1:10.

⁸⁰⁷ *pace* Jones 1964, 1:566.

⁸⁰⁸ e.g. MacMullen 1988, Tainter 1988, 150.

studies. Kate Cooper, for instance, has posited that the expanded bureaucracy was a factor that drove social upheaval and the dismantling of traditional domestic configurations.⁸⁰⁹

This study of martial imagery in the administration reveals a more mixed picture. The bureaucracy was quantitatively and qualitatively different from the earlier administration, but at least as far as we can judge from elite epistolary sources, the soldierly ethos of state service had limited appeal. Its appearance in letters of recommendation underscores the degree to which even new-fangled *militia inermis* remained embedded in the traditional channels of patronage. Social elites were wary of portraying themselves as bureaucratic servants, and some even derided lowly administrators with taunts such as “half-soldier.” The commanding heights of culture and status, in some sense, were still held by the free-wheeling heroes of old.

But the emergence of a soldierly ethos of state service, for all its limitations, had real consequences. In elite letters, we see the degree to which the language of *militia* suffused the administration with an ideology that valorized endurance and obedience. This was a way of strengthening bonds of *amicitia* and patronage, rooted in a conception of shared service and role within a hierarchy. In administrative conflicts, bound to arise in a governing structure with so many competing departmental and personal interests, martial imagery became a tool of invoking adherence to duty. The opposition to this

⁸⁰⁹ Cooper 2007, 54: “Both asceticism and bureaucracy threatened the older, more embedded way of doing things” and 152: “by creating a situation in which power was leached away from the local communities toward the imperial bureaucracy, Diocletian had set in motion a ‘domino effect’ of social consequences favouring the young man who left home to seek his fortune at the appropriate level of the expanded bureaucracy over his contemporary who married a suitable bride and established himself as a pillar of his local community.”

ethos, such as it was, indicates anxiety about the power of soldierly martial imagery as a competing conception of society, but within many of our sources, the orderly picture of *militia* appeared uncontested. Even the very same holdouts like Libanius and Symmachus saw fit to pick up the ethos of soldierly service when it suited them.

This does not mean that this bureaucratic martial imagery existed in a vacuum. Peter Brennan, writing on the *Notitia Dignitatum*, has stressed that “*militia Caesaris* remained in essence distinct from *militia Christi*,”⁸¹⁰ but while this may have been true within the four corners of the *Notitia*, I have shown many ways in which the ethos of soldierly service in the administration suggestively paralleled ascetic martial imagery. In the next chapter, I consider these echoes in greater detail, and argue that the vulnerabilities stemming from dissatisfaction with *militia inermis*, both in theory and in practice, fed a Christian critique of state service.

⁸¹⁰ Brennan 1996, 158.

CHAPTER IV:
OPPOSING *MILITIAE*:
SOLDIERLY-SERVICE AND THE PRESENCE OF THE STATE

About a century after the death of Augustine, Ferrandus, deacon of Carthage, was asked by Reginus, a Roman *dux*, for a spiritual *regula* appropriate for a man in military affairs faced with the challenges of administering Justinian's new diocese of Africa.⁸¹¹ After ruminating on the insurmountable distinction between *militia corporalis* and *militia spiritalis*, Ferrandus suggested that God could grant a government official the ability to bridge the gap between earthly and heavenly service:

We ask by constant prayers him who justly orders the earth and makes everything accord with the design of his will...that he deign to advance his soldiers hiding beneath the garb of secular *militia* to the greatest honors, ruling them from within and granting some the skill of ruling, just as he has clearly already done for you, illustrious *dux* Reginus.⁸¹²

Ferrandus proceeded to explicate seven *regulae innocentiae* whereby the official might live his secular *militia* in accordance with divine principles. Like other late antique rules, both monastic and secular, these expressed an idealized vision of proper conduct, generally applicable to all imperial *milites*.⁸¹³ This vision of bureaucratic service, a

⁸¹¹ Ferrandus, *Ad Reg. 2* (PL 67:929) The request was actually intended for Fulgentius of Ruspe, but the bishop had, unbeknownst to Reginus, recently passed away. Ferrandus saw fit to answer the letter in Fulgentius' stead. For the date of Fulgentius' death (c. 533), see Modéran 1993, 135-62. For the likely administrative context, see Whelan 2018a, 409.

⁸¹² Ferrandus, *Ad Reg. 2* (PL 67:929): "Rogemus ergo precibus assiduis eum qui disponit orbem terrae in aequitate, faciens universa secundum consilium voluntatis suae; quoniam de ipso Psalmista veraciter canit: Omnia quaecumque voluit, fecit in caelo et in terra, in mari et in omnibus abyssis (Ps 134:6); ut videlicet milites suos sub habitu militiae saecularis latentes promovere dignetur ad maximas dignitates: regens eos intus, et regendi alios scientiam tribuens sicut tibi quoque, dux illustris Regine, iam donasse cognoscitur." Translation my own.

⁸¹³ Robin Whelan points out Ferrandus' pessimistic vision of the state while still holding out a hope of a transformed state: "By framing it as a *regula*, Ferrandus opens up the possibility that this individual advice could be 'scaled up' – that is, that the greater mass of those serving the imperial state could adopt this

rapprochement with ascetic notions of *militia Christi*, was an intriguing development on the version of soldierly allegiance propounded by writers such as Symmachus, for whom dutiful martial service was a secular proposition. How did late antique writers infuse a militarized notion of state service with ascetic virtues?

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to trace the trajectory of a discourse of *militia* in the late-fifth and sixth centuries, but the roots of this comparison between *militia*, this flourishing discourse of state service, can be found in the waning decades of the fourth century, when men like Ambrose, Paulinus, and Augustine compared *militia Christi* with state service in much the same terms as Ferrandus. Some of these parallels between *militia Christi* and *militia Caesaris* were obvious. My previous two chapters suggested many of these symmetries: the endurance of the imagined soldier, his dutiful adherence to rank within a hierarchy, and his support for his comrades. This chapter elaborates on these similarities and shows, through mostly epistolary evidence, that the parallels between the two *militiae* were a popular theme, self-consciously contrasted by Christian writers in ways that betray a sophisticated understanding of notions of state service and the soldierly ascetic ethos.

The significance of this recurring motif, however, is more fraught. Did it reflect an emergent political theology, part of a wider attempt, posited by some scholars, to subordinate secular power to the celestial? Was it a means of effecting the “Christianization” of the so-called aristocracy of service, a group that Salzman argued

ideal Christian administrative *habitus*” (2018, 416). In addition to the emerging importance of monastic *regulae*, one might also note Vegetius’ *regulae bellorum generales* (Veg. *Mil.* 3.26), which maintained a conceit of general applicability and may have been circulated in bureaucratic circles. For a general discussion of their authenticity and significance, see Warner 2020.

was more receptive to church influence? And if the Christian discourse of competing *militiae* was effective, could this have been instrumental in depriving the state of manpower and ideological potency, hastening the fragmentation of the west and enervating the rump of empire in the east?

These grand explanations may be appealing stories, and there is certainly a shred of plausibility in each, but a close look at the evidence reveals the shortcomings of these historiographic frames in addressing the significance of a soldierly ethos. To be sure, Christian writers reveled in contrasting the deficiencies of earthly *militia* with the rewards of God's service, but as much as such rhetoric gestured towards political views, there was no coherent theology of state service shared among Christian writers. The scattered references to competing *militiae* in letters to bureaucrats cannot demonstrate that this was a meaningful factor in driving the putative "Christianization" of the aristocracy of service. In fact, the evidence for the exceptional Christianization of the bureaucracy is weak, diminishing the ability of martial imagery to contribute to a narrative of religious change in the fourth and fifth centuries. Nor does the evidence show that the discourse of competing *militiae* was instrumental in depriving the state of valuable talent. This martial imagery and the late antique ethos of soldierly service cannot reasonably be situated into any narrative of decline, fall, or transformation that focuses on a shift in authority or status away from the state to the church.

Rather than a story of political transformation or religious change, a close look at the language of late antique correspondence and other literary texts reveals a process by which Christian writers used the language of soldierly service to serve their own ends, but, in the process, they unwittingly reinforced the presence of the state in late

antiquity. Bishops exhibited an entrepreneurial attitude to *militia*, deploying it in similar ways to be sure, but capitalizing on different aspects of the discourse to pursue their own rhetorical aims. These clever twists on administrative *militia* were simply attempts to speak to members of the aristocracy in their own idiom. To the extent that scholars divine a subordination of state power to the church in hindsight, they are witnessing bishops who grasped after the best rhetoric available to suit their own present needs.

Recognizing the contingent and *ad hoc* nature of grandiloquent challenges to state power should not diminish the significance of the concept of an ethos of soldierly service in explaining the behavior of bishops. The symmetries between the ascetic and administrative service of Christ amplified the imagined contrast between sacred and secular soldiers. Bishops exploited this difference. Other metaphors could have described the society of the Roman Empire in ways favorable to bishops, but there was something about the lively world of martial imagery that helped churchmen map out their own order of things. It raised the stakes of the dialogue and fabricated a choice between heaven and earth. *Militia* was the most vulnerable entry point for Christian writers aiming to win over bureaucrats, to emphasize oppositional allegiances, and to promote more dramatic narratives of personal conversion. These were not coherent ideologies of state service aimed at subordinating the secular to the heavenly or making a statement of political theory. Instead, enterprising bishops saw a thread and pulled on it, hoping to turn the ideology of state-service to their own advantage.

Martial – specifically soldierly – imagery seeped into additional areas of discourse and offered a new plane on which bishops could compete for and exert influence. They tried to draw ideological power from the very system of imagery that

promoted a hierarchical, organized, and duty-bound bureaucracy. By activating the discourse of *militia*, bishops made the discourse more salient as a way of imagining total hierarchies. Put differently, when bishops chose to depict themselves or their correspondents as *militantes*, whether for the emperor or for God, they chose to embrace that quasi-military way of seeing the world. Counterintuitively, bishops who used the language of *militia* to critique state service may have contributed to the idea's potency and salience. Tapping into the ideological reservoir of *militia* meant that bishops brought powerful imperial, centralizing images to bear in their own discourse. When they opportunistically argued that their *militia* stood opposed in some way to secular *militia*, they encouraged their readers to see in the terms of the state, to look at humans as cogs in a larger leviathan with rules, hierarchies, and uncompromising allegiances.

In his book *Seeing Like a State*, James C. Scott argued that ruling authorities tend to privilege a synoptic and simplified picture of society that renders individuals legible, reducible to abstraction, and thus controllable. Many of his historical examples were expressed using martial metaphors – *e.g.* scientific forests become serried ranks of “conscripts” – or were fashioned along explicitly military lines – *e.g.* the *viae militares* of Alberti and Palladio.⁸¹⁴ This fits nicely with a point that I made at the end of my second chapter, that the language of war has historically been a powerful tool of creating and reinforcing hierarchies well beyond the military sphere. Just as martial imagery – “the health of the state” – could breathe life into an ascetic vanguard, it could also animate the discourse of a proto-bureaucracy still steeped in the games of patronage and power politics.

⁸¹⁴ Scott 1998, 15 and 56.

As two critical areas within society pulsed with an ethos of soldierly service – on the one hand, the dutiful bureaucrats of Caesar and, on the other, the austere soldiers of Christ – bishops bridged this gap, and in their writings to and about bureaucrats, they picked up on the same military logic, encouraging totalizing rubrics and structures. This martial ethos called for individuals to submit themselves to an external and abstract logic that could bring order and simplicity to the bevy of late antique identities, religious allegiances, and administrative contradictions. As a project of control, martial imagery reproduced a quasi-militarized vision of society with broad appeal. The symmetries between the language of church and bureaucracy and bishops’ opportunistic use of this language expanded the salience of this dirigiste language and reinforced the inescapable presence of the state in late antiquity.

The Significance of Martial Imagery

Just as Ferrandus did in his letter to Reginus, Christian writers of the fourth and fifth centuries compared the soldierly service of God to that of Caesar, implying or stating outright that the latter was in some way inferior to the former. Whereas service of the emperor was full of danger and uncertainty, there was security in Christ. The earthly soldier’s servility to his own passions and superiors was contrasted with the heavenly soldier’s freedom in his orderly and virtuous life. These uses of *militia* constituted an effort to take advantage of certain structural features of the discourse of state service to subordinate earthly to heavenly authority.

This opposition of two *militiae* is pregnant with implications for the historiography of political and religious change in late antiquity. The presence of an ethos of soldierly service in the bureaucracy suggests that this Christian discourse could

have helped transform the religious affiliation of the empire's aristocracy. Likewise, the dichotomy between earthly and heavenly service that bishops promoted by opposing *militiae* might have contributed to the withdrawal of some from administrative pursuits, undermining the effectiveness of the empire's political apparatus. But each of these historical narratives badly overgeneralizes from scanty evidence and elides the complex social forces that drove "Christianization" or political legitimacy. In fact, the rhetoric of *militia* was less a statement of political philosophy than a rhetorical ploy to encourage submission to the concerns of church leaders. *Militia* did not flip a switch and cause allegiances or the locus of society to shift. To the contrary, the adoption of totalizing military language in the area between church and state meant that martial imagery, with its vertical hierarchies and absolute allegiances, became a more common rubric, challenging older and more traditional forms of social organization.

Militia, "Christianization," and the Aristocracy of Service

It has been suggested that the imperial service was demographically and structurally more sensitive to Christianizing than other segments of the aristocracy. Still, evidence and explanations of this putatively more Christian group have been wanting. Emperors only intermittently favored their coreligionists, and the tendency of bureaucrats to come from the provincial and social periphery, even if true, begs the question. A common idiom of martial imagery, however, opens cultural and rhetorical avenues to explain this phenomenon. When one considers the many examples of bishops appealing to bureaucrats in terms of *militia Christi*, it might seem an attractive hypothesis that martial imagery drove cultural changes within the group of administrators. This argument must be rejected, however, for two main reasons. Setting

aside the manifold historiographical problems with a story of “Christianization,” it is not clear that the thesis of an especially Christian bureaucracy passes muster, as it rests on dubious quantitative evidence. But even if the bureaucracy were especially “Christianized” – loosely defined as the degree of conversion visible in outward expressions of religious identity – the handful of martial appeals to bureaucrats cannot be taken as representative of wider trends or be said to have been especially successful.

The topic of the “Christianization” of the imperial service is intimately connected to the controversial historical question of Christianization. Counting the highest office-holders and their religious affiliations, Raban von Haehling identified the reign of Gratian as the turning point for imperial elites.⁸¹⁵ Timothy Barnes took issue with von Haehling’s reckoning of pagans and Christians and instead preferred an earlier date for the Christianization of the aristocracy.⁸¹⁶ Michele Renee Salzman developed a catalogue of her own and argued that, through a process of differentiation and then convergence of pagan and Christian career paths, a “critical mass” of aristocratic Christians existed at some point in the late fourth century.⁸¹⁷ Alan Cameron argued against each of these approaches and instead preferred to say that about three-fourths of so-called “center pagans” became “center Christians” between 340 and 430.⁸¹⁸

Each of these narratives suffers from some fundamental methodological issues. The very notion of Christianization and conversion is owed to a framework reliant on categories and narratives promulgated by our Christian sources. Non-Christians did not

⁸¹⁵ Haehling 1978.

⁸¹⁶ Barnes 1994 and 1995.

⁸¹⁷ Salzman 2002.

⁸¹⁸ Alan Cameron 2011, 177.

consider their paganism to be a coherent category of religious identity,⁸¹⁹ and even among Christians there were a multiplicity of different ways of expressing and ordering religious identities. The very term “pagan” caught on as an oppositional term, a way of defining outsiders to the Christian faith, or even Christians who were perceived as insufficiently militant and thus criticized by their peers as proverbial civilians (*miles* vs. *paganus*).⁸²⁰ To endeavor to establish the turning point at which the majority of the aristocracy ceased being “pagan” and started being “Christian” is to reduce diverse identities and religious commitments to a rigid binary. Still it cannot be denied that there was a broad shift over the course of the period. Whatever the constitution of the clarissime at any given moment, from the time of the tetrarchs to the reign of Theodosius II, the number of visible Christians within the senatorial aristocracy rose, to judge by the number of attested Christian high office-holders, the popularity of coffins bearing biblical motifs,⁸²¹ or literary accounts.⁸²²

Against this historiographic backdrop, scholars have also sought to identify the main causes for the Christianization of the aristocracy. Numerous suggestions have been made – the conversion of aristocratic women, the inherent appeal of the faith, the indoctrination of the army, *etc.*⁸²³ – but the notion that the bureaucracy was somehow

⁸¹⁹ Markus 1990, 28; Alan Cameron 2011, 173.

⁸²⁰ Alan Cameron 2011, 22-5. See Boin 2014 for this latter interpretation of the *miles* vs. *paganus* divide based on his reading of Tertullian and Victorinus: “many Christians did not know they were ‘not Christian’ until their more uncompromising Christian peers, or their more politically active ones, told them so” (195).

