

**EASTERN RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES
IN THE IMPERIAL ROMAN ARMY**

AMANDA CHOMIAK
Bachelor of Arts, University of Lethbridge, 2004

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
of the University of Lethbridge
in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

History Department
University of Lethbridge
LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA, CANADA

© Amanda Chomiak, 2008

Abstract

Religion was an important, and unifying element of the imperial Roman army. The imperial cult created and maintained a bond among the troops. Studying the specific cults of Mithra, Jupiter Dolichenus and Sol Invictus is also valuable, as they reflect Romanization, illustrate cult movement in the empire and represent military religious practices. Despite contemporary concerns there was also a Christian and Jewish presence within the imperial army. The imperial army permitted all cults, as long as Rome's state cults were respected.

Imperial influence, especially by the Severan Dynasty, may explain the introduction of many eastern cults. An increased number of provincial recruits over the first three centuries CE, and a heightened transfer of troops to the eastern frontiers, may also explain the escalated worship of non-Roman, eastern cults during the imperial period. Modern scholarship on such issues is emphasized in this study, as it guides the interpretation of primary evidence.

Acknowledgments

Many people are responsible for the completion of this thesis. I would like to thank my co-supervisors, Dr. Christopher Epplett and Dr. Thomas Robinson. Thank you Chris for taking me on as your first graduate student and working through the process with me. Thank you Tom for always reminding me of the other side of the argument. Only one word is really necessary to sum up the last three years: MacMullen. I would also like to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. John von Heyking and Dr. John Vanderspoel for their suggestions given during the thesis defense. Thank you Dr. Kevin McGeough for your encouragement to enroll in the Graduate Studies program, as well as your help throughout the process. Thank you Dr. Jo-Anne Fiske, Dean of Graduate Studies, for allowing me to continue my studies of ancient languages. I also would like to thank Charlene Sawatsky for helping me through a couple of panicked moments. I could not have finished this thesis without the support of my family. Thanks Mom, Dad and Jenny for being there for my defense, listening to me as I rehearsed my presentations, hauling library books with me to and from the library and for being there for me. I greatly appreciate all of your help and support.

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter #1 - An Introduction to the Roman Imperial Army.....	2
Chapter #2 - The Imperial Cult in the Military.....	12
Chapter #3 - The Role of the Severan Dynasty in Military Religion	19
Chapter #4 - Eastern Cults in the Roman Army.....	48
Mithra.....	51
Jupiter Dolichenus.....	71
Sol Invictus.....	80
Chapter #5 - Christians in the Military.....	106
Chapter #6 - Jews in the Military.....	142
Conclusion.....	157
Bibliography.....	161

Introduction

When studying the religious practices of the imperial Roman army, there are many questions to consider, such as: did the introduction of non-Roman cults to the military affect its unity, and in the bigger picture, that of the empire; what role did the emperor play in regards to religious influence in the military; and how did political decisions regarding religious policies affect those in the military? Such themes will become particularly clear in the chapters below. The primary focus of this investigation, however, is modern scholarship, and the different trends in research regarding non-Roman cults in the military. One major example of the dichotomy in modern scholarly views is the opposing opinions of Franz Cumont and Ramsey MacMullen. The works of Cumont place extraordinary emphasis on the origins of the so-called “oriental” cults, those from Rome’s eastern provinces and their corresponding frontiers, as well as conversion of troops as the primary method of religious introduction and movement of beliefs throughout the empire. MacMullen, on the other hand, places a focus on the rituals, as opposed to the sources, of these cults, as well as the transfer of troops to explain the spread of cults. This scholarly debate is important when looking at the issues involved with religious practices in the military, as scholarship often guides the interpretation of primary sources, iconography and epigraphy. These considerations will be included in the study of state religion, especially under the Severan dynasty, the presence of eastern cults in the military, and the issues facing Christian and Jewish troops.

Chapter #1 - An Introduction to the Roman Imperial Army

The defense of the Roman empire was provided by the imperial Roman army. In the case of this study, the period ranging over the first three centuries C.E. will be reviewed. According to Yann Le Bohec, the Roman military was a well-oiled machine with numerous divisions, a detailed system of organization, and hierarchical structure. The military's forces were divided between the provinces and Rome itself. The army garrison in Rome was made up of at least three units: the Praetorian cohorts, or *cohortes praetoriae*; the urban cohorts, or *urbaniciani*; and the *Vigiles*.¹ The role of the Praetorian cohorts was to serve as an imperial guard and safeguard Rome, in times of both peace and war. These elite soldiers were the best of their kind, who played an important role in public life, politics, and in maintaining peace in Rome.² This was a large body of men, although over time, the number of cohorts varied, as well as the number of soldiers in each unit.³ This change in size of a military garrison was common throughout the empire and within the units. The fluctuation was based on necessity and on the current emperor. The role of the urban cohorts was to patrol Rome. "They had to be 'the guard of the city'

¹Yann Le Bohec, The Imperial Roman Army (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1994), 20-23. Besides these three sizable units within Rome, Le Bohec also discusses military units responsible for such roles as secret police, spies, couriers, bodyguards and so on.

²Ibid., 20.

³Ibid., 21. The number of cohorts seemed to range between nine and sixteen, from the reign of Augustus to Constantine. As well, the number of troops changed, depending on who the emperor was, from 500 to 1000.

just as the Praetorians were the ‘Emperor’s guard’. They were basically a police force.’⁴ The *Vigiles* also had a policing role, but not to the extent of the urban cohorts. As well, they were not as close to the ruler as the *urbanici* were. The units of *Vigiles* held a dual purpose; policing and fire-fighting.⁵ While the units stationed within Rome and its surrounding cities in Italy were important, Roman protection of provincial borders was more crucial to the empire’s overall safety.

Due to the immense size of the empire, and the length of its borders, large numbers of troops were required to patrol these lines. Each of Rome’s border provinces was assigned a military force that included at least an auxiliary army, but usually a legion and its accompanying auxiliaries.⁶ The threat of invasion was very real and the need for these provincial units was reflected by the number of troops assigned to them. Le Bohec suggests that the majority of the Roman military was stationed on Rome’s provincial frontiers, and that only five percent were a part of the garrison within Rome itself, discussed above.⁷ Because of the vast number of provincial troops, a sense of order and hierarchy was critical to their efficiency.

The units that made up the provincial army included the legions and the

⁴Ibid., 22.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 24.

⁷Ibid., 19.

auxiliaries. The most elite unit of the provincial Roman army was the legion. Because the majority of the imperial army was in the provinces, there had to be a constant supply of men to fill their garrisons. During Julius Caesar's campaigns, troops for the legions were recruited every year. These troops were Roman citizens.⁸ Augustus, however, began recruiting from outside of Italy itself, using men from the provinces as his recruits. Webster shows that based on the origins of troops as given on their tombstones, "the recruitment areas gradually spread outwards towards the frontiers in the first two centuries of the Empire."⁹ For example, there are fourteen inscriptions of troops from Syria and Egypt from the reigns of Augustus to Caligula, but by the reign of Hadrian to the end of the second century, there are seventy-nine tombstone inscriptions of soldiers from Syria and Egypt.¹⁰ This illustrates the increasing recruitment of provincial troops under the empire. The number of legions ranged anywhere from twenty-five to thirty legions depending on whether the emperor created or disbanded a particular legion and, of course, some were lost or fragmented in battle.¹¹ These legions were dispersed throughout the provinces, depending on the current need for defense.

This practice of provincial recruitment, beginning in the imperial period with

⁸Graham Webster, The Roman Imperial Army of the First and Second Centuries A.D., 3rd ed. (London: A&C Black Publishers Ltd., 1985), 102.

⁹Ibid., 103. Webster concludes that the number of recruits from Italy by the second century did not even add up to one percent of legionaries.

¹⁰Ibid., 108. See Webster's table for further examples.

¹¹Ibid., 109.

Augustus, may help to explain the increased level of worship of non-Roman religious cults during the imperial period. While some foreign cults were present in the Roman Republic, they would be less likely to have been introduced, or practiced, within the military prior to the recruitment of provincial soldiers. These cults, including Mithra, Jupiter Dolichenus, Sol Invictus, as well as those of Christians and Jews, will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

Unity among soldiers serving together was of the utmost importance. Spending as much time together as they did required a strong bond: a type of brotherhood. Besides a dedication to one's own legion, allegiance to the Roman empire was crucial. Oaths and standards were two aspects of the legion that aided in creating and maintaining this bond, and these became the biggest concern for Christian writers such as Tertullian. The Christian objections will be discussed in greater detail below. Reciting the oath to the emperor was required before one became a member of the Roman legion. Ensurance of loyalty to the Roman emperor was needed. The *sacramentum* recited by the recruits required one "to serve the Emperor and his appointed delegates and obey all orders unto the death and recognize the severe punishment for desertion and disobedience."¹² This oath was also sworn to the gods,¹³ thereby adding a religious aspect to the ceremony. Not only was this oath sworn at the initiation of a soldier, it was recited annually, thereby re-emphasizing the duties and the commitment that each soldier had made. As well, before

¹²Ibid.

¹³Le Bohec., 74.

a unit was mobilized for battle, the *sacramentum* was sworn again to emphasize the bond between the soldier and his general, as well as to the emperor.¹⁴

According to Le Bohec, this oath, the *sacramentum*, seemed to be focused on the professional relationship between the military and its leaders in the first two centuries of the imperial period, “but reverted to a religious nature in the third century, [by taking the oath before the gods], because of the influence of the monotheistic competition.”¹⁵ The need to return to an emphasis on Roman religion may suggest that there was an increase in the number of Christians in the military, or at least a rise in those converting while serving as soldiers. This renewed emphasis on swearing an oath before Roman gods, however, would have been seen as idolatry to Christians. Thus, these ties to pagan beliefs made military service more and more difficult, as service to defend the safety of the empire became more than a career, but rather, what seemed to be a constant test of loyalty, not just to the empire, but to the gods associated with it.

The Roman standards were another important aspect of the military. Each legion had its own unique standard. Webster contends that “the standards were the religious focus of the army and could be said to embody the very ‘soul’ of the unit.”¹⁶ The standard was, in a sense, worshiped by the legionaries. It was kept in a shrine, dressed in

¹⁴Ibid., 239.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Webster, 133.

garlands and wreaths and even anointed with oils.¹⁷ It is clear that the standard was not just a symbol for the troops, but a ‘divine-like’ aspect of the legion itself. The soldiers would follow the standard into battle, and set up camp where it was placed.¹⁸ Carrying the standard was a specified role for one legionary, the standard bearer.¹⁹

What were the standards? Every legion had an eagle standard. The use of the eagle as the supreme standard was established as far back as the Roman republic. The rationalization behind the use of the eagle as the highest standard was that it was a symbol of the god Jupiter,²⁰ the supreme deity of Rome. Jupiter was always referred to as the ‘Best and Greatest’ and took on many titles, depending on where one was in the empire. Jupiter Dolichenus was a popular form among the men in the army.²¹ The eagle was seen as an integral piece of the legion, and “its loss to the enemy would be a permanent disgrace and stain on the history of the regiment [...] and the recovery of captured standards was a serious matter of imperial pride.”²² It is clear that these standards were very highly regarded, as it seems that no expense was spared on them. The eagle standards of the legions were likely made of gilded silver.²³ Representations of

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Le Bohec, 46.

²⁰Webster, 135.

²¹John Ferguson, The Religions of the Empire (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 34-35.

²²Webster, 133.

²³Ibid., 137.

the eagle, along with gods and historical heroes, have been found at military sites and forts in the form of gems, seal-rings and paintings on shields and helmets.²⁴ Henig suggests that by wearing these heroic symbols, the Roman troops were encouraged to fight based on the example of these victors.²⁵

The standards had a multipurpose function in the army. Standards were used as unique identification for the units in question, as objects of dedication, and most importantly, as a source of “esprit de corps.”²⁶ It is clear that the religious aspect of the standards cannot be underestimated. Festivals were held in honor of the standards, such as the *natalis aquilae*, to recognize the anniversary of a legion’s foundation.²⁷ This emphasizes how significant the standards were to the military. Helgeland emphasizes the importance of these official cults to the military. “The official religious observances were kept uniform throughout the Empire. One reason for this was that centurions were continuously being transferred from legion to legion, so the similarity from place to place made them feel at home and secure. Then too, the army brought in soldiers from a plethora of cultural backgrounds, the religion of the army ‘Romanized’ these people.”²⁸

²⁴Martin Henig, “The Veneration of Heroes in the Roman Army: The Evidence of Engraved Gemstones,” *Britannia* 1 (1970): 258-260.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 263.

²⁶Webster, 137.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 130.

²⁸John Helgeland, et. al., *Christians and the Military: The Early Experience*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 49.

Each unit had many other symbols in addition to the eagle. These standards were represented as zodiac signs, commemorating the ‘birthday,’ or formation date of the unit itself, or its founder.²⁹ Another form of standard was the *vexillum*, a type of flag that depicted a symbol or had the name of the legion written on it.³⁰ And finally, due to the importance of the emperor to the military, and to all of the empire, there was an actual standard depicting the emperor’s image that was carried with each legion as well.³¹ This added presence of the emperor standard would be considered as part of the imperial cult, which will be elaborated on in greater detail below. Each auxiliary unit also had a unique standard, which also had the same effect of unifying its troops.

It is important to elaborate next on the auxiliary troops, the other unit besides the legion, that formed the provincial armies. The main role of the auxiliaries was to accompany the legions in the Roman provinces, as Roman legions were not stationed alone and without support.³² Especially later in the imperial period, during the third century, however, auxiliaries were used on their own, without the legions.³³ This was possible because auxiliary units could be equal in size to a legion; as well, the auxiliaries were not only fitted with infantry, but also with trained cavalry.³⁴ The distinguishing

²⁹Ibid., 135.

³⁰Ibid., 138-139.

³¹Ibid., 136.

³²Le Bohec, 25.

³³Ibid., 28.

³⁴Ibid., 27.

feature between a soldier in the legion and one in the auxiliary, prior to 212 CE, was citizenship, which was necessary in the case of the former. The role of any military force made up of non-Romans was to assist the citizen legions, thus explaining the title *auxilia*.³⁵ Citizenship, however, was not completely out of reach for an auxiliary soldier. The emperor Claudius (41-54 CE), who ruled early in the imperial period, established an empire-wide practice of giving citizenship at the discharge from service to those who had served twenty-five years of honourable service in the *auxilia*.³⁶

It is important to note, however, that not everyone without Roman citizenship could join the army. One had to possess free birth³⁷ in order to be either recruited or to volunteer. Slaves were not permitted to join the military under any circumstances. If a slave was discovered in the military, he could be punished, possibly by death. Pliny explains that a slave may have been present within the military, but only as an oversight. “If they are conscripts, the examination was at fault; if they were substitutes, the blame rests with those who offered them; if they came forward as volunteers and in full knowledge of their status, they must be punished.”³⁸

The Romans viewed the military as an essential element to the defense, and

³⁵Webster, 141.

³⁶Ibid., 142-143.

³⁷Roy W. Davies, Service in the Roman Army (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 9.

³⁸Pliny, *Epistulae* 10:30 in Davies, 9.

therefore, the survival of the empire. Its incredible organization is unrivaled by any other system in Rome, which contributed to its success. As briefly mentioned above, there was a strong religious aspect to the Roman army. The importance of religious life in Rome and in its military will now be explored in detail.

Chapter #2 - The Imperial Cult in the Military

The focus of this paper is the period between the reigns of Augustus and Constantine. In this period, many important religious events occurred. Both of these emperors were innovators, as each man brought forth a new emphasis on religion that had been lacking prior to his rule. While Constantine was the first Roman emperor to formally permit Christianity, Augustus renewed the old and cherished Roman religion that had fallen out of practice during the republican Period. Constantine instituted a freedom of religion for those in the Roman empire, which then included Christianity as an accepted cult. Despite suggestions that both Augustus and Constantine used religion for their own political gain and popularity,³⁹ positive results for Rome occurred, regardless of motive. Augustus, as the founder of the empire, brought an overall sense of unity to the empire in the form of patriotism.⁴⁰ And there was no better way to express his dedication to this renewed patriotic sentiment than for Augustus to invest in a project that would be valued by all Roman citizens: a state religion.

This state religion was more than just a mere idea. Augustus illustrated his dedication to the empire's newfound patriotism "[...] in the reorganization of the city of Rome, in the splendid buildings of the Forum; the Palatine, and the Campus Martius; in

³⁹Jesse Benedict Carter, The Religious Life of Ancient Rome: A Study in the Development of Religious Consciousness from the Foundation of the City until the Death of Gregory the Great (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1972), 66 & 117.

⁴⁰Ibid., 67.

the Basilica Julia, the Temple of Mars Ultor, the Ara Pacis, and, most conspicuous of all, the glistening marble Temple of Apollo on the Palatine.”⁴¹ These architectural additions to Rome made a lasting statement concerning Roman religion: one of permanence and longevity. Augustus supported this new patriotism through his many actions, especially “in the recapture of the standards which Crassus ... [had]... lost to the Parthians, an event of such supreme importance that it is portrayed on the centre of the breastplate in the famous statue of Augustus from Prima Porta.”⁴² As seen above, the Roman standards of the military units were of the utmost value to the soldiers’ pride, unity and success. Not only did Augustus express his dedication to the military by recapturing the standards, but he symbolically illustrated that the new imperial Roman dynasty could correct the misdeeds and errors of the past. Augustus did not just rebuild temples and fill them with a newly trained and dedicated priesthood, however: he instituted a new religious scheme, that of emperor worship.⁴³

This cult, dedicated to the emperor of Rome, went further than a recognition of divine powers. It established a relationship between the emperor-god and the community through the formation of a traditional cult following which included festivals, shrines and a number of priests.⁴⁴ This interpretation of the emperor’s cult by J. Rufus Fears

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., 69 & 70.

⁴⁴J. Rufus Fears, “Emperor’s Cult,” in The Encyclopedia of Religion, 16 vols. ed. Mircea Eliade, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), 5:101.

illustrates the reason that Romans would have worshiped a man. He was the emperor, and secular leader of Rome. But his responsibilities went further than that. He was seen as one with divine attributes. This religious aspect present within the emperor allowed him to create new cults in Rome. But his power extended further than his influence on which other cults to worship. He had a mutual relationship with his cult followers. In return for the community's homage, the ruler cult would provide it with benefits.⁴⁵ The people of the empire owed their prosperity to the emperor. Not to pay homage to the emperor's cult would be to show disrespect for what the emperor had done for Rome. Any other form of worship was allowed in the empire, whether it be other gods of the pantheon, or provincial cults, as long as the emperor was venerated. Carter suggests that as long as the state cults were respected, and a sacrifice was given, religious freedom was permitted. But a religion which forbade these national sacrifices must be suppressed."⁴⁶ This stipulation in Roman worship is what drew attention to the Christians.

Price, however, argues that the imperial cult is one of a secular nature and should not be categorized as religious.⁴⁷ The imperial cult, according to this argument, lacked religious content and was both derived and controlled by the state.⁴⁸ Whatever the value of Price's argument, epigraphic evidence and texts, such as *Act of the Christian Martyrs*,

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Carter, 114.

⁴⁷S.R.F. Price, Rituals and Power: The Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 15-16.

⁴⁸Ibid., 16.

which will be discussed in more detail below, make it clear that those contemporary with the imperial cult came to believe that it had a religious nature. It is not just Christians who found the imperial cult to be of a religious nature. Both in Gaul and at Narbo, sacrifices were made for the emperor, including a taurobolium, or bull sacrifice, at the latter.⁴⁹

The origins of the imperial cult are worth mentioning within the context of this study, as there are ties to the eastern empire. MacMullen notes that, upon settlement in the east, the Romans incorporated many eastern practices into the imperial cult.⁵⁰ While the idea of emperor worship seems to be one that would be centered around Rome, and not its frontiers, it seems that is not quite the case. The imperial cult is best understood as having a combination of both native and imported aspects.⁵¹ The imperial cult in Rome was tied to the history of the city, but it is the presence of the imperial cult in newly annexed provinces that is worth mention. There is evidence of imperial games occurring in Galatia and Asia in Asia Minor as early as three years after becoming a Roman province.⁵² Provincial cities were involved in emperor worship on a local level and took an active role by sponsoring feasts, sacrifices and games.⁵³ Price argues that the imperial

⁴⁹Ramsey MacMullen, Paganism in the Roman Empire (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 105.

⁵⁰Ibid., 46.

⁵¹Price, 78.

⁵²Ibid., 79.

⁵³Ibid., 101.

cult remained as an active presence in the east because dedications to the cult were mandatory.⁵⁴ But beyond enforcement, there had to be some sort of foundation of ruler worship in the provinces that allowed the imperial cult to be easily adapted. Hellenistic culture had a royal cult, that honoured the king for his political contributions to his subjects.⁵⁵ Therefore, it appears that eastern culture was even more apt than the Romans' to accept emperor worship.

Was it possible for the living emperor to be a god? After death, in a ceremony, emperors in the first and second centuries could be deified, and then become immortal.⁵⁶ But in life, it was not the emperor as a man that was worshiped, but his *genius*, “the divine element and creative force that resided in the emperor and guided him like a guardian angel.”⁵⁷ Michael Speidel argues that the *genii* (plural of *genius*) were the most worshiped of all cults in Rome, even more so than the identifiable gods of the Roman pantheon or the imported oriental cults of the east.⁵⁸ This was also the case in the military. *Genii* include “the multitude of the more shapeless powers and spirits that held

⁵⁴Ibid., 61. There were severe penalties, including death, for the failure to follow these regulations.

⁵⁵Ibid., 54-56.

