

THE INNER AND OUTER RELATION OF THE MILITARY VICUS TO ITS FORT

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'Miles non timetur, si vestitus, armatus, calciatus et satur et habens aliquid in zonula.'

'The soldier is not to be feared when he is dressed, armed, shod, has a full stomach and something in his money-belt'¹

and, as I would like to add, a place where he could spend the money. This quote of Alexander Severus from the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* provides the connection between my lecture 'The Inner and Outer Relation of the Military Vicus to its Fort' and this conference.

When I was asked to deliver a paper at this conference, it was suggested that one topic would be the role of the civil settlements outside the forts - the military vici - as places of production and loss of military equipment. As I have never specifically worked on military finds, I for my part wanted to give some background information about the close relation between fort and military vicus.² However, looking at the program it seems to me that the problem of military finds in military vici has been pushed a little to the side. Nevertheless, I hope that my paper may be of some interest and use to you.

From the time of the Republic, we know that *'mercatores scorta vates denique sacrificosque'* and *'lixae'*³ accompanied the Roman army. When arriving at their troop sites in 134 and 108 B.C. respectively, P. Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus and Q. Caecus Metellus Numidicus first had to expell these camp-followers and to separate them from the soldiers. That this action did not have a lasting effect becomes clear when we read about later incidents. Both Caesar and Augustus had to deal with these people who, for example, settled behind the porta decumana of one of Caesar's winter-camps, or who even followed Varus' army on campaign into Free Germany.⁴ But neither Caesar nor Augustus seemed to have worried much about the issue.

Archaeologists find traces of camp-followers outside the short-lived Augustan camp of Dangstetten in Upper Germany, next to Vespasian's siege-works of Masada in Judaea and, more importantly, outside almost every legionary fortress and auxiliary fort, at least where one has looked for them. In Roman Britain for example, a military vicus is known or can be suggested at 64% of all known forts; in Raetia the figure is 84% and in Upper Germany even 87%.

This leads to the conclusion that probably every fort had a military vicus and that their inhabitants developed from a group of people who were originally a hindrance to military discipline - during the Republic - to civilians who were generally accepted adjacent to the troops during the early and middle Empire. In order to understand this development better we have to look at the beginning and end of the military vici. As far as it is possible to prove archaeologically, 37 to 44% of all known military vici in the provinces studied (Britannia, Upper Germany and Raetia) began at the same time as the fort they are

attached to. Looking at these figures one has to bear in mind that aerial photography, field-walking, and small scale test-trenching do not necessarily immediately discover the earliest feature. Thus, I believe that the actual number of military vici which began simultaneously to the forts is much greater than currently known. An important fact is that in Upper Germany and in Raetia (to the right of the Rhine and the north of the Alps) most of the forts and their military vici came into existence in areas where virtually no trace of native population had been found.⁵ Therefore, at least in these regions the people of the military vici could not have come from the vicinity. But where did they come from?

We come closer to the answer after realising that many military vici dissolved at the same moment when the adjoining garrison moved away. This was true especially in areas with little or no romanized hinterland, such as Wales and the Pennines in Great Britain, the Odenwald and the Schwabian Alb in Germany. Apparently the military vici were here so firmly attached to the troops that without them they did not have a basis for livelihood. Thus, they moved with 'their' military unit and halted when the army halted.

In summarising the points made so far, I would like to emphasise that the inhabitants of the military vici were firmly connected to 'their' unit, so much so, that they would follow it everywhere - even into Free Germany or across the Channel. This means that we have to look for their traces around marching-camps too.

This leads us to the question of the function of the military vici: From the literature we know that services were very important. We must expect soothsayers, priests, actresses, musicians, prostitutes, pubs, restaurants etc.,⁶ everything a soldier might have needed or missed in the camp and which he could afford with his regularly-filled money-belt. Production was a very important aspect of these settlements, too. In almost every military vicus there was at least pottery production and/or metal-working. There are no signs that this production was directed by the military, nor that it was used exclusively by the camp-followers. This, however, is a field for more detailed study. Another major point was trade. Negotiatores and mercatores are mentioned in literature and inscriptions. Archaeology proves their existence, too, at least indirectly, as someone must have brought Samian ware, the wine, the oil etc. to the forts and military vici.