⁸²¹ Wrede 2001, 84-94 notes the emergence of both more military-civil accoutrement under Valentinian and Theodosius as well as a greater predominance of Christian themes. Ewald 2003, 567-71 criticizes Wrede’s socio-historical approach and questions the degree to which the art-historical evidence speaks to developments within the senatorial class, but a long-run shift to a more Christian subject matter still stands.

⁸²² E.g. Hier. *Epist.* 22.16, along with other passages noted by Alan Cameron 2011, 186-7.

⁸²³ Women: e.g. Herrin 1987, 173-4; Army: e.g. Shean 2010, 19.

especially important to Christianization is particularly relevant here. Scholars have long posited relatively higher rates of conversion in the new “aristocracy of service.” Jones, for instance, surmised that, after the conversion of Constantine, the prospects of career advancement offered by imperial favor incentivized bureaucrats to become Christians.⁸²⁴ Salzman’s prosopographical studies have provided some numerical evidence that seems to support higher rates of conversion in the imperial service than elsewhere.⁸²⁵ 19% of Christians in her study but only 6% of pagans were bureaucrats, making the imperial service “the most Christian of all career paths.”⁸²⁶ Salzman boldly avers that “the differences in the career paths of pagan and Christian aristocrats is one of the most significant results of the growth and differentiation that occurred within the aristocracy in the fourth and early fifth centuries.”⁸²⁷

The oldest feature of this argument is the stress on the person of the emperor, especially Constantine, in driving the process. Eusebius complained that many officials adopted the faith of the new emperor just to secure promotions within the bureaucracy.⁸²⁸ Ambrose and Augustine likewise accused some converts of career opportunism.⁸²⁹ These complaints notwithstanding, the evidence for the religious preference of emperors in promoting high-officials is quite mixed, as von Haeling’s figures show. It was not until 408 that a decree of Honorius barred heretics from wearing

⁸²⁴ Jones 1964, 1: 35-6.

⁸²⁵ Salzman 2002, 123-8. Brown notes that Salzman’s general results “agree with common sense” (2012, 46).

⁸²⁶ Salzman 2002, 124-5.

⁸²⁷ Salzman 2002, 116.

⁸²⁸ Eus. *V. Con.* 4.54.2.

⁸²⁹ Salzman 2002, 127-8.

the *cingulum*, and this ban may have not applied to pagans until 416.⁸³⁰ For these reasons, the religious affiliation of the emperor is unlikely to have been a decisive factor in driving conversion at the highest levels.

Another possibility is that other forms of social pressure drove bureaucrats to prefer Christianity in relatively higher numbers. To advance from the lower levels of the bureaucracy, one needed access to a network of patronage and recommendations, and Salzman reasons that these may have drawn more bureaucrats to the faith. Moreover, bonds with fellow bureaucrats may have created incentives around religious identity sympathetic to the faith. Although these are plausible factors that could explain the spread of Christianity *within* the bureaucracy, on their own they fail to explain the putatively “most Christian of all career paths,” for they do not identify a prime mover that could have made networks of patronage favor the faith in the first place.

The provincial backgrounds of a significant number of bureaucrats is another more reasonable, yet problematic, explanation for the ostensible Christianization of the imperial service.⁸³¹ This argument is a bit circular, as we do not have much independent evidence that provincials were more Christian than the senators of Rome. But even

⁸³⁰ The two laws in question are *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.42 (408 A.D.) and 16.10.21 (416 A.D.). I do not find persuasive evidence that the law of 408 was applied to pagans, *contra* Salzman 1993, 368 and 2002, 127. The law only prohibited “those who are inimical to the catholic faith from the palatine *militia*” (Translation my own: “eos, qui catholicae sectae sunt inimici, intra palatium militare prohibemus”). Salzman cites Zosimus’ story of the pagan *comes* Generidus which does indicate that the law of 408 banned all non-Christians from wearing the ζώνη, but Zosimus could have misunderstood the law if Generidus merely voluntarily laid down his ζώνη in protest (Zos. 5.46.3-4; *PLRE* 2:500-1; on the general ignorance of religious legislation and the *Cod. Theod.*, see Errington 1997). Even by Zosimus’ account, the emperor tried to summon the official to court after promulgating the law. Although pagans might have been targeted, it is more likely that some officials objected to the rule and forced it to be withdrawn. At the very least, the situation was a confusing one, and the law could not have rooted out pagans from the bureaucracy.

⁸³¹ Salzman 2002, 125: “This study population supports the view that imperial court careers attracted provincials; nearly all of the men in this path are either of provincial (42%, 11 out of 26) or unattested (54%, 14 out of 26) provenance (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2).”

ignoring provincial differences in religious affiliation, it is possible that recruitment into the central bureaus from across the empire created a group environment in which religious solidarity could become more salient than more fragmented local identities.⁸³² To a greater degree than local *curiales* or traditional senators, bureaucrats as a group lacked parochial family connections and religious practices, so there may have been an increased proclivity to unite around a universalizing faith.⁸³³ Augustine's *agentes in rebus* at Milan could, by this logic, be a model of this inclination for conformity, as one imperial servant's religious commitment impelled another to take the same path.⁸³⁴

If the cosmopolitan *esprit de corps* of the bureaucracy was, in fact, a decisive element in facilitating Christianization, might the discourse of *militia* have played an instrumental role? On its face, the suggestion is plausible. Augustine, Paulinus, and Ambrose all used the idea of *militia* to persuade imperial potentates. But there are problems with this line of thinking. As I will argue later in this chapter, comparisons of *militiae* are best understood as opportunistic attempts to exploit structural features of bureaucratic martial imagery in service of some other aim (self-presentation, praise, or persuasion). None of the examples offer good evidence that this strategy effectuated a change in religious identity or catalyzed a process of Christianization. We do not know how Licentius and Romanianus responded to Paulinus' missives about *militia*.⁸³⁵ When Ambrose played with the idea of *militia* in his imperial appeals, it was to improve his

⁸³² On the lack of a coherent category of "paganism" as recognized by adherents of traditional cults, see Alan Cameron 2011, 27.

⁸³³ But cf. Momigliano 1986 for the disadvantages of monotheism as a universalizing project.

⁸³⁴ Aug. *Conf.* 8.6.15; for further discussion of the episode, see below.

⁸³⁵ We possess no letter from Licentius, and Romanianus did not remain a disciplined adherent to the faith, at least from Augustine's point of view. For discussion of the letter to Romanianus, see above, chapter 2. For discussion of the attached letter to Licentius and the other examples cited in the paragraph, see below.

supplicatory position and public image, not to convince the emperor or his ministers to be “more Christian.” And although the example of the *agentes in rebus* in Augustine’s *Confessions* might offer a suggestive example of martial comradery and susceptibility to the idea of *militia Christi*, the second-hand story gives us more of an indication of Augustine’s thinking about conversion and his own agenda of self-presentation than any conditions on the ground in the imperial service.

All of this brings us to the evidence for the bureaucracy as the “most Christian of all career paths.” Although Salzman’s figures indicate that bureaucrats were much more likely to be Christian than other aristocrats, the relatively small size of the bureaucratic career path relative to the “senatorial civic” path calls into question the representativity of her figures (26 bureaucrats to 135 traditional senators, see Figure 1, below).⁸³⁶ After all, we know that by the end of the fourth century the number of imperial servants who achieved the rank of at least *clarissimus* far-outstripped the number of traditional senators, we might assume a high degree of evidentiary distortion in Salzman’s numbers.⁸³⁷ Were we to find just four more pagan bureaucrats, this “most Christian of career paths” would change to the same religious breakdown as the military. None of this even addresses the 102 persons for whom career paths could not be

⁸³⁶ In both her book (2002, 7) and her rejoinder to a review (2005, 123-7), Salzman asserts that she did not intend for her population to be taken as a statistically random sample or as necessarily representative of the whole. In his review and response to Salzman’s rejoinder, Mathisen considers the sample to be “about as random as one can get for this period – there was no selection process utilized save for that imposed by the random chances of survival” (2002, 271) because he views the potential evidentiary distortions from wealth, cities of origin, and selective destruction as unlikely in the case of pagan and Christian aristocrats (2007, 238). Whether this is true for the entire population, when it comes to career paths, the relatively low count of imperial servants could be owed to wealth differentials, cultural variation, or some other factor which may, in turn, distort the count of pagans and Christians.

⁸³⁷ As noted by Liebeschuetz (2005, 534), Salzman’s numbers for *illustres* are greater than her count of the lower-ranked *clarissimi*. Mathisen views this as a product of Salzman’s “overly stringent approach” in only choosing senators whose status was undeniable (2007, 240).

determined.⁸³⁸ Just as I argued in the preceding chapter that *militia* could overlap with *dignitates*, it could be argued that the distinction between civic and bureaucratic career paths may, in some cases, be forced.⁸³⁹ Given the questionable size and representativity of Salzman’s samples, we should not assume that the religious makeup of the imperial service was uniquely Christian.

Career Path	Pagan/pagan convert	Percent of career path pagan	Christian/Christian convert	Percent of career path Christian
Senatorial civic	86	63.7 %	49	36.3 %
Military	7	38.9 %	11	61.1 %
Imperial bureaucratic	8	30.8 %	18	69.2 %
Religious	17	60.7 %	11	39.3 %
Mixed/indeterminate	7	53.8 %	6	46.2 %

Figure 1: Salzman’s Religious Identification of Men by Career Path⁸⁴⁰ (Modified)

However appealing the notion of *militia Christi* as a vehicle of Christianization might seem, at present, there is insufficient textual and quantitative evidence to maintain in the first place that the bureaucracy was substantially more Christianized than other segments of the aristocracy and in the second place that a discourse of *militia* was a

⁸³⁸ This counts both the 7 “mixed/indeterminate” career paths and the 95 individuals “missing observation” (Salzman 2002, 223, table 4.1).

⁸³⁹ Mathisen (2002, 264-5) raises this critique, citing work by Chastagnol and Kuhoff that argued for a mixed career path (Chastagnol 1970; Kuhoff 1983). Salzman responds that her approach was consonant with this scholarship (2005, 130). Without a more detailed breakdown of individual career paths in her appendix, this point is difficult to judge. I have maintained the receptiveness of even the traditional senatorial aristocracy to a discourse of *militia*, so I am skeptical of the explanatory power of such rigid career paths.

⁸⁴⁰ Modified from Salzman 2002, 223, table 4.1. I consider misleading her representation of pagan bureaucrats as a percentage of all pagans and Christian bureaucrats as a percentage of all Christians. What matters is not the percentage of bureaucrats in each of Salzman’s religious populations, which could be skewed by the relative size of each, but rather the ratio of Christians to pagans within the bureaucracy. The results of Salzman’s calculations – 18.9% of Christians were bureaucrats (18 out of 95) and 6.4% of pagans were bureaucrats (8 out of 125) – could suggest a higher Christian to pagan ratio (18.9%/6.4% = 2.95) than the actual numbers of bureaucrats she counts (18/8 = 2.25). I have reproduced Salzman’s figures with Christians and pagans as a percentage of each “career path,” which I believe better show the implications of her data.

decisive factor in driving this process. This does not mean that martial imagery was an unimportant factor in shaping late antique society or that its impact on the imperial service can be ignored. We must now turn to consider the degree to which martial imagery distracted the imperial elites of late antiquity away from administrative pursuits in favor of heavenly service.

“The Vampire of the Imperium Romanum”?

The impact of Christianity on the Roman state has long been a focus of historians, and it is especially relevant to this chapter, which looks at the connections between imagined *militia* of God and that of the empire. Although Gibbon is often held up as its chief exponent, the charge that Christianity weakened Rome is an ancient one. Augustine wrote his *City of God* at least in part to respond to critics who thought the faith was to blame for the sack of 410,⁸⁴¹ and Machiavelli included in his *Discourses on Livy* a polemical chapter that pinned the division of Italy and its degenerate morals on conversion to Christianity.⁸⁴² Although he did not treat it as an independent cause of Roman decline, Gibbon argued that Christianity deflated the martial zeal of the Romans while radical asceticism deprived the empire of valuable manpower beginning in the fourth century.⁸⁴³ This same inclination, to blame Christianity for imperial decline, emerged in Nietzsche’s philosophical writings, where he wrote that “Christianity was

⁸⁴¹ Aug. *Epist.* 135-8.

⁸⁴² Machiavelli, *Discorsi* 1.12.

⁸⁴³ For an overview of Gibbon’s nuanced view, unfairly characterized by critics as blaming decline and fall squarely on Christianity, see Ando 2009. Gibbon, chs. 15 and 16: “pusillanimous youth preferred the penance of the monastic to the dangers of a military life.”

the vampire of the *imperium Romanum*, – overnight it destroyed the vast achievement of the Romans.”⁸⁴⁴

Few historians today would adopt such baldly polemical stances, but this does not mean that these pessimistic interpretations of Christianity and empire are inconsequential. The Gibbonian narrative is still a staple of popular historical writing and commentary.⁸⁴⁵ In the academy, serious historians have maintained that the spread of Christianity led to meaningful withdrawal from public life.⁸⁴⁶ In his magisterial *Later Roman Empire*, Jones argued that the chief economic weakness of the empire was that too many “idle mouths” consumed too much of the empire’s shrunken economic productivity. Among these unproductive classes, Jones counted pampered senators, civil and military officials, and “full-time stipendiary clergy” who came to outnumber imperial officials by the sixth century.⁸⁴⁷ Nor is this view entirely out of fashion. Hugh Elton recently opined that, while the aristocracy of service was the defining feature of the late Roman Empire, Christianity “divert[ed] many men and much money into the church as it changed the social and cultural world, and many of the talented church

⁸⁴⁴ Nietzsche 1918, 169 (Mencken, trans.). Cf. *Human, All Too Human* in which Nietzsche describes ‘the spread of Christianity’ as ‘the principal cause’ of ‘the decline of Roman culture’ (cited on p. 107 of Cantor, *Shakespeare’s Roman Trilogy*).

⁸⁴⁵ E.g. Nixey 2018. For an incisive critique, see Averil Cameron 2017.

⁸⁴⁶ As argued, for example, by Momigliano (1963, 9-12 and 1986, 296-7) and Grant 1976, 232-48, echoing Gibbon’s negative assessment of ascetic movements (ch. 37, 1901, 4:57-75): “The subjects of Rome, whose persons and fortunes were made responsible for unequal and exorbitant tributes, retired from the oppression of the Imperial government; and the pusillanimous youth preferred the penance of the monastic, to the dangers of a military, life. The affrighted provincials of every rank who fled before the Barbarians, found shelter and subsistence: whole legions were buried in these religious sanctuaries; and the same cause, which relieved the distress of individuals, impaired the strength and fortitude of the empire.”

⁸⁴⁷ Jones 1964, 2:1045-7. In his view, the qualitative effect was more pronounced than the quantitative difference, with the most principled and prudent men preferring a spiritual life to state service (1063-4).

leaders might have been brilliant governors or generals.”⁸⁴⁸ With greater nuance, Kate Cooper made a related argument that changes in bureaucracy and experiments in asceticism changed the configuration of the typical elite household, detracting from the family unit’s sense of civic responsibility.⁸⁴⁹

As I will show, the spread of the language of *militia* resulted in discursive competition between church and state. Bishops tried to exploit dissatisfaction with a soldierly bureaucracy by tapping into their own language of ascetic *militia* to challenge imperial potentates. One might extrapolate from this circumstantial observation support for the thesis that Christianity in some way enervated the empire. Bishops could have used martial imagery to drain ideological influence and manpower from the highest echelons of the imperial administration. But Christianity as “the vampire of the *imperium Romanum*” remains as much a mirage in this area as others. As mentioned above, there is no evidence that these rhetorical gambits involving martial imagery were decisive in changing the career path or religious allegiance of the individuals mentioned.

To be sure, ascetic luminaries across the empire came from backgrounds in or adjacent to the imperial service. Rabbula, bishop of Edessa and author of monastic *regulae*, was trained in Greek rhetoric and served in the bureaucracy before his move into an ecclesiastical career.⁸⁵⁰ Alexander Acoemetus was a well-educated

⁸⁴⁸ Elton 2018, 351. Harris takes a similar tack, arguing that Christianity was coopted as a language of power for such men as Theodosius and Stilicho even as the religion weakened empire by creating division (2016, 239): “Its shared rituals and myths existed, but they had never worked on the great mass of the population, and Christianity had weakened them still further.”

⁸⁴⁹ Cooper 2007, 54-5; 100-1; 152-6. See also 9 where she distinguishes her position from Gibbon’s: “The problem was not so much that potential generals joined the ascetic movement instead of the army (although the ferocity of some of the monks suggests that this could have been the case). Rather, it was in the erosion of an ancient consensus regarding duty, honour, and the pursuit of the common good.”