⁵⁶Fears, 102. The act of deification was authorized by a “senatorial decree” that attested to the emperors' virtues.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Michael Speidel, Roman Army Studies: Volume One (Amsterdam, J.C. Gieben, 1984), 353. Speidel has written an entire chapter on the cult of the *genii* and their strong presence in the military. See pages 353-368.

in their care every action and event, every person and every place.”⁵⁹ Speidel concludes that because the *genii* cannot be identified as a specific image or form, as they are the essence of all things, there has been a lack of interest by modern scholars in the study of such cults. There appears to be, however, no shortage of Roman evidence for their worship. This evidence can be found in the form of temples, monuments, and even on coinage.⁶⁰

While the *genius* can be dated back to early Rome as “one of the oldest features of Roman religion,”⁶¹ its worship flourished in the imperial period as a part of the emperor’s cult. The imperial cult was very dominant in the army, as hierarchy and rank were prominent aspects of military organization and lifestyle, and, therefore, the emperor was at the height of this order. The *genii* were so popular within the military that worship expanded beyond the *genius* of the emperor, “the *Genius Imperataris* or *Genius Augusti*.”⁶² Almost every division of the military, whether serving in Rome or on the frontiers, had its own cult to a *genius*. These cults were not connected with the imperial cult, and helped impart individuality to each unit. In fact, according to Speidel’s study, the century was responsible for most of the dedications to *genii*. These units of eighty men, the centuries, had their own cult of a *genius*, the *genius centuriae*, and according to

⁵⁹Ibid., 353.

⁶⁰Ibid., 354.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid.

Speidel, “obviously because the soldiers attached to their *centuriae* the strongest feeling of identity and sense of belonging.”⁶³ So, as the units of the military were divided, and the numbers of men in them decreased, the sense of unity among these smaller groups of soldiers grew. This is illustrated by the sharing of a cult that was unique to them only.

The cult of the emperor is also tied to the Roman pantheon’s highest deity, Jupiter. The emperor was chosen by Jupiter to rule for the gods on earth.⁶⁴ This belief held by the Romans only strengthened the imperial cult. When studying any Roman deity, and the reasons that it was worshiped, it is useful to look at how the god was perceived in the civilian world, as these beliefs were carried over into the military. As G. R. Watson writes, “the army religion and the state religion were identical.”⁶⁵ It is important, though, not to forget that there were additional complexities regarding religion in the military. One cult that was present in the military, and not in the civilian world, was the cult of the standards, mentioned above. In addition to emperor worship, the cult of the standards was not only common to all military units, it was a necessity. But these cults of the emperor and the army were not the only ones worshiped in the military.

⁶³Ibid., 357.

⁶⁴Fears, 102.

⁶⁵G. R. Watson, The Roman Soldier (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 128.

Chapter #3 - The Introduction of Eastern Cults by the Severan Dynasty

Before discussing the eastern provincial cults in detail, it is important to reflect on the role that the dynasty of the Severi played, especially in regards to the oriental cults imported to Rome. Considering that each of the emperors in this family line was born in one of Rome's border provinces, it is not surprising that elements of eastern cults made their way to Rome. The strong eastern heritage of the dynasty is reflected during their reigns. In this chapter, I will give a brief history of the Severan family and examine the religious influences of Septimius Severus, Caracalla, Elagabalus, and Alexander Severus on both the Roman empire and the military. The dynasty is valuable when studying eastern religions in the military because of both the interest in, and experience with, provincial religious practices. The Severan family, especially Septimius Severus, also had strong ties to the Roman military.

The Severan dynasty ruled Rome for less than fifty years, from 192-235 CE, yet they left their mark on history. The Severan dynasty began at a time of political upheaval in Roman history. Septimius Severus, the first in the dynasty, became Rome's emperor after the assassination of Pertinax following a coup d'etat, the result of Commodus' assassination. At the time of Septimius' rise to power, he had to defeat many others who wanted the title of emperor, including Didius Julianus, Pescennius Niger and Albinus, all governors or consuls throughout the Empire. Throughout his almost twenty years as emperor, Septimius Severus introduced many reforms. He is responsible for numerous

architectural achievements, including a triumphal arch, and reforms in the military, such as an increase in pay, greater chance for promotion, and the allowance of marriage.⁶⁶ As well, Septimius introduced new religious cults to Rome.

When discussing Septimius Severus, it is not difficult to believe that he would have brought outside ideas into Rome. He was an African, born in the city of Leptis Magna, located in modern day Libya. Septimius kept close ties with the African city, even rebuilding it at one point during his reign.⁶⁷ It was not just the African province that captured his attention. Septimius Severus focused on Rome's provinces more so than on Rome itself. And therefore, he preferred his soldiers to Roman civilians,⁶⁸ as it was the military who protected the provinces and helped to expand the empire. It is clear why his religious beliefs follow such a pattern, a provincial preference, as well. It was in 180 CE, prior to becoming emperor, under the orders of the current emperor Commodus, that Septimius was sent to Syria to command the IV Scythica legion under the governor of Syria, P. Helvius Pertinax.

It is while in Syria that Septimius was introduced to local Syrian cults. It is reported that he visited an oracle, that of Zeus Balos, the local form of the god Ba'al at

⁶⁶Charles Freeman, Egypt, Greece and Rome: Civilizations of the Ancient Mediterranean (New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 1996), 469.

⁶⁷Ibid., 469.

⁶⁸Ibid

Apamea, which is located between Antioch and Emesa.⁶⁹ This oracle predicted an imperial future for Severus. It is not surprising that Septimius would have been intrigued by these temples in Syria. There is a form of Ba'al worshiped in Africa, Baal Hammon, who was a native god.⁷⁰ Ba'al has many local variations, but the basic consensus is that "Baal, known as 'Rider of the clouds,' is a fertility god representing the beneficent aspects of water as rain. This lightning and thunder depict his power, and the fertile earth his beneficence."⁷¹

Another one of Baal's variants was Elagabalus,⁷² worshiped in the Syrian temple of Emesa. Elagabalus would become a very important deity to the Severan dynasty. Severus, in fact, visited Emesa while in Syria. The locals of Emesa worshiped Baal in the form of a large conical black stone that they believed to be "an unworked image of the sun."⁷³ This temple was well regarded across the region, and also possessed great wealth due to the gifts sent by the local elite. The temple's priests descended from a long line of a native dynasty, who had been, however, Roman citizens since the first century CE.⁷⁴

⁶⁹Ibid., 117.

⁷⁰Arnaldo Momigliano, "Roman Religion: The Imperial Period," in The Encyclopedia of Religion, 16 vols., ed. Mircea Eliade, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), 12:463.

⁷¹Charles Russell Coulter and Patricia Turner, Encyclopedia of Ancient Deities (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1997), 86-87.

⁷²Ibid., 165.

⁷³Anthony Birley, Septimius Severus: The African Emperor (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1972), 117.

⁷⁴Ibid.

Severus left Syria in 182 CE and spent the next three years studying in Athens. Anthony Birley suggests that while in Greece, like past emperors Hadrian, Lucius Verus, Marcus Aurelius, and Commodus, Severus would have been, or was interested in becoming an initiate of the mysteries of Eleusis.⁷⁵ The mystery religions were most prevalent in the Greco-Roman world in the first three centuries CE. The Eleusinian mysteries were developed from the cult of Demeter and involved secret initiation rituals, meals and ceremonies.⁷⁶ There is no firm evidence of Septimius' initiation into this cult, but due to its secretive tendencies, that is only to be expected. This possible connection between a member of the Severan family and a fertility goddess appears again. Septimius' son, Caracalla, was involved in the cult of Isis, another goddess with a mystery cult. The Egyptian goddess, like Demeter, is associated with the powers of fertility and sexuality.⁷⁷ Despite these similarities, however, a connection between Septimius and the Eleusian mysteries cannot be confirmed. This apparent interest in the cult of Eleusis, however, would be consistent with Septimius Severus' interest in provincial cults.

In 185 CE, Septimius was recalled to serve as governor of Gallia Lugdunensis.⁷⁸

⁷⁵Ibid., 119.

⁷⁶“Mystery Religion,” Britannica Concise Encyclopedia (2006), On-line encyclopedia: <<http://britannica.com/ebc/article-9372935>> [28 August 2005].

⁷⁷Barry B. Powell, Classical Myth, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004), 239.

⁷⁸Birley, 122.

While in Gaul, his first wife died. Two years later, in 187 CE, Septimius wrote to Syria, intrigued by a horoscope predicting that the daughter of the priest of Elagabalus, Julia Domna, would marry an emperor, asking for her to join him as his wife.⁷⁹ Julia arrived from Syria, and after their marriage, they had two sons in the next two years: L. Septimius Bassianus and P. Septimius Geta.

It was once Septimius was proclaimed Caesar in 193CE that his influence on Roman religion began. Septimius Severus, like his predecessor, Commodus, emphasized his connection to the gods.⁸⁰ A few years after becoming the sole emperor of Rome, Severus announced that he was the son of Marcus Aurelius, and was henceforth referred to as “Son of the deified Marcus Pius”.⁸¹ In imperial Rome, many emperors were made into gods upon their deaths. Since Marcus Aurelius was a deity, and Severus was his son, he was the son of a god.

Septimius Severus took his relationship with the gods further than being an alleged descendent of a deity. He wanted to be identified with the gods himself, and he did not wait until his death to be deified. While the emperors were often viewed as deities after death because they held supreme power and virtues in life,⁸² it is likely that

⁷⁹Ibid., 123.

⁸⁰Freeman, 469.

⁸¹Birley, 184.

⁸²J. Rufus Fears, “Emperor’s Cult,” in The Encyclopedia of Religion, 16 vols. ed. Mircea Eliade, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), 5:102.

Severus made the extra effort to connect himself with the gods because it was a common practice in Roman Africa to do so, a tradition with which he was familiar.⁸³ Septimius became identified with Jupiter, and his wife Julia, with Juno.⁸⁴ Despite their provincial origins, Africa and Syria respectively, and their interest in oriental religions, Severus and his wife associated themselves with Roman gods, familiar to those within Rome. As well, they did not choose just any gods to align themselves with: they used the highest gods of the Roman pantheon. Freeman thinks this was a method of connecting with the Roman people, as “the cohesion of the state was also maintained through religious ritual.”⁸⁵ As well, it is clear that by referring to his wife as Juno, the state goddess of Rome, Severus was imparting a great deal of power to Julia Domna. He did not just make himself a supreme deity, he deified his wife as a living god as well. Perhaps this honour was given to her because Severus saw her as more than a wife. She was the daughter of the priest of Elagabalus, and the mother to the future Caesars of Rome.

Septimius Severus did not stop there in naming himself as a god. After going to Egypt in 199 CE, Septimius renewed his interest in the Egyptian pantheon of gods that he learned of while in Athens prior to becoming emperor.⁸⁶ The *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* mentions this interest in Egyptian culture and religion. “In after years Severus

⁸³Freeman, 433.

⁸⁴Momigliano, 465.

⁸⁵Freeman, 313.

⁸⁶Birley, 205.

himself continually vowed that he had found this journey very enjoyable, because he had taken part in the worship of the god Serapis, had learned something of antiquity, and had seen unfamiliar animals and strange places.”⁸⁷ As well, Severus likely participated in the ritual offering of gold and silver to the divine Nile River, a sacred practice carried out by the leader of Egypt.⁸⁸ Since Egyptians believed that their leaders were gods, it is clear that Septimius would have desired to have that title bestowed on him as well.

His interest in Egyptian religion, especially the god Serapis, did not end once he left Egypt. In Rome, on the Arch of the Argentarii, which is dated to 203-4 CE, there is a relief sculpture depicting Septimius Severus and Julia Domna making a sacrificial offering as Jupiter-Serapis and Juno Caelestis.⁸⁹ Serapis was believed to rule the lowest level of the heavens, the underworld in “the sphere beneath the moon.”⁹⁰ Severus is depicted on coinage dating from the same time period as the Arch of the Argentarii with his hair styled “with the forked Serapis style of beard and corkscrew curls.”⁹¹

⁸⁷David Magie, trans., *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, 3 vols., (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), *Severus* 1.17:4.

⁸⁸Birley, 206-207.

⁸⁹Joscelyn Godwin, *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1981), 63. Godwin suggests that Hermes was standing next to them, as Hermes is a guide to Hades, Godwin, 35. However, Birley suggests that the figure, which has been removed, was an image of Geta, taken out of the carving after he was killed by his brother. Birley, Plate 11b.

⁹⁰Godwin, 35.

⁹¹Birley, Plate 11a.

Before leaving Alexandria, Septimius Severus not only ordered building to begin on baths and a gymnasium, but he also had a temple built for Cybele.⁹² Cybele can be equated with such goddesses as Hera and Isis. She is the Great Mother Goddess that can be found in every culture.⁹³ The fact that Septimius Severus placed importance in the goddess Cybele is very important to note. Typically, Romans focused on the male gods; warriors and heroes that had wives and consorts.⁹⁴ Yet there seems to be a certain respect that Severus had for women, both goddesses and his wife, Julia Domna. The cult of Cybele required *taurobolium*, or the sacrifice of bulls, which emphasized the pouring of blood over an initiate into the cult, or as an act to benefit the emperor.⁹⁵ The main connection between Severus and the goddess Cybele lies in the form which her cultic image took. “Cybele took shape there [in her native Troy] as a black stone the size of a fist, probably a meteorite, set as the face of a silver statue [... that, in 204 BCE,] was duly installed in a temple on the Palatine Hill and worshiped there for over five hundred years.”⁹⁶ Whether or not a connection can be drawn between the black stone of Cybele and that of Elagabalus is not certain. By establishing a temple for the cult of Cybele in Egypt, Septimius Severus was bringing a goddess that was accepted in Rome, for almost four-hundred years, to Egypt, seemingly using religion to hold the empire together.

⁹²Ibid., 209.

⁹³Godwin, 110.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid., 111.

⁹⁶Ibid., 110.

Septimius' son, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (Septimius Bassianus) came to power in 211 CE, after his father's death in York, Britannia. It was Septimius' wish that his sons jointly rule the Empire. Antoninus is said to have been unwilling to rule the empire as a co-emperor with his brother P. Septimius Geta, and therefore, had him killed.⁹⁷ The fratricide of Geta did not occur, however, as quickly as suggested in *The Scriptorum Historiae Augustae*. It has been suggested by other historians, including Herodian, that Antoninus did attempt to have Geta killed, by the military, immediately following Severus' death. It was not carried out, however, until about nine months later.⁹⁸

Antoninus realized that while ridding himself of Geta would make him the sole emperor of Rome, it would not ensure his safety, or the support of the military and the Senate. He presented himself as a victim of the attack which had taken the life of his brother, and appealed to both the Senate and the military for their support.⁹⁹ Anyone who had shown support for Geta, however, was killed, likely to prevent future rebellions,

⁹⁷Magie, trans., *The Scriptorum Historiae Augustae*, *Severus* 1.13:5-7. "He [Septimius] then ordered a duplicate made of the royal statue of Fortune which was customarily carried about with the emperors and placed in their bedrooms, in order that he might leave this most holy statue to each of his sons; but later, when he realized that the hour of death was upon him, he gave instructions, they say, that the original should be placed in the bed chambers of each of his sons, the co-emperors, on alternate days. As for this direction, Bassianus ignored it and then murdered this brother." Also, see Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 6 vols., trans. Herbert Baldwin Foster (Troy, NY: Pafraets Book Company, 1906), 77.3-5. for a description of Geta's death in his mother's arms.

⁹⁸Birley, 268-271. Due to the army's loyalty to Geta, they would not kill him. Geta also held senate support. Severus died on 4 February 211 CE. Geta was dead by the end of the year.

⁹⁹Dio, 77.3-5. Also discussed in Birley, 271.

including about twenty-thousand soldiers and civilians.¹⁰⁰ Caracalla attempted to remove his brother from history by chiseling Geta's name and images off of monuments, so much so that not a lot is known about him.¹⁰¹ Caracalla, as Antoninus was known because of a Celtic cloak that he wore, was assassinated in 217 CE by his Praetorian prefect, Macrinus.¹⁰²

Like his father, Caracalla played an important role in importing foreign religious cults to Rome. Caracalla, however, placed the majority of his interest in the cult of the Egyptian goddess Isis. While both men and women could worship her, it is clear that she was quite popular among women due to her own feminine powers.¹⁰³ It may seem unusual that Caracalla would choose a female deity to worship primarily, especially due to her supposed power of making men love their wives, and even granting power to women that was equal to that of their husbands.¹⁰⁴ Isis worship, however, was not only appealing to men, it captured the attention and patronage of a few Roman emperors. Interest in Egypt and its capital Alexandria can be traced back to Caesar, as the holidays associated with Isis were placed on the new Julian calendar at that time.¹⁰⁵ It was not

¹⁰⁰Dio, 77.4:6.

¹⁰¹Birley, 271.

¹⁰²Freeman, 470.

¹⁰³Momigliano, 466.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Franz Cumont, Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 84.

until the reign of Caligula (37-41 CE), however, that the first temple to Isis was built.¹⁰⁶ But it has been recorded by historians contemporary to Caracalla that he was one of the dominant patrons of Isis. Two temples to Isis, in the Quirinal and on the Coelian, were built in Rome by Caracalla in 215.¹⁰⁷

Like the cult of Isis from Egypt, and Cybele from Anatolia, the mystery cults were imported to the Roman world from the provinces. Thus, the appearance of, or emphasis on, these eastern deities in Rome occurs during the Severan dynasty, which emerged from a provincial background. As seen above, Septimius Severus spent time in Egypt while emperor. While there, he became enamored of the gods of Egypt. It is not surprising, then, that his son Caracalla would also develop an interest in another Egyptian deity. According to Godwin, “On his accession, Caracalla followed his father in devotion to Serapis, appearing on his coins as ‘Serapis Cosmocrator’, calling himself ‘Philosarapis’ and leading the Egyptian cults to their zenith.”¹⁰⁸ Due to the popularity of his murdered brother and his deceased father, it seems to have been an intelligent step by Caracalla to keep religious life the same, at least for a while until he became accepted as the emperor. The fact that Caracalla ultimately chose a different deity than his father to worship, however, does emphasize the need of Caracalla for distinction from the rest of his family. His desire to be the sole emperor of Rome caused him to have his brother and co-emperor

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Godwin, 63.

killed, and possibly led to the desire, or plan, to kill his father, Severus.¹⁰⁹

In fact, the emphasis on one supreme deity, like Caracalla's worship of Isis, was common during this period of Roman history. "The intensely personal nature of the relationship between worshiper and god acted to elevate the favored deity above other gods."¹¹⁰ This emphasis on one god, does not, however, imply monotheism. Caracalla still promoted the Roman gods of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva. The Capitoline triad and the corresponding cults were brought to Egypt by Caracalla as well.¹¹¹ This action has been seen as an attempt to unify the Empire with common deities, and emphasize the Roman cults within the provinces.

Caracalla is most notably remembered for his *Constitutio Antoniniana*, issued in 212 CE, which granted citizenship to everyone, except slaves, within the Empire, including provincials.¹¹² This resulted in a sense of unification among the people of the Empire, eliminating the distinction between citizen and provincial. It has been suggested that this grant of citizenship was carried out "in hope of contributing to religious unification."¹¹³ This may have been a result of granting citizenship to freedmen in the

¹⁰⁹"Caracalla (198-217A.D.)," Mount Allison University (1997), On-line article: <http://www.mta.ca/faculty/humanities/classics/Course_Materials/clas3031/projects/bennett_et_al.html> [28 August 2005].

¹¹⁰Freeman, 490.

¹¹¹Momigliano, 464.

¹¹²"Caracalla (198-217A.D.)," On-line article.

¹¹³Momigliano, 464.

provinces, but it was likely not the primary reason for this action. Dio discusses the variety of taxes implemented by Caracalla, and states that the increase in the number of citizens to tax was Caracalla's real intention. "Nominally it was to honor them, but his real purpose was to get an increased income by such means, since foreigners did not have to pay most of those taxes."¹¹⁴ Whatever Caracalla's reason was, however, he did further tie the provinces to the empire as a whole.

After the assassination of Caracalla, Macrinus proclaimed himself to be the emperor of Rome, and because Caracalla was so hated by the Senate, Macrinus was accepted. "Anyone rather than the fratricide, anyone rather than the incestuous, anyone rather than the filthy, anyone rather than the slayer of the Senate and people."¹¹⁵ This acceptance did not last long. He lost battles against barbarians and lost the support of the military and the Senate. After the death of Julia Domna,¹¹⁶ her sister, Julia Maesa, was determined to keep the Severan line alive by installing her grandson Varius Avitus Bassianus, or Elagabalus, as emperor, who would gain the support of the Romans over Macrinus within a month.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴Dio, 77.9:11-12.

¹¹⁵Magie, trans., *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Opellius Macrinus 2:4*. The author refers to Caracalla as incestuous because many at the time believed him to be the son of Severus' first wife, and after he was declared emperor, he was rumored to have married his step-mother, Julia Domna.

¹¹⁶For a thorough description of Julia's death, through voluntary starvation, self-inflicted physical abuse and breast cancer, see Dio, 78.23-24.

¹¹⁷Birley, 275.

The Severan dynasty went out the way it came into power, leaving Rome in a state of turmoil. The last of the Severans were Elagabalus and Alexander Severus, who was only thirteen years of age when he became emperor. Alexander was to be the replacement for Elagabalus. Elagabalus and Alexander shared a grandmother who took the responsibility for the emperor and his behavior. Their grandmother was Julia Maesa, the sister of Julia Domna, Septimius Severus' wife.¹¹⁸ Therefore, with the death of Caracalla, the next two emperors of the Severan dynasty were not actually of Severan blood. Elagabalus and Alexander's ties to the dynasty were through Julia Domna. Julia Maesa, however, claimed that her grandson Elagabalus did have Severus' blood, as he was Caracalla's illegitimate son.¹¹⁹ Elagabalus ruled for four years and, during this reign, publically displayed his transvestism and bi-sexuality.¹²⁰ He was also known for his emphasis on the eastern cult of Elagabalus, whence he took his name, and acted as its priest.

By his name alone, it is clear that Elagabalus was a religious man. He was born Varius Avitus Bassianus, to the granddaughter of the priest of the temple at Emesa. He assumed the name of the god Elagabalus, as he too would become a priest for its cult. Because of his intimate connection to his namesake, it is difficult to distinguish Elagabalus from his cult. It is clear that he wanted the people of Rome to see the

¹¹⁸Ibid., 307. For the complete family tree of the Severan Dynasty see Appendix 1 of Birley.