The whole layout of the military vici had basically one purpose: to bring the customers into contact with their suppliers in the easiest and most efficient way possible. As everybody had the same desires the so-called strip-houses of the military vici were packed tightly along the main roads. Additionally, there is increasing proof of the existence of market-places, usually just beyond the fort-gates, as for example in Ladenburg, where the street towards Mainz was widened over a stretch of 200m to about 24m. At Zugmantel the street to the baths was shaped into a triangular area of more than 100 m length. Malton, in Great Britain, is another example. In most cases market-places were laid out contemporary to the fort and military vicus. This fact and the dimensions of the markets indicate that a major proportion of the supply to the military vicus and the fort was exchanged here. Other

means of acquiring provisions are unlikely - during a long term stationing repeated requisitioning is inconceivable, and the annona militaris was not established before the third century. Furthermore, the people of the military vici did not earn their living through large scale farming for the following reasons:

1. The strip-houses did not supply the space for agricultural activity.
2. Around the forts and military vici there was not enough farming space. The neighbouring villae rusticae were often less than 1 km away from the fort. The area around Friedberg for example, which was not managed from the villae, had the size of about 4 km², equalling the size of only 4 average villas. The often claimed military territory or prata could only have consisted of fairly small exercising and grazing grounds.

One other point about the military vici should be mentioned here and that is the result of the personal contacts between the soldiers and the civilians. Although soldiers were not allowed to marry, or even to have sexual relations,⁷ the military diplomas strongly suggest a different practice. Apparently there was a big difference between the official law and what was officially accepted, as evidenced by the frequent legalisation of de facto marriages and children. It is therefore unnecessary to propose the existence of 'married quarters' as at Vindolanda,⁸ despite the fact that it was not before Alexander Severus that soldiers were by law allowed to live with their wives.⁹ As J.C. Mann showed, the children of the liaisons between soldiers and women from the military vici often joined the units of their fathers.¹⁰ The military vici soon served also as recruiting grounds for the army.

In the liaisons of soldiers with civilians we have the key to the question: where did the camp-followers come from originally? I believe they came from the area of initial recruitment, as many men must have already had strong personal bonds with civilians when they were drafted. At least some of the wives, girlfriends, children and perhaps parents will have followed 'their' soldiers and thus formed the nucleus of the military vici.

The close relation between soldiers and civilians, or between fort and military vicus, which I hope has already become clear to you, also has an official side. The way in which the surveyors laid out not only the fort, the roads, the baths and other military installations, but also an extensive area for the military vicus, clearly points towards the fact that the military vicus was considered an integral part of the surroundings of the fort.

In Roman Britain as well as in Upper Germany and Raetia cemeteries were always planned and laid out at a certain distance to the forts. The purpose was not to keep the dead apart from the living, but to provide space for the military vicus. This is proven in quite a number of places. It can clearly be seen at Grinario-Köngen and Nida-Hedderheim, where the whole length of 600m and 1000m, respectively, between fort and cemetery was used from the beginning of the fort by the military vicus.

The view of the close link between fort and its military vicus is supported at places like Housesteads where ditches were apparently never built at the side of the civil settlement. Furthermore, in the

provinces studied in detail, except for the incident at Vetera,¹¹ I could not find any place where an existing military vicus had to give way to expanding military installations. That means that the civilians next to the forts were no longer pushed around - they were a group of people with their own rights.

To conclude: at least in the northern provinces of the Roman Empire there was a very strong tie between military vici and forts. The one could not exist without the other. The inhabitants of the military vici earned their living from the soldiers. Through the military vici the army could satisfy a large portion of its vital needs, such as food, pottery, metal equipment and recruits. The soldiers as individuals were able to acquire in the military vici luxury items, additional food, equipment, and, probably most important, amusement. This means that the soldiers spent quite some time in the military vici. We should therefore not be surprised if we find military equipment in the military vici almost as frequently as in the camps.

NOTES

1. Scriptores Historiae Augustae Alex. Sev. 18, 52, 3.
2. For more details see SOMMER, 1984; SOMMER, 1988.
3. Appian, Iber. 85; Val. Max. 2, 7, 1; Sallust, Bell. Jug. 44, 5.
4. Caesar, Gallic Wars 6, 36, 37; Dio, Roman History 56, 20, 2-5.
5. CHRISTLEIN, 1982, 275ff; SOMMER, forthcoming.
6. VON PETRIKOVITS, 1979, 1027ff.
7. CAMPBELL, 1978, 153ff; JUNG, 1982, 302ff.
8. BIRLEY, 1977, 44ff.
9. Herod. 3, 8, 4-5.
10. MANN, 1963, 145ff. 11. Tac., Hist. 4.22.

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