⁸⁵⁰ *Rabb. 2*, “He was strongly devoted to the illustrious office of the honor assigned him by the emperor” (“ܠܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ”). Translation my own. the verb “was

praefectianus in Constantinople when he realized that “the things of this life are infirm and insecure” and abandoned his worldly career for ascetic pursuits.⁸⁵¹ Ambrose also served under a praetorian prefect and then as governor before his rapid elevation to the episcopacy of Milan,⁸⁵² and Paulinus of Nola was a distinguished senatorial governor prior to his withdrawal from public life. Even men who did not hold posts in the bureaucracy, like Augustine, often had designs on government careers, and training in rhetoric was a pathway to imperial and ecclesiastic clout alike. But as tantalizing as these anecdotes may be, they do not indicate that the brightest minds in the empire were favoring careers in the church over the imperial service. Such a claim would require a systematic survey, and, given the lack of detailed biographical information on most known bishops, historians will probably never be able to quantify meaningfully the draw

strongly devoted” (ܠܥܡ ܡܠܚܬܐ) (which in other contexts can be used of strong attachment to paganism, Margoliouth s.v. ܡܠܚܬܐ (‘āz), Ethpa.) indicates the strength of Rabbula’s attachment to his position. I see no reason to think that the office in question was a sinecure (*contra* Bowersock 2000, 262-3), for the word I translate as “illustrious” (ܠܡܬܬܐܠܡܐ, the pass. part. of ܡܬܐܠܡܐ (*shāmāh*)) could simply be an equivalent of a title such as *clarissimus* (λαμπρότατος), *spectabilis* (περίβλεπτος), *illustris* (ἰλλούστριος) rather than meaning something like “honorary” or “nominal,” and the word I translate as “honor” (ܠܡܚܬܐ) seems like a Syriac approximation of *dignitas* or *honor*. Unfortunately, the lack of clear equivalencies between Syriac vocabulary and Greek or Latin titles (Kawar 1959, 322) obfuscates the specific post held by Rabbula, which the text makes clear was an official commission, rather than an inherited post (see Sokoloff s.v. ܡܬܐܠܡܐ, Etpa.5; *pace* Phenix and Horn 2017, lxxix).

⁸⁵¹ *V. Al. Akoim.* 5 “καὶ ἐν ὀλίγῳ καιρῷ καταμανθάνει τὰ βιωτικά ὅτι σαθρὰ καὶ ἐπίσαλα...” Translation by Caner (2000, 253). Sections 5-6 describes his successful career as part of the praetorian prefect’s staff: “παιδεύται δὲ ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει πᾶσαν τὴν γραμματικὴν ἐπιστήμην καὶ ἀναχθεὶς ἐν σεμνότητι καὶ σωφροσύνῃ τὴν τελείαν ἡλικίαν, στρατεύεται ἐπαρχικός...Τοῦτο οὖν ἀκούσας καὶ εἰλικρινῶς πιστεύσας, ἀνυπερθέτως τὸ ἐπιβάλλον μέρος αὐτῷ τῆς πατρικῆς οὐσίας καὶ τὰ τῆς στρατείας αὐτοῦ πράγματα – ἔχεν γὰρ πολλὰ ὥσάτε σώφρων καὶ γενναῖος ἐπαρχικός – τοῖς πτωχοῖς καὶ πενησιν διαδίδωσιν.” Note the vocabulary of *στρατεία*.

⁸⁵² On Ambrose’s career, see Paul. Med. *V. Ambr.* 5, “Sed postquam edoctus liberalibus disciplinis ex urbe [Roma] egressus est professusque in auditorio praefecturae praetorii, ita splendide causas perorabat, ut eligeretur a viro inlustri Probo, tunc praefecto praetorii, ad consilium tribuendum. Post quod consularitatis suscepit insignia, ut regeret Liguriam Aemiliamque provincias, venitque Mediolanum.” Cf. also Ambr. *De off.* 1.1.4: “ego raptus de tribunalibus atque administrationis infulis ad sacerdotium.”

of celestial *militia* on members of the imperial service, not to mention the counterfactual question of what churchmen would have done had they not pursued clerical careers.

Without such quantitative evidence, the notion of an ecclesiastical brain-drain is not a falsifiable proposition, and what is more, there are three problematic premises underlying it. The first faulty assumption is that the career-decision dynamic in the later empire was a zero-sum game which would not have existed but for the popularity of ecclesiastical careers. If there were a fixed pool of skilled administrators, the thinking seems to be, every single churchman would have represented a loss for the imperial administration and vice-versa. But there was not a fixed pool of skilled administrators. The quality of administrators depended on education and experience, and these variables were themselves dependent on a bevy of economic, social, and political factors. Without doubt, other pursuits – philosophical inquiry, literary diversions, military careers, and estate management to name but a few – drew manpower away from *militia Caesaris*, so the church cannot be blamed for a putative dearth of talent.⁸⁵³

The second problem undergirding a theory of the church draining the empire of skilled *milites* is the structure of the administration itself. With thousands of new jobs available every year, the highest echelons of society churned through positions in the bureaucracy at a high rate. In these circumstances, the quality of administrative talent

⁸⁵³ It may be helpful to think with numbers of ecclesiastics, bureaucrats, and soldiers. Whereas the total number of administrators was probably higher than 35,000, the number of ecclesiastics (clerics, monks, and nuns) was, according to Ian Wood, roughly 400,000-600,000 by 600, roughly the same as the number of troops in the fourth century (Wood 2018, 79). At first blush, this might suggest a serious drain on manpower, but the persons pursuing each of these “career paths” were drawn from diverse backgrounds across an empire of some 50 million, all-told representing only about 2% of the population. And this assumes that Wood’s numbers hold for the fourth and fifth centuries, which is probably not the case. What is more, causation may have even gone other way, with clerics picking up administrative tasks as the administrative overhead shrank with the political fragmentation of the empire, but such an argument is beyond the chronological scope of this dissertation.

was a function of screening at the entry-level (*statuti*) and evaluation and promotion at the higher ranks. In the proto-bureaucratic world of the fourth- and fifth-century empire, we know of no formal exams, performance reviews, or evaluative metrics. Typical recommendations spoke of virtues, like *honestas*, *industria*, or *paideia*, that nodded in the direction of qualification, grit, or literary skill, but these were mere platitudes. Men won jobs and rose in the ranks because of whom they knew. Networks of patronage mapped paths of advancement. In such circumstances, to say that Christianity subtracted talent from the imperial service is to put the cart before the horse: the limiting factor was a mechanism of advancement that did not prioritize the quality of imperial officers.

Finally, apart from the assumption that promotion was a zero-sum matter and the fact that quality of administrators was dependent on many other factors, to say that clergy were mere “idle mouths” underestimates the important social functions that such clergy could play. Peter Brown has noted the importance of the holy man in serving as an intermediary in social disputes, and Claudia Rapp has shown the degree to which episcopal authority was dependent on pragmatic involvement in social affairs.⁸⁵⁴ Not to speak of the valuable economic output of certain clerical and ascetic groups, even the unproductive members of society could have played a valuable role in moderating conflicts and maintaining institutions of support.⁸⁵⁵ Neither the supply nor the output of ecclesiastical and imperial administrators was a zero-sum matter, and the notion that Christianity diverted resources from the empire is seriously flawed.

⁸⁵⁴ Brown 1971a; Rapp 2005, 172-290.

⁸⁵⁵ *Pace de Ste. Croix* 1981, 491-3 for the drain of the civil service on the resources of the Roman world.

Comparing Militiae: A Coherent Political Program?

We cannot maintain that the language of *militia* drove empire-wide political or religious changes, but bishops did exploit the vocabulary of state service to frame a contrast between earthly and heavenly allegiance. If one approaches Ambrose, Augustine, or Paulinus' martial rhetoric in the context of each writer's wider theological and philosophical views, there can be little question that each espoused God's supremacy and providence in all affairs, but the specificity of the overlaps and contrasts made in the sphere of *militia* might suggest a radical ideological project that aimed to challenge or deconstruct secular authority in some way. Robert Markus suggested that Augustine advocated a view of the *res publica* in which the government had a responsibility to work within a framework of commonly-held values, and John Milbank championed an even more radical reading of Augustine's political theology in which the church was the only legitimate political sphere and the only true society, and could thus be fused with the state in a just society.⁸⁵⁶ Did these bishops' discourse of *militia* aim to construct a grander image of the world in which imperial service would be placed within a larger divinely-sanctioned system of *militia*? In other words, did this constitute a coherent political program? As alluring as such a majestic scheme may be to a scholar seeking late-antique exemplars of political theology, these comparisons of *militia*, with their various contradictions and contexts, were an inchoate image rather than an intricate system. The very notion of "political theory" is anachronistic as applied to Christian

⁸⁵⁶ Markus 1970, 72-104; 2006, 49-69. Milbank 1991, esp. at 417-22. For a thoughtful account and critique of each of these positions, see Dodaro 2009b, which was influential on my thinking.

writers of the time,⁸⁵⁷ and if we consider these “critiques” of state service, internal contradictions and contexts suggest a more modest yet still meaningful interpretation, namely an entrepreneurial engagement with existing discourses of state service.

Ambrose, for one, did not present a coherent framework of *militia* in his imperial missives. In a letter to Eugenius, the bishop indicated three different categories of individuals who must live with constancy in fear of God: priests (*sacerdotes*), imperial servants (“qui vobis militant”), and provincials (“aut in numero habentur provincialium”).⁸⁵⁸ Likewise, his appeal on the Callinicum affair used the term *militia* to apply to those in the emperor’s service and to imply a distinct and separate *militia Dei* for the clergy.⁸⁵⁹ In contrast, Ambrose wrote to Valentinian II that “all serve you” (“omnes homines...vobis militent”) but the emperor himself serves God.⁸⁶⁰ When one considers these letters side-by-side, it becomes apparent that Ambrose varied his martial images to suit the context; his impressionistic language was supple and did not constitute a coherent framework of *militia*. In the appeals to Theodosius and Eugenius, he was happy to advise the emperor that he operated in a separate sacred sphere, almost as a divine plenipotentiary. In the letter to Valentinian, however, Ambrose saw fit to craft an imperial encomium that encompassed the whole empire, enjoining upon the emperor a responsibility to act as God’s representative. To be sure, many of these

⁸⁵⁷ Markus 1970, 72-3; Kaufman 2010, 721: “The realists’ restrained hopes for progressive justice and the liberals’ search for a consensus or conversation that encompasses respect for difference typically take Augustine’s hopes for souls as hopes for society.”

⁸⁵⁸ Ambr. *Epist. ex. coll.* 10.6, “Verum nosti pro dei timore agendum esse constanter, quod etiam pro libertate frequenter fit non solum a sacerdotibus sed etiam ab his qui vobis militant aut in numero habentur provincialium.” Here, the conjunction “aut” implies an antithetical and mutually exclusive contrast between items (*L&S*, s.v.).

⁸⁵⁹ e.g. Ambr. *Epist.* 74.29, “Nam si qui vobis militant, certo militiae tempore servantur, quanto magis etiam eos considerare debetis qui deo militant?”

⁸⁶⁰ Ambr. *Epist.* 72.1.

images owed something to the ideal of the Christian ruler as expressed by such writers as Eusebius and Synesius,⁸⁶¹ but in their specifics, Ambrose's blending of earthly and heavenly *militia* does not constitute a coherent system.

Nor did Augustine's many references to *militia* articulate a consistent pattern of imperial or divine service. In the *Confessions*, the concept of soldierly service was amply used, but its extension to the secular world might seem to encompass more than just the imperial service, but Augustine left it an open question whether a worldly career was itself a sinful enterprise.⁸⁶² Whatever the breadth of his notion of *militia*, Augustine seems to offer conflicting advice on the morality of imperial service in his letters to Caecilian, Macedonius, and Boniface. Writing to Caecilian, Augustine declared that Marcellinus' bond of marriage prevented him from attaining a truly holy *militia*,⁸⁶³ and in a missive to Macedonius he noted that the vicar's godly service was approaching a heavenly *cingulum*.⁸⁶⁴ At first blush, these missives might seem to offer conflicting, or at best vague, indications of whether Augustine thought government service was compatible with a life of righteousness. The bishop's letters to the *comes* Boniface add to this confusion, for in them, Augustine reasoned that the general's service was merely a different, almost equally valuable kind of vocation, one which enabled the spiritual warriors to pursue their own pursuits:

You wanted to give up completely the public life in which you were involved and to devote yourself to holy leisure and to live the life that the servants of God, the monks, live. But what held you back from doing

⁸⁶¹ See, e.g. Eus. *Laus. Const.* 4-5 and Synes. *De regn.*

⁸⁶² Aug. *Conf.* 9.2.4: ““peccasse me in hoc quisquam servorum tuorum, fratrum meorum, dixerit, quod iam pleno corde militia tua passus me fuerim vel una hora sedere in cathedra mendacii, at ego non contendo.”; for further discussion on the following passages, see below.

⁸⁶³ Aug. *Epist.* 151.8.

⁸⁶⁴ Aug. *Epist.* 155.17.

this except that you considered, when we pointed it out, how much what you were doing was benefitting the churches of Christ? You were acting with this intention alone, namely, that they might lead a quiet and tranquil life, as the apostle says, in all piety and chastity, defended from the attacks of the barbarians. But you also wanted to seek nothing from this world except what would be necessary for sustaining your life and that of your family, while you were girded with the belt of a most chaste continence and, in the midst of bodily weapons, were armed more safely and more strongly with the weapons of the spirit.⁸⁶⁵

There is enough ambiguity in Augustine's political writings that it becomes impossible to square his disparate treatments of *militia* with any of the modern neo-Augustinian perspectives. Imperial service was not a sphere of agreed-upon values and principles analogous with Markus' view of the *saeculum*. At the same time, neither does Augustine's apparently rigid view of the superiority of heavenly *militia* constitute proof of a grand design of subordinating imperial to divine authority. Augustine still recognized the state as a legitimate separate authority, and, as much as he may have hoped that government officials would moderate their behavior, he still imagined them as exercising legitimate violence.⁸⁶⁶

When bishops contrasted *militia Christi* and *militia Caesaris*, they were not expressing a political philosophy but their own agendas. A coherent subversion of imperial *militia* cannot be discerned in either Ambrose's or Augustine's writings, and

⁸⁶⁵ Aug. *Epist.* 220.3, Teske trans., modified: "nempe omnes actus publicos, quibus occupatus eras, relinquere cupiebas et te in otium sanctum conferre atque in ea uita uiuere, in qua serui dei monachi uiuunt. ut autem non faceres, quid te reuocauit, nisi quia considerasti ostendentibus nobis, quantum prodesset Christi ecclesiis, quod agebas, si ea sola intentione ageres, ut defensae ab infestationibus barbarorum 'quietam et tranquillam uitam' agerent, sicut dicit apostolus, 'in omni pietate et castitate,' tu autem nihil ex hoc mundo quaereres nisi ea, quae necessaria essent huic uitae sustentandae tuae ac tuorum, accinctus balteo castissimae continentiae et inter arma corporalia spiritalibus armis tutius fortiusque munitus?" Boniface, Augustine later notes, had fallen from his chaste service and needed to purify himself of the battle raging within himself. Cf. Aug. *Epist.* 189.4-5, in which he notes many biblical soldiers and Boniface's calling to corporeal as opposed to spiritual warfare, and 17*.2 where Augustine notes that Boniface's "most excellent renown" (*excellentissima tua fama*) would glorify God, "even in military affairs" (*etiam in ipsis bellicis operibus*).

⁸⁶⁶ Aug. *Epist.* 153.19.

Paulinus of Nola's missives urging a rejection of state service also must be contextualized. When he urged Crispinianus to cease being a soldier, his follow-up letter made clear that he only urged a reordering of priorities, not necessarily a career change, and his anti-*militia* rhetoric to Licentius was aimed chiefly at conversion rather than career change.⁸⁶⁷ In adopting the language of *militia*, bishops were not seeking to “desecularize” the political arena, nor were they imitating the ideology and machinery of the bureaucracy to subvert state power.⁸⁶⁸ Bishops adopted the ethos of soldierly service to serve their own immediate ends.

Pulling on a Thread: Engagement with Existing Views of Militia

Militia in the correspondence of bishops does not represent a coherent political theology, nor can such a discourse be shown to have Christianized the bureaucracy, nor did the language persuade men of Caesar to become clerical *milites Christi*. When put to the test, each of these hypotheses fails to measure up to the evidence available. Once we dispense with these variations on the narrative of Christianization, we are left wondering what it means that bishops eagerly wrote to emperors, functionaries, and fellow clerics comparing *militia Christi* and *militia Caesaris*.

One insight that can be gleaned is that the ethos of soldierly service was one of the closest points of contact between ways of imagining one's relationship to the *res*

⁸⁶⁷ For the letter to Licentius, see below. For the letter to the soldier Crispinianus, see chapter 1.