¹¹⁹Freeman, 470.

¹²⁰Birley, 275-276.

importance of the cult of Elagabalus to him. The cult was native to Emesa in Syria, which Septimius Severus had visited prior to his marriage to Julia Domna. Elagabalus, a Syrian, came from a line of priests of that cult. He had lived in Syria until being named the Roman emperor at the age of fourteen. It is said that because Elagabalus looked like his mother's cousin, the assassinated Caracalla, he was encouraged to claim that he was fathered by the former emperor, thereby making Elagabalus the rightful heir to the throne.¹²¹ He claimed to be the emperor, and presented himself to the troops stationed in Syria as Marcus Aurelius Antoninus.¹²²

Although his claim to the throne was not firmly established, and was not technically legitimate, Elagabalus had a sense of arrogance about him even before he reached Rome a year later. His dictating of which god Romans should worship began before he arrived. He sent a self-portrait to Rome to be hung above the altar in the Senate-house, and "the magistrates were directed to call first on [the God] Elagabalus in their official prayers."¹²³ He did not try to become a Roman emperor of Syrian descent, who added his gods to the Roman pantheon. Rather, Elagabalus saw himself as a Syrian who was the legitimate emperor of Roman territories, replacing the gods sacred to Rome

¹²¹Birley, 275. He suggests that Caracalla may have been a lover of Elagabalus' grandmother Julia Maesa, after she was widowed. The *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* suggests that Caracalla's affair with Julia Soemias was well known at the time, making him the father of Elagabalus. Magie, trans., *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Antoninus Elagabalus* 2:1-2.

¹²²Birley, 275.

¹²³Ibid.

with his eastern deity. Elagabalus, upon his entry into Rome, brought the god of Emesa with him. “The black stone, which was home to the god [...] entered the city mounted like all triumphant gods on a four-horse chariot.”¹²⁴ While making Elagabalus the supreme deity of Rome, he did not intend to eliminate the other deities, but to incorporate them into one cult, absorbing all of their symbols and rites into the new cult. This included the “emblem of the Great Mother, the fire of Vesta, the Palladium, the shields of the Salii, and all that the Romans held sacred.”¹²⁵ The new temple for Elagabalus was placed on an existing site of the shrine of Orcus.¹²⁶

Despite this disrespect for the other gods of Rome, Elagabalus did express interest in the practices of Judaism and Christianity, unlike the previous members of the Severan dynasty. “He declared, furthermore, that the religions of the Jews and the Samaritans and the rites of the Christians must also be transferred to this place, [the temple of Elagabalus], in order that the priesthood of Elagabalus might include the mysteries of every form of worship.”¹²⁷ It appears that by incorporating features from all cults, especially those from the east, he attempted to unify worshipers by having one deity above all. Perhaps this was to gain support for his cult, preventing negative reaction to it.

¹²⁴Godwin, 69.

¹²⁵Magie, trans., *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Antoninus Elagabalus* 2.3:4.

¹²⁶Ibid., *Antoninus Elagabalus* 1:6-7. The selection of this site seems only to be a coincidence, as Orcus, associated with the underworld, seems not to relate with the cult of Elagabalus, a sun god.

¹²⁷Ibid., *Antoninus Elagabalus* 2.3:5.

Elagabalus cannot be given much credit regarding respect towards other cults. His many wives, at least three of whom are known, included a Vestal Virgin.¹²⁸ This latter marriage was seen as disrespectful, not only to the woman herself, but to the cult of Vesta and to Rome. Vestal Virgins “[...] had of course to guard their virginity on pain of death; their main responsibility was to look after the hearth and to maintain the sacred fire that symbolized the continuity of Rome [...]”¹²⁹ The cult of Vesta had been in Rome since the regal period, approximately seven-hundred years before Elagabalus introduced his cult to Rome. It would seem that the Syrian emperor was not only introducing his foreign cult, but he was disrespecting some of Rome’s oldest traditions. Dio claimed that Elagabalus chose the Vestal Virgin Aquilia Severa to marry for the purpose of producing a perfect and divine heir.¹³⁰

The rituals associated with the cult of Elagabalus were also offensive to Romans. Elagabalus was circumcised, as were many other members of this cult, as it was a required aspect of the priesthood.¹³¹ Circumcision had been prohibited for non-Jews during the reign of Antoninus Pius, about eighty years prior to Elagabalus’ reign, originally as an attempt to control Judaism.¹³² Dio also alludes to other rituals performed

¹²⁸Birley, 276.

¹²⁹J.A. North, Roman Religion (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.

¹³⁰Dio, 79.9:93.

¹³¹Ibid., 79.11:92.

¹³²Thomas M. Finn, From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 123.

by the emperor, such as “barbaric chants” and the slaughter of boys.¹³³ The negative opinion that contemporaries of Elagabalus had towards him seem to be consistent. The *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* also mentions human sacrifice, particularly “children of noble birth and beautiful appearance.”¹³⁴ This claim is important to note as it brings to light the severity of distaste for the emperor on the part of these contemporary writers.

Considering his behavior and unusual ritual practices, how could Elagabalus remain as emperor of Rome for four years? It seems that, as his successors before him were provincial Roman citizens, some of the members of the court may also have been of Syrian descent.¹³⁵ “Functionaries of all kinds, senators and officers, vied with each other in devotion to the patron gods of their sovereigns, gods which the sovereigns patronized in turn.”¹³⁶

Elagabalus, both the god and the emperor, however, did not ultimately last long in Rome. When Elagabalus’ behaviour became disgraceful to the family, Julia Maesa had him murdered and replaced with Alexander.¹³⁷ Elagabalus’ murder was recorded in Dio’s *Roman History*.

Due to the presence of the Praetorian guards, Elagabalus realized that he

¹³³Dio, trans. Foster, 79.11:94.

¹³⁴Magie, trans., *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Antoninus Elagabalus* 2.8:1.

¹³⁵Cumont, 113.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Birley, 275-276.

was to be executed. He then made an attempt to flee, and intended to escape to some point by being placed in a box, but was discovered and slain, having reached eighteen years of age. His mother, who embraced and clung tightly to him, perished with him; their heads were cut off and their bodies, after being stripped naked, were first dragged all over the city, and then the woman's trunk was cast off in some corner while his was thrown into the river.¹³⁸

Alexander had earlier been named by Elagabalus as the heir to the Roman throne.

“He [Elagabalus] introduced his cousin Bassianus [Alexander] before the Senate, and, having stationed Maesa and Soaemias [Elagabalus' grandmother and mother, respectively] on either hand, adopted him as his child. Then did he congratulate himself on being suddenly the father of so large a child (as if he surpassed him much in age) and declared that he needed no other offspring to keep his house free from dependency.”¹³⁹

Therefore, Alexander was legitimately the next emperor. Dio does not have a lot to say about the history of Alexander's reign, as Dio himself was not present in Rome at the time.¹⁴⁰ Herodian, besides mentioning a return to the original state of the shrines in Rome, does not discuss the religious policy of Alexander.¹⁴¹ The *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* makes note that Alexander did not want to be worshiped as a god.¹⁴² It is known that Alexander was controlled by his mother, Julia Avita Mamaea. This was

¹³⁸Dio, trans. Foster, 79.21:102.

¹³⁹Ibid., 79.17:99.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 80.2:107.

¹⁴¹Herodian, *Herodian in Two Volumes*, 2 vols., trans. C. R. Whittaker (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1969), 6.1:3.

¹⁴²*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Severus Alexander* 18:1-3.

likely due to his youth, as he was only a teenager at the start of his reign. It was Alexander who chose his mother to be proclaimed Augusta, and in turn, take charge of the empire's affairs.¹⁴³ Alexander ruled for thirteen years, but like his predecessors, he too was assassinated.¹⁴⁴ In 234 CE, German tribes and Sasanian Persians began to attack Roman territory. It was Alexander's decision to attempt a negotiation with the German attackers, rather than fight. This action resulted in his murder, which was carried out by his own troops.¹⁴⁵ Thus, the Severan dynasty was ended.

After looking at the religious beliefs of the Severan emperors, it is important to examine how the emphasis on these eastern cults affected Roman citizens. As seen above, Septimius Severus did not only introduce Syrian and Egyptian cults, he also maintained support for the popularly accepted Roman pantheon, such as Jupiter and Juno. As well, he introduced Roman cults to the provinces, like the cult of Cybele to Egypt. While Septimius was a very religious man, and open to numerous foreign cults, he was not accepting of Christianity. In fact, it has been suggested that Severus ordered Christians to be persecuted in Egypt, as the number of persecuted Christians rose drastically soon after Septimius' visit to Egypt.¹⁴⁶ Birley mentions, however, that Septimius would not have needed to order Christian persecutions, as such actions were

¹⁴³Dio, 80.1:107.

¹⁴⁴See Herodian, 6.8:3-6.9:8 for a description of Alexander's assassination.

¹⁴⁵Freeman, 470-471. These attacks would continue for the next fifty years and Rome would have at least eighteen emperors in this period of barbarian attacks.

¹⁴⁶Birley, 209.

already in place. “It had long been established that it was a capital offence merely to be a Christian. [...] Christians were arrested, prosecuted, and if they refused to recant, executed.”¹⁴⁷ Whether or not Severus was involved in ordering Christian persecution is not the issue. What is important to note is that Severus did not see the practices of Christians, or the god that they worshiped, as a potential interest for himself, despite his highly religious mind set, and his interest in religious beliefs from the Roman provinces of the east. Perhaps he saw the Christians as a potential threat. If he viewed the Christians as just another local cult, he would have left them to worship on their own. It is clear that because the “Christians obviously did not yield or retreat,”¹⁴⁸ their behaviour may have been seen as a challenge to the Roman imperial government. A majority of Roman emperors throughout the imperial period were also hostile to Jews living within the empire. Septimius is said “to have prohibited conversion [by non-Jews] to Judaism altogether.”¹⁴⁹ But it does not appear that he persecuted those already tied to Judaism.

It seems that while Christians were persecuted and conversion to Judaism was disallowed, many cults were allowed, even if the emperor was not an initiated member or a patron of the particular cult. “Much of the religious life in individual towns was in the hands of local authorities or simply left to private initiative.”¹⁵⁰ Considering the size of

¹⁴⁷Ibid.

¹⁴⁸Momigliano, 469.

¹⁴⁹Finn, 123.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 463.

the Roman Empire, the vast number of cults and the complexities of administration, it would have been nearly impossible for one man to control all aspects of religion in Roman territory. Although this was the case, there were recorded instances in which Septimius, to mark a victory near a given territory, would honour a particular temple.¹⁵¹ Therefore, when looking at how the Roman people, who were contemporary with Septimius Severus, reacted to his introduction of eastern cults in Rome, it must be concluded that, with the exception of Christians, the Roman populace responded well under his rule. This may be because the introduction of eastern cults did not interfere with their preexisting beliefs. The same cannot be said for his son Caracalla.

Caracalla is not represented well in Cassius Dio's *Roman History*. "Antoninus was allied to three races. And he possessed not a single one of their good points, but included in himself all their vices. The lightness, the cowardice, and recklessness of Gaul were his, the roughness and cruelty of Africa, the abominations of Syria whence he was on his mother's side."¹⁵² It seems that Dio's view was not unique. Birley states that one of the reasons Julia Domna committed suicide was the "shock brought on by the news that her son's death had been greeted with rejoicing at Rome."¹⁵³ This may have been due to Caracalla's tax increase on the Roman citizens, or a fear of his decreasing mental health. As discussed above, Caracalla made free people throughout the Empire citizens,

¹⁵¹Birley, 187. This was the case in 195 CE when Septimius sent a decree to Aezani, Phrygia in order to recognize the local gods after the capture of Byzantium.

¹⁵²Dio, trans. Foster, 78.6:8-9.

¹⁵³Birley, 274.

as a method of increasing his revenue from taxes by creating a larger taxable population. It was the murder of his brother, however, that caused Caracalla to suffer from endless guilt, resulting in mental illness. He seemed to use the gods to cleanse himself of this guilt. “But to Antoninus not one of the gods gave any response pertaining to the healing of either his body or his mind, although he showered attention upon all the most distinguished shrines. This showed in the clearest light that they regarded not his offerings, nor his sacrifices, but only his purposes and his deed.”¹⁵⁴ It is clear that Dio interprets Caracalla’s religious dedication as having selfish motives, not undertaken in the best interest of the empire.

While Caracalla brought in many temples of Egyptian gods, primarily Isis, it appears that he could be detrimental to Roman religion. “He erected palaces, temples and theatres in every city, which he would disdain from visiting or upon completion would have them immediately torn down,”¹⁵⁵ Caracalla was emperor for less than six years, so perhaps it is not fair to compare him to his father, and the latter’s religious role in the Empire. It is clear, however, that Caracalla did not introduce strange or unfamiliar gods to the Roman pantheon, and therefore, Roman religious response cannot be gauged, as Isis was already known to Romans, and had been for centuries. Besides some popularity in the military,¹⁵⁶ however, Caracalla was not well liked as an emperor, and was feared by

¹⁵⁴Dio, trans. Foster, 77.15:21.

¹⁵⁵“Caracalla (198-217A.D.),” On-line article.

¹⁵⁶Birley, 275. This can likely be attributed to the wealth he gave to the military, as well as the fact that he “shared their burdens.”

some. While he worshiped the gods of Egypt, the Egyptian people were not as lucky. Caracalla killed many people in Alexandria, apparently slaughtering them for “speaking of his brother’s death.”¹⁵⁷ The overall Roman view of Caracalla can best be summed up in a passage from *The Scriptorum Historiae Augustae*. “His mode of life was evil and he was more brutal even than his cruel father. He was gluttonous in his use of food and addicted to wine, hated by his household and detested in every camp save that of the praetorian guard; and between him and his brother there was no resemblance whatever.”¹⁵⁸

Elagabalus, the son of Caracalla’s cousin, was not much more popular than he was. Elagabalus’ brutal death illustrates just how hated he was as an emperor. His family, especially his grandmother, Julia Maesa, was embarrassed by his excessive sexual behavior and luxury. His mother, Julia Saemia, is said to have been viewed in the same light as her son, which is not surprising, as the two were not often separated, even in death.¹⁵⁹ The fact that he depended on his mother is not surprising, considering that he was only fourteen years of age when he was named emperor. He was clearly disliked, as well, for his wasteful attitude towards the Roman treasury.¹⁶⁰ Elagabalus treated the

¹⁵⁷“Caracalla (198-217A.D.),” On-line article.

¹⁵⁸Magie, trans., *The Scriptorum Historiae Augustae, Antoninus Caracalla* 2.9:3.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., *Antoninus Elagabalus* 2:1.

¹⁶⁰Examples of his excessive spending and waste of expensive items are found throughout the chapter on Antoninus Elagabalus in *The Scriptorum Historiae Augustae, Antoninus Elagabalus* 1:1-35:7.

people of Rome, no matter their status, with disrespect. According to one critic, “He often showed contempt for the Senate, calling them slaves in togas, while he treated the Roman people as the tiller of a single farm and the equestrian order as nothing at all.”¹⁶¹

Considering this lack of respect that Elagabalus had for the people of Rome, it is no wonder that they did not adopt his religious cult as one of their own. The cult of Elagabalus may have been more successful in Rome if the Emperor had not tried to place a foreign cult above the long-worshiped Roman cults. The fact that he wanted the god Elagabalus to be the only deity worshiped alienated him from the rest of Rome. Not only was Elagabalus a Syrian, but his god was foreign as well. The expectation that Elagabalus had of the people of Rome was unreachable. “His aspiration for one faith, one god, and one priest-king was a worthy one, but quite unremarkable in practice, in the terrible third century, and dubious in theory so long as the priest-king was someone so unstable.”¹⁶² Had Elagabalus tried to promote the concept of monotheism with a popular Roman god, such as Jupiter, for example, the idea may have been more successful, as it was later in the third century.¹⁶³

After the assassination of Elagabalus, his cult was no longer worshiped in Rome,

¹⁶¹Magie, trans., *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Antoninus Elagabalus* 2.20:1-2.

¹⁶²Godwin, 58.

¹⁶³This idea was carried out by Diocletian during his reign in 284-305 CE, but because he was a co-emperor, the situations cannot be accurately compared.

at least not until the reign of Aurelian, in the form of Sol, according to Dio.¹⁶⁴ “As for [the god] Elagabalus, he was banished from Rome altogether.”¹⁶⁵ Although Alexander Severus was also of Syrian descent, and was Elagabalus’ cousin, he had the idol taken back to Emesa in Syria.¹⁶⁶ Herodian states that the temples and shrines of Rome were restored to their original state, as they had been prior to Elagabalus’ reign.¹⁶⁷ Alexander also made donations to the temples of Serapis and Isis on the Campus Martius, deities favoured by Septimius Severus and Caracalla, respectively.¹⁶⁸ This decision was made in order to gain support and popularity among the Romans who had just endured four years under his cousin Elagabalus. The effect of Alexander Severus on religion in Rome could be described as a positive one. It appears that his desire was to maintain a sort of status quo. According to *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Alexander allowed both Jews and Christians to worship without penalty; as well, he supported Roman religious practices, such as augury, astrology and the use of the Sibylline Books.¹⁶⁹ These actions were apparently a success, as Alexander remained emperor for thirteen years.

The emperors of the Severan dynasty contributed vastly to the religious diversity

¹⁶⁴Godwin, 58.

¹⁶⁵Dio, trans. Foster, 79.21:103.

¹⁶⁶Godwin, 69.

¹⁶⁷Herodian, 6.1:3.

¹⁶⁸*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Severus Alexander* 26:8-9.

¹⁶⁹*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Severus Alexander* 22:4-5 and 27:5-6. See 43:5-7 for a brief discussion of Alexander Severus’ desire to build a temple dedicated to Christ.

of the empire. Septimius Severus and Elagabalus were provincials themselves and both were extremely involved in eastern religious customs prior to becoming Roman emperors. It cannot be denied that the emperors of the Severan dynasty in Rome played an important part in the introduction of foreign cults to Rome. Those far in the interior of the empire's vast territory, especially near Rome, would not have been exposed to these new cults had it not been for the Severan family. Septimius Severus, the first of the Severans, was a well-traveled and educated man who seemed open to numerous cults. There is evidence of his involvement in mystery cults, as well as the cults of Rome, Syria, Anatolia and Egypt. Some charge that his son, Caracalla, however, seemed to use these cults as devices to diminish his guilt over the murder of his brother. It was Elagabalus, however, who took full advantage of his authority as emperor to force his cult onto the people of Rome. It is clear, however, through the reactions of his own army, and his brutal assassination, that Rome might accept new cults, but not above their own Roman pantheon. The favoured cult of Elagabalus, *Sol Invictus Elagabal*, will be explored further in the following chapter.

_____The Severan dynasty was influential to the military and its religion. Septimius Severus was perhaps the most influential, as he had strong ties to the military. His positive reforms for soldiers made him popular amongst the troops. He was a military commander in Syria and elsewhere prior to becoming an emperor. Therefore, he was not only a part of the army, but he held one of the influential positions of authority within the military, which, as will be discussed in more detail below, were responsible for much of

the transmission of cults. As well, during his reign, Septimius made some major adjustments to the military. Firstly, he strengthened the praetorian guard by increasing their numbers to one-thousand men.¹⁷⁰ What is important to note here is that these men were drawn from the provincial legions.¹⁷¹ Septimius Severus also created three new legions, the I, II and III *Parthica* within a four year span, of which the II *Parthica* was stationed near Rome to protect the emperor from political challengers.¹⁷² Septimius was also a very religious man. Therefore, one may presume that his religious ties would have trickled down to the troops that he was so strongly connected with. Caracalla, on the other hand, had both a negative and positive relationship with the military. Many troops, who supported his late brother, were killed upon Caracalla's ascension. He was, nonetheless, quite popular among the military due to the large sums of money that he bestowed upon them.¹⁷³ In 212 CE he granted citizenship to many provincials. This allowed for a sense of unification within the empire, incorporating residents of Rome's provinces into the Roman Empire, perhaps unintentionally, allowing for the acceptance of easterners and their cults into the empire and the military. This is not to say that these individuals were missionary in nature,¹⁷⁴ but they, and therefore their beliefs, were now acknowledged by the state. The effect of Elagabalus on religion in the military would

¹⁷⁰Marcel Le Glay, et. al., A History of Rome, 3rd ed. trans. Antonia Nevill (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 379.

¹⁷¹Ibid.

¹⁷²Ibid.

¹⁷³Dio, 78.9-10.

¹⁷⁴Ramsey MacMullen, Paganism in the Roman Empire, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 111.

seemingly be a positive one, as his reign was centered around the inclusion of all cults, especially those practiced in the eastern empire. His lack of longevity as an emperor, however, suggests religious diversity was not enough to maintain political support for such an eccentric and extremist leader. Alexander Severus offered much religious freedom in the empire. He, however, did not have unanimous loyalty among the troops.¹⁷⁵ While he had support from eastern troops,¹⁷⁶ Campbell suggests that he did not provide the soldiers with the leadership, or rewards, that they had expected of him,¹⁷⁷ thus leading to his assassination.

¹⁷⁵Pat Southern, The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History, (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2006), 126.

¹⁷⁶Ibid.

¹⁷⁷Brian Campbell, The Roman Army, 31BC-AD337: A Sourcebook, (London: Routledge, 1994), 191.