⁸⁶⁸ For desecularization, see Markus 1990, 16 and *passim*; for the triumph of ecclesiastical over imperial authority, see Bowersock 1986, especially 307: “the bureaucratic system that the Christian emperors took over in the fourth century provided a powerful model for the architects of the Church who, because of the Christianity of the emperors, were confronted with an entirely new authority for their own institution. Once the bishops had sorted out the sectarian controversies that blunted the conflict between Church and State in the fourth century, the scene was set for the triumph of orthodoxy over the State as a whole no less than over the heretics.”

publica on the one hand and one's religious affiliation on the other. This is not to say that bishops relied exclusively on soldierly language when writing to government officials. They could and did write to government officials with other figural language, some of which would have mapped neatly onto classical metaphors of the state. The "body of Christ" motif, for example, was quite popular, and it appeared in letters from bishops to bureaucrats, but, to my knowledge, not once was it used alongside traditional conceptions of the corporeal body politic, as found in such celebrated *loci classici* as Menenius Agrippa's fable of the body during the secession of the plebs.⁸⁶⁹ Nor did letter-writers explicitly combine the commonplace "ship of state" with gospel stories of Christ calming the seas or similar episodes. These negative observations should not be taken too far, as they impressionistically rely on arguments from silence, but the appearance of the *militia* motif in many different letters to government officials is suggestive.

The exceptional usage of *militia* points to the image's potency in defining individual roles in society, especially vis-à-vis the state. Some of this may have been contingent on historical circumstances. Following military and political crises in the fourth and fifth centuries, commenting on empire through martial imagery may have been a particularly effective strategy. Still, it is difficult to link specific letters to

⁸⁶⁹ Liv. 2.32; Plut. *Cor.* 6.2-4. Cf. 1 Cor 12:14-23. For an analysis of the passage and its dialectical symbolic inversion, see Lincoln 1989, 145-8. The so-called *Institutio Traiani*, discussed in the previous chapter, wedded the militarized picture of the bureaucracy with a corporeal metaphor of society (*Inst. Trai.* fr. 2 (Kloft and Kerner) = Iohann. Saresb. *Policr.* 5.2, 540a: "Est autem res publica, sicut Plutarco placet, corpus quoddam..."), but lacking a specific authorial context, it cannot shed light on epistolary representations of society. For further discussion of the text, see chapter 3.

momentous moments in military history, and anyways, the main thrust of this Christian discourse of *militia* was not on secular defeat but on the hollowness of earthly victory.

Bishops' predilection for comparing *militiae* in letters to officials could also stem from a more fundamental element of the social milieu, namely the centrality of soldierly imagery in defining relationships to the state as an institution. The first chapter elaborated how a general emphasis on heroizing military language colored bureaucratic, municipal, and ecclesiastical letters of praise and petition. But whereas that imagery often featured champions of myth and scripture as points of comparison for civilian roles, the more institutional and technical focus of soldierly martial imagery brought contrasts with the state as a powerful administrative and political entity into sharper relief. Soldierly *militia* could unite the activity most-exclusively associated with the Roman state – warfare – with a much wider scope of non-military activities. It is no mistake that many of the letters of Augustine that deal with *militia* focused on officials' coercive use of force. Ambrose was keen to draw connections between the emperor's role as commander-in-chief and his control of the apparatus of the *res publica*, and when he requested that Studius, an imperial *iudex*, exercise forbearance, he fixated on the sword as a metonymic expression of judicial power.⁸⁷⁰ *Militia's* centrality in conceptions of state service made it an important opportunity for bishops to engage with

⁸⁷⁰ See, e.g., the Callinicum affair (discussed above and in ch. 1). *Epist.* 90.1 (to Studius): “De quo etiam ego vererem responsum referre, constrictus altero, quod est commissum vobis propter custodiam legum, altero autem propter misericordiam et gratiam, nisi de hoc apostolicam haberes auctoritatem: ‘Quia non sine causa gladium portat qui iudicat’; dei enim vindex est in eos qui male agunt,” quoting Rom. 13:4, “θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν. ἐὰν δὲ τὸ κακὸν ποιῇς, φοβοῦ· οὐ γὰρ εἰκὴ τὴν μάχαιραν φορεῖ· θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν, ἐκδικὸς εἰς ὀργὴν τῷ τὸ κακὸν πράσσοντι.” The stress on the sword itself (perhaps heightened by the abstract use of “custodiam legum” and even the double usage of “constrictus” (cf. *OLD* s.v. *stringo*, 4, “to bare, unsheathe”) engages with the martial symbolism of officeholding in much the same way as references to *cingula* or *chlamydes*. Cf. Gr. Naz. *Epist.* 224.3 for a similar association between a civil official and his sword and belt.

ideas about government service and subordinate them in some way to the triumphantly formidable notion of *militia Christi*, constructing an imaginary that could extoll a community united in service of God.

That the notion of state *militia* could touch so closely on concurrent ideals of ascetic martial imagery offered fertile ground for entrepreneurial churchmen to deploy contrasting images in letters to powerful members of society. Churchmen were keenly aware of both the ideological architecture that undergirt the imperial service and the limited appeal of that world of imagined *militia*. Steeped in a culture that valorized civilian life with martial imagery and aware of the similarities between the soldierly language of asceticism and bureaucracy, bishops like Ambrose, Augustine, and Paulinus of Nola opportunistically exploited the structural features and weaknesses of *militia inermis*. To heighten contrasts and persuade, bishops and priests wrote of a world defined by military metaphor, not merely in the banal language of heroes and champions, but through a discourse of militarized allegiances and loyalties. This rhetorical strategy brought to the fore an ethos of soldierly service, invigorating a theme in areas of discourse where it would not have otherwise existed. Just as the rhetoric of imperial edicts was echoed in the appeals and acclamations of Roman citizens⁸⁷¹ and just as the ostensibly anti-imperial martyr narratives embraced the truth claims of imperial records,⁸⁷² so too did the writings of bishops adopt and amplify the martial imagery of the bureaucracy. Far from undermining the ideal of a “fictively-militarized”

⁸⁷¹ Harries 1999, 214.

⁸⁷² Ando 2000, 128-30.

imperial service, entrepreneurial critiques of secular *militia* may very well have increased the idea's salience.

Soldiering for the Emperor and God: Ambrose's Adaptations of Militia

A defining feature of an ethos of soldierly service, whether of the ascetic or bureaucratic variety, was the privileging of hierarchical, dendritic structures of command that stretched upwards toward an ultimate authority. The first chapter considered how heroic language offered a discourse through which one could appeal to men of clout. Ready to grease the wheels of power, petitioners hailed imperial officials as mighty defenders, often with reference to mythical, biblical, or historical warriors. A different route to men of power was to appeal to their soldierly sense of propriety, a tack taken by Augustine in the Faventius episode. But the existence of parallel structures of heavenly and earthly *militia* offered another avenue of appeal, a merging of the two hierarchies to subordinate the concerns of imperial authority to religious considerations, as expounded by the "holy man." The most enthusiastic exponent of this strategy was Ambrose in his letters to the emperors. His adaptations of *militia*, however exceptional, reflect an awareness of the opportunistic possibilities inherent in the structure of soldierly martial imagery. As we shall see, similar possibilities could also be exploited in less high-powered contexts, such as letters to lower officials.

In martial imagery we see a valuable element of Ambrose's epistolary toolkit, a mode of writing that allowed the bishop to draw connections between earthly and heavenly service. This was an essential rhetorical move when he wanted to show imperial potentates that he had separate and legitimate authority in religious matters. In

his first letter on the altar of Victory to Valentinian II, then but 13 years old, Ambrose opened the letter in grandiose terms:

Not only do all men under Roman authority serve you, emperors of the earth and *principes*, but you yourselves serve omnipotent God and the holy faith. For salvation cannot be secured unless everyone worships the true God by whom all things are governed, that is the God of the Christians.⁸⁷³

Beyond mere encomium, this formulation of the emperor as God's subordinate was significant, for it implied a powerful corollary, that God's decrees were higher than the emperor's. The verb for service (*militare*) was applied to both "all men" and "emperors," whereas God governs all (*regere*). Later in the same letter, Ambrose made a comparison between a *civilis causa* and a *causa religionis*; in the former, the different legal parties get a voice, but in matters of religion "I preside as bishop."⁸⁷⁴ Analogy with the administration was key:

If a military matter must be dealt with, the opinion of a man trained in battles ought to be consulted; his advice ought to be esteemed. When a religious matter is treated, think of God.⁸⁷⁵

The second letter on the controversy reminded Valentinian of his soldierly responsibilities beneath God's commands; the child emperor may have been the age of a recruit, but he was acting like "a veteran by virtue of faith" when he refused to return

⁸⁷³ Ambr. *Epist.* 72.1, "Cum omnes homines qui sub dicione Romana sunt vobis militent imperatoribus terrarum atque principibus, tum ipsi vos omnipotenti deo et sacrae fidei militatis. Aliter enim salus tuta esse non poterit, nisi unusquisque deum verum hoc est deum Christianorum, a quo cuncta reguntur, veraciter colat." Translation my own.

⁸⁷⁴ Ambr. *Epist.* 72.13, "Si civilis causa esset, diversae parti responsio servaretur. Causa religionis est, episcopus convenio." On this legal sense of *convenio* (here used absolutely), see Lewis and Short, s.v. I.3.B (with only transitive uses).

⁸⁷⁵ Ambr. *Epist.* 72.7, "Si de re militari est consulendum, debet exercitati in proeliis viri expectari sententia, consilium comprobari; quando de religione tractatus est, deum cogita." Translation my own.

the altar.⁸⁷⁶ As Ambrose would make clear in later letters, he, as *sacerdos*, had an important role to play as well, ostentatiously ‘speaking truth to power.’ In this instance, the occasion for the bishop’s intervention had already passed, but writing an appeal to the emperor was an opportunity for Ambrose to make a public case for his own episcopal authority and situate it into a framework that imagined state, emperor, and bishop through the language of *militia*. Again and again, in his edited collection of letters, he framed imperial missives with soldierly martial imagery.

Ambrose’s letter to Theodosius on the Callinicum affair was perhaps the best example of this military imperial appeal. Writing to dissuade the emperor from punishing the local clergy for arson, Ambrose both drove a wedge between the emperor’s Christian allegiance and the Jews of Callinicum, whom Ambrose depicted as hostile enemies, and asserted a separate sphere of affairs over which the leaders of the church should, as legitimate *milites Christi*, receive deference. As argued in the first chapter, Ambrose married the military rhetoric of religious polemic to the image of the emperor as heroic champion, a commonplace of panegyric and epistolary flattery.⁸⁷⁷ In this way, heroic martial imagery offered a bridge between religious conflict and imperial intervention. But another current, related yet distinct, ran through the letter, and this was similar to how the bishop used soldierly language to conceive of the state and the

⁸⁷⁶ Ambr. *Epist.* 73.1, “...tu, imperator, licet adhuc in minoris aevi tirocinio florentibus novus annis, fidei tamen virtute veteranus obsecrata gentilium non probares, eodem quo comperi puncto labellum obtuli, quo licet comprehenderim quae suggestionem necessaria viderentur; poposci tamen exemplum mihi relationis dari.” Translation my own. The arguments of the *secta gentilium* are depicted with a lengthy metaphor of precious metals in the next section; their words gleamed with *phalerae*, but within they were hollow. The mention of *phalerae* is particularly meaningful in that it draws a sharp contrast with the emperor’s *virtus fidei* in the preceding section and the analysis of the Rome’s past military successes in what follows.

⁸⁷⁷ For valor and divine favor at Frigidus, see Ambr. *Epist. ex. coll.* 2.2; on mercy, see *Epist.* 74.32.

emperor in his letters to Valentinian II four years earlier. What is more, the placement of these two letters alongside one another in his tenth book of his letters indicates the centrality of the shared portrait of an empire of ordered *militia* in Ambrose's curated public image.⁸⁷⁸ As in his letters on the *ara Victoriae*, the bishop took advantage of the soldierly logic of bureaucratic martial imagery to insinuate himself as an authority on religious affairs.

This theme of soldierly *militia* ran through the whole appeal and established a foundation upon which Ambrose could make his case. As in the letter to Valentinian, the first allusion to a formal structure of *militia* appears in the *captatio benevolentiae* segment of the letter:

But it befits neither an emperor to deny frankness of speech nor a bishop not to say what he thinks. For nothing is so popular and loveable in you, emperors, as the fact that you delight in liberty even in those who have been subjected to you through the allegiance of service.⁸⁷⁹

The idea of "allegiance of service" (*obsequium militiae*), used broadly of the emperor's authority over the entire administration, might seem to run against Ambrose's case for "frankness of speech" (*libertas dicendi*) before the emperor. But the soldierly logic of administrative hierarchy did not run in just one direction; even as imperial servants

⁸⁷⁸ The collection is disordered in the MSS, but many scholars have argued for Plinian imitation. "According to this view, Ambrose subjected the organizing principles of Pliny to a Christian *retractation* by using the same method that he used for other ancient sources" (Nauroy 2016, 149).

⁸⁷⁹ Ambr. *Epist.* 74.2, "Sed neque imperiale est libertatem dicendi negare neque sacerdotale quod sentiat non dicere. Nihil enim in vobis imperatoribus tam populare et tam amabile est quam libertatem etiam in his diligere qui obsequio militiae vobis subditi sunt." Translation my own. Beyenka (1954, 7) wrongly translates the last clause as "those whom you have subdued on the battlefield." Liebeschuetz more accurately translates it as "imperial service" (2005, 97).

owed their emperor undivided loyalty, the emperor was expected to act with forbearance towards his subjects and heed their advice, frankly offered.⁸⁸⁰

Ambrose's chosen frame of reference for imperial authority (i.e. one based on service (*militia*)) helped him assert his jurisdiction over religious matters. One could almost imagine the bishop standing at the *consistorium*, soldiering on alongside the other dutiful counselors. He made this analogy explicit:

For if someone serves you, he serves for a fixed length of time. How much more ought you consider those who serve God?⁸⁸¹

And again, he wrote in the same letter:

If you consult your *comites*, in financial cases, how much more is it just that you consult the priests of the Lord in the case of religion?⁸⁸²

By holding that the bishop's service to God was analogous to that of soldiers and bureaucrats, Ambrose could assert his jurisdiction in religious matters. All the better that his chosen analogy put himself on par with the lofty *comes rei privatae* and *comes sacrarum largitionum*! These were two of the four *comites consistoriani*, positions codified by imperial decree under Valentinian, and they were some of the most prestigious offices.⁸⁸³

Latent throughout these *argumenta a fortiori* ("...quanto magis...") was the notion that bishops themselves followed a loftier, higher *militia*, and this was the

⁸⁸⁰ Rapp 2005, 260: "The general accessibility of the emperor was one of the characteristic features of late Roman government."

⁸⁸¹ Ambr. *Epist.* 74.29, "Nam si qui vobis militant, certo militiae tempore servantur, quanto magis etiam eos considerare debetis qui deo militant?" Translation my own.

⁸⁸² Ambr. *Epist.* 74.27 = *ex. coll.* 1a.27, "Si de causis pecuniariis comites tuos consulis, quanto magis in causa religionis sacerdotes domini aequum est consulas?" Translation my own.

⁸⁸³ These men (along with the *quaestor sacri palatini* and *magister officiorum*) were only outranked by praetorian and urban prefects (Jones 1964, 1:143, 528-9), and unlike others, they served as *ex officio* members of the *consistorium* (Jones 1964, 1:333); for the financial *comites* in Valentinian's "law of precedence" of 372, see *Cod. Theod.* 6.9.1.

destabilizing part of Ambrose's use of *militia*. After his first mention of the *libertas* of those who soldier for the emperor, Ambrose reiterated his point:

It is not displeasing even to emperors for each to complete his own duty, and you patiently listen to each and every one fulfill his office. In fact, you upbraid him if he does not make use of the rank of his *militia*. Therefore, what you happily accept in those who serve you, can this seem bothersome in priests when we say not what we want but what we are ordered?⁸⁸⁴

Whereas other officials speak for themselves to the emperor, men of God have a scriptural command to 'speak truth to power.'⁸⁸⁵ These "watchmen of the house of Israel" answer to God, and unlike *milites* of Caesar, they quell mobs and pursue peace.⁸⁸⁶ Ambrose tried to articulate a special sphere for himself, a stakeholder in all deliberations, but especially in matters of religious import:

If I speak in matters of state, although even there justice must kept, I would be bound by not so much fear if I should not be heard. But in a case pertaining to God, to whom will you listen if not to a priest, who is imperiled more greatly by sin? For who will dare to speak the truth if even a priest does not so dare?⁸⁸⁷

⁸⁸⁴ Ambr. *Epist.* 74.4: "Habemus ergo et nos cui displicere plus periculi sit, praesertim cum etiam imperatoribus non displiceat suo quemque fungi munere et patienter audiat unumquemque pro suo suggerentem officio, immo corripiatis si non utatur militiae suae ordine. Quod ergo in his libenter accipitis qui vobis militant, num hoc in sacerdotibus potest molestum videri cum id loquamur non quod volumus sed quod iubemur?"