Chapter #4 - Eastern Cults in the Roman Army

As discussed above, a Roman could privately worship any cult of his choosing, as long as the Roman cults were respected. While the Romans used the army as a way of introducing state religion to new citizens from the provinces, the reverse was also true. Moore notes that it was the soldiers who were mainly responsible for the introduction of the eastern cults.¹⁷⁸ In the provinces where the military was stationed, the auxiliary units were partially responsible for the spread of the cult of Elagabalus.¹⁷⁹ While serving on Rome's eastern frontiers, especially in Syria and Persia, soldiers became introduced to new deities.¹⁸⁰

Eastern cultic practices were reportedly adopted by the army as early as the first century CE.¹⁸¹ Military presence in the east, however, predates the Roman empire. A lack of inscriptions and literary evidence of an association with eastern cults in the republican period may suggest that the first century CE was the start of the process. MacMullen states that "explanation lies in plain human variety, not in place or period."¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸Clifford H. Moore, "The Distribution of Oriental Cults in the Gauls and the Germanies," Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association 38 (1907): 145.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., 117.

¹⁸⁰Gaston H. Halsberghe, The Cult of Sol Invictus (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), 36.

¹⁸¹Ibid.

¹⁸²Ramsey MacMullen, Paganism in the Roman Empire (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 65.

Therefore, we cannot base our conclusions on small samples from a given location or time frame. Nonetheless, the inscriptions and epigraphy are all that we have to base our understanding of the empire on.¹⁸³ And, according to this information, the newly converted soldiers helped to aid in the growing number of members in the cults of the eastern sun,¹⁸⁴ one of which was Mithraism. The dates of the inscriptions, mainly in the second and third centuries, correspond with the known popularity and spread of eastern cults.¹⁸⁵

The eastern cults discussed below all share a later popularity in the imperial period, flourishing in the second and third centuries. There could be many reasons for this. One possibility, which was discussed in the first chapter, is the increasing recruitment of non-Italian troops over time. A second possibility is an imperial, or authoritative, support of these cults. A third factor may be the increased transfer of troops to the eastern frontiers. An example of this is the Parthian War during the reign of Marcus Aurelius in which western troops were stationed in the east for an extended period of time. Also, we must consider that it may take the troops some time to adopt a newly introduced cult. These factors will be looked at in more depth below.

Eastern cults flourished in the army. Besides worshiping the living Roman

¹⁸³Ibid., 64-66.

¹⁸⁴Halsberghe, 36.

¹⁸⁵Moore, 137.

emperor, in the form of a standard, the troops in the Roman army were also known to have worshiped non-Roman gods. Below, I will discuss three deities commonly associated with the military. According to MacMullen, however, their inscriptions are not the most numerous, as compared to dedicatory inscriptions of other deities, such as Mercury, for example, when looking at the entire empire.¹⁸⁶ These deities, nonetheless, are worth further study, as expansion of their cults occurred within the military.¹⁸⁷ The cults associated with Mithra, Jupiter Dolichenus and Sol Invictus are valuable when studying military religion as they reflect Romanization of provincial cults, illustrate cult movements throughout the empire, and represent military religious practices in the imperial period.

¹⁸⁶MacMullen, 6.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., 118.

Mithraism in the Army

The cult of the god Mithra originated in Asia, more specifically in ancient Iran. Mithraism was a mystery cult which required initiation and excluded women. Like many mystery cults, the liturgy of Mithraism is mostly lost to modern scholarship, apart from a partial hymn verse that was preserved in Greek.¹⁸⁸ Because this was a mystery religion, not only was the liturgy kept secret, but some relevant inscriptions cannot yet be deciphered.¹⁸⁹ What is interesting about Mithraism is that it seems to have retained some elements of its eastern roots, while still being adaptable to Roman culture.

Although there was some variation in Mithraea, the ‘temples’ of Mithra, throughout the empire, the one common image found in every temple was the tauroctony.¹⁹⁰ The tauroctony is the scene in which Mithra is portrayed in the process of slaying a bull. Because this image is so prevalent in the empire, it leads us to believe that deciphering it may be the key to solving the Mithraic mysteries.¹⁹¹ Liebeschuetz notes

¹⁸⁸Franz Cumont, The Mysteries of Mithra, 2nd revised French ed., trans. Thomas McCormack (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), 150.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., 150-151.

¹⁹⁰David Ulansey, The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology & Salvation in the Ancient World (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1989), 6. Liebeschuetz also comments on how this iconography is constant, while initiation imagery varies. J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, Decline and Change in Late Antiquity: Religion, Barbarians and their Historiography (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 213.

¹⁹¹Ulansey, 6.

that this iconography is absent from Persian sites, thus making it a distinctly Roman element of Mithraism.¹⁹² The attempts of modern scholarship to interpret the remains of Mithraic iconography and inscriptions, however, have met with many challenges.

The argument of Hinnells, however, is worth mention. He argues that while the tauroctony reflects the Iranian origins of the cult, the Mithraism practiced in Rome was not based upon Iranian interpretations of the imagery.¹⁹³ Some, like Cumont, have placed much emphasis on the eastern aspects of the Roman cult.¹⁹⁴ Hinnells states the opposite: “The ancient traditions were adapted, modified and expressed in the light of contemporary ideas: ancient Iranian ideas of animal sacrifice were made meaningful to the Roman devotees.”¹⁹⁵ This was done by representing the Iranian ideas of sacrifice with the use of ‘Graeco-Roman’ designs and motifs that were contemporary to those at the time.¹⁹⁶ Hinnells does not see the Roman Mithraic cult as an adoption from the east, but as a development from its Iranian origins into Roman practices.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, we cannot label Mithraism in imperial Rome as an eastern cult, but as a distinct Roman adaptation

¹⁹²Liebeschuetz, 199.

¹⁹³John R. Hinnells, “Reflections on the bull-slaying scene” in Mithraic Studies: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies, vol. 2, ed. John R. Hinnells (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), 309-312.

¹⁹⁴Cumont, 135-137. Cumont gives a thorough description of the myth based on Zoroastrianism.

¹⁹⁵Hinnells, 312.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., 311-312.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., 305.

of an eastern cult.

Because Mithra was often viewed by Romans as the *genius*, or essence, of the sun's light, celestial patterns appear to be a valued aspect of Mithraism.¹⁹⁸ In some Mithraic iconography, there are depictions of the zodiac surrounding the central image of the tauroctony. As a result, an alternate theory for the meaning of the bull-slaying iconography states that the entire image, including the tauroctony, represents stars and constellations. While this complex association with science and astronomy may have appealed to the educated, the belief that the gods were present in all aspects of life and nature would attract those who were not as informed.¹⁹⁹

While myths were important to mystery cults at their inception, Robin Lane Fox believes that the Roman world adopted the cults and their practices without placing importance on the actual myth, as the myth and ritual developed independently of one another.²⁰⁰ Therefore, the cult of Mithra, upon adoption into the Roman world, would be valued for what it provided to the initiate, and not for its historical/mythical origins.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸Ulansey, 16. The sun and moon are represented as busts at the top of most tauroctonies, and may also be portrayed driving chariots. The other planets were also represented in the tauroctony, either as busts, or as seven stars on Mithra's cape or surrounding him.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 148-149.

²⁰⁰Robin Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1986.), 93.

²⁰¹Ibid. It is, however, important to note that much of the imagery of Mithra in Rome portrays the god in his eastern garb. "The attitude and attire of the young Iranian

What the myth provided was a sense of validity to the cult, especially in the case of the mystery cults. Lane Fox states that the myth was valued in the mysteries, as “the relation between a mythical “secret” and a cult act was very close.”²⁰² The fact that the cult had a mythical background was important, not necessarily the content of the myth. While some of the mythical imagery remained, such as that of the tauroctony discussed above, the ritual of the mystery continued without emphasis on the literal myth. With this being the case, it is important to address some of these rituals.

Mithraism was a cult that required initiation. It is called a mystery cult because initiation is required before the central idea or mystery may be known.²⁰³ Being initiated into Mithraism was a very complex process. According to Cumont, it was a seven degree initiation, in which the initiate, or mystic, took a new name at every level.²⁰⁴ These levels were, in ascending order, the Raven, Occult, Soldier, Lion, Persian, Runner of the Sun and Father.²⁰⁵ The seven levels of initiation appear to mirror “the seven planetary spheres which the soul was forced to traverse in order to reach the abode of the blessed.”²⁰⁶ The seven levels of initiation, more particularly, have been equated with the seven known

god are those of an eastern prince.” This description is of Mithra from a Mithraeum in Capua. M.J. Vermaseren, Mithriaca I: The Mithraeum at S. Maria Capua Vetere (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971.), 5.

²⁰²Lane Fox, 93.

²⁰³Ulansey, 3.

²⁰⁴Cumont, 152.

²⁰⁵Ibid.

²⁰⁶Ibid., 154.

planets in antiquity. As the initiates ascended the so-called ladder of levels, they were said to be under the protection of the planetary god that was associated with each rank.²⁰⁷ The association of planets with the grades can be seen as a form of validation to initiates for the number of levels in the cult; seven planets, therefore, seven grades.²⁰⁸ Upon examination of various Mithraea, however, some variation in the order of the planetary symbols has been found. Beck ascribes this to possible individual local sequences unique to each Mithraeum, or to changes based on specific planetary or celestial events.²⁰⁹ What does remain constant, however, is the association between each level and a planet.

The exact meanings behind each symbolic name for the initiation grades is unknown. We cannot, however, discount their presence in the Mithraic cult. In reliefs, the initiates are depicted either wearing or carrying masks portraying the various levels of initiation. One could, in fact, argue that the images we have of men in costume were used only to identify the varying levels of initiation in the illustrations, not to suggest actual role-playing on the part of the initiates. Cumont suggests that to dress and act like a divine figure, however, could be a method of identifying oneself with it.²¹⁰ Such artistic evidence, nonetheless, can only be considered an external aspect of Mithraism, as

²⁰⁷Roger Beck, Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 1.

²⁰⁸Ibid. The seven planets are Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, the Moon, the Sun and Saturn. This information was based on a mosaic found in the Mithraeum of Felicissimus in Ostia.

²⁰⁹Ibid., 13-14.

²¹⁰Cumont, 152-153.

Ulansey points out.²¹¹ In this sense, we only know the basic structure of the cult but not the importance of each level of initiation, its meaning or the key secret to the cult. It is unknown whether these aspects of the cult will ever be discovered by the modern scholar, as the teachings of Mithraism and the beliefs of the initiates are not known to have been recorded.

After studying the unique iconography and liturgy of the Mithraic cult, we must next examine what it was about this mystery that was so attractive to members of the Roman military. Cumont argued that one popular doctrine was the struggle of good against evil.²¹² This idea of a battle between right and wrong definitely parallels the life of a soldier, especially one stationed against barbarians on the frontiers. Another proposed influence that Mithraism had on the army, according to Cumont, was a promise of immortality. “The hopes of life beyond the tomb which this religion instilled in its votaries were one of the secrets of its power in these troublous times when solicitude for the life to come disturbed all minds.”²¹³ The lives of soldiers at war, or facing battle, were at risk, and a cult that could provide a guarantee of an afterlife to its adherents would be popular among them. Robin Lane Fox notes that “in the later second century, Celsus assumed that the rites of Mithras assisted the soul on its ascent through the

²¹¹Ulansey, 6.

²¹²Cumont, 148.

²¹³Ibid.

heavenly spheres.”²¹⁴ Here, however, the reference is to the soul living on.

Some, like MacMullen in particular, question Mithraism’s connection with immortality. Inscriptions inside Mithraea referring to rebirth are discounted by MacMullen because they are not clear in meaning. Inscriptions such as ‘Reborn and created for delights’²¹⁵ could be connected to initiation rituals, and imply a rebirth from one’s life before the cult into an initiate’s life. Nonetheless, evidence such as that above illustrates that the theme of death and rebirth was present for those in the cult. The presence of the concept of rebirth within the cult definitely leaves open the possibility of immortality as a promise to adherents. While MacMullen finds this evidence to be inconclusive, or to be an aspect of all mystery religions,²¹⁶ the fact that there is any literary or epigraphic evidence at all warrants further investigation into the idea. Liebeschuetz adds that while present life would not continue in death, a part of it would survive.²¹⁷ Due to the nature of his profession, a soldier would desire divine protection. Those who followed Mithraic rites in the army likely found comfort in such promised protection and perhaps even in some sense of an afterlife.

²¹⁴Origen, *Contra Celsus* 8:48 in Lane Fox, 96.

²¹⁵Ramsey MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 54.

²¹⁶Ibid., 54-55.

²¹⁷Liebeschuetz, 114-115. The person would not continue as he/she was in life, but “at least part of the human psyche survives death.”

But while Mithraism offered spiritual protection, one could argue that this could be found in numerous other mystery cults of the ancient world. What else set Mithraism apart? First, it is important to note that Mithraism was prominent within the military. Mithraists within the military were allowed exemption from other ‘pagan’ ceremonies.²¹⁸ This argument is backed by Tertullian, who describes a Christian soldier who refused to participate in pagan ceremony, and was therefore accused of pretending to be a Mithraist.²¹⁹ This treatise illustrates that Mithraism must have been recognized, and permitted, as a legitimate cult, at least by military officials. What was it about Mithra that captured the Roman soldiers’ interest enough to make Mithraism so strongly associated with the army? We know from the imagery of the tauroctony that Mithra is always armed with a sword or a knife. In the interpretation of the tauroctony as representing constellations, Speidel has equated Mithra with the constellation of Orion.²²⁰ If this interpretation is correct, then it is easy to see why a Roman soldier would be drawn to this cult. Orion, the sword-bearer, could be seen as the ideal soldier.²²¹ He was strong, carried weapons, wore a military belt and, most relevant to the bull-slaying scene, was a hunter.²²² If a soldier equated Mithra with Orion, then Mithraism would carry with it an eliteness of which a soldier could be a part: the god being worshiped was himself a

²¹⁸Lane Fox, 304.

²¹⁹Ibid. Here Lane Fox refers to Tertullian, *De Corona Militis*.

²²⁰See Michael P. Speidel, Mithras-Orion: Greek Hero and Roman Army God (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980)

²²¹Ibid., 38.

²²²Ibid.

soldier or warrior.

The worshipping soldiers would, as well, gain something from their dedication to the god, according to Speidel. “According to a widespread popular belief the constellations imparted their characteristics to those born under them, and thus Orion created officers and soldiers [...].”²²³ Because Mithra had made his worshipers into virtuous soldiers, they were dedicated to him.²²⁴ The key to the idea of Orion as Mithra, though, is that Mithra is not to be viewed as just a pattern of stars representing an idea, something inanimate. He was to be seen as a protector, “retaining an ongoing interest in their [the soldiers’] lives as a true god would.”²²⁵ This reveals a mutual relationship between god and man that would help ensure the cult’s success.

Did the Roman army worship Mithra, a native Persian god, as an incarnation of the Greek god Orion? Evidence of dedications to numerous Greek heroes have been found in military camps.²²⁶ In the case of Orion, however, evidence is sparse. The only dedication found in the entire Roman empire was in a military camp in Syria in the first century CE.²²⁷ Nonetheless, if Orion is viewed as an embodiment, so to speak, of Mithra, and is portrayed in the tauroctony as the god Mithra, as opposed to the Greek hero Orion,

²²³Ibid., 38-39.

²²⁴Ibid., 41.

²²⁵Ibid., 42.

²²⁶Ibid., 40.

²²⁷Ibid.

then, as Speidel suggests, it would be understandable that dedications would be made to Mithra, and not to Orion.

The scholarly debate over Mithraism illustrates how much of a mystery the cult really was. Watson suggests that it was because Mithraism was a mystery cult that it gained popularity among the elite: “its exclusive nature appealed primarily to the officer class.”²²⁸ The connection of Mithraism to the officer class may also help to explain its spread. There exist dedications from Mithraea near forts in Britain made by a prefect and a centurion, further illustrating the dedication of some of the officer class to the cult, and their role in its spread.²²⁹ “To the invincible Sun-god Mithras, Everlasting Lord, Publicius Proculus, centurion, on behalf of himself and his son Proculus, willing and deservedly fulfilled his vow, in the consulship of our lords Gallus and Volusianus.”²³⁰ Also, found at a Mithraeum near a fort: “To the invincible god Mithras, Marcus Simplicius Simplex, prefect, willingly and deservedly fulfilled his vow.”²³¹ Both dedications date to the third century C.E.

²²⁸G. R. Watson, The Roman Soldier (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 133.

²²⁹Brian Campbell, The Roman Army, 31BC-AD337: A Sourcebook, (London: Routledge, 1994), 135.

²³⁰*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 7. 646, inscription, Vercovicium (Housesteads), Britain, 252 CE in Campbell, 135.

²³¹*The Roman Inscriptions in Britain* 1546, inscription, Brocolitia (Carrawburgh), Britain, 3rd century CE in Campbell, 135.

Upon promotion, army officers would commonly be transferred elsewhere in the empire.²³² Each tour of duty of both officers and centurions could last just a few years. They would then be transferred to either another active post or to an administrative position.²³³ Daniels' argues that this transfer between civil and military duty allowed for numerous contacts to emerge between members of the officer and administrative classes throughout the empire, and may have facilitated the spread of the cult. The conversions of those in the officer class are very important to the idea of conversions within the military in general, as those who held an authoritative position had an influence over those beneath them. We do not know the degree of influence that the officer classes would have had over the religious lives of troops. We do have evidence of a legate, Marcus Valerius Maximianus, who was transferred to many units, mainly auxiliary, and to many provinces.²³⁴ Each unit that Maximianus commanded, produced a Mithraic dedication, although some postdate his command.²³⁵ The fact remains, however, that common soldiers, and not just the elite, made dedications to Mithra.²³⁶

In order to illustrate the importance of troop transfer to the success of Mithraism,

²³²Cumont, 40-41.

²³³C. M. Daniels, "The role of the Roman army in the spread and practice of Mithraism" in Mithraic Studies: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies, vol. 2, ed. John R. Hinnells (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), 250.

²³⁴Ibid., 254-255.

²³⁵Ibid., 255.

²³⁶Ibid., 260.

it is worth examining the movement of particular legions in the eastern empire, according to Daniels. An area of interest in this regard is the Danube frontier, where many Mithraic inscriptions have been found. It was garrisoned by a number of troops who were previously stationed in the east. The highest concentrations of Mithraic inscriptions occur in the northern and central provinces.²³⁷ This information aligns with the presence of troops on the frontiers. There is, for example, evidence of a dedication at an altar of Mithra by a centurion of the *XV Apollinaris* legion in Pannonia. The movements made by this legion are known, and can be helpful in tracing where Mithraic practices were introduced and adopted by the legion. The inscription is believed to belong to the period between 62 C.E. and 71 C.E. after the legion's transfer from the East (Armenia and Judea) back to Pannonia.²³⁸ Armenia was a known site of Mithraic worship.²³⁹ It is also worth mentioning that a number of lost troops in this legion were replaced with men from the eastern provinces of Cappadocia and Galatia, other known sites of Mithraic worship. Interest in the cult may have occurred among the troops after interaction with others in the cult.

Many eastern cults gained public support and, therefore, financial support.

Mithraism, however, was funded by those tied to the cult and remained a 'private' cult.²⁴⁰

²³⁷MacMullen, 6.

²³⁸Daniels, 251.

²³⁹Ibid.

²⁴⁰Lane Fox, 82-83.

This exclusiveness, which must have seemed to be a positive attribute to its members, likely prevented the cult from becoming universally accepted. Because Mithraism was a mystery cult, however, initiates had an increased sense of loyalty,²⁴¹ which made this cult ideal for the army. As Gherardo Gnoli states, “Mithraism promoted camaraderie on the battlefield and in the barracks.”²⁴² This loyalty or, at the very least, a familiarity with a cult that was adopted during a soldier’s time in the military continued beyond the term of service. The spread of Mithraism by the military continued during the soldiers’ retirement. It is during this phase of the soldier’s life that new people, who would not have normally had access to members of the military, would be introduced to the cults that the soldiers continued to worship. Whether a soldier settled in a town or region closest to where he was last stationed, or was sent to a newly-established colony, he and his fellow veterans would bring their acquired cults with them.²⁴³ Therefore, a soldier could be credited with aiding in the spread of religion throughout the empire twice in his lifetime. First, a centurion may have already been recruited to the cult prior to his promotion, and took the cult with him as he was transferred. And secondly, the retiring soldier, after his quarter-century of service in the military, could bring his newly adopted cults home with him. This seems to be the case for many oriental cults, including Mithraism. We must remember that, while appealing to those in the army, many of these cults were worshiped by civilians as well.

²⁴¹Gherardo Gnoli, “Mithraism,” in The Encyclopedia of Religion, 16 vols., ed. Mircea Eliade, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), 9:581.

²⁴²Ibid.

²⁴³Cumont, 60-61.

It is also important to note that dedications not only help to illustrate the locations and time periods in which Mithraic cults were established, but they also reveal much about the religious practices of the military. Roman soldiers record more information about themselves than Roman civilians do.²⁴⁴ Some of the information that can be gathered includes the rank of the personnel who made the dedication, and whether they were from a legionary or auxiliary unit. By examining the areas where Roman legions were stationed throughout Roman territory, we are able to trace where Mithraic beliefs had spread.

While numerous worshipers of Mithra were civilian, as can be seen through dedications, we do know, as discussed above, that Mithraism was present among the troops. This can be determined in many ways: the close proximity of camps to Mithraea; the discovery of Mithraic material, such as altars or tauroctonies, in known military sites; and dedications by named legions or individual soldiers or officers.²⁴⁵ In Roman Germany, there is a complete separation between Mithraic temples for military personnel and those of civilians.²⁴⁶ Those temples associated with the army were found on the sites of permanent military forts and in defensive zones.²⁴⁷ This would clearly explain the

²⁴⁴Daniels, 268.

²⁴⁵Ibid, 258.

²⁴⁶Ibid., 267. The difference between military and civilian sites can be determined by the location of the site, as well as by who made the dedications.