⁸⁸⁵ Ambrose proceeded to quote 2 Tim 4:2: "Scis enim lectum: 'Cum stabitis ante reges et praesides nolite cogitare quid loquamini; dabitur enim vobis in illa hora quid loquamini: non enim vos estis qui loquimini, sed spiritus patris vestri qui loquitur in vobis.'"

⁸⁸⁶ Adapted from Ambr. *Epist.* 74.2: "Fili hominis, speculatorem te posui domui Israel, in eo, inquit, ut si avertatur iustus a iustitiis suis et fecerit delictum, quia non distinxisti ei"; pursuing peace, *Epist.* 74.6: "Relatum est a comite orientis militarium partium incensam esse synagogam idque auctore factum episcopo. Iussisti vindicari in ceteros, synagogam ab ipso exaedificari episcopo. Non astruo expectandam fuisse assertionem episcopi; sacerdotes enim turbarum moderatores sunt, studiosi pacis, nisi cum et ipsi moventur iniuria dei aut ecclesiae contumelia."

⁸⁸⁷ Ambr. *Epist.* 74.4: "Et tamen si in causis rei publicae loquar, quamvis etiam illic iustitia servanda sit, non tanto astringar metu si non audiar; in causa vero dei quem audies, si sacerdotem non audies, cuius maiore peccatur periculo? Quis tibi verum audebit dicere si sacerdos non audeat?" Translation my own.

While the *causae rei publicae* fall within the sphere of all advisors, *causae dei* were the special remit of the *sacerdos*. As in his letter to Valentinian, Ambrose's conception of the state connected religious concerns to a spiritual sphere that could rise above more mundane matters of state.

This discourse of *militia* was related to what I have dubbed "heroic" imagery in that warlike praise colored appeals to imperial potentates. By calling on Theodosius to raise a *tropaeum* of Christ over the Jewish synagogue, Ambrose tapped into long-standing conceptions of imperial representatives and emperors as valiant protectors, but by raising soldierly imagery – the idea of the dutiful subordinate within a loftier hierarchy – Ambrose grappled with the institutional rationale for imperial authority itself. Ambrose was asserting that the emperor should listen to his plea precisely because he 'spoke truth to power' and worked from a position within a hierarchy of terrestrial and celestial *militia*. On the one hand, Ambrose's soldierly rhetoric affirmed the emperor's theoretical position at the apex of empire. On the other hand, when Ambrose established bishops within a related sphere of *militia*, he grafted contested issues of religious piety onto the imperial decision-making process and destabilized the emperor's authoritative position. Could the emperor rightly ignore a *miles* who spoke for God?

By engaging with soldierly martial imagery, Ambrose could carefully make challenging requests while maintaining a loyal position beneath the emperor, akin to one of his administrative functionaries. A similar nexus between *militia* and loyalty appears throughout his letters to emperors over several decades. In a letter of 379, he conveyed his spiritual support, "watches of prayer," for Gratian in lieu of his presence

in the imperial *castra*.⁸⁸⁸ When writing to Valentinian about his embassy to Magnus Maximus, Ambrose used martial language to suggest that Maximus' authority was illegitimate; the usurper could only boast that he had barbarians soldiering for him, whereas Ambrose could adduce a higher authority to God and an emperor who sought peace, not war.⁸⁸⁹ In a letter to Eugenius ostensibly pertaining to the altar of Victory, Ambrose stressed the constancy of the emperor's subjects, writing that steadfastness was required not only of priests, "but also by those who serve (*militant*) you or are numbered among your provincials."⁸⁹⁰ After the defeat of Eugenius, Ambrose wrote to Theodosius to make clear that he never once doubted that Theodosius would "free the Roman Empire from the savagery of a barbarian brigand and the enthronement of an illegitimate usurper" with divine support.⁸⁹¹ When Theodosius died, Ambrose's funeral oration, surely delivered before not only Honorius and Stilicho, but also the rank and file of the army and administration, called upon his listeners to remember their *fidei militia*.⁸⁹² In each of these instances, the bishop cleverly used martial imagery to

⁸⁸⁸ Ambr. *Epist. ex. coll.* 12.1: "tuum cottidianum iter legebam, nocte ac die in tuis castris cura et sensu locatus orationum excubias praetendebam, etsi invalidus merito, sed affectu sedulus." I do not translate *orationum excubiae* as "a coverlet of prayers" as Beyenka translates.

⁸⁸⁹ Ambr. *Epist.* 30.3, "...mihi tot milia barbarorum militent et annonas a me accipiant!"; Ambrose's higher loyalty, 30.5; Valentinian's pursuit of peace. 30.8. Theodosius himself employed barbarians, a point which Pacatus could praise in panegyric (Pan. Lat. 2.4). This use of supplemental barbarian mercenaries was not unusual in times of war (Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 497n117; Liebeschuetz 1986; Heather 1991, 161-2n16-18), so Ambrose's language here should be interpreted as rhetorical invective rather than simply a reaction to historical circumstances.

⁸⁹⁰ Ambr. *Epist. ex. coll.* 10.6, "Verum nosti pro dei timore agendum esse constanter, quod etiam pro libertate frequenter fit non solum a sacerdotibus sed etiam ab his qui vobis militant aut in numero habentur provincialium." In reality, the issue was question was subsidies to senatorial envoys rather than the altar, a dispute which Ambrose was attempting to cloak with religious significance (Liebeschuetz and Hill 2005, 255-6).

⁸⁹¹ Ambr. *Epist. ex. coll.* 2.1, "...non praesumerem caeleste auxilium pietati tuae adfore, quo Romanum imperium a barbari latronis immanitate et ab usurpatoris indigni solio vindicare."

⁸⁹² Ambr. *De ob. Theo.* 9, "Nos autem non subtrahamus nos ad dispendium animae, sed inhaereamus fidei ad animae nostrae acquisitionem, quoniam in hac fidei militia 'testimonium consecuti sunt' seniores nostri Abraham, Isaac, Iacob et ideo hereditatem nobis fidei reliquerunt." cf. 6, "Nec moveat aetas! Fides militum imperatoris perfecta aetas est; est enim perfecta aetas, ubi perfecta est virtus. Reciproca haec,

emphasize his own loyalty to the imperial regime, whatever it might be at the moment. *Militia* was a convenient way for Ambrose to prove his own *fides*, whether by highlighting the loyalty of the emperor's *milites* or by pointing out the illegitimacy of a competitor.

Militia ingratiated the epistolographer to his recipient, but it did not constitute an unmitigated pledge of fealty. There were clear strings attached. In each of the above examples, Ambrose made clear that his allegiance was predicated on the imperial regime remaining on the right side of religious matters. Unlike the barbarians who served Maximus in his rapacious pursuit of power, Ambrose had a loftier, divinely-sanctioned obligation to protect widows and orphans, an obligation that he made clear to both Valentinian and the usurper (if the dialogue in the letter is to be believed).⁸⁹³ Eugenius' officials, soldiers, and provincials may have been showing steadfast loyalty, but Eugenius himself needed to preserve his standing with God by refraining from gifts to pagans.⁸⁹⁴ Theodosius was victorious at Frigidus only with divine aid, and Ambrose aspirationally reminded the emperor in a letter how different he was from past victors:

Other emperors at the beginning of a victory order triumphal arches or insignia to be prepared. But your Clemency prepares a sacrifice for the Lord and desires an offering and an act of thanksgiving to the Lord to be celebrated through priests.⁸⁹⁵

Finally, the eulogy of Theodosius stressed Christianity as the reason for military success and the source of all good virtues in soldiers. Just as Ambrose's use of *militia* in the

quia et fides imperatoris militum virtus est." The eulogy was not a letter, but Ambrose probably situated the letter between *Epist.* 76 and 77 (see Liebeschuetz 2005, 176-7).

⁸⁹³ Ambr. *Epist.* 30.5.

⁸⁹⁴ Ambr. *Epist. ex. coll.* 10.7, 12.

⁸⁹⁵ Ambr. *Epist. ex. coll.* 2.3: "Alii imperatores in exordio victoriae arcus triumphales parari iubent aut alia insignia triumphorum, clementia tua hostiam domino parat, oblationem et gratiarum actionem per sacerdotes celebrari domino desiderat." Translation my own.

Callinicum letter reminded the emperor of the bishop's loyalty even as it staked out a special episcopal dispensation, so too did other letters wield double-edged martial imagery. *Militia* legitimated Ambrose's *bona fides* and opened a path for episcopal influence.

Of course, all of these appeals were written with an eye to persuasion as well as self-promotion. Ambrose was writing for a wider audience than just the emperor. Between the initial draft of the Callinicum letter and the edited collection he published, Ambrose intensified his language and more forcefully asserted the need for intervention.⁸⁹⁶ He aimed to craft a careful justification for his own position that could appeal to a wide audience. He painted a picture of the state – whether in the Callinicum affair, the controversy over the *ara Victoriae*, or an embassy to a usurper – in which a bishop could take a place alongside other *milites Caesaris* and flip the very hierarchy of that *militia*. Although he positioned himself as a loyal soldier of the emperor, he also made himself a spiritual representative who could deliver divine mandates to the emperor himself. A picture of society as an army puts the emperor at the top of a vast chain of command. By situating that chain of command beneath an omnipotent God, Ambrose destabilized the imaginary universe of *militia* and moved himself into a privileged episcopal post with greater responsibilities and remit than other functionaries.

⁸⁹⁶ Ambr. *Epist.* 74.32: “Tu igitur qui armatis pepercisti hostibus et servasti inimicos tuos, ne, quaeso, tanto studio putes vindicandum in Christianos.” This line and the concluding section in the letters *extra collectionem* was added before the promulgation of his letter collection (Nauroy 2016, 148). Perhaps such a forceful call for imperial vindication of true religion was more apt for Ambrose's self-promotion rather than his persuading the emperor to act.

Paulinus of Nola's Opportunistic Critiques of Militia

Ambrose was not alone in taking advantage of the language of *militia* in serving his own agenda. Paulinus of Nola and Augustine each tried to twist the notion of soldierly service to encourage a subordination of earthly to heavenly loyalties. But whereas Ambrose exploited the structure of *militia* in imperial appeals, Augustine and Paulinus aimed at existing discontent with the imperial service as they pressed for their own brands of *militia*.

We clearly see such a strategy in a letter of Paulinus to the poet Licentius, asking the young man to heed the words of his teacher Augustine and shift his attention from his government career. To persuade him, Paulinus composed some elegiac verses:

But this advice I shall repeat again and again: Avoid the slippery dangers of exacting state service. Position has an inviting title, but it brings evil slavery and a wretched end. He who now delights in desiring it, later repents of having desired it. It is pleasant to mount the summit, but fearsome to descend from it; if you stumble, your fall from the top of the citadel will be worse. Do false blessings now delight you? Does ambition bear you off on every breeze? Does hollow reputation hold you in her brittle grasp? But when the belt of office, purchased and worn, redounds to your great harm, and breaks your spirit with the barren toil it entails, you will vainly and too late reproach your idle hopes, and desire to loose the bonds which you are now tying.⁸⁹⁷

Paulinus laid out a case that Licentius' chosen career was incompatible with a truly fulfilling spiritual life. "Hard service" (*durae...militiae*), despite appealing honors and titles, was rather "evil slavery" (*mala servitus*). Even to ascend the summit of the

⁸⁹⁷ Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 8, ll. 11-22 (Walsh, trans. modified), "Hoc tamen et repetens iterumque iterumque monebo, / Ut fugias durae lubrica militiae. / Blandum nomen "honos", mala servitus, exitus aeger, / Quem nunc velle iuvat, mox voluisse piget. / Scandere celsa iuvat, tremor est descendere celsis. / Si titubes, summa peius ab arce cades. / Nunc tibi falsa placent bona, nunc rapit omnibus auris / Ambitus et vitreo fert cava fama sinu? / Ast ubi te magno damnosus cinxerit emptus / Balteus et sterilis fregerit inde labor, / Serus et in cassum spes accusabis inanes / Et modo quae nectis rumpere vincla voles."

bureaucracy, evocatively depicted as a “citadel” (*arx*), was to risk a dangerous fall. Remuneration and reputation were fleeting rewards for such a hazardous enterprise (*falsa...bona...cava fama*). The *cingulum militiae*, poetically rendered as the “damnosus...emptus balteus,” became “chains” (*vincla*) to tie down the young man.⁸⁹⁸

Each of these critiques of the administrative career evokes many different commonplace views and representations of bureaucrats discussed in the previous chapter. Pursuing a career could be a costly and lengthy endeavor, as a *supernumerarius* might have to languish for years in paperwork before advancing to a salaried position. It was a trope of letters of recommendation that a career in the bureaucracy demanded laborious self-abnegation. The uncertainties of career advancement were a recurring theme, and *Fortuna* often appeared rescuing the unsuccessful functionary in Symmachus’ letters. Lower-level bureaucrats could be mocked for being mere soldiers, and their lack of traditional pedigree or culture could invite criticism. With changing political winds, the hapless bureaucrat sometimes found himself out of favor with the imperial regime, to the detriment of his career or life. These concerns with servility and danger suggestively parallel Paulinus’ rendering of *dura militia* as *mala servitus, exitus aeger*.

With this in mind, it seems likely that Paulinus crafted his language to appeal to Licentius’ own concerns. The concept of *militia* struck at the worries of bureaucrats in general, and the very form of the letter, enclosed elegiac couplets, addressed the young

⁸⁹⁸ For this recurring theme of binding, see Prud. *Pe.* 1.65, where soldiers turned martyrs take new golden torques as a mark of their heavenly allegiance.

man's poetic inclinations.⁸⁹⁹ But what precisely did the letter aim to achieve? The accompanying letter to Romanianus, Licentius' father, predicted that spiritual instruction would overcome the "carnal vows" of Licentius.⁹⁰⁰ The prose section of the letter to Licentius repeats jussive and exhortatory versions of the proverb: "Listen, my son, to the teaching of your father, and do not dismiss your mother's instruction,"⁹⁰¹ and the didactic couplets urge the young man to scorn the trappings of a secular life: a career, wealth, marriage, and social respect. But aside from these platitudes, the precise nature of the commitment Paulinus sought from Licentius is obscure. Was the man to shun the imperial service entirely and take up ecclesiastical pursuits? Did Paulinus want him to seek baptism or atonement for something in particular? Or was Licentius merely to change his priorities without completely changing his status? Paulinus was unclear:

If you listen to him and follow him, to again win you over with the words of Solomon, "son, you will receive a crown of thanks upon your head." And then you will truly be, not in a dream but in truth, consul and pontifex, with Christ filling out the empty images of false work with the solid fulfillment of his own work. For then Licentius will be truly pontifex and truly consul, if you keep to the footsteps of Augustine, the teachings of the prophets and apostles, as holy Elisha to Elijah, as young Timothy to the illustrious apostle, with the company undivided through

⁸⁹⁹ This is explicitly stated by Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 8.3: "...Sed in mentem venit epistolae tuae, qua te musicis familiarem modis intellexi. A quo studio ego aevi quondam tui non abhorruui. Itaque mihi ad tuam mentem, si in aliquo exulcerassem, deliniendam remedium litteras tuas recordatus repperi, ut te ad dominum harmoniae omniformis artificem modulamine carminis evocarem." Licentius' poetic inclinations are attested in Augustine's correspondence (*Epist.* 26.4) and philosophical works, where the young man appeared as a character (*C. Acad.* 2.4.10, 3.1.1; *De ord.* 1.2.5: "poeticae deditus").

⁹⁰⁰ Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 7.3: "Credimus in omnipotente Christo, quod adolescentis nostri votis carnalibus spiritalia Augustini vota praevaleant. Vincetur vel invitus, mihi crede, vincetur piissimi parentis fide..." Note the playful contrast between different meanings of *vota*, "the spiritual prayers of Augustine will overcome the carnal vows (pursuits) of our young man." For the use of soldierly martial imagery in this appeal to Romanianus, see ch. 2.

⁹⁰¹ Prov 1:8, "audi fili mi disciplinam patris tui et ne dimittas legem matris tuae." Paulinus' letter begins with a deliberate allusion to the verse in which Augustine becomes both mother and father to Licentius: "Audi ergo, fili, legem patris tui id est fidem Augustini et noli repellere consilia matris tuae, quod aequale nomen in te Augustini pietas iure sibi vindicat, qui te tantillum sinu gestavit suo et a parvulis primo lacte sapientiae saecularis inbutum nunc etiam spiritalibus lactare et enutrire domino gestit uberibus..." Translation my own.

divine journeys. So that you may learn to deserve the priesthood with perfect heart and to guide the people to health with the mouth of a teacher.⁹⁰²

One could read this passage along with Paulinus' injunctions against "the dangers of *dura militia*" and "the marriage bed" as implying that Licentius should abandon the imperial service and make an ascetic commitment. But for all the protreptic verve with which Paulinus wrote, he was not so clear. The easiest way to read the words for Licentius is as a general request for a change in lifestyle, as was the case in Paulinus' missive to the soldier Crispinianus. In this case, the contrast of *militiae Christi* and *Caesaris* is meant not necessarily to demand an alternative career, but rather to define a Christian identity in aristocratic terms. Paulinus was not so crass as to link social success to spiritual allegiance as though he were promulgating a "prosperity gospel," but he could still sketch a vivid picture of a Christian in terms akin to the rewards of the imperial service: rank ("consul et pontifex"), remuneration ("solidis suae operationis effectibus"), and attachment to imperial influence ("indivulso per itinera divina comitatu").

Paulinus chose to define Christian identity and lifestyle by antithesis, especially through military language. In fact, he began two separate letters to Sulpicius Severus by disparaging a courier's official garb and comparing it favorably to the modest habit of himself, his friend, and their brothers. The culprit was one Marracinus, evidently a

⁹⁰² Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 8.1: "Quem si audias et sequaris, ut rursum te sermone Salomonis adliciam, fili, coronam accipies gratiarum tuo vertici. Et tunc vere eris ille non phantasmate somniatus, sed ab ipsa veritate formatus consul et pontifex vacuas imagines falsi operis implente Christo solidis suae operationis effectibus. Vere enim pontifex et vere consul Licentius erit, si Augustini vestigiis, prophetis et apostolicis disciplinis, ut sacro beatus Eliseus Eliae, ut inlustri apostolo Timotheus adolescens, adhaereas indivulso per itinera divina comitatu. Ut et sacerdotium corde perfecto discas mereri et populis ad salutem magistro ore consulere." Translation my own.

soldier or imperial servant. In the first missive, Paulinus marveled at “his boots and garb, not at all like a monk’s, especially since he was red-faced no less than his cloak, with insufficiently pious cheeks.”⁹⁰³ Whatever the man’s actual position, Paulinus’ chosen word for the official’s mantle (*armilausea*) evoked military associations.⁹⁰⁴ The second letter was even more scathing. Paulinus did not meet the crimson-clad Marracinus again, as the letter was intercepted by one of his agents at Rome, perhaps, Paulinus wryly surmised, because the “unspiritual monk” was too lazy or ashamed to make it all the way to Nola and feared changing his garb.⁹⁰⁵ But he made a point to linger on the deficiencies of Marracinus, even though this was tangent to the occasion of the letter:

Let our dear little pallid fellow servants come and visit me, not haughty with colored garments but humble with bristly fatigues, not covered with a short *chlamys* but garbed in *sagula*, not girt with a baldric but a rope, not trimmed with a shameless brow of hair but shaven to the scalp with chaste modesty and irregularly shorn, leaving the brow exposed.⁹⁰⁶

⁹⁰³ Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 17.1: “Quem quidem primo minime monachali caliga et veste mirati, cum praeterea facie non minus quam armilausea ruberet, parum spiritalibus buccis, tunc demum esse non nostrum scivimus, cum per ipsum tabellarii dominum litteras a nobis reposcentem necessitudine vos proxima copulates esse conperimus.” Translation my own. Marracinus is not named in the letter, but it is clearly the same courier mentioned in *Epist.* 22 (Trout 1999, 130n156).

⁹⁰⁴ Whatever the actual etymology, the word struck Isidore of Seville as having come from *arma*; Isid. Sev. *Orig.* 19.22.28: “Armilausea vulgo vocata quod ante et retro divisa atque aperta est, in armos tantum clausa; quasi armiclausula, C littera ablata.”

⁹⁰⁵ Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 22.1: “Epistolas, quas per nostrum illum inpsiritalium ‘monachum’ miseris, vere spiritalis tabellarius intercepti et pertulit, id est filius noster Sorianus, in quo duplicem gratiam dominum contulisse perspeximus...ne vel iterum tuas nobis litteras Marracinus adferret, qui divinitus, ut credo, inspirata sibi aut verecundia nos videndi aut pigritia ultra urbem itineris porrigendi Romae litteras tuas supradicto fratri dedit...Sibi ergo ille habebat armilauseam suam et suas caligas et suas buccas, quarum alia mutare, alia deducere timuit.”

⁹⁰⁶ Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 22.2: “Nos adeant et revisant conservuli et conpallidi nostri, non vestibibus pictis superbi sed horrentibus ciliciis humiles nec chlamyde †curtalini† sed sagulis palliati nec balteo sed reste succincti nec improba adtonsi capitis fronte crinite sed casta informitate capillum ad cutem caesi et inaequaliter semitonsi et destituta fronte praerasi.” The hapax legomenon “curtalini” is probably corrupt (Lienhard 1977, 73n77), and I tentatively accept Skeb’s emendation of “curta liti” (1998, 2:470).

As in the letter to Licentius, Paulinus mapped the opposition between earthly and heavenly allegiances onto martial images. Ostentatious imperial accoutrement (red *armilatus*, *chlamys*, *cingulum*, and even the “shameless” haircut) is opposed to the austere habit of a warrior of Christ: goat-skin fatigues (*cilicia*),⁹⁰⁷ a soldier’s cloak (*sagulum*),⁹⁰⁸ rope-belt (*restis*), and roughly shaven head. The martial imagery juxtaposed the boisterous Marracinus and the rigorous piety of Paulinus and his comrades. Although we might detect a degree of chauvinism in Paulinus’ invective against Marracinus, depicted as a drunken *miles gloriosus* and Virgilian Fury,⁹⁰⁹ it would go too far to posit this to be criticism of an official’s “social climbing.”⁹¹⁰ Instead, the letter should be read as an attempt to manage a fraught relationship between Paulinus and Severus.⁹¹¹ By setting up an oppositional polarity, Paulinus sought to draw his friend away from one client and into his own social orbit. We do not know the exact nature of Severus’ relationship with Marracinus and his patron, Sabinus, but we can plausibly interpret Paulinus’ harping on the courier’s uncouth *militia* as advertising his and Severus’ shared ascetic virtue. All the better that he could do so by way of reference

⁹⁰⁷ *EL*, s.v. *cilicium*, “a covering, originally of Cilician goat’s hair, used by soldiers and seamen” (cf. Gk. κιλίκιον).

⁹⁰⁸ Walsh suggests that the contrast between *chlamys* and *sagulum* was meant to distinguish between “the military cloak worn by private soldiers” and the “effeminate” garb of an officer (Walsh 1966, 1:256n5).

⁹⁰⁹ The letter compares Marracinus to Thraso of Plautus’ *Eunuchus* and likens the criticism of Marracinus to Juno’s description of Allecto (Verg. *Aen.* 7.323 ff.). Paulinus coyly portrayed these classical references as necessary and excused them as imitation of Severus’ citation of Verg. *Aen.* 3.493 and Plaut. *Aul.* 2 (*Epist.* 22.3).

⁹¹⁰ *Contra* Williams 2005, 3: “The whole style of the letter suggests that Paulinus’s censure arises originally as much from Paulinus’s upperclass view of Marracinus’s social climbing as from Paulinus’s own Christian principles.”

⁹¹¹ Trout argues that the letter was “written primarily to chasten Severus at the nadir of his relationship with Paulinus” (1999, 130). *Epist.* 17 complains of a long period of silence from Severus, and *Epist.* 22 – “relatively brief, frigid, and censorious” (Walsh 1966, 1:256n1) – precedes the twenty-third letter, which insists on the two men’s great friendship and affection.

to the extra-textual occasion of the letters! In fact, another letter of Paulinus began with an encomium of the letter-carrier's dutiful labors as a soldier of Christ.⁹¹²

In fact, this occasional element of the letter would suggest that the notion of *militia Christi* in opposition to *militia Caesaris* was a useful framing device for Paulinus. Let us not forget that the letter to Licentius was bound to another letter to his father, Romanianus. Although modern editions tend to present the two as separate missives, the manuscript tradition is not so clear, and the text suggests that Paulinus may have intended Licentius to be aware of the connection between the two separate letters.⁹¹³ If that were the case, the soldierly themes of the two epistles were even more significantly connected. Paulinus had just joked that he had sent the father *buccelatum* and encouragement to join him on his campaign for Christ. Then the letter turned to advising the son to shun a different *militia* and join in the heavenly rewards of a Christian life. Whether through references to the letter-carrier's *chlamys*, an enclosed gift of "hard-tack," or even a protreptic poem that warned of the dangers of state service, Paulinus used the notion of *militia* to frame the allegiance and identity of himself and his correspondents.

Martial Imagery and Self-representation in Augustine's Writings

Augustine's *Confessions* contain an illuminating passage that echoed almost exactly Paulinus' contemporaneous critique of *militia*.⁹¹⁴ In the eighth book of his

⁹¹² Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 33.1.

⁹¹³ On the MS evidence, see Skeb 1998, 1:214n1. The letter begins, as discussed above, with a modified citation of Prov 1:8 (cf. Vulg. "audi fili mi..." and Paul. Nol. "Audi ergo, fili..."), and the addition of the adverb "ergo" could suggest connection to the preceding letter to his father, although the adverb can be used independently with an imperative (*L&S s.v.* II.B.3).

⁹¹⁴ Augustine's *Confessions* was written around 397 (Brown 1967, 161). Paul. Nol. *Epist.* 7-8 date to 396 (see discussion in ch. 2).

Confessions, Augustine related a story that dealt directly with very theme of competing *militiae*. Two officials stumbled upon a copy of the *Life of Antony* in a small cottage:

One of them began to read it, to marvel at it, to be inflamed by it, and, while reading it, to consider taking up such a life, setting aside his earthly *militia* and serving you – for these men were from the ranks of those called *agentes in rebus*. Then, suddenly filled with holy love and angered at himself with a sober shamefulness, he cast his eyes upon his friend and said to him: “Tell me, please, what will we attain through all these labors of ours? What do we seek? Why do we soldier for the state? Can our prospects in the palace be greater than becoming friends of the Emperor? And what is not unsure and full of dangers there? And after how many dangers do we arrive at a still greater danger? And when will we get there? But look, if I wish, even now I become a friend of God...Even now I have broken free from that ambition of ours, and have decided to serve God; and from this hour, in this place I enter this course. If it bothers you to imitate me, do not oppose me.” The other man responded that he would stick with him as a sharer of such a reward and *militia*. And both, now yours, began to build a tower at the appropriate cost, leaving behind all their things and following you.⁹¹⁵

Although it would still be some time before Augustine’s moment of conversion in the garden, this story cut him to the quick. Turning to Alypius, he asked why they were not also rising up and seizing heaven by force.⁹¹⁶ This passage, an emotional high-point of the narrative, draws together a number of threads. The passage engaged with widespread concerns about the imperial service and starkly contrasted those with a life of holiness:

⁹¹⁵ Aug. *Conf.* 8.6.15: “quam legere coepit unus eorum et mirari et accendi, et inter legendum meditari arripere talem vitam et relictam militiam saeculari servire tibi. erant autem ex eis quos dicunt agentes in rebus. tum subito repletus amore sancto et sobrio pudore, iratus sibi, coniecit oculos in amicum et ait illi, ‘dic, quaeso te, omnibus istis laboribus nostris quo ambimus pervenire? quid quaerimus? cuius rei causa militamus? maiorne esse poterit spes nostra in palatio quam ut amici imperatoris simus? et ibi quid non fragile plenumque periculis? et per quot pericula pervenitur ad grandius periculum? et quando istuc erit? amicus autem dei, si voluero, ecce nunc fio.’...‘ego iam abrui me ab illa spe nostra et deo servire statui, et hoc ex hac hora, in hoc loco aggredior. te si piget imitari, noli adversari.’ respondit ille adhaerere se socium tantae mercedis tantaeque militiae. et ambo iam tui aedificabant turrem sumptu idoneo relinquendi omnia sua et sequendi te.” Translation my own. *contubernales* appears earlier in the passage to denote the *agentes in rebus*.

⁹¹⁶ Aug. *Conf.* 8.8.19, “quid patimur? quid est hoc? quid audisti? surgunt indocti et caelum rapiunt, et nos cum doctrinis nostris sine corde, ecce ubi volutamus in carne et sanguine! an quia praecesserunt, pudet sequi et non pudet nec saltem sequi?”

where the former brought danger (“ibi quid non fragile plenumque periculis? et per quot pericula pervenitur ad grandius periculum?”), the latter gave sure rewards (“respondit ille adhaerere se socium tantae mercedis tantaeque militiae”); where the former demanded servile ambition, the latter offered freedom in Christ (“ego iam abrui me ab illa spe nostra et deo servire statui”); and where the former set uncertain prospects far in the future (“omnibus istis laboribus nostris quo ambimus pervenire?...et quando istuc erit?”), the latter gave instant friendship with God (“amicus autem dei, si voluero, ecce nunc fio”). A connection to the martial and agonistic imagery of the *Life of Antony* might even be called to mind, for the whole discourse on the evils of state service were occasioned by reading the text in a small cottage distant from the travails of society, a pathway to a celibate life and the kingdom of God.⁹¹⁷

To be sure, this tale of *agentes in rebus* does not appear in a letter but in a literary memoir. Still, the line between the epistolary and autobiographical genre was not as clear-cut as it might seem to a modern reader. Letters, although written for a specific, occasional context, were curated, collected, and sometimes edited to tell a particular story about the author. Augustine’s *Confessions* mingled deep internal reflections with a continuous narrative and, like a letter collection, had an agenda of self-presentation which centered his life-story on moments of dramatic interior change and conversion, especially “the mighty emotional upheaval in the garden in Milan.”⁹¹⁸ Within this

⁹¹⁷ Aug. *Conf.* 8.6.15: “sed illos vagabundos inruisse in quandam casam ubi habitabant quidam servi tui spiritu pauperes, qualium est regnum caelorum, et invenisse ibi codicem in quo scripta erat vita Antonii.” This cottage was contrasted with the *palatium*: “isti autem nihilo mutati a pristinis fleverunt se tamen...et trahentes cor in terra abierunt in palatium, illi autem affigentes cor caelo manserunt in casa. et habebant ambo sponas quae, posteaquam hoc audierunt, dicaverunt etiam ipsae virginitatem tibi.”

⁹¹⁸ Quotation from Brown 1967, 170.

literary context, Augustine, through Ponticianus' story, presented a model of holy commitment, a paradigmatic change from a public career to a life of self-denial. He likewise portrayed Evodius, an *agens in rebus* and fellow Thagastan, as having changed *militia* when he was converted and baptized.⁹¹⁹ Augustine explicitly called attention to the trappings of office (“relicta militia saeculari accinctus in tua”), and the physical act of changing garb served as vivid metonymy for a change in status. As Salvian would put it not too much later in the fifth century, “when someone changes his garment, he immediately changes his rank.”⁹²⁰

Augustine himself, having never entered the imperial service, could not describe his own transformation in exactly the same terms, but he still put the soldierly image in a central position within his own story. At the end of the seventh book, having realized the insufficiencies of Neoplatonic philosophy, Augustine contrasted the delusion of the philosophers with the experience of the faithful in military terms:

It is one thing to see the country of peace from a forested peak, not to find a path to it, and to attempt impassable routes while fugitives and deserters block them and set ambushes around them along with their chief the lion and the serpent. And it is another thing to keep to the path that leads there, protected by the care of the heavenly *imperator*, where there are no bandits who have deserted the heavenly *militia*, for they avoid it as though a punishment. These things were cutting into me in

⁹¹⁹ Aug. *Conf.* 9.8.17: “qui habitare facis unanimes in domo, consociasti nobis et Evodium iuvenem ex nostro municipio. qui cum agens in rebus militaret, prior nobis ad te conversus est et baptizatus et relicta militia saeculari accinctus in tua.”