²⁴⁷Ibid.

exclusive nature of dedications by the military at these temples. There were, however, dedications by the military at civilian temples at other German sites. Overall, the presence of a large number of Mithraic temples and dedications in the Rhine region suggest the popularity of the cult in the area.²⁴⁸

The military appears to have had a dominant role in the introduction of Mithraism to Rome's southern territories, specifically in the African provinces. In particular, three of the Mithraic inscriptions found in the African province of Numidia were dedicated to the safety of Commodus.²⁴⁹ These inscriptions are the first that have been found in that region, and the late second century CE can therefore be marked as the probable time of the introduction of Mithraism to the area, despite the fact that there had been one legion in Africa, the *III Augusta*,²⁵⁰ since the reign of Augustus.²⁵¹ The fact that the African inscriptions are dated to the late second century, believed to be the period of the intensive spread of Mithraism in the empire, may indicate just how quickly the cult of Mithra was adopted once it was initially introduced. Due to the transfer of military elite every few years, we may be able to explain the transfer of ideas from three distant frontiers in such a short time frame. As well, Parker states that the soldiers being added to the *III Augusta*

²⁴⁸Ibid. There are about ten of these temple sites in the area. Ibid., 266-267.

²⁴⁹Ibid., 270.

²⁵⁰H.M.D. Parker, The Roman Legions, (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, Ltd., 1958), 119.

²⁵¹Marcel Le Glay, et. al., A History of Rome, 3rd ed. trans. Antonia Nevill (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 204.

were increasingly of eastern origin over the first two centuries CE.²⁵²

Daniels discusses one problematic feature of Mithraism and the military. He states that “the eastern troops who have been seen as the propagators of Mithraism across the empire did not practice that religion in the East.”²⁵³ He goes on to state that there is little evidence of military-supported Mithraic practices in the eastern provinces, despite the fact that these regions would be expected to produce massive amounts of evidence.²⁵⁴ This evidence supports the idea that the Mithraism practiced by Romans in the imperial period is a completely Romanized version of the cult. If the cult being worshiped was the Persian Mithraism of its origins, then more evidence of its existence in the east would exist. We can use the Parthian Wars of 161-166 CE as an example. Under the command of Lucius Verus, three legions were sent to the east from the Danube and Rhine regions.²⁵⁵ If the Mithraism practiced by Romans was an eastern version, one would perhaps assume that these troops would have adopted it during these wars. Despite the fact that a Mithraeum was established midway through the period in which they were stationed in the east, Francis, however, argues that this Mithraeum shows no evidence of Roman participation.²⁵⁶ MacMullen, while acknowledging the presence of the

²⁵²Parker, 182-184.

²⁵³Daniels, 273.

²⁵⁴Ibid. There is, however, some evidence of first century eastern units practicing Mithraism. Armenia and Syria have produced Mithraic evidence.

²⁵⁵Le Glay, 305.

²⁵⁶E. D. Francis, “Mithraic Graffiti from Dura-Europos” in Mithraic Studies: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies, vol. 2, ed. John R.

Romanized Mithra in the west, notes that evidence has been found at Dura, dating to the third century, that is believed by scholars to represent evidence of the cult having been brought by troops from Palmyra, who, themselves, likely adopted the cult from Europe.²⁵⁷ Francis also feels that it was not the Roman military, but the local Palmyrene militia, that was responsible for the temple.²⁵⁸ What is important to note, however, is that these Palmyrene troops were previously stationed on Roman fronts associated with Mithra, thereby having contact with the Romanized cult.²⁵⁹ Francis concludes that the Palmyrenes converted to Mithraism while serving with the Roman army.²⁶⁰

Daniels' point of a Romanized Mithraism may also help to explain its popularity in the imperial period, despite the fact that Mithraism was originally introduced to Rome in the republican period. If the cult was still viewed as foreign to the Romans in the republican period, it may not have gained the popularity that a later Roman version of the cult would. Daniels' argument is not detrimental to the theory of the military transmission of Mithraism. We know that legions move, and with them, their beliefs and religious practices. This is especially the case when looking at the elite officers. If the elite members of the unit were to be transferred, they might take their cults with them. They would have to be replaced, and with new centurions or the like, came their own cult

Hinnells (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), 429-430.

²⁵⁷MacMullen, 119.

²⁵⁸Francis, 430.

²⁵⁹Ibid.

²⁶⁰Ibid., 431.

practices. Thus, the east would be introduced to new cults as well, including the Romanized Mithra. While initially of eastern origin, Mithraism seemed to be fluid enough to become adapted to the needs of the worshiper. It seems that the cult of Mithraism is unique when studying ‘eastern’ cults, as its Romanized form seems to be what became popular in Rome and the military.

Mithraism complemented the official cults of the military (emperor-worship, and the cult of the standards) by providing an increased sense of brotherhood and comfort in battle. While Mithraism was found in Rome prior to the imperial period, evidence of devotion to this cult remains relatively sparse in the first two centuries CE. It was not until the later second century, during the reign of Commodus, that we begin to see an increase in Mithraic monuments.²⁶¹ Some relevant inscriptions are closely datable and others are dedications to particular emperors, both of which allow for estimations to be made concerning the spread of Mithraic cults.²⁶² It is apparent that there are almost no inscriptions that date before Commodus.

The major question concerning Mithraism in the empire is why it was not as prevalent in the first and early second centuries. The lack of inscriptions in this period is curious. What conditions in the late second and third centuries allowed this cult to flourish and spread? These questions are difficult to answer. A possible factor may be

²⁶¹Daniels, 252.

²⁶²Ibid., 254. Daniels makes note of a dedication to Severus, Caracalla and Geta.

the transfer of Roman troops throughout the empire. Three legions were sent from the west to the east during the Parthian Wars of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus in 161-166 CE, and many of these later returned to the west.²⁶³ Perhaps the cult's popularity was tied to imperial support. Imperial influence on religion is seen with the Severan dynasty of the late second and early third centuries, as discussed above.

Another point of interest to explore is initiation into the cult. To participate in a taurobolium would be an elaborate and expensive undertaking. Not many soldiers would be able to afford the ceremony independently. Therefore, in order for the cult to spread, a more affordable, and easier, option would have to have been available to the troops. Mithraic material has also been found at the forts of auxiliary troops,²⁶⁴ thereby suggesting its popularity among all levels of troops. One could speculate, of course, on how this cult increased its popularity and presence among the troops. MacMullen suggests that the cult grew in a "cell by cell" method, in which meetings were held that included eating, singing, and the participation in religious rites.²⁶⁵ Perhaps this was all that was required for admittance to the cult, and therefore, allowed for a greater spread of the cult and an increase in membership. Maybe only the centurion was required to partake in the ritual, thereby allowing those within his units to become members. Daniels has found that the dedicators of Mithraic material have been those of elevated status, such

²⁶³Le Glay, 305.

²⁶⁴Daniels, 253.

²⁶⁵MacMullen, 53-54.

as centurions and commanders, but also veterans.²⁶⁶ Of course, the above is only speculation.

²⁶⁶Daniels, 253.

Jupiter Dolichenus in the Military

As mentioned above, the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus, like that of Mithra, was popular within the Roman military. It must be remembered, though, that just because these cults are often associated with the military, they were not exclusive to soldiers. Civilians also worshiped these deities. But because of the popularity of these cults in the military, many mistakenly assume that these cults were exclusive to the imperial Roman army. Michael Speidel emphasizes this point in his study of Jupiter Dolichenus. He states that the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus, “while certainly strong in the military zone was by no means confined to it. The same picture emerges from the fact that only 97 out of 254, i.e. less than 40% of the dedications [found in archaeological sites connected to the god] mention soldiers, officers, veterans, or military units.”²⁶⁷ While Speidel is trying to emphasize that sixty percent of the inscriptions found were from civilians, the fact that nearly half of the dedications were military is significant. As well, it is likely that all military shrines have not yet been discovered, making the actual amount of data unknown. Many cult objects, such as statuettes, lamps and standards were buried by certain military units for the protection of the artifacts during war. For example, a shrine dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus was found in Austria in 1937, where the Roman province of Noricum was located.²⁶⁸ At a Roman fort on the site of Mauer an der Url, dating from

²⁶⁷Michael P. Speidel, The Religion of Iuppiter Dolichenus in the Roman Army (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 38.

²⁶⁸Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, “Dolichenus Find from Mauer an der Url,” <<http://www.khm.at/system2E.html?/staticE/page1564.html>> [28 August 2005].

the early to mid third century C.E., we are able to gain an understanding of the inventory of a provincial shrine that was buried for protection from invasion.²⁶⁹ The objects found include: statuettes of both Jupiter Dolichenus, standing on the back of a bull, and Victoria, the goddess of Victory; a triangular plaque with Jupiter Dolichenus, Sol, Luna, Juno Regina, Victoria and other unnamed deities in relief; as well as bells, lamps, vessels, tools and a votive plate.²⁷⁰ Sites like these help to illustrate that religious veneration was occurring in the Roman camps. Because Jupiter Dolichenus was dominant in the military during the imperial period, it is important to look at the cult's practices and how it was introduced to Romans, especially those in the military.

Jupiter Dolichenus originated in the town of Doliche on the border between Asia Minor and Syria.²⁷¹ What is unique about this cult is that it only emerged during the imperial period, and was not known about, or was not adopted by Romans in the Republican period,²⁷² prior to the reign of Augustus. So, like Christianity, it was introduced to Rome in the first century CE. What made this cult so much more intriguing and adoptable into the accepted norm of Roman religious life than Christianity? One reason is that this cult was adaptable to the existing deities in Rome. The cult did not demand primacy above other cults, or, like Christianity, to be one's only religion. As

²⁶⁹Ibid.

²⁷⁰Ibid.

²⁷¹Robert Turcan, The Cults of the Roman Empire, trans. Antonia Nevill (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1996), 159.

²⁷²Speidel, 1.

seen above, at the shrine in Noricum, Dolichenus statuettes and engravings were found among religious items, images and statuettes belonging to other deities.

Arnaldo Momigliano refers to the idea of syncretism, the practice of worshipping multiple deities and incorporating cults with one another, “with the result that the presence of Sarapis, Juno, and even Isis was implied in the shrine of Jupiter Dolichenus on the Aventine in Rome.”²⁷³ If the Romans could identify foreign, or provincial gods with one another, and with the gods of Rome, then it is understandable how the Romans would have been more apt to worship an oriental deity like Dolichenus. Ferguson categorizes Dolichenus as one of many incarnations of ‘the sky father,’ the most supreme deity, equivalent to Zeus in the Hellenistic period, Jupiter to the Romans, and to many eastern sun gods, such as Ba’al.²⁷⁴ This interchangeability between oriental deities with a supreme Roman god Jupiter, may explain a lack of physical evidence for the cult, as Ferguson notes in his study.²⁷⁵ The association of Dolichenus with other cults was, according to Watson, deliberate on the part of the priesthood, in order to increase the popularity of the cult.²⁷⁶ This policy of popularizing the cult coincides with the peak of

²⁷³Arnaldo Momigliano, “Roman Religion: The Imperial Period,” in The Encyclopedia of Religion, 16 vols., ed. Mircea Eliade, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), 12:467.

²⁷⁴John Ferguson, The Religions of the Empire (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 34.

²⁷⁵Ibid., 35.

²⁷⁶G. R. Watson, The Roman Soldier (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 132.

western worship in the third century.²⁷⁷

The fact that this god is given the name of Jupiter indicates the importance attached to this deity. As early as the emperor Hadrian's reign in the early second century he was given the name Jupiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus, and was known as "the god 'from where the iron grows', [and] appears as the lord of a major religion of the Roman Empire."²⁷⁸ Jupiter Dolichenus had been known as storm god, and was depicted as "standing on a bull, grasping a double ax and thunderbolt, wearing the 'Phrygian' cap and a sword."²⁷⁹ Although adopted by Rome, he was still depicted in ethnic costume. His cuirass was adopted in the Hellenistic period and remained in future depictions.²⁸⁰

What was it about this Syrian cult that made it popular in the imperial army? Firstly, it must be noted that if temples to Jupiter Dolichenus were built in Rome, then it definitely had the support of the Roman emperor. If a deity was venerated by the emperor, it was an accepted cult, especially within Rome itself.²⁸¹ The temples to Dolichenus in Rome were located on the Aventine, the Esquiline, and on the Caelius Hill, and seem to date to the mid second century CE.²⁸² An inscription in the Aventine temple

²⁷⁷Ibid.

²⁷⁸Speidel, 1.

²⁷⁹Ibid.

²⁸⁰Ibid.

²⁸¹Momigliano, 463.

²⁸²Speidel, 19-20.

is dated to 150 CE, during the reign of Antoninus.²⁸³ This temple remained in Rome through most of the third century CE.²⁸⁴ It must be noted, however, that this was a civilian temple.²⁸⁵ The sanctuary on the Esquiline was a mixed Dolichenum, for both military and civilian worshipers.²⁸⁶ It was enlarged twice in the second century, first by Commodus, and then again in 191 CE by soldiers.²⁸⁷ The third of Rome's temples to Dolichenus, on the Caelius Hill, is believed to have belonged to the military, specifically, the "imperial cavalry guard of the *equites singulares Augusti*."²⁸⁸ While the membership in the three Dolichena varied in Rome, Speidel suggests that because the military and the civilian temples were contemporary with one another, and the temples appear to be alike, military and civilian worship of the cult were very similar.²⁸⁹ The emperor's influence on religious choice was not as dominant outside of Rome. Therefore, we cannot base our understanding of military religion on what we know to be true in one city. Due to the tendency towards emperor worship, however, the military may have followed the lead of the emperor in whom to worship.

But besides imperial influence, which probably occurred in the second century,

²⁸³Ibid.

²⁸⁴Ferguson, 35.

²⁸⁵Speidel, 12.

²⁸⁶Ibid.

²⁸⁷Ferguson, 35.

²⁸⁸Speidel, 12.

²⁸⁹Ibid.

after the temple to Jupiter Dolichenus was built in Rome, why did the soldiers take so strongly to this god? In order to understand its popularity in the military ranks, we must first address how it was introduced to the troops. Watson suggests that the appeal of Jupiter Dolichenus may have been because he was referred to in dedications as “born where the iron is born”.²⁹⁰ The suggestion is that the connection of the deity to iron, and therefore weaponry, would be attractive to those in a militaristic profession. This may well be a valid point, but without some means of transmission from Doliche to the military, the cult’s doctrine could not have been adopted. As mentioned above, the Dolichenus temples in the city of Rome are all quite similar, whether civilian or military. This may suggest that the military shared with the general public in their methods of worship, and therefore, perhaps in the spiritual value of the cult. Speidel notes that there has been a tendency amongst scholars to simplify the military’s worship of Dolichenus in comparison to that of Roman civilians.²⁹¹ If Speidel is correct, and the military held the same relationship with the deity as civilians, then cult membership consisted of more than a camaraderie among the troops: the deities had significant meaning to the soldiers.

As seen above, Rome recruited troops from the provinces. Therefore, men from Syria, already familiar with the cult, or active members of it, were recruited into the Roman ranks. These men would have acquainted the other men in their units with

²⁹⁰Watson, 132.

²⁹¹Speidel, 11. See Allan S. Hoey, “Official Policy towards Oriental Cults in the Roman Army,” Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association 70 (1939): 456-481.

Dolichenus. Michael Speidel, using inscriptions from sites on the northern borders, illustrates that the army aided in spreading the cult by moving its eastern adherents throughout the empire.²⁹² The following inscription, made by a centurion, dates to 211-217 CE and was found on an altar in Upper Germany: “*In h(onorem) d(omus) d(ivinae) I(ovi) o(ptimo) m(aximo) Dolicheno Domit(ius) Asclepiades, domo Arethusa Suriae, 7(centurio) leg(ionis) XXII pr(imigeniae) Antoninianae v(olum) s(olvit).*”²⁹³ A second inscription, undated, but also belonging to a centurion, was found in Numidia: “*I(ovi) o(ptimo) m(aximo) Doliche[no], Valerius Rufus, 7(centurio) leg(ionis) III Aug(ustae) v(otum) l(aetus) l(ibens) s(olvit).*”²⁹⁴ Speidel uses such epigraphic evidence in order to illustrate that soldiers from the eastern empire occupied influential military positions which aided in the northern and western movement of the cult.

The cult of Dolichenus did spread under the empire. MacMullen states, in regards to those from eastern regions of the empire, that “wherever they went, [they] took with them their loyalty to their religious customs.”²⁹⁵ This reveals a movement of troops already loyal to the cult. It is important to note, however, that MacMullen notes the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus, along with that of Mithra, as a cult showing growth through

²⁹²Speidel, 8-9.

²⁹³From *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* XIII, 11811 in *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁹⁴From *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* VIII, 18223 in *Ibid.*, 8-9.

²⁹⁵Ramsey MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 38.

conversion.²⁹⁶ MacMullen argues that this remarkable growth, although perhaps exaggerated, would have been due to those of eastern origin in the west and those stationed within the military.²⁹⁷ Relevant monuments and inscriptions have been found as far away from Doliche as Hadrian's Wall in northern Britain.²⁹⁸ Ferguson refers to a now lost inscription found at Caerleon, a shrine at Ribshire, a bronze head at Cirencester, and fragments related to the cult on the Antonine Wall.²⁹⁹

There are at least three ways to explain the movement of this eastern cult. The first possibility occurred as early as the late first century CE, when some of the eastern legions who had fought in the east, were later posted in the west.³⁰⁰ Campaigns into Dacia and Parthia under Trajan in the early second century CE³⁰¹ may have also have acted as a point of introduction of eastern culture to Roman troops. Therefore, with followers of the cult of Dolichenus being transplanted to western provinces, the cult itself was introduced to western soldiers. The families of these men, including their daughters and wives, also subsequently joined in the worship of this cult.³⁰² A second possible

²⁹⁶Ibid., 118.

²⁹⁷Ibid.

²⁹⁸Ferguson, 35.

²⁹⁹Ibid.

³⁰⁰Turcan, 167.

³⁰¹Marcel Le Glay, et. al., *A History of Rome*, 3rd ed. trans. Antonia Nevill (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 290.

³⁰²Turcan. 167. See also Watson, 133-138 on the Roman military's policy on marriage and soldiers.

reason for the spread of the cult was the centurions, who moved from legion to legion throughout the Empire, likely taking their cults with them. After about three years with one unit, a centurion would be transferred to another.³⁰³ And a third possibility for the cult's adoption by Romans was its association with similar deities. Watson, however, believed that this was what led to the downfall of the cult.³⁰⁴ Associations with other cults can lead to a loss of individuality within the cult. The need to worship a particular cult is lost, as it no longer offers the worshiper a unique experience that cannot be found within another cult. This may be because Dolichenus was seen as a form, or incarnation, of Jupiter, and not an independently valuable deity. As well, Ferguson notes that there are associations between the sky god and sun god.³⁰⁵ This may explain why the cult of Dolichenus has the least amount of evidence found in comparison to other deities associated with Jupiter, as illustrated by MacMullen.³⁰⁶ Jupiter Dolichenus, however, was popular among soldiers for his protection on the battlefield, but the spiritual aspect must not be overlooked. This cult would not have existed outside of the military, and among civilians, if it did not offer more to the worshiper than security and safety in battle.³⁰⁷

³⁰³Yann Le Bohec, The Imperial Roman Army (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1994), 74.

³⁰⁴Watson, 132.

³⁰⁵Ferguson, 35.

³⁰⁶MacMullen, 6.

³⁰⁷Speidel, 11.

Sol Invictus

Worship of the sun as a god is one of Rome's oldest practices, and can be dated in its origins from the fourth to second century BCE.³⁰⁸ This dedication to the sun went beyond the observation of the solar cycle, and can be identified as cultic worship.³⁰⁹ The connection between the sun deity and Jupiter is believed to date to this foundation period as well.³¹⁰

During the late republican period, and at the start of the imperial period, eastern cults lost favour, and a renewed interest was placed in Rome's older and perhaps more forgotten deities.³¹¹ This resulted in a resurgence of the cult of Sol. In establishing the Roman empire, Augustus wanted a distinctly Roman foundation, and so he naturally returned prominence to Rome's traditional gods. This was the case in the military as well. The official list of festivals, the *Feriale Duranum*, does not contain a single entry regarding eastern cults.³¹² Therefore, it is important to note that when the two Egyptian

³⁰⁸Gaston H. Halsberghe, The Cult of Sol Invictus (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), 27.

³⁰⁹Ibid.

³¹⁰Ibid.

³¹¹Ibid., 28-29.

³¹²Allan S. Hoey, "Official Policy towards Oriental Cults in the Roman Army," Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association 70 (1939): 457. This document, which dates to the reign of Alexander Severus, maintains the official canon set forth by Augustus. This calendar of festivals, according to Nock, was considered to be more of a guideline, especially in the third century Near East, where it was found. Arthur Darby Nock, "The Roman Army and the Roman Religious Year," The Harvard Theological Review 45, no. 4 (October 1952): 229.

obelisks, dedicated to Egypt's version of the sun god, were brought to Rome by Augustus, they were rededicated to Rome's own sun god.³¹³ This rededication to deities of Roman origin, however, did not last. The sun remained a popular deity, though not as its distinctly Roman form of *Sol Indiges*, but as an eastern cult, beginning in the second century CE.³¹⁴ This was part of a gradual change as eastern ideas slowly began to be introduced to Rome.

How was the eastern form of the sun god introduced to the military? We know that many troops were stationed in Rome's eastern provinces. Some scholars think this contact accounts for the adoption of these cults. It is important to note, however, that Roman troops were stationed in the east in the republican period as well. So, one must also ask why was the cult adopted in the second century CE, and not sooner? It seems that imperial influence had a part in the adoption of these cults, which will be discussed in greater detail below. Not only were some rulers patrons of these cults, as seen with the Severans above, but some proved to be a hindrance to them as well. For example, Nock discusses how Augustus, in the first century, destroyed the temple to Isis and disapproved of worship of Egyptian cults.³¹⁵ Augustus' emphasis on distinctly Roman religious practices may help to explain why eastern cults were not as popular in the early empire.

³¹³Halsberghe, 29-30.

³¹⁴Ibid., 35.

³¹⁵Nock, 213-214.

Nock suggests, nonetheless, that there was nothing in the republican period that would have prevented a freedom of private worship.³¹⁶ If this is the case, then one must explain the lack of military involvement in eastern cults prior to the imperial period. One idea that comes to mind is the constant state of war on the eastern borders during the republican period. If in battle for territory, perhaps the troops would not be willing to, or have the desire to, adopt the favoured cults of their enemies. It was not until 69 BCE, for instance, that Pompey declared Syria to be a Roman province and afterwards, it remained relatively peaceful.³¹⁷ During the imperial period, when the popularity of these cults among soldiers increases, Rome already has ownership of these territories, such as Syria. In times of peace, perhaps, a soldier may be more interested in the cults of the east, as they may not have been seen, necessarily, as the cults of the enemy.

Another point to consider when looking at an increasing interest in eastern cults in the imperial army, is the possible recruitment of soldiers native to these territories. Cumont states that many foot soldiers were drawn from the Syrian population throughout the imperial period, and were then stationed throughout the empire.³¹⁸ Parker states that, as early as Nero's reign, troops were being recruited from the east.³¹⁹ He uses the *III*

³¹⁶Ibid., 211-212.

³¹⁷Marcel Le Glay, et. al., A History of Rome, 3rd ed. trans. Antonia Nevill (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 100, 176.

³¹⁸Franz Cumont, Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 111-112.

³¹⁹H.M.D. Parker, The Roman Legions, (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, Ltd., 1958), 181-182.

Gallica as an example, stating that two Syrians were transferred from this legion to *III Augusta*.³²⁰ It can be assumed that these men would have maintained their religious beliefs.

It should be noted, however, that eastern troops within the military may have aided in the conversion of Roman troops, although we do not know this for sure. What we do know is that worship of the sun took place among those of the *III Gallica*, which Parker suggests confirms the eastern descent of the troops.³²¹ Tacitus, as well, notes that, in 69 CE, “the soldiers of the third legion saluted, as is the custom in Syria, the rising sun.”³²² If these provincial men were a part of the Roman military in the first century, and we know that the cult increased in popularity in the second and third centuries, perhaps the presence of eastern troops is not the reason for the cult’s success. It seems that for the cult to have flourished as it did, conversion had to be taking place. MacMullen states, however, that, as opposed to Christians, “pagans had never sought to make converts *to* any cult.”³²³ Therefore, if conversion was not an active missionary-type activity, could it have been a slower occurrence? We know that soldiers during and after Constantine’s

³²⁰Ibid., 182.

³²¹Ibid.

³²²Tacitus, *The History 3.24*, from The Complete Works of Tacitus, ed. Moses Hadas, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (New York: The Modern Library, 1942), 552.

³²³Ramsey MacMullen, Paganism in the Roman Empire (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 132.

conversion to Christianity maintained their pagan beliefs for years.³²⁴ This phenomenon may be explained by Christianity remaining as a taboo religion for so many years. As well, it appears that the policy towards a freedom of worship that was offered to soldiers, while now allowing Christianity, also did not force it on them.

While the official policy of the army did not accept eastern cults, it seems very clear that soldiers had the freedom to worship eastern deities, as dedications throughout the empire illustrate.³²⁵ Evidence of dedications, such as those that identify the emperor Caracalla with Sol Invictus, have been found in areas of the empire that had continuous military occupation, like the Rhine.³²⁶ “[A]t Wittenberg in the reign of Marcus Aurelius Q. Antistius Adventus, legatus Augusti pro praetore (provinciae Germaniae Inferioris), set up a dedication to Sol Invictus and eight other associate divinities; and at Mogontiacum in 213 A.D. the legatus pro praetore Germaniae Superioris erected a statue in honor of Caracalla, whom he identified with deus invictus Sol.”³²⁷ Coinage and inscriptions also depict eastern gods popular in the army, with the exception of Mithra, represented in military attire.³²⁸ Kantorowicz argues, however, that the military attire

³²⁴Ibid.

³²⁵Hoey, 457.

³²⁶Clifford H. Moore, “The Distribution of Oriental Cults in the Gauls and the Germanies,” Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association 38 (1907): 113-115.

³²⁷Ibid., 141.

³²⁸Ernst H. Kantorowicz, “Gods in Uniform,” Proceedings of the American Philological Society 105, no. 4 (15 August 1961): 379. There is only one case of Mithra in military garb. See Kantorowicz’s article.

does not mean that the deities were “soldier gods.”³²⁹ He suggests that military garb was commonly worn by emperors after the first century.³³⁰ What is interesting, and especially relevant, is that it was primarily the non-Roman, eastern gods who were portrayed in uniform, and not typically Roman gods. This is explained as an attempt of the foreign cults to become more appealing to the Romans.³³¹

Hoey argues that eastern cults were not only tolerated within the military, but were encouraged.³³² Whether or not this was the case, eastern cults were not readily accepted into the official religion of the Roman military, as this process would mean the cult would have to be practiced by the entire military of the empire.³³³ Therefore, tolerating the practice of an eastern cult was more practical, as a favoured cult may vary by region or legion. There was one eastern cult, however, that would become officially accepted by the military: Sol Invictus. Therefore, as an official cult, worship of Sol Invictus would become empire-wide; thus, even though this cult may not have had active missionaries, it was able to spread as the empire did its work for it.

The popularity of the sun god can be seen in the Roman province of Egypt by the second century C.E. Contemporary statues of the Egyptian god Horus were found

³²⁹Ibid., 380.

³³⁰Ibid., 381.

³³¹Ibid., 384.

³³²Hoey, 458.

³³³Ibid.

dressed in military garb. While one of these figures is wearing Egyptian clothing, he wears a Graeco-Roman crown and sun rays surround his head, suggesting a connection with the sun god.³³⁴ On another bust, Horus is dressed in accurate Roman officer attire.³³⁵ The addition of Roman features to an Egyptian god suggest a Roman religious influence, as well as a dominant military presence. Another interesting feature of some of these statuettes is a raised right arm, an imperial gesture used when addressing legions.³³⁶ This may suggest that these statuettes were used by soldiers, due to the presence of both military attire and features of the sun god, a popular cult within the military.

It is with Sol Invictus that an elevation of one deity above others appears to develop, though this acceptance of henotheism in the early Roman empire is not argued by all scholars. There is a question as to why Romans would elevate some deities and demote others. MacMullen states that the practice of elevating one deity above the others “was to imply a subordination not very flattering to the inferior.”³³⁷ A Roman society, known for its acceptance of a vast number of various gods, seems unlikely to adopt such practices. Perhaps, in recognizing the glory of the sun, the acceptance of the cult as valid by Romans may appear to some to be an emphasis on one cult. Thus a simple preference towards one cult may appear to be trend towards monotheism, while in fact a more

³³⁴Kantorowicz, 370-371.

³³⁵Ibid., 371.

³³⁶Ibid., 372.

³³⁷MacMullen, 83.

accurate term for this phenomenon is henotheism. In the early third century, the emperor Elagabalus attempted to have *Sol Invictus Elagabal* recognized as the supreme deity, as he, Elagabalus, was supreme in Rome.³³⁸ Henotheism is founded on the idea of one deity that is above all other gods, not a recognition of only one god. Elagabalus attempted to absorb qualities from other cults into one large cult, instead of making one deity supreme. MacMullen notes that some, like Cornelius Labeo, writing in the mid third century, suggested that all gods were just different aspects of the same, singular god.³³⁹ MacMullen argues that one could not be a monotheist, however, if one retained a belief in other deities.³⁴⁰ Even though Romans must still be considered to be polytheists, however, the occasional elevation of a deity to a supreme status may show a trend towards henotheism.

The attempt of Elagabalus to elevate the Syrian Sol Invictus to the top of Rome's pantheon was not such a foreign idea. Sol was known to Romans. The Syrian Sol Invictus was introduced and worshiped by many of Rome's emperors in the second century CE, including Hadrian. Hadrian, who had personally traveled to Rome's eastern frontier, began to seek personal identification with the sun god, so much so that the sun, portrayed as driving a four-horse chariot, was frequently portrayed on his coinage.³⁴¹ The

³³⁸Cumont, 114.

³³⁹MacMullen, 87.

³⁴⁰Ibid., 88.

³⁴¹Halsberghe, 46.

later second century, as well, saw a continued spread of the cult of Sol Invictus, illustrated by numerous dedications to the deity.³⁴² This trend of emperors as adherents to the cult of Sol Invictus continued with Commodus. He, like Hadrian, had the sun god depicted on his coinage, but took it one step further in adding “invictus” to the imperial title, and Septimius Severus actually put the title “invicto imperatori” onto his coins.³⁴³ What is most important to note is that it was during the reigns of the Severan dynasty, specifically Septimius and Alexander Severus, that eastern cults began to have official support within the military.³⁴⁴ It is also of note that during and after the reign of Septimius Severus, eastern gods, including Sol Invictus, begin to appear on coinage before their cults become officially accepted by the state.³⁴⁵

It is important to next examine the cult’s structure. Under Elagabalus, a college of priests for the cult was initiated and was actually run by the emperor, who was a priest of the cult himself.³⁴⁶ Not much is known about the structure of the college, but what separates this cult from other eastern examples, such as Mithraism, is that there was not an internal hierarchy or levels of initiation.³⁴⁷ This may have drawn more adherents, as initiation to the cult would not have required an extended indoctrination process. We do

³⁴²Ibid., 46-47.

³⁴³Ibid.

³⁴⁴Hoey, 456.

³⁴⁵Ibid., 470.

³⁴⁶Halsberghe, 76-77.

³⁴⁷Ibid., 77.

know that the priesthood was powerful and dedications have been found referring to individual priests as protectors.³⁴⁸

Priests of this cult were, however, not tied to the cult of Sol Invictus alone and could be priests of other Roman cults.³⁴⁹ This seems to contradict the argument that the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal was monotheistic, as some have argued. It would seem to be expected that the priests of a “monotheistic” cult would be required to serve only one god, the sun. It could be, however, that this idea refers to a supreme deity above all others. If this were the case, membership in another cult would not seem to be an issue if a sort of divine hierarchy was recognized. But what was it about Sol that would convince a worshiper that he was the highest god? It seems that Sol Invictus Elagabal was deemed supreme because he was more than just an abstract deity, like the other gods, but was a being that was incarnate and could be seen everyday as the sun.³⁵⁰ This belief stemmed from the Syrian origins of the cult, where astrology and the role of the sun was accepted and present in day to day life.³⁵¹ Because the sun never failed to rise in the east, the altars were all placed facing in the same direction.³⁵² The fact that altar placement did not vary illustrates the importance placed on the physical sun for the cult of Sol Invictus.

The supremacy of Sol Invictus Elagabal, however, did not become a permanent fixture in

³⁴⁸Ibid., 78.

³⁴⁹Ibid.

³⁵⁰Ibid., 81.

³⁵¹Ibid.

³⁵²Ibid.

Roman society.

It is necessary to recognize the imperial bias at the time, which may have coloured historical interpretation, or as MacMullen says in reference to the sun god, “a point at which religious and political history intersect.”³⁵³ Here, MacMullen points out that the god in question, the sun, is not just the emperor’s favoured cult, but that the deity is seen as one and the same with the emperor, thus, making dedication to the cult an act of emperor worship.³⁵⁴ Again, because these monotheistic tendencies occur only with three emperors, Elagabalus, Aurelian and Constantine, the concept cannot be attributed to the entire imperial period. MacMullen notes that limited, and questionable, sources are not enough to base a conclusion of monotheism upon Roman deities.³⁵⁵

Another of MacMullen’s arguments is that to give absolute power to one deity would take everything from the others, thereby destroying the entire Roman culture.³⁵⁶ Therefore, associating the deity Sol with monotheism must be done with caution. Yes, some emperors attempted to make Sol a supreme deity above all others. We do not, however, know if these were just proposed concepts, or if they were, at least partially, practiced. What is apparent is that Sol seems to be the deity most associated with the

³⁵³MacMullen, 85.

³⁵⁴Ibid.

³⁵⁵Ibid., 85-86.

³⁵⁶Ibid., 88.

concept of monotheism. It seems clear, however, that this was not a product of trend, but individual desire and political will.

What aspects of the cult of Sol Invictus would have been appealing to the masses? A promise of an afterlife may help to explain its attraction to the military. In a profession that forces one to face death on a daily basis, this guarantee of a blissful life after death ties one to the cult on an emotional level.³⁵⁷ In combining the above two ideas, that of conquering darkness and a promised afterlife, the appeal of Sol Invictus Elagabal can be better explained. The conquering power of Sol Invictus was passed from god to adherent in order to guarantee military victories, but also victory over evil spirits in life, as well as in death.³⁵⁸ And like the sun's nightly battle with darkness in which success was always guaranteed, the devotees would be led out of the darkness towards eternal light.³⁵⁹

The above concept of Halsberghe, while sound in theory, does not establish whether the belief in the afterlife was the consensus of all common soldiers, or just a modern concept developed to explain a connection to the deity. MacMullen quotes Seneca: "The greater part of the people know not why they do what they do."³⁶⁰ Applying this argument to the above paragraph causes one to question if all devotees to Sol had the

³⁵⁷Halsberghe, 80.

³⁵⁸Ibid., 81.

³⁵⁹Ibid.

³⁶⁰Quoting Seneca from Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 6.11 in MacMullen, 101.

same reasons for joining the cult. Perhaps the idea of an afterlife appealed to some. Most, however, probably followed the crowd, or favoured the cult for some sort of personal benefit. MacMullen argues that vast concepts, such as the afterlife, or even monotheism, were unappealing to most.³⁶¹ These ideas would have only been attractive to the philosopher type, as these concepts involved deep understanding and knowledge, and likely would not have been of interest to those in the military.³⁶²

The introduction of Roman soldiers to this cult was due to first hand exposure to it, as was the case with many other cults. Syria held the largest population of Roman troops in the East, and Syrian governors, during the imperial period, also held the position of military commander in the East.³⁶³ One example of western legions being moved to the east was in 162 CE during the Parthian Wars of Marcus Aurelius' reign. At least three full legions from the Rhine-Danube territories, and contingents from four others, were sent to Syria.³⁶⁴ This is an important example, because this action of transporting the troops out of province was not according to policy.³⁶⁵ A legion, if used elsewhere in the empire, was to be returned to its province, yet, legion *V Macedonia* for example, was sent from Syria to be stationed in Dacia, keeping it in the east.³⁶⁶ Because the cult of Sol

³⁶¹MacMullen, 90.

³⁶²Ibid.

³⁶³Halsberghe, 38.

³⁶⁴Parker, 166-167.

³⁶⁵Ibid., 167.

³⁶⁶Ibid.

Invictus Elagabal was centered in Emesa in Syria, there was an increased chance of exposure to it on the part of Roman troops stationed in the area. As well, enlisted Syrian troops brought their deity with them when they were stationed in other regions.³⁶⁷ The cult was not closed to outsiders. In fact the contrary was true. Fellow troops who did not feel satisfied with state religion were welcome to join the Syrians and their cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal.³⁶⁸ Temples were built throughout the second and third centuries dedicated to their deity.³⁶⁹ This construction clearly illustrates that eastern soldiers or new adherents were not secretive or private. Again, as discussed above, the imperial support of these cults during the late second and third centuries likely aided in the flourishing of the cults of Sol. The openness of the cult of Sol Invictus would also have been valuable to the military. The reign of Septimius Severus marked the start of a merging of military and civilian lives. Soldiers were permitted to live outside of the military camps with their families.³⁷⁰ If all were welcomed into this cult, a soldier and his wife and children could worship together, as temples of eastern cults were erected outside of camp walls.³⁷¹

³⁶⁷Halsberghe, 39.

³⁶⁸Ibid., 40.

³⁶⁹Ibid.

³⁷⁰Hoey, 467.

³⁷¹Ibid., 463. If a cult was not an official cult, recognized by the emperor, it would be excluded from the praetorium, and therefore, had to remain outside of the camp walls. The exception to this is the military camp in Dura, in which many eastern cults were located within the camp walls. This has been explained, however, as the camp was built into an established city. Ibid., 465.

Senators and members of the cult's priesthood were free to support their national beliefs, and did so readily in order to aid in its spread.³⁷² The priesthood was strengthened by the fact that the only responsibilities that a priest held were to his cult and its success, which also led to strong efforts in assuring its spread.³⁷³ The elite, or priestly classes, and eastern worshipers were not the only devotees who spread this cult. As priests could be civilians and not military, with the exception of the occasional veteran, they remained outside of the camp walls.³⁷⁴ Within Roman cults, the commander fulfilled the majority of the priestly roles, while eastern cults required that a priest be the only individual to carry out a sacrifice.³⁷⁵

During the reign of Elagabalus, in which the high priest and the emperor were one and the same, Syrian rituals were prevalent in Rome's capital. Sacrifices were made to Sol every morning at the altars of the imperial palace, at the Elagabalium, or place of worship, and elsewhere.³⁷⁶ Because he was a priest, Elagabalus could act as an augur in order to interpret the meanings of the entrails of the sacrificial animals.³⁷⁷ Elagabalus did not just bring his Syrian cult to the west, he incorporated Syrian culture into the empire.

³⁷²Halsberghe, 40.

³⁷³Ibid.

³⁷⁴Hoey, 471.

³⁷⁵Ibid.

³⁷⁶“The sacrifices made by the emperor in this manner usually consisted of hecatombs of sheep and bulls, libations of rare perfumes and excellent old wines, mixed with blood of sacrificial animals.” Halsberghe, 85.

³⁷⁷Ibid., 84.

For these ceremonies, and as head priest, Elagabalus would dress in ornate, jewelled, Syrian robes and silk dresses, decorate his face and around his eyes with makeup, and surround himself with Eastern music and dancing women.³⁷⁸

Elagabalus did not just practice these rituals publicly, but he incorporated Roman officials into the ceremony as well. The officials included military commanders and other state functionaries whom Elagabalus honoured by allowing them to partake in the sacred rituals.³⁷⁹ This is important to note, as it is clear that by incorporating elite members of both the political and military spheres into the cult, Elagabalus was emphasizing the importance of the cult to all segments of society. These lavish ceremonies, however, took place in Rome, not throughout the empire. Therefore, any attraction tied to Elagabalus and his cult would not necessarily have had an immediate impact outside of the city.

While Elagabalus placed Sol Invictus as the supreme deity, however, he did not attempt to eliminate other cults present within the empire. In fact, quite the opposite was true. Elagabalus was himself an initiate into other mystery cults, including that of the Magna Mater, in which he was baptised by blood during the *taurobolium* ritual.³⁸⁰ As mentioned above, the emperor used his memberships in other cults in order to be able to

³⁷⁸Ibid.

³⁷⁹Ibid., 85.

³⁸⁰Ibid., 84-85.

add the symbols of their deities in his temple to Sol Invictus, the *Elagabalium*.³⁸¹ This, again, illustrates Elagabalus' desire to unify the cults of Rome, and create a cult that was all encompassing. Clearly one cannot call the emperor a monotheist, as he would not have acknowledged the rituals of these other cults, and would not have valued the symbols of these deities if he were.

That the cult was preferred by the emperor is indeed illustrated by the summer festival of Sol Invictus Elagabal in which the conical black stone, the symbol of the deity, was carried by a covered horse drawn chariot in an elaborate procession between temples.³⁸² Leading the way in this procession were symbols and images of other gods,³⁸³ again illustrating their presence and acceptance by the emperor. Their presence at the front of the procession, however, does represent a lesser emphasis on them, as they led the way for the supreme deity.³⁸⁴ The military participants in the procession included a centurion and standard bearer of the praetorian guard.³⁸⁵ The emperor and highest priest led the chariot of the deity by the reins, walking backwards, so as not to look away from their god.³⁸⁶ At the end of the procession, sacrifices were made. It is clear, however, that

³⁸¹Ibid.

³⁸²Ibid., 85-87.

³⁸³Ibid., 87.

³⁸⁴Ibid. Halsberghe, here, describes the other deities as "body-guards who preceded their lord and master Elagabal."

³⁸⁵Ibid., 86.

³⁸⁶Ibid., 88.

while Elagabalus had attempted to make Sol Invictus the supreme god of Rome, the Roman citizens did not value the deity to the same extent as their emperor. The crowd valued gifts of fabric, animals and precious metals that followed sacrifices, as well as the games and entertainment of the festivals, more-so than the religious aspects of the event.³⁸⁷ Other festivals of both Rome's native and imported deities continued to be held.³⁸⁸ This is likely one of the primary reasons that the cult did not become as influential upon Romans as it could have.

The Syrian traditions that accompanied the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal were taken to the extreme by the emperor, who was believed by many to show signs of insanity.³⁸⁹ Many accounts are given describing the horrific actions of Elagabalus, including the sacrifice of children. Although primary sources allow us to get first hand information, the question has been raised whether or not this information was exaggerated or even misunderstood by those either not in the cult, or out of hatred for the emperor who was later assassinated.³⁹⁰

It is clear from the reaction to emperors, such as Elagabalus, why Rome maintained a policy which excluded non-Roman cults from the official pantheon. The

³⁸⁷Ibid., 88-89.

³⁸⁸Ibid., 88.

³⁸⁹Ibid., 95.

³⁹⁰Cumont, 114.

drastic break in tradition was unpopular, likely because it was accompanied by a weak emperor. There was, however, a more practical reason behind the centralization of religion within the military. Foreign cults were already accepted within the empire outside of the military, but the fear of “barbarization and decentralization” within the army could have posed a security risk to the empire.³⁹¹

Sol Invictus did not disappear from Rome following the assassination of Elagabalus four years after his accession. The cult of Sol Invictus was officially revived in Rome by the emperor Aurelian fifty years later.³⁹² In the period between the two emperors, the cult did not completely disappear from the empire. Of course it remained popular in Syria, as the cult symbol, the black stone, was returned to Emesa.³⁹³ But many outside of Syria also remained loyal to the cult, for many Syrians lived throughout the empire and had brought their beliefs with them. The *sacerdotes Solis Invictus* are believed to have remained in the capital, despite the cult’s obvious connection with the assassinated emperor, on the basis of dedications found after his death.³⁹⁴ Clearly cult activities would have been reduced following the death of the emperor, however, as he was its major adherent.³⁹⁵ The daily public rituals would not be prominent, as the

³⁹¹Hoey, 477.

³⁹²Cumont, 114.

³⁹³Halsberghe, 106.

³⁹⁴Ibid., 107. This argument is based on a lack of evidence of the demise of the priesthood, as opposed to evidence of its remaining presence.

³⁹⁵Ibid.

symbolic stone had been returned to Emesa. The temples of Sol Invictus Elagabal in Rome nevertheless remained in the city, acting as a constant reminder of the cult and its ongoing presence.³⁹⁶ Some coinage dating to the reign of Gallienus also features Sol Invictus.³⁹⁷ Emesa itself remained a prominent religious centre despite its negative associations.³⁹⁸

As discussed above, many legionaries, and auxiliary troops especially were drawn from Syria's population after it had been conquered by Rome.³⁹⁹ Troops from this region were stationed in large numbers in both Europe and Africa.⁴⁰⁰ Cumont states that during the imperial period, though not specific under whose reign, a cohort of one-thousand archers, for example, was recruited from Emesa and then stationed in Pannonia.⁴⁰¹ Emesa, as mentioned above, was the religious center of Syria, and was home to the high-priesthood of Sol Invictus Elagabal. These troops may have continued their worship and helped to enable its spread outside of Syria. Syrians maintained a strong population throughout Rome as soldiers, dignitaries or members of other professions. Therefore, whether the cult symbol was present in Rome or was sent back to Emesa, worship

³⁹⁶Ibid.

³⁹⁷MacMullen, 84-85. This is important to note as Gallienus ruled between the two major patrons of Sol Invictus, Elagabalus and Aurelian.

³⁹⁸Halsberghe, 107.

³⁹⁹Cumont, 111-112.

⁴⁰⁰Ibid., 112.

⁴⁰¹Ibid.

continued because the cult itself was so firmly established. Despite the fact that Elagabalus, its high priest, was killed, the priesthood itself continued and its worshipers remained, even without imperial support.⁴⁰² Therefore, a surviving foundation was set for the cult's next imperial supporter, Aurelian.

The lasting foundation was, in part, a result of the dynamics of the cult. It was unlike Mithraism, which was a mystery cult and involved a multiple level initiation in cave-like structures. The cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal was a more Roman-style cult. Both the state religion in Rome and the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal had large public temples and were run by a religious authority who was also a powerful public official.⁴⁰³ In tying the religious and political elements together, the cult could be ensured support, as it was an official cult. It has been noted, by contrast, that even a popular cult like Mithraism was not official, despite its popularity among the elite, as it was not established as such by the emperor.⁴⁰⁴

When Aurelian came to power, imperial support of the cult re-emerged. During Aurelian's war with Zenobia, he reconquered Syria for Rome. "And so, having reduced the East to its former state, Aurelian entered Emesa as a conqueror, and at once made his way to the Temple of Elagabalus, to pay his vows as if by a duty common to all. But

⁴⁰²Halsberghe, 106.

⁴⁰³Ibid., 118.

⁴⁰⁴Ibid.

there he beheld that same divine form which he had seen supporting his cause in the battle.”⁴⁰⁵ Here it is apparent that conquering a territory and its people did not mean an end for their native traditions. In fact, the traditions were honoured and brought back to Rome. A comparison can be drawn, here, between Aurelian and Constantine. Both emperors attribute military successes, at least in part, to a deity: Aurelian with Sol Invictus Elagabal and Constantine with Christ. Constantine will be discussed in greater detail below.

The imperial influence as to which deities to worship would revive support for this cult, especially among the troops involved in this particular battle. The soldiers of the imperial army were responsible, at least in part, for the dispersion of cults throughout the empire. This is the case when considering Syrian cults as well. Inscriptions illustrate that the cult of Sol Invictus was spread by the army, but do not, however, reveal which particular military body is credited with the introduction of the cult to the northern territories.⁴⁰⁶

While emperors were adherents of many cults, that of Sol Invictus Elagabal was instituted in Rome by an emperor. This imperial support returned with Aurelian. His dedication to the sun god was apparent, even outside of Rome. After destruction of a

⁴⁰⁵*The Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, 3 vols., trans. David Magie (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), *The Deified Aurelian* 25:2.

⁴⁰⁶Moore, 122. Those who dedicated these inscriptions from the Rhine region vary from prefects to cohorts to the lower classes.

temple in the east, Aurelian ordered it rebuilt. Specifically, The *Scriptores Historia Augusta* states:

Now as to the Temple of the Sun at Palmyra, which has been pillaged by the eagle-bearers of the Third Legion, along with the standard bearers, the dragon-bearer, and the buglers and trumpeters, I wish it restored to the condition in which it formerly was. You have three hundred pounds of gold from Zenobia's coffers, you have eighteen hundred pounds of silver from the property of the Palmyrenes, and you have the royal jewels. Use all these to embellish the temple; thus both to me and to the immortal gods you will write to the senate and request it to send one of the pontiffs to dedicate the temple." This letter as we can see, shows that the savagery of the hard-hearted prince had been glutted.⁴⁰⁷

After Aurelian took over the eastern territories, he became known as "*Restitutor Orientis*,"⁴⁰⁸ a title which translates to restorer of the east. In taking this title, we can deduce that Aurelian valued his eastern territories, not just for their restoration to the empire, but for what they could offer Rome. Keeping this in mind, it is important to note that it was the sun god that Aurelian made the official deity of Rome.⁴⁰⁹ What is important to note is that Aurelian made the cult of Sol Invictus official in both Rome and in the military.⁴¹⁰ Aurelian, however, did not choose the cult of Sol Invictus Elagabal as his new imperial cult, but a variant form of the sun god, Deus Sol Invictus. The essential aspect of this cult is that, while based upon the eastern cult, it was not Syrian, like the cult led by Elagabalus. Aurelian redesigned the cult so that it was Roman. "Only a

⁴⁰⁷Magie, trans., *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae, The Deified Aurelian* 31:7-10.

⁴⁰⁸Halsberghe, 133.

⁴⁰⁹Ibid.

⁴¹⁰Hoey, 480.

restructured cult like this of Deus Sol Invictus could be entirely satisfactory, both internally and externally, because it was Roman for the Romans - no matter what part of the *imperium* they had been born in.”⁴¹¹ It has been suggested that it was Elagabalus’ attachment to a distinctly Syrian cult, in effect replacing Roman cults, that inevitably destroyed his reign.⁴¹² Aurelian believed that his new cult would hold together the citizens of his newly reestablished empire. The emperor hoped to use his cult to unify the empire, especially in the political realm.

Aurelian’s reign is very important when considering religion in the military. This was the first time that a Romanized eastern deity would become an officially accepted god in the military. As mentioned above, a fear of disunity and barbarism kept non-Roman cults out of the military before this time. Through coinage, which depicts Sol Invictus along with military gods, we begin to see some of the first evidence of the cult’s acceptance into the army.⁴¹³ It seems that the cult was not tied to Aurelian, as it was with Elagabalus. The cult continued to receive imperial support up to and including the reign of Constantine. There is epigraphic evidence, during the reign of Licinius, that assigns December 19 as the date of a celebration of a festival of Sol Invictus within the

⁴¹¹Halsberghe, 137.

⁴¹²Ibid.

⁴¹³Hoey, 480. Sol Invictus appears on coinage dating back to Septimius Severus. The combination of military figures with Sol Invictus on coinage appears during the reign of Aurelian. Ibid., 479.

military.⁴¹⁴ Perhaps the strongest evidence for the integration of Sol Invictus into the Roman military is on the Arch of Constantine. Here, there is a depiction of statuettes of Sol Invictus being carried by the the army's standard bearers.⁴¹⁵ This inclusion of Sol Invictus into the official military pantheon is very important, as it is the first non-Roman, or "oriental" cult to be officially accepted by the military since the reign of Augustus.⁴¹⁶ While the favoured form of Sol tended to evolve over the course of Roman history from Sol Indiges to Sol Invictus Elagabal to Deus Sol Invictus, and the cult began to take on more Romanized features, I believe that it is still appropriate to include Sol Invictus in a chapter on eastern deities, as its origin, and much of its duration in Rome, was as an eastern deity.

The late second and early third centuries had seen the import of many foreign cults into the heart of Rome. With the reign of Elagabalus, we have seen his attempt to make one god the supreme deity. The symbols of other deities, however, remained, although subordinate to the imperial cult. This apparent progression in the belief system, by Rome's emperors, from polytheism to syncretism to henotheism continued under Aurelian. Halsberghe states that Aurelian felt that this central belief in one deity would be a strong foundation upon which to build his political system.⁴¹⁷ This cult also gave

⁴¹⁴Ibid.

⁴¹⁵Ibid.

⁴¹⁶Ibid., 481.

⁴¹⁷Halsberghe, 136.

Aurelian “the aura of divinity,”⁴¹⁸ which ensured the legitimacy of his reign. Aurelian found himself in a similar situation as Augustus, as leader of an empire that was beginning to demand a return to its roots. Just as Augustus supplied the Roman people with a renewed sense of nationalism, Aurelian provided a Romanized deity to unite the Roman people. This was a successful decision, as official support continued into the fourth century. The cult of Sol Invictus was the only cult of eastern descent to ever be officially accepted within the military. While other cults, such as those of Jupiter Dolichenus and Mithra were popular within the army, and worship of them was allowed, they were never official, as the cult of Sol Invictus would become during the reign of Aurelian. Christian soldiers, however, did not share in this freedom of worship.

⁴¹⁸Ibid.

Chapter #5 - Christians in the Military

It is clear that religion played a very important and central role in the Roman military, as it was critical to the bonds shared among those in the army. Emperor worship gave the soldiers a general idea that they were all fighting for a common leader and a shared cause: the protection of the empire. To pay homage to the emperor was something held in common by all legions. In addition to emperor worship, the officially recognized pagan gods, usually the gods of which the emperor was a patron, unified those in each individual legion or auxiliary unit.

With this being the case, how was it possible for Christians to be in an army in which a common loyalty was to be shared by all in a unit, and the military as a whole? Before examining the relationship between pagans and Christians within the same legion, however, other issues must first be addressed. One of the most important questions is how the Christian soldier found himself to be in the military at all. Under which circumstances would a Christian, whose beliefs tend to focus on nonviolence, be faced with a career in the army? This issue can best be examined by separately addressing those men who converted to Christianity while already serving their term in the military and those who were already Christians when they joined the army.

From the secretive beginnings of Christianity to its dominance in the mid-fourth century, it was not only the opinion that the Romans had towards Christians that changed;

the Christians' view of themselves and their own roles and actions within the empire evolved over time as well as they faced new obstacles. Until the mid-to-late second century, any conversion to Christianity was viewed by Christians as a positive one. The number of Christians was small, and their influence on the empire was so minuscule, that any conversion of a pagan was to be celebrated, even that of a soldier. Harnack notes that "[...] there was certainly great joy among the brethren when it was learned that even in the raw and brutal warrior's profession men had been awakened to faith."⁴¹⁹ In the formative years of Christianity, the Roman military, like the emperor, was seen by Christians as a necessity to the empire, despite the evil role they both could play. In the first century, as Christians felt that Christ would return shortly, they would tolerate all hardships, believing that they would only last for a brief period.⁴²⁰

The issue of Christians in the military was not one of great controversy initially. An early Christian in the Roman army would not be expected to outwardly voice his objections to the evils of the military. In fact, Adolf Harnack found quite the opposite was true. According to the teachings of the Apostle Paul, "everyone should remain in the state in which he was called."⁴²¹ Thus, if one was already a soldier when he converted to Christianity, should he remain a soldier and therefore carry out all tasks related to such a

⁴¹⁹Adolf Harnack, *Militia Christi: The Christian Religion and the Military in the First Three Centuries*, trans. David McInnes Gracie (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 69.

⁴²⁰Ibid., 68-69.

⁴²¹*1 Corinthians* 7:24 in Ibid., 68.

profession? While there is no way of truly knowing how a Christian soldier serving in the late first century or early second century CE would have interpreted this teaching of Paul, it is clear that the basic understanding would have been to maintain the status quo, not drawing attention to oneself, as Christianity was just becoming established.

A military career was not just an ordinary job. A soldier could not just leave his unit because his new religious beliefs conflicted with the cults worshiped by the rest of the troops. When one joined the army, whether voluntarily or as a recruit, he took on an oath to serve the empire. Leaving the military before the designated term of service was over would have resulted in punishment for the Christian soldier. In addition, being a soldier, while not the ideal Christian position, cannot be compared to other inappropriate roles, such as prostitution. After conversion to Christianity, prostitutes could change their lives more easily than soldiers. The soldier had a duty to the empire that was not taken lightly by his superiors. If Christians followed this teaching of Paul, remaining in their current state, they would not be outwardly professing their beliefs, and perhaps placing themselves at risk, but carrying on their lives as they had before their conversion; at least it appeared so on the surface. Although they would seemingly be separated from society in terms of belief, they remained an active part of Roman society. Harnack argues that because of the belief in the coming of Judgement, or the end of the world, “it caused Christianity not to insist upon the carrying out of its principles in the state and in society, which would have led immediately to bloodshed or failure. It made possible a mission

which could quietly lay its foundations.”⁴²²

It seems that the only non-scriptural evidence about Christian life in the empire in the late first century is the *First Letter of Clement*.⁴²³ This text uses military references in its description of living a good Christian life. “With all zeal, then Brethren, let us serve as good soldiers under his irreproachable command. Let us remember the discipline, obedience and submission that our government troops exhibit when they carry out orders. [...] Each one carries out the orders of the emperor and the governors according to his own rank.”⁴²⁴ Swift believes that this use of military terminology illustrates a Christian familiarity and acceptance of a military lifestyle.⁴²⁵ While biblical sources argue for peace, it appears that this primary source by a Christian writer in the first century does not encourage military participation, but it does not seem to oppose it either.

In the late second and third centuries, with the emergence of prominent Christian pacifist theologians, Christians, including those within the army, now had some different guidelines upon which to base their decisions. The views of these influential Christian leaders will be discussed in more detail below. Christians in the late first century had to depend on the gospels and the letters of Paul for guidance. Paul traveled throughout the

⁴²²Ibid., 68-69.

⁴²³Louis J. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983), 32.

⁴²⁴*First Letter of Clement* 37.1-4. From *Sources Chretiennes* 167.160 in Swift, 33.

⁴²⁵Swift, 33.

Roman empire, including many cities in Greece and Asia Minor.⁴²⁶ It is Paul's letters that addressed pertinent issues regarding the Christian way of life at the time. It is commonly believed, and argued by MacMullen, that "the church's teachings were offered most often to the unsophisticated or uneducated, and by people of low standing in the community."⁴²⁷ If these Christians, those of the lower classes, joined the military, either through enlistment or as volunteers, they would have been the point of access to these new teachings for the other soldiers. As Gonzalez points out, "Paul's greatest and unique contribution to the shaping of early Christianity was not so much in the actual founding of churches. Rather it was in the epistles that he wrote in connection with that activity, since those epistles eventually became part of Christian Scripture."⁴²⁸ Paul is a valuable primary source regarding the Christian standpoint on issues that sparked controversy in the first century.

While Christians outside of the Roman army could, in most cases, keep their Christian beliefs and practices quiet and only speak of doctrine with other Christians, a soldier who converted to Christianity would have a much more difficult time. First, the length of military service was incredibly long. In the second century, the length of service for a legionary was around twenty years, and could extend up to twenty-six

⁴²⁶Justo L. Gonzalez, The Story of Christianity, 2 vols. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1984), 1:25.

⁴²⁷Ramsey MacMullen, Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 37.

⁴²⁸Gonzalez, 1:25.

years.⁴²⁹ Therefore, if a soldier was to convert to Christianity relatively close to the beginning of his service, it would be a long period of time in which to remain silent about his beliefs. Secondly, like other aspects of his life, a soldier's religious practices, and the cults he belonged to, were subject to military control. Helgeland argues that "since army policy forbade unofficial cults inside the walls, it would have been most difficult for a Christian to practice his religion inside of the camp unless, of course, he could keep everything in his head."⁴³⁰ As I have noted above, however, emperors of the second and third centuries were not as strict over the worship of unofficial cults within the military.

While the Christian soldier in the early phase of Christian conversion faced a long career immersed in pagan practices, he was not completely shut out from civilian life. Although a soldier had numerous duties, he did have access to the outside world, especially when he was not involved in battle. His responsibilities in the military "[...] did not prevent him from having a private life, however, nor from playing a role in the economic and religious life of the province in which his garrison was stationed."⁴³¹ Consequently, as long as there was a Christian presence in the particular area he was currently in, it can be suggested that a converted Christian soldier would have had access to Christians who were civilians. A stationed soldier, however, could not wholly become

⁴²⁹Yann Le Bohec, The Imperial Roman Army (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1994), 64.

⁴³⁰John Helgeland, et. al., Christians and the Military: The Early Experience (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 54.

⁴³¹Le Bohec, 64.

an active member of a Christian congregation, as there would be limits to his independence. Although not at war, a soldier was still in the army and had duties within the camp as well. Harnack states that “we cannot forget that the control over these soldiers by the congregations could only be limited. Since the soldier was separated from civilian life much more than he is today, it was not easy for the congregations and their leaders to oversee him.”⁴³² While contact was limited, however, as suggested by Harnack, it was still extant. This brief access to others who practiced the Christian morals and lifestyle may have helped the Christian soldier to balance his military role and contradictory beliefs.

The fact that there was, in some cases, a Christian presence near the military garrison may also help explain how a pagan soldier would have been introduced to Christian teachings in the first place. The question then arises, however, as to how the soldier would have met up with this congregation if he was not Christian to begin with. Ramsey MacMullen suggests that Christians in the second and third centuries did not publicly preach. This opinion is mainly due to the fact that, according to recorded sources, there is little mention given to preachers, and hence, they ‘hardly exist’ in the early church.⁴³³ Despite the lack of sources reporting the presence of Christian preachers, however, the chance still remains that there were some that spoke of the Christian

⁴³²Harnack, 69.

⁴³³MacMullen, 34. Of the few third century teachers mentioned, they are recorded as teaching among the existing Christians, and not to the pagans in hopes of converting them.

message. Celsus, in the late second century, spoke of certain individuals who were noticed around the military garrisons, who may have been spreading the word. He talks of “many, who are nameless, who prophecy at the slightest excuse for some trivial cause both inside and outside temples; and there are some who wander about begging and roaming around cities and military camps, and they pretend to be moved as if giving some oracular utterance.”⁴³⁴ If those in the military had limited outside contact, and there was no one of the Christian faith publically delivering sermons, how would non-Christians in the military hear about Christian teachings enough to want to convert from their pagan beliefs to Christianity? According to MacMullen, “after Saint Paul, the church had no mission, it made no organized or official approach to unbelievers; rather it left everything to the individual.”⁴³⁵

If this were the case, as suggested by MacMullen, then each Christian conversion must have been separate and personal to every convert; a process done one by one, or a few converts at a time, prior to Constantine’s reign, as opposed to mass conversions. It is clear that conversions were taking place. This process seems to correspond well with the idea that outside cults and practices were not promoted in the Roman military. If one individual soldier were to convert to Christianity, and of course keep his conversion silent, there would not be a noticeable ripple in the particular unit, as there might have been if a whole group were to convert. This would thereby give the process a sense of

⁴³⁴Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 7.9 in *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴³⁵*Ibid.*

secrecy.

The method by which Christianity was communicated to non-Christians in the military, if not from an outside mission, must have been from within. Since the majority of a soldier's time was spent with other soldiers, then it can be deduced that contact with a Christian most likely occurred within the army. It is known through sources contemporary with the time of Christian conversions in the early third century that there were Christians in the Roman military. For example, a Christian apologist states that "We [Christians] live together with you in this world, including the forum, including the meat-markets, baths, shops, workrooms, inns, fairs, and the rest of commercial intercourse, and we sail along with you and serve in the army and are active in agriculture and trade."⁴³⁶ Therefore, with an underlying Christian presence in all aspects of Roman life, it is understandable that a conversion could occur in the military. A soldier may have been exposed to vague Christian beliefs, or heard of their practices prior to his enrollment in the military, thus raising questions or piquing an interest in Christianity. While in the military, this initial interest may have been further developed through close relationships among soldiers, some of whom were Christian. The Christian "points of contact with non-Christians lay quite inevitably at street corners or at places of employment, or in the working quarters of dwellings [...]."⁴³⁷ So, to return to MacMullen's theory that the church expanded in size through individual conversions,

⁴³⁶Tertullian, *Apology* 42.2f in *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴³⁷*Ibid.*

casual in nature, rather than by means of official missions, it becomes clear that those who converted while in the military likely did so by way of the Christian soldiers serving alongside of them.

Which soldiers would have been most likely candidates for conversion to Christianity? There can be no definitive answer to this question as these beliefs would have, in most cases, been kept silent, at least in the early years of conversion. Some conclusions can be drawn, however, through an examination of both military recruitment and the religious roles that were held by pagans in various units of the military.

One's role in the military in the Roman Empire was selected, in most cases, by social standing, wealth and citizenship. According to Le Bohec,

Both military tradition and collective mentalities considered certain types of unit more worthy of interest than others, and these attitudes were reflected in the sort of men called upon to serve in them. The elite units were composed of Roman citizens from Latium and Central Italy. The further from Rome and the lower down the scale of legal status, the less important the soldiers became for the security of the Empire.⁴³⁸

For example, the legions that were stationed on the borders of Roman territories and outside of the city of Rome itself, were made up of more prestigious or higher ranked citizens than the auxiliary units, which were not composed of citizens prior to 212 CE. What is important to note, however, is that the soldiers in both of these units were

⁴³⁸Le Bohec, 102.

inferior to the centurion, a position usually determined by social ranking.⁴³⁹ As seen above in the discussion of Roman deities, it was those in a position of authority who seemed to be responsible for the movement of the cults throughout the empire. When looking at Christianity, however, the opposite appears to be true. Those in the inferior units, and in the rank and file within these units, may have been more likely to convert, as I argue below.