⁹²⁰ Salv., *De gub. Dei* 4.7: “Itaque, ut diximus, si honoratior quispiam religioni se applicuerit, illico honoratus esse desistit. Ubi enim quis mutaverit vestem, mutat protinus dignitatem; si fuerit sublimis, fit despicabilis; si fuerit splendidissimus, fit vilissimus; si fuerit totus honoris, fit totus injuriae. Et mirantur mundani quidam et infideles, si offensam Dei aut iracundiam perferunt, qui Deum in sanctis omnibus persequuntur? Perversa enim sunt et in diversum cuncta mutata.” The context is somewhat different, for Salvian is speaking of the church or in general terms, rather than specifically with regard to government officials.

marvelous ways, when I began to read the least of your apostles, and I considered your works and fed on them.⁹²¹

In the next book, Simplicianus and Ponticianus' stories of Marius Victorinus, Anthony, and the *agentes in rebus* prime Augustine for his moment of 'conversion.' Like that official who changed his *militia*, Augustine's moment of decision came in another garden of Milan, prompted by another text (Rom 13:13-14), and soon followed by another companion (Alypius).⁹²² When he lingered in his post as chair of rhetoric for a few weeks, Augustine noted that some might have taken issue with his decision and said "that I sinned in this because when my heart was already full with your *militia* I allowed myself to sit for even one hour in my throne of lies, but I leave that aside."⁹²³ That Augustine's professorship could conflict with his heavenly service could suggest a notion of competing *militiae* broader than the imperial service itself. Whatever Augustine thought of the criticism of his dilatory career moves, his choice of *militia* to describe them was particularly meaningful. Along with the prominence of *militia* in the seventh and eighth book of the *Confessions*, this reference elevated the stakes of Augustine's conversion experience and allowed him to respond to contemporary critics

⁹²¹ Aug. *Conf.* 7.21.27: "et aliud est de silvestri cacumine videre patriam pacis et iter ad eam non invenire et frustra conari per invia circum obsidentibus et insidiantibus fugitivis desertoribus cum principe suo leone et dracone, et aliud tenere viam illuc ducentem cura caelestis imperatoris munitam, ubi non latrocinantur qui caelestem militiam deseruerunt; vitant enim eam sicut supplicium. haec mihi inviscerabantur miris modis, cum minimum apostolorum tuorum legerem, et consideraveram opera tua et expaveram." Translation my own.

⁹²² To add to the similarities, one could note the suggestive series of rhetorical questions that preceded Augustine's conversion (8.12.28: "quamdiu, quamdiu, "cras et cras"? quare non modo? quare non hac hora finis turpitudinis meae?") hardly a unique stylistic feature of this text, but certainly parallel to those asked by the *agentes in rebus* 8.6.15. The connection to Antony's moment of decision is made explicit as well (8.12.29: "audieram enim de Antonio quod ex evangelica lectione cui forte supervenerat admonitus fuerit..."). Like the second *agens in rebus* Alypius followed Augustine (8.12.30: "...sine ulla turbulenta cunctatione coniunctus est").

⁹²³ Aug. *Conf.* 9.2.4: "peccasse me in hoc quisquam servorum tuorum, fratrum meorum, dixerit, quod iam pleno corde militia tua passus me fuerim vel una hora sedere in cathedra mendacii, at ego non contendo." Translation my own.

of his “notably unspectacular” conversion experience.⁹²⁴ As a paradigm of devotion, the abstraction of *militia* could speak to general loyalties rather than just the technical vocabulary of state service.

Augustine did not confine his uses of martial imagery to his own self-representation. In his letters, he relied on contrasts between earthly and heavenly *militia* to pursue an agenda of epistolary persuasion. Earthly service could be usefully contrasted with heavenly service, a comparison that emphasized the demands of the faith upon the administrator, who was himself engaged in a praiseworthy (albeit lesser) kind of *militia*. In a letter to the vicar Macedonius, Augustine used the image of the *cingulum* to contrast Macedonius’ secular and heavenly concerns:

If you did not already have a share in [this life of piety] and did not esteem your earthly honors worthy to serve him, you would not say in an edict to the Donatist heretics in order to bring them into the unity and peace of Christ: “this is done for your sake; for you priests of the holy faith, the emperor Augustus, and we, his judges, all labor” and many other things which you have put in the same edict, so that it appears that you, with the baldric of an earthly judge, are thinking in no small part of the heavenly kingdom.⁹²⁵

This flattery sought to frame the outlook of Macedonius, who had already questioned Augustine’s right to challenge an official’s authority. Augustine pointed out the extent to which Macedonius already had a stake in enforcing religious values and then affirmed that this was part of a larger framework through which Macedonius would place his earthly *militia* beneath a heavenly rubric (“ut te appareat in terreni iudicis cingulo non

⁹²⁴ Brown 1967, 163.

⁹²⁵ Aug. *Epist.* 155.17: “ad hanc te perfectius adsequendam et perseuerantissime retinendam exhortor ut me ipsum. cuius nisi iam particeps esses tuosque istos honores temporales ei seruire oportere iudicares, non Donatistis haereticis ad eos in unitatem Christi pacemque redigendos per edictum diceret: pro uobis hoc agitur; pro uobis sacerdotes incorruptae fidei, pro uobis imperator Augustus, pro uobis nos quoque eius iudices laboramus et alia multa, quae in eodem edicto ita posuisti, ut te appareat in terreni iudicis cingulo non parua ex parte caelestem rem publicam cogitare.” Translation my own.

parua ex parte caelestem rem publicam cogitare”). This was a tactful way of conceding Macedonius’ main point – that a bishop should not bluntly order a *iudex* who is God’s representative on earth (Rom 13:4) – without giving up on changing the vicar’s mind regarding punishment of the Donatists.

In a letter to Caecilian, an imperial representative, Augustine echoed this distinction between earthly and heavenly *militia*. He remembered the late Marcellinus for nearly taking up the “cingulum militiae christianae” but having remained in the bond of marriage with his wife.⁹²⁶ Like the praise of Macedonius’ *militia*, Augustine’s eulogy of Marcellinus highlighted values which he wanted Caecilian to privilege. Later in the same letter, the bishop returned to the theme of the dutiful bureaucratic soldier:

You still want to be a catechumen, as if believers cannot more faithfully and better govern the state to the extent that they are more faithful and better. But what good do you aim at in these great worries and labors of yours but that people may be well off? For, if you do not achieve this, it is better to sleep night and day than to keep watch in labors of the state that bring no benefit to people.⁹²⁷

Like a guard, Caecilian watched over the state (“vigilare in laboribus publicis”), but his service could only truly be meaningful and effective if he saw not only to his earthly responsibilities, but to his heavenly standing.⁹²⁸

Augustine chose to adopt the fictively-militarized language of *militia* because it offered a point of contact between a model of Christian allegiance and a comparable

⁹²⁶ Aug. *Epist.* 151.8.

⁹²⁷ Aug. *Epist.* 151.14 (Teske, trans.): “unum est autem, si uerum quaeris audire, quod in te molestissime fero, quod, cum sis et huius iam aetatis et huius uitae atque probitatis, adhuc uis esse catechumenus, quasi fideles non possint; quanto sint fideliores atque meliores, tanto fidelius ac melius administrare rem publicam. quid autem boni agitis in his tantis curis et laboribus uestris, nisi ut bene sit hominibus? si enim hoc non agitis, uel dormire satius est noctes diesque quam uigilare in laboribus publicis nulli utilitati hominum profuturis.”

⁹²⁸ Aug. *Epist.* 155.10.

system of public service. Like the passages from the Confessions or the letter of Paulinus to Licentius, Augustine set *militia Christi* alongside *militia Caesaris* to show the hollowness of the latter with its ephemeral rewards and the virtue of the former. The martial valence of the vocabulary was key. It allowed Augustine to slide from considering the most visible and serious aspects of state action, the “monopoly on legitimate violence,” to a more general exploration of the nature of public service. In a letter to the aforementioned Macedonius, Augustine moved from considering whether one who serves the state should let religion affect his judgments to debating the appropriateness of force more generally. He opined that all social structures (from that of the king to the father) necessarily involve violence and that these should be governed by Christian virtues.⁹²⁹ In his letter to Marcellinus, answering the question of whether Christianity was inimical to empire, Augustine slid from a discussion of Christian service in the army, to a broader conception of an empire in which all soldiers, citizens, and civil servants are Christian.⁹³⁰ That the letters to Macedonius and Caecilian both dealt with the question of torture and capital punishment only increased the relevancy of an imagined military role for the bureaucrat who wielded the state as a violent instrument.

All of this relates to a more general discourse of *militia* found in Christian epistolography. In the first chapter, I argued that the critiques of military service found in bishops’ letters to soldiers represented opportunistic attempts to call for changes in

⁹²⁹ Aug. *Epist.* 153.16.

⁹³⁰ Aug. *Epist.* 138.15.

lifestyle rather than wholesale critiques of military service.⁹³¹ Not only did writers sometimes flatter imperial potentates in martial terms, but criticism of soldiers was often qualified and focused on immoral behavior rather than fighting itself. Ambrose, Paulinus, and Augustine's engagement with the expansive notion of *militia inermis* was likewise an attempt to set the terms of discourse in a way advantageous to their agendas of persuasion and self-promotion. By so forcefully imposing categories of *militia* on his imperial appeals, Ambrose could destabilize the structural position of the emperor and turn such matters as liability for arson into the purview of the *sacerdos*. When Paulinus called on Licentius to forsake his career in favor of religious pursuits, he was pursuing a strategy concordant with his martial letter to Licentius' father. And Augustine's ruminations on *militia* in his letters and *Confessions* framed the issues of conversion and devotion to curate his self-image and persuade government officials to act on his behalf.

Conclusion: Militarism and Universalism

To describe martial imagery as simply an expression of imperial ideology would grossly oversimplify the significance of *militia* and return to the totalitarian stereotypes that long colored the study of late antiquity. As Jill Harries astutely observed, "imperial rule...was both autocratic and populist."⁹³² Citizens' appeals and acclamations were just as important in defining the contours of authority as the legal pronouncements of the

⁹³¹ For an interesting variation on this theme, see Max. Tur. *Serm.* 26.103 in which an interlocutor objects to being held to a high moral standard because he is a soldier of Caesar, not a monk. Maximus objects that sin resides in the action itself, not in the *cingulum*.

⁹³² Harries 1999, 215.

emperor and his consistory. What I hope to have shown in this study of martial imagery is the reverberation of the state's presence through both imperial pronouncements and individual responses that capitalized on the idiom of government.⁹³³ This was a gradual process wherein an expanded bureaucracy relied on an ethos of soldierly service and created a social dynamic in which individual actors, even conservative skeptics of new-fangled *militia*, faced incentives to adopt the martial imagery of government.

Christian writers also unwittingly reinforced the quasi-military model of society. In attempting to speak to the categories and mentalities of imperial elites, Christian writers compared the imperial ideal of soldierly service and the Christian discourse of ascetic martial imagery. Although these enterprising bishops were trying to express the superiority of Christ's army over Caesar's, in doing so they repeated the same totalizing framework of *militia* and universal allegiance. It is that sympathy between two different poles of military language, on the one hand the "insistent bureaucratic rhetoric of autocracy"⁹³⁴ and on the other the militant language of the "ascetic invasion,"⁹³⁵ that can be said to have created or contributed to militarization at the broadest and most abstract levels of society and culture.

Attempts to exploit similarities and weaknesses in the state's discourse of *militia* turned out to foster the very idea of militarism in society. It did not displace or weaken the ability of the state to command loyalty. It reduplicated it in another area of discourse, but in the service of a different agenda. A corollary of soldierly martial imagery was the

⁹³³ See Brown's nuanced remarks navigating past the "totalitarian monster" of older scholarship to a subtler appreciation of the nuances of state power (1997, 25): "What is now stressed is the nature of the 'presence' of the state, and the habits of mind and behavior that this 'presence' induced."

⁹³⁴ Humfress 2009, 390, in the context of late antique legal codification.

⁹³⁵ "Ascetic invasion" as a shorthand is borrowed from the title of the thirteenth chapter of Markus 1990.

tendency to view the world in hierarchical and dirigiste terms. This feature of the image, along with its malleability and currency in both ecclesiastical and administrative contexts, presented an opportunity for the language to emerge as a “totalizing discourse.”⁹³⁶ *Militia* simplified and partitioned individual social roles into a narrow set of allegiances and duties.⁹³⁷ This was the kind of simplification that pushed away from contextual and embedded ways of seeing the world and moved towards abstractions that elided the multifaceted social reality. Just as Sulpicius Severus could have Martin state “I am a soldier of Christ; I cannot fight,”⁹³⁸ so too did bishops press for vertical metaphors of allegiance in their messaging to representatives of the state. This was the core of Paulinus’ appeal to Licentius, Augustine’s letters to Caecilian and Macedonius, and even Ambrose’s imperial missives. It sought, with questionable success, to subordinate a secular to a religious version of martial duty.

This engagement with state representatives cannot be said to have been successful in transforming the structure of power, but it has skewed the way that historians have thought about the later Roman Empire for a long time, be they acolytes of Gibbon who see the loyalties of church and empire as necessarily competing, historians who interpret the social history of the bureaucracy in light of a story of Christianization, or scholars of political theology who look for the stirrings of a theory of church and state. Each of these mirages may spring, in part, from contrasts of *militia Christi* and state service, and these were themselves part of an attempt by late antique

⁹³⁶ On this expression, see Averil Cameron 1991, 2.

⁹³⁷ Cf. Rebillard 2012, 79, where he argues that Augustine advocated “a hierarchical arrangement by which all membership sets are interpreted.”

⁹³⁸ Sulp. Sev. *Mart.* 4.3: “Christi ego miles sum; pugnare mihi non licet.”

writers to produce a unitary and simplified image of the world and the self that could serve their own discrete interests.

This study of competing martial imageries of church and state allows us to return to the question of the militarization of late antiquity with a new perspective. The deficiencies of a barracks-view of late antiquity are apparent, as it elides the endemic militarism of the Roman state with the fictively-militarized world of the administration and the ascetic overtones of *militia Christi*, all packaged within a grim story of civil war, decline, and fall. What I have traced instead is a subtler strand of militarism, an ethos of soldierly service. This is somewhat different from what Jones called the “social regimentation of the empire” in that this ethos was a socio-cultural phenomenon rather than primarily a matter of imperial attempts at control.⁹³⁹ This martial ethos of service was framed and invigorated by historically contingent circumstances, the creation of a quasi-martial bureaucracy and the ideal of the self-effacing ascetic warrior.⁹⁴⁰ Seeing opportunity, bishops sprung on the metaphorical similarity of these two spheres and tried to craft rhetoric that could exploit parallels between state and church *militia*.

Neither in effect nor in intent did the Christian challenge to a soldierly ethos of state service shift the locus of allegiance to another political model. Instead, the dynamic of two new, competing forms of soldierly service reinforced the presence of the state. But it was also an element in the move away from the traditional forms of social

⁹³⁹ Jones 1964, 2:1049. The historian was using the phrase primarily to refer to the binding of individuals to hereditary positions. His discussion is measured, and he emphasized the limits of state control in this area (1964, 2:1049-1052; 1970).

⁹⁴⁰ The role of genuine military threats in making a martial idiom relevant cannot be entirely discounted. Still, the separation of most of our sources of this ethos were quite separate from military affairs, so any connection to “barbarian invasions” is difficult to establish without any explicit comments from our sources. Among epistolographers significant in this study, Synesius was the only one with substantial exposure to warfare.

organization, embedded as they were in town and city, and towards a more universal, vertical hierarchy. Historians have long sought to explain the connection between the religious changes in late antiquity and the political fortunes of empire. Monotheism in particular seems implicated in the politico-cultural dynamics of late antiquity that pressed, if only unsuccessfully and for a time, for universalism and world empire.⁹⁴¹ To Garth Fowden, “late antiquity’s contribution to the technique of empire was the discovery of a nonmilitary and only partially political basis for self-perpetuation.”⁹⁴²

Although I am skeptical of the absolute novelty of universalism as a feature of the Roman Empire in late antiquity, understanding the socio-cultural bases for “self-perpetuation” remains key to explaining the coherence and character of the later empire. The spread of a quasi-militarized ethos of service should not be underestimated as a part of this picture. Christopher Kelly has noted how Christian visions of heaven and the final judgment often mirrored the orderly apparatus of imperial officialdom.⁹⁴³ Peter Eich has gone even further, suggesting that the turn towards a monarchical bureaucracy in the Roman Empire may have fueled and been legitimized by monotheistic theologies.⁹⁴⁴ Whatever the case, parallels between heaven and earth seem to have

⁹⁴¹ Momigliano 1986, with significantly greater nuance than Peterson 1935, realized the paradoxical shortcomings of monotheism in driving for universal monarchy. Garth Fowden echoed this view in his assessment of monotheism’s divisiveness (1993, 156), even as he recognized the ability of universal religion to form “commonwealths” – politically distinct polities that shared common cultures – out of the body of failed experiments in world empire.

⁹⁴² Fowden 1993, 170.

⁹⁴³ Kelly 2004, 232-45, esp. at 238: “Perhaps in response to their own experiences of dealing with government (and with those who sought their aid in preference to an official tribunal), later Roman divines were captivated by visions of an afterlife characterized by its ceremonial order, its careful regimentation, and its bureaucratic exactitude.”