For the average soldier, there would not have been as much pressure to conform to pagan ceremony. Even Tertullian, in his *Treatise on Idolatry*, discusses this idea, despite his concern for all Christians in the military. “But now the question is whether a believer can become a soldier and whether a soldier can be admitted into the faith, even if he is a member only of the rank and file who are not required to take part in sacrifices or capital punishments.”⁴⁴⁰ Soldiers were not under as much pressure to take part in cult practices as those in elevated positions of authority were, and therefore, would have been at less risk if they converted to Christianity than would have officers. While this may be the case, and sacrifices to pagan deities were carried out by those of a higher rank, Roman cults still played a role in the army in general. As seen above, standards, false idols for Christians, were venerated and the *sacramentum* was annually sworn. The pagan presence was reduced, not eliminated.

⁴³⁹See Le Bohec, 36-67, for a thorough discussion of the hierarchy and structure of the Roman military. Prior to 212 CE, the auxiliaries were not citizens.

⁴⁴⁰Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 19; *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 3:73 in Helgeland, 22-23.

Now that the issue of conversion to Christianity while serving in the military has been addressed, it is necessary to discuss in more detail how and why a Christian would enter the Roman military. The basic ideas behind the military and the Christian faith seem to have been such polar opposites that it does not appear to be possible to combine the two. This is true especially during times of persecution and the foundation of Christianity itself. Pagan practices and emperor worship were so prevalent in the army that it was a danger to Christians and their beliefs to become a part of the military. This concern can be seen as early as the second century. Helgeland argues that “many Christians had gone into the legions and consequently lost their faith. Others had to resort to compromises with both Christian and military requirements.”⁴⁴¹ Here, when he uses the word compromise, Helgeland is referring to Christians who stayed in the army and accepted the sacrifices they must have made to their own faith in order to do so. This argument is based on the writing of Tertullian, in his *Treatise on the Crown*, where he saw Christian soldiers as “living two lives.”⁴⁴² While maintaining Christian beliefs, a soldier would still be required to work on the Sabbath, wear military insignia, and follow legionary standards.⁴⁴³ Thus he would have the life of soldier in public, and that of a Christian, although compromised, in private. Helgeland, however, does not discuss what part of the military life would have to be compromised in order to remain a Christian. Perhaps if a Christian stayed in the lower ranks, not attempting to be promoted, the

⁴⁴¹Helgeland, 25.

⁴⁴²Tertullian, *Treatise on the Crown* in Ibid.

⁴⁴³Ibid.

chances of having to perform a sacrifice to pagan cult or in honour of the emperor, could be lessened. It is clear, however, that “no soldier, we may be safe in saying, was an astute theologian [...]”⁴⁴⁴ Therefore a Christian soldier would not have been expected to understand completely what was expected of him as a Christian. Depending on one’s rank in the Roman military, and which unit one served with, the pressures on the Christian soldier would have varied. But the fact remains that the pressures would have been felt, regardless of the unit in which one served.

It is difficult to separate paganism from the Roman military, as there were religious aspects interwoven with military life. According to Helgeland, there was on average a religious festival every ten days.⁴⁴⁵ These pagan festivals were a part of military service, and in order to be a soldier, one would seemingly have to participate in some of these events. To exclude oneself from these activities, especially considering their frequency, would be almost impossible without drawing attention to it, or being noticed. Therefore, the chance of a Christian being discovered within the military would have been raised, as participation in these pagan activities was required. This is another case in which a soldier must have had to compromise some of his Christian beliefs in order to serve. Arthur Darby Nock, however, sees no evidence of a deliberate Romanization of religious beliefs within the military, except under specific emperors,

⁴⁴⁴Ibid. Helgeland suggests that a Christian soldier may even have been confused by similarities between Mithraism and Christianity.

⁴⁴⁵Ibid., 51. Evidence of these religious festivals has been found in an army calendar called the *Feriale Duranum*.

such as Elagabalus for example.⁴⁴⁶ Therefore, we can only use the *Feriale Duranum* as a basic guideline, and not a firm schedule. We do not know how many of these festivals were mandatory, or if they were all celebrated. “There is no reason to hold that, at the time when the *Feriale Duranum* was copied, there was any official desire to see the soldiers worshiping the gods listed in it rather than other gods.”⁴⁴⁷

Considering the length of service and the idolatry of pagan practices, according to Christian teaching, it is hard to explain the reasoning behind Christians voluntarily enlisting in the Roman army. If they could keep their Christian faith a secret, and survive their term in the military, then they would be rewarded for their service to the empire. Joining the military for monetary and societal benefits, however, was an ongoing issue for the church fathers. They objected to enlistment for land, income and citizenship.⁴⁴⁸ The desire for material goods and benefits for oneself on earth, in this lifetime, seem to conflict with early Christian doctrine and the importance placed on the afterlife.

Some, such as Swift, have argued that the military’s emphasis on emperor worship, idolatry in the eyes of Christians, may not have always been prominent in the army. Louis J. Swift suggests that this was the case up to the latter part of the second century C.E. “Loyalty to the state had little or nothing to do with military service; hence

⁴⁴⁶Arthur Darby Nock, “The Roman Army and the Roman Religious Year.” The Harvard Theological Review 45 no. 4 (October 1952): 223-224.

⁴⁴⁷Ibid., 223.

⁴⁴⁸Helgeland, 54.

the one could be affirmed without coming to grips in any way with the other.”⁴⁴⁹ If this were the case, then military service would not contradict the monotheism of Christianity. In the early third century, during the reign of Septimius Severus, objection to military service also may not have been as prevalent. In this period, Christians of lower classes, and those who were not citizens, saw the military as a chance to gain status without the worry of facing battle, as “civil offices of the empire were increasingly populated by military personal.”⁴⁵⁰ Therefore, a soldier may not have faced armed conflict, and bloodshed. This desired role in the civilian office, however, was not always a guarantee.

The argument by Swift, however, is not shared by many other historians. Contrary to Swift’s belief, Jesse Carter asserts the dominance of emperor worship in Rome, implemented most strongly by Augustus. Carter even goes so far as to argue that emperor worship was the one religious cult common throughout the empire, without local variations, as was the case in the worship of other Roman deities, such as Jupiter.⁴⁵¹ He states that “it is difficult for us to realize the power that emperor worship possessed during the centuries to come. It was in a sense the only universal form of religion in the Roman Empire.”⁴⁵² Carter brings up an interesting point, that of emperor-worship being

⁴⁴⁹Swift, 36.

⁴⁵⁰Ibid., 46.

⁴⁵¹Jesse Benedict Carter, The Religious Life of Ancient Rome: A Study in the Development of Religious Consciousness from the Foundation of the City until the Death of Gregory the Great (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1972), 70-71.

⁴⁵²Ibid., 70.

empire wide. If this were the case, then, Christians, whether in the military or not, would have had to deal with the pressures of worshiping the false god of the emperor. This would not have been isolated to the military only. Day-to-day life in the empire would have been full of pressures. Perhaps a Christian would have seen the military as no different than civilian life. Idolatry, however, cannot have been the only concern of Christians in regards to military life. Persecution for their beliefs and an objection to killing would have been at the forefront of concern for some. Given that there were so many reasons for Christians not joining the military, we must ask what pressures there were to counteract that resistance to military service.

One possibility for Christians joining the Roman military was recruitment by the army. Becoming a soldier in this case was not voluntary. The army counted on volunteers. But if there was an urgent demand for soldiers, conscription was a possibility.⁴⁵³ Watson suggests, however, that the ranks were kept relatively full, and were stationed on the provincial frontiers, even in times of peace, so that when in need of a military force, the army was already prepared.⁴⁵⁴ Nonetheless, if a Christian was recruited and could not find a substitute, his military career was not necessarily one of violence. Watson continues in saying “the bulk of [a soldier’s] military service was spent

⁴⁵³Harnack, 66-67. Harnack footnotes Mommsen and Neumann who suggest that conscription could be avoided if one was able to find a substitute for their military service.

⁴⁵⁴G. R. Watson, The Roman Soldier (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 31.

under conditions of peace. Any study of the life of a Roman soldier should primarily be concerned with his experiences in time of peace.”⁴⁵⁵ If this was the case, and warfare was not as prevalent, then Tertullian’s later views, normally against Christians serving in the military, could be explained: “in short, we have a slight modification of his [Tertullian’s] pacifist views;⁴⁵⁶ Christians could remain in the army as long as their role was non-violent.”⁴⁵⁷ This opinion on the issue of Christians in the military calls attention to the idea that perhaps it was the killing that pacifists were concerned about, and not the oaths to Caesar, which are normally seen to contradict Christian beliefs. Due to the complexity of this issue, the reactions of contemporary Christians to military service will be examined more closely below.

Christian Reactions to Christian Soldiers

The idea of Christians serving in the Roman army was not advocated by contemporary Christian writers. Roland Bainton describes the period in which these men were writing as the age of pacifism. “The age of persecution down to the time of Constantine was the age of pacifism to the degree that during this period no Christian

⁴⁵⁵Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶Tertullian, in his *Treatise On The Crown*, 11.1-7 in Swift, 43-45, describes what he views as problematic regarding Christians in the military, including: oaths to man and not God, violence, dishonour of father, mother and neighbour, carrying standards of false gods and working on the Sabbath.

⁴⁵⁷Swift, 46.

author to our knowledge approved of Christian participation of battle.”⁴⁵⁸ Because this issue is written about by numerous Christians, beginning for the most part in the mid second century CE, we know that this issue must have been one of great concern for Christians. However, while Bainton refers to the pacifist tendencies of Christians, his classification of the first centuries of the imperial Roman army tends not to emphasize one of the major concerns of Christians, that of idolatry.⁴⁵⁹ Adolf Harnack sums up the Christian rejection of the military as a profession in eight major points: five of these concern the issue of idolatry.⁴⁶⁰ Because of the idea of worshiping false gods, such as the emperor and the standards, as well as the taking of oaths, Christian participation in the military was prohibited. Both Harnack and Bainton agree, however, on the relative lack of sources concerning Christian soldiers prior to 170 CE.⁴⁶¹ They conclude that a Christian would not have joined the military voluntarily in this early period, so there would be no conflict for writers to address. But it seems that there was not an expectation for those soldiers who did convert to leave the military or, as Harnack suggests, there would be a written record. He states that “the baptized Christian did not become a soldier, and those who converted to the Christian faith in the camp had to determine how they might come to terms with their soldier’s life.”⁴⁶² This suggests that

⁴⁵⁸Roland H. Bainton, Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-evaluation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 66.

⁴⁵⁹Ibid., 73-74 includes a brief discussion of the issue of idolatry.

⁴⁶⁰Harnack, 65. See Harnack, 65 for the complete list.

⁴⁶¹See Harnack, 65-72 and Bainton, 67-68.

⁴⁶²Harnack, 69.

they were not expected to leave that position.

There are numerous relevant writings in the period from 170 CE until Constantine's reign. Tertullian, St. Cyprian and Origen were all contemporaries, and lived from the late second century to the mid-third century CE. These men objected to war and killing; they were pacifists. Tertullian felt that no Christian should be a part of the military whether during times of peace or war, as the sword is a symbol of killing; and to him it did not matter which rank in the military one held, as all had to take the *sacramentum*.⁴⁶³ In his work *On Idolatry*, Tertullian said that "there can be no compatibility between an oath made to God and one made to man, between the standard of Christ and that of the devil, between the camp of light and the camp of darkness. The soul cannot be beholden to two masters, God and Caesar."⁴⁶⁴ Therefore, if one was a Christian, one could only follow God's teachings. To join the army required one to take orders from a superior other than God. Once baptized, you became a Christian, a soldier under God's command. Because of this belief, Tertullian comes to the conclusion that after being baptized, a Christian cannot serve in the army.⁴⁶⁵ Therefore, if a man was to convert to Christianity or Christian beliefs while serving in the military, baptism would presumably have been withheld from him until he completed his service. The idea of disallowing Christian soldiers from taking part in the sacraments is also discussed by St.

⁴⁶³Swift, 41-43, referring to Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 19.1-3.

⁴⁶⁴Tertullian, *On Idolatry*, 19.1-3 in Swift, 41.

⁴⁶⁵Helgeland, 24.

Cyprian of Carthage, another contemporary of Tertullian. He states that “after the reception of the Eucharist the hand is not to be stained with the sword and bloodshed.”⁴⁶⁶

Because he is a pacifist, Tertullian argues against Christians being involved with the army. However, his pacifism seems to only extend to Christians in the military. While it is clear that Tertullian does not promote war, he seems to understand that it is necessary to maintain the empire and keep it safe. Cyprian seems to agree with this belief. Louis Swift states that in his writings, Cyprian “condemns bloodshed and reinforces traditional ideas about the peaceful character of Christianity, but at the same time he acknowledges that the empire cannot survive without military force.”⁴⁶⁷ Therefore, it seems that the goal of these writers was to ensure that Christians followed the teachings of Jesus, but they did not object to Roman pagans being soldiers. A later Christian writer, Arnobius, writing in the early fourth century, was not only concerned with the role of Christians in the military, but all soldiers. He turned his focus towards a pacifism encompassing the entire empire. Arnobius rejects Roman war in general due to the killing, or enslavement of men.⁴⁶⁸ Like many others writing at this time, however, when adherents of Christianity were struggling to find ways of living a moral life in a pagan world, Arnobius’ opinions were adjusted.⁴⁶⁹ There is evidence that he was proud

⁴⁶⁶St. Cyprian, *In the Goodness of Patience* 14 in Swift, 49.

⁴⁶⁷Swift, 50.

⁴⁶⁸Ibid., 60.

⁴⁶⁹Arnobius was writing about fifty years after the death of Origen

of the expansion of the empire.⁴⁷⁰ Swift, however, suggests that Arnobius' views may stem from the earlier works of Origen.⁴⁷¹

Origen was a pacifist who believed so strongly about Christianity that he felt its spread would end the need for war, as everyone would believe in peace.⁴⁷² Origen's writings appear to focus on the fact that for the safety of the empire, all of those living in Rome could do something to protect it. "For Origen, however, it is also evident that pagans and Christians have quite distinct responsibilities in their joint concern for the safety and well-being of the empire."⁴⁷³ Origen felt that it was the responsibility of the pagans to take care of warfare and defense, while the role of Christians should be prayer for man and the empire.⁴⁷⁴ Swift sums up the role that the Christians had in Roman defense, according to the works of Origen. "Their battle is against the powers of evil both within and outside man that stir up conflicts and prevent lasting peace."⁴⁷⁵

Origen's primary concern was that Christ had prohibited killing and, therefore, a Christian has no excuse, not even military service, for taking life.⁴⁷⁶ But this raises the

⁴⁷⁰Ibid., 61.

⁴⁷¹Ibid.

⁴⁷²Ibid., 53.

⁴⁷³Ibid., 56.

⁴⁷⁴Ibid., Swift refers to Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.8.

⁴⁷⁵Ibid., 56.

⁴⁷⁶Ibid.

question of loyalty to the empire. As discussed below, pagans contemporary with Origen criticized the Christians for their lack of effort to protect the empire. If Christians avoided military service, then they showed their disregard for the well-being of the empire. Origen wrote a response to these and other criticisms held by pagans, such as Celsus. In his book, *Against Celsus*, Origen illustrates the point that not only are Christians loyal and helpful to the empire, but they do more to safeguard it than the soldiers could ever do through violence. “Though they keep their right hands clean, the Christians fight through their prayers to God on behalf of those doing battle in a just cause and on behalf of an emperor who is ruling justly in order that all opposition and hostility toward those who are acting rightly may be eliminated.”⁴⁷⁷ In this statement, Origen does allude to the idea of a just war, but he makes sure to emphasize that Christians have no part on the physical battlefield. They battle through prayer.

Origen does not just suggest that Christians should not fight in a physical battle for the army. He goes on to say that they should reject military service outright, even if it were an imperial command. “We do not go out on the campaign with him [i.e. the emperor] even if he insists, but we do battle on his behalf by raising a special army of piety through our petitions to God.”⁴⁷⁸ Origen’s *Against Celsus* was written in 248 CE, about fifty years after Celsus’ attack on Christians was written.⁴⁷⁹ By this time,

⁴⁷⁷Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.73 in Swift, 55.

⁴⁷⁸Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.73 in Swift, 55.

⁴⁷⁹Swift, 53.

persecutions against Christians had taken place in Rome, most notably during the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus. In 202 CE, even Origen's father had been killed during persecutions of Jews and Christians in Alexandria.⁴⁸⁰ With this being the case, the question arises why Origen would seem to have a positive view of the empire, especially at such a volatile time. Gonzalez suggests that while Christians had been persecuted in this period, the number actually killed was not high. As a result, "for this entire generation of Christians, [in the first half of the third century,] the martyrs were worthy of great admiration, but they had lived in times past, and those evil times were not likely to be repeated."⁴⁸¹

There are numerous sources, as discussed above, that describe what a Christian should or should not do. We assume that many Christian leaders wrote about issues that were current and important to them. They did not want a Christian to join the military, due to pacifist beliefs and the presence of idolatry as a common practice. While these writings are a teaching tool or guide for Christians outside of the military, there seems to be a lack of clear guidance for a Christian who has already found himself to be a soldier; whether through recruitment, which seemed to be common in the east; as a volunteer, which was not recommended; or as a new convert, who had joined the military as a pagan. But some think that Christian writings of the third century tend to be theoretical in nature, and do not provide realistic advice on how Christians could coexist with pagan

⁴⁸⁰Gonzalez, 83.

⁴⁸¹Ibid., 84.

soldiers and be under pagan command. Clement of Alexandria, (circa 150-215 CE), according to Swift, was a theologian “concerned with the integration of pagan and Christian cultures.”⁴⁸² In looking at the writings of Clement, however, it seems that his idea of Christian integration into the Roman world was to remain subservient to pagan demands, and blend in with society. This was even the case for the military. Clement writes: “If you were in the army when you were seized by the knowledge of God, obey the commander who gives just commands.”⁴⁸³ Therefore, Clement does not feel that one should leave the military, even if one converted to Christianity. His solution of following ‘just commands’ may or may not have been a realistic request, depending on a soldier’s rank or unit.

This lack of direction for Christian soldiers begins to change when they have examples of Christian virtue to follow. During the persecutions of the third century, especially those conducted by the Roman emperor Decius, many Christians were forced to worship pagan gods, a practice routinely confronting a Christian soldier. Yet, these policies acted as a sort of test for Christians; would they remain loyal to their Christian beliefs at the risk of torture, or even death? According to Gonzalez, “there were now those who remained firm in their faith, even in the midst of cruel torture, but who never received the crown of martyrdom. Those who had confessed the faith in such circumstances were then given the title of “confessors,” and were highly respected by

⁴⁸²Swift, 50.

⁴⁸³Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 10.100.2 in Swift, 52.

other Christians.”⁴⁸⁴ Authors, such as Origen, who had endured imprisonment and torture in this situation,⁴⁸⁵ could be seen as credible and very influential because not only had they explained the importance of non-idolatry, they had demonstrated their beliefs as well. Those who may have made a sacrifice to the emperor or Roman gods, however, were referred to as lapsed.⁴⁸⁶ This may have been a very real possibility for Christians in the military.

In the third and fourth centuries CE, there seems to be an increased pressure on Christian soldiers, and we begin to see a breaking point. Swift addresses a new character in the story of military Christians; that of soldier martyrs, who were punished for either leaving the army, or for their unwillingness to enlist.⁴⁸⁷ The first recorded example of a Christian being killed in the military was Marinus, in 260 CE, who refused to carry out a sacrifice for the emperor upon becoming a centurion.⁴⁸⁸ The records of this martyrdom are invaluable, as they strengthen many theories about religion in the military. The fact that Marinus was serving his term in the legion as a Christian does not seem to have been an issue of concern. As he was to move up in rank, however, and more idolatrous behavior was demanded of him, Marinus, upon accusation of being a Christian by a

⁴⁸⁴Gonzalez, 88. After the reign of Decius, the policy of persecution was lifted for a time.

⁴⁸⁵Ibid, 87.

⁴⁸⁶Ibid., 87-88.

⁴⁸⁷Swift, 71.

⁴⁸⁸*Martyrdom of St. Marinus*, 10-11 from *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, ed. Musurillo, Oxford Early Christian Texts in Ibid.

fellow soldier, would not recant his beliefs, and as a result, was beheaded.⁴⁸⁹ Had Marinus not been betrayed, it appears that he may not have had to proclaim his beliefs publicly, and may have possibly continued within the military. This incident seems to have sparked many other Christian soldiers to do the same; admitting that they were Christians and therefore they could not serve in the emperor's army.

It seems that over time, Christian soldiers evolved a greater confidence in asserting their beliefs publicly, even at the risk of death. Two further examples illustrate this more clearly. One, Maximilian, is a recruit, while the other, Marcellus, is a centurion. The case of Maximilian is one of importance to this study as it brings many issues to the forefront. Maximilian is a Christian recruit who refuses to accept the military seal for official enrollment because he already carries the seal of Christ, baptism.⁴⁹⁰ The uniform itself was a problem to Christian apologists because of its connotations. In *On Idolatry*, Tertullian states that "... the Lord, by taking away Peter's sword, disarmed every soldier thereafter. We are not allowed to wear any uniform that symbolizes a sinful act."⁴⁹¹ What is interesting about the Maximilian text, a dialogue between Maximilian and the proconsul Dion, is the mention of other Christians already serving in the military. "The sacred bodyguard of our sovereigns Diocletian and

⁴⁸⁹Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰*The Acts of Maximilian 1-2* from *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, ed. Musurillo, Oxford Early Christian Texts, 244 in Swift, 72-74.

⁴⁹¹Tertullian, *On Idolatry*, 19.1-3 in Swift, 41-42.

Maximian, Constantius and Maximus, includes Christian soldiers who serve.”⁴⁹² This illustrates that in 295 CE, there was a Christian presence in the military, specifically within the emperors’ own troops.⁴⁹³ Also, it is clear that the religious beliefs of these men were public knowledge. Further, it seems, that these soldiers did not have the same objection to the military seal as Maximilian had.

Marcellus, a centurion in North Africa in 298 CE, refused