⁹⁴⁴ Eich 2015, 145: “The empire became a fundamentally monarchic society in the second, third, and fourth centuries, and the widespread belief in a monarchical order of heaven and a hierarchical structure of the spiritual world could certainly serve as a strong reinforcement of the new protobureaucratic administration, as its construction was made to look inevitable and unchangeable. There is of course reciprocity between the two modes of conceptualization. But that does not take away from the

become increasingly relevant in the minds of many Roman elites who looked to the imperial administration for judicial remedies and career paths, even as they dodged the gaze of prying imperial agents. At times, there was opportunistic irony and criticism in such comparisons,⁹⁴⁵ but the mirroring of divine and secular *militia* represented an acceptance of the underlying framework of soldierly service, assimilating bureaucratic and ascetic ideals of endurance and discipline. This sort of cultural militarization was an emergent process that slipped beyond the reach of any imperial agenda. The dynamic was driven by a confluence of historical contingencies: new administrative structures and rhetoric, experiments in ascetic abnegation, and a deep-seated proclivity for martial imagery in civilian life. This higher-pitched order subordinated an increased number of social roles under one rubric and called attention to a distant universal hierarchy outside of the individual.

legitimizing effects of the realm of beliefs on the superstructure of empire.” See also 146-7, where Eich argues that imperial legitimacy rested on an ideology of *arma et leges*.

⁹⁴⁵ Kelly 2004, 244.

CONCLUSION:
TOWARD A NEW PARADIGM OF LATE ANTIQUE MILITARISM

Main Arguments

There are two main classes of argument in this dissertation: negative and positive. On the one hand, the negative arguments dismantled various theories about the nature of extended militarism in the late antiquity. In the first chapter, I note the pervasiveness of martial imagery across a wide swathe of elite discourse to argue against the ostensible anti-militarism of Christian actors. While the introduction dispenses with outdated claims of sweeping militarization, the third chapter also rejects the argument that the “fictive militarization” of the bureaucracy had little import. And finally, the last chapter argues that, at least in terms of martial imagery, Christianity should not be viewed as a competitor with empire either in practice or in theory. These negative arguments should not be underappreciated as contributions to the field. As long as academics and popular historians continue to weave stories of pacifism, military despotism, and imperial decline, it will remain imperative to correct exaggerations and distortions of the historical evidence.

On the other hand, the dissertation has made positive additions to our understanding of late antique society and empire. One recurring theme has been the generative power of martial imagery in tying together elites through letter-writing and enforcing group cohesion across the Roman world. The imagined military sphere added significance and depth to the familiar rituals of patronage, tutelage, and friendship, whether it be Symmachus commending the soldierly service of his underlings, Pelagius

urging ascetic devotion of a young noblewoman, or Augustine extolling the martial valor and Christian virtues of imperial potentates. Over and above other figurative language, martial imagery offered a vivid means of expression that could be both ennobling and demanding in its requirements of others. Negative military exemplars (deserters, brigands, and traitors) were tools of control and retribution; writers used these unseemly examples in their letters to police boundaries and regiment behavior. Ambrose could call for imperial intervention by speaking in the parlance of imperial victory and holy war. Augustine could invoke the rhetoric of desertion to marginalize a wayward cleric. Social actors were entrepreneurial in using the language of empire to divide and unite people in imagined networks of military allegiance.

Given this cohesive power, martial imagery could have been a vehicle for “nationalizing,” or rather “imperializing,” a broadly shared ideal of service across the Mediterranean. As a centripetal force, an ethos of soldierly service linked bishops and bureaucrats in networks of allegiance across the Mediterranean. In this respect, understanding the dynamic of extended militarism could function as a counterweight to historiographic emphases on localization and diversity.⁹⁴⁶ This unifying effect proceeded gradually and not by design. As a reaction to the widespread ethos of service, articulated through a military framework, elites across the empire contrasted state service with other systems of meaning, and in doing so they inadvertently increased the presence of the state. Bishops, such as Ambrose, Augustine, and Paulinus, actively opposed heavenly *militia* and the imperial service for reasons of self-promotion and persuasion. Established elites with interests outside the organs of the bureaucracy, like

⁹⁴⁶ See Bowersock 2004 for “centrifugal” forces in the study of late antiquity.

Symmachus and Libanius, contrasted the trappings of *militia* with ancestral and educational claims of status. In such instances, the proximate criticism or challenge to a martial imagery of imperial service relied on the logic of *militia* to think about the world. That this logic could be criticized shows that the ideals explored in this dissertation were not universally revered. Nevertheless, the rhetorical edifice of imperial service was widely recognized and replicated in each of these cases.

All of this speaks not only to the socio-cultural coherence of the Roman Empire but also to the inherent power of martial imagery in defining human relationships. In late antiquity, the appeal of martial imagery is inseparable from contingent historical circumstances and a wider literary background. On the one hand, the emergence of the civil service from the secondment of imperial soldiers can partly explain the origins of the fictively militarized administration even if its enduring relevance must be found in some combination of bureaucratic conservatism and other cultural factors. On the other hand, a chorus of literary and ideological antecedents rendered the image of the soldier an attractive basis for ideals of state and church service. Greek and Roman sources had long used metaphors of military service in such wide-ranging areas as philosophic inquiry and erotic poetry.⁹⁴⁷ The martial imagery in the Pauline and pseudo-Pauline epistles, especially Ephesians 6, offered a blueprint for the extension of military language into religious discourse, and heresiological literature developed from at least

⁹⁴⁷ On the former, see Edmonds 1963. On *militia amoris*, see Drinkwater 2013, who makes a compelling case that Ovid's adaptation of the motif in the *Heroides* consciously engaged with the contemporary political and military background. For early, albeit isolated, examples approximating *militia inermis*, see Speidel 2006 with discussion in ch. 3 above.

the second century with a focus on castigating opponents as enemies in a spiritual war.⁹⁴⁸

But why did the notion of soldierly service become so widespread as a means of conceiving of ascetic and administrative service in late antiquity? There were, after all, other metaphors with which both could have been conceived. I would suggest that one reason for this, apart from the historical origins of the bureaucracy and literary antecedents, was the enduring role of the army as the “total institution” *par excellence* in the Roman imagination.⁹⁴⁹ In the empire, one of the only large institutions that spanned the Mediterranean was the army, professionalized and geographically dispersed,⁹⁵⁰ and even under the republican system of magistracies, governors had spheres of command defined in terms of military authority (*imperium*). For imperial officials, even those who never took to the field of battle, the greatest number of underlings outside their *familiae* were soldiers. As a result, in the later empire, with few available models of universal institutional allegiance and discipline, the army served as

⁹⁴⁸ On these points, see above, ch. 1 and 2.

⁹⁴⁹ On the army as a “total institution,” see James 1999, 17-18, along with Macmullen’s description of the Roman army “as a society rather sealed off from the ordinary, that is from the civilian” (1984, 441). The concept of a “total institution” is derived from Erving Goffman, whose fourth category, “institutions purportedly established the better to pursue some worklike tasks and justifying themselves only on these instrumental grounds,” is most clearly met by the Roman army (1961, 5). Cf. Foucault’s prisons as “complete and austere institutions” which he compared to schools, barracks, and workshops (Foucault 1995, 231 ff.). The analogy to late antique administrative and ascetic institutions, such as they were, is imperfect, as they failed to control movement and behavior in as thoroughgoing a manner as the modern “total institutions” which captured the imagination of Goffman. Still, see the remarks of the historian David Rothman for the general applicability of the concept: “historians have confirmed the validity of Goffman’s concept of ‘total institutions’ which minimizes the differences in formal mission to establish a unity of design and structure” (1990, xxv). See also Farmer 1995 for the “carceral character of public administration” (78).

⁹⁵⁰ The distribution of troops was of course uneven, and the greatest numbers were doubtlessly stationed along the edges of empire (Jones 1964, 2:1069-70; Wood 2018, 80). Still these “frontier zones” were by no means devoid of population, and the military maintained a police function (Isaac 1992; Fuhrmann 2012). The logistical networks that linked them to the interior meant that the army must have had a real impact on the ground even as it remained a prominent force in the public imagination (see ch. 2).

a convenient tool with which to conceive of and socialize dutiful bureaucrats and ecclesiastics.⁹⁵¹

Paths Forward

It is also tempting to wonder whether there are wide-ranging reasons for the coalescence of a universalizing ethos of service around martial imagery. Bourne evocatively, if in a somewhat different context, dubbed war “the health of the state.”⁹⁵² I would suggest that there are general qualities of military logic – regard for hierarchy, discipline according to strict rules, and valorization of endurance – that render martial imagery a powerful ideological and cultural tool for conceiving of self-effacing service to an abstract entity. Since Weber, both critics and proponents of government power have conceived of the military as the ideal type of bureaucratic organization.⁹⁵³ In many cases, the civil services of modernity drew on and grew out of military structures. Vestiges of this process are still with us. Diplomatic officials regularly speak of “posts,” and politicians feel the need to offer civil servants formulaic intonations of thanks for their years of service, just as they do for soldiers. One hears echoes of late Roman *militia* in such examples, a distant parallel which may hold important lessons for scholars seeking to understand the socialization of bureaucrats and notions of state service.⁹⁵⁴

⁹⁵¹ One of Goffman’s categories of institutions is “establishments designed as retreats from the world even while often serving also as training stations for the religious” (1961, 15). Cf. Rüpke 2019, 96 for the hypothesis that *militia Christi* could only thrive in the empire when “entry into the military no longer leads into society but in a quasi-definitive manner out of it.”

⁹⁵² Bourne 1998, 7.

⁹⁵³ References to the military as the “ideal type” of bureaucracy may have been excised by Marianne Weber from the manuscript of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* after Weber’s death in 1919 on account of the political circumstances after World War I (Cochrane 2018, 6-7). Mises 1944, 66: “Armies are certainly the most ideal and perfect bureaucratic organizations.”

⁹⁵⁴ Oberfield 2014, for example, wrestles with the difficult question of how modern welfare case workers and police officers are socialized through self-selection, recruitment, training, and supervision.

These transhistorical observations can be pushed too far. There are many other ways of conceiving of institutions without reference to martial logic. In antiquity, the Han bureaucracy, in many respects more sophisticated than the late Roman system of administration, used a blend of Confucianism and Legalism as “a common and internally rational belief system.”⁹⁵⁵ And while contemporary agencies like the F.B.I. have explicitly paramilitary structures, most civil services today eschew baldly military chains of command and opt for more mundane administrative hierarchies. The fictively militarized bureaucracy of the late Roman Empire is an attractive subject of study precisely because it so colorfully combines protobureaucratic and premodern institutions with martial accoutrement and hierarchy. But this does not mean there is nothing to be gleaned from comparative study. Particularly intriguing is the possibility of a connection between movements of radical abnegation and the development of more formalized, bureaucratized state structures.⁹⁵⁶ A future study that takes an explicitly comparative perspective can shed further light on the particular structures of Roman administration and their differences and similarities with other bureaucracies, militarisms, and ideals of service in other societies, both ancient and modern.

Perhaps more promising than disparate comparative studies would be a study of the interrelationship between ascetic and bureaucratic ideals and the trajectory of social and political history beyond the chronological parameters of this study. I have alluded to a similar, persistent repertoire of martial imagery in letters, treatises, and monastic *regulae* from the fifth and sixth centuries.⁹⁵⁷ The bureaucracy of the Byzantine empire

⁹⁵⁵ Eich 2015, 144. For a detailed description of the Han bureaucracy, see Bielenstein 1980.

⁹⁵⁶ For the asceticism of modernity, see Rousseau 2004, 96-99.

⁹⁵⁷ See above, introduction, ch. 2, and ch. 4.

survived in modified form from the seventh through fifteenth centuries, and it retained the notion of στρατεία to conceive of service.⁹⁵⁸ In the west, the so-called successor kingdoms combined Roman bureaucratic structures and idioms with new political and social practices, and the mirroring of *militia Christi* and *militia saecularis* emerged as an important ideological construct.⁹⁵⁹ A proper understanding of the cohesive potential of martial imagery can shed light on these developments and put the putative militarization of the post-Roman west into context.⁹⁶⁰ Beyond these direct inheritances of Roman administrative and ascetic imagery, a wider view suggests the importance of *militia* as a structuring device in later periods as well. The division of society into those who fight for the king, those who pray to God, and those who produce for the other orders manifestly drew on late antique quasi-militarized notions of state service.⁹⁶¹ One might even say that late antique cleavages between different notions of *militia* – *armata*, *inermis*, and *spiritualis* – presage the gray area between earthly and heavenly soldiers occupied by lay crusaders, military orders, and armed ascetics.⁹⁶² And finally, as a

⁹⁵⁸ For a brief description of these changes, see Haldon 1993, 127-9. On the neglect of Byzantine continuity in historiography, see Averil Cameron 2016.

⁹⁵⁹ On the transformation of the Roman administrative terminology and its significance in Merovingian Gaul, see Wood 1990 and, for the vocabulary of *militia*, Werner 1998, 176-84 and 187-93. For the ideological potency of the idea under the Carolingians, see Le Jan 2000, 66. Two economists have recently described this as a “double scissors” that maintained a balance between state power and freedom in Merovingian Gaul (Acemoglu and Robinson 2019, 153-164).

⁹⁶⁰ For discussion of the imprecision of a militarization narrative and its lack of reference to late Roman militarism, see Introduction above.

⁹⁶¹ For discussion, see Duby 1980, 1-6 with citations of Adalbero of Laon and Gerard of Cambrai, each of whom divides society into *orantes*, *pugnantes*, and *laborantes*. See also John of Salisbury’s transmission of the *Institutio Traiani*, discussed in some detail in ch. 4. Although I posit a late antique source for the text, the *Policraticus*’ corporeal metaphor was also reflected in the writings of near contemporaries, such as Hugh of St Victor (O’Daly 2018, 106-7).

⁹⁶² On which gray areas in the medieval period, see Smith 2011, 5, 110-1, and 156 ff.

vestigial legal category, *militia inermis* justified the nobility and tax-exemption of clergy and lawyers into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁹⁶³

But the importance of this study is not confined to *militia*'s genealogy or descendants. Martial imagery in late antiquity sheds significant light on the society of the Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries. The finding of this study, that an ethos of soldierly service came to color late antique society in profound ways, should be weighed against other types of sources that could only be mentioned in passing: epigraphy, panegyric, law codes, sermons, exegesis, and works of art. These other materials may complement, nuance, or contradict my arguments about martial imagery in elite correspondence, and such insights would add welcome depth to the historical picture of soldierly service.

Epistolography, although a valuable source of knowledge for the period, gives a predominantly elite, male point of view, so humility is required in these findings. These sources cannot shed light on the vast swathes of society that so often escape the gaze of historians who focus on the ideas and actions of the literate. Still, this should not undermine the value of studying an important group within the Roman Empire whose impact on political events, cultural production, and religious ideals was profound.⁹⁶⁴ What Symmachus and Paulinus wrote may not represent the bulk of late antique correspondence, but the letters of such men give a vantage point from which we can

⁹⁶³ MacHardy 2003, 176; Bleeck and Garber 1982, 75-6.

⁹⁶⁴ For a comparison, see Blaudeau on the bureaucratic and ecclesiastic audience of Zachariah Rhetor in the sixth century: "Enfin il faut croire que, tout comme Évagre un siècle plus tard, son travail s'adresse encore à ceux qui ont suivi une formation semblable à la sienna en tout ou partie. Servant l'État ou l'Église sans pouvoir nécessairement prétendre à une carrière prestigieuse, ils constituent en effet un puissant d'opinion" (2006, 560).

appreciate how a shared, if contested, martial ethos of service was constructed and maintained.

Finally, I hope that this dissertation highlights the bridges between political, social, and religious dynamics in late antiquity. Historians of the Roman Empire cannot ignore cultural and religious changes in late antiquity any more than historians of Christianity can ignore the social and political background.⁹⁶⁵ The martial colorings of ascetic and administrative service cannot be viewed in isolation; they developed in tandem, reflecting one another and drawing on the same sensibilities of hierarchy, allegiance, and dutiful endurance. The ethos of soldierly service was not universally accepted, but it did push towards universalism. Even for its critics, the renunciation of state service was a meaningful act primarily defined through opposition to a martial image of empire. Symmachus esteemed the traditional toga over the *chlamys*; Libanius favored a life of philosophy over the “fearsome belt of office”; Augustine preferred the heavenly army to Caesar’s *militia*. But the resonance of martial imagery in so many spheres and the rewards to be found in embracing a quasi-militarized ethos encouraged each to fall back on the language and logic of the soldier, a fact which reinforced the inescapable presence of the state. We would do well to appreciate this subtler, cultural

⁹⁶⁵ See the recent plea by Ian Wood for a similar approach: “Although Brown has insisted that the history of religion and the history of society are inseparable, it is striking that his reading has rarely been integrated into general studies of socio-economic change. Nor has religion often played a major role in more straightforwardly political narratives, except at those moments when doctrine impinges on politics...[W]hen we consider the political and economic history of the fifth and sixth centuries on the one hand, and the religious and cultural on the other, it is often as if we are dealing with two parallel worlds. The historiographical problem facing us is...to work out how they relate to one another: the issue is one of integration” (2018, 33-4). Cf. Rousseau 2004, 99: “...early Christian asceticism cannot be explained exclusively in relation to religious antecedents, whether Jewish or pagan.”

militarism in late antiquity and its potential to generate fields of power beyond the scope of naked martial authority.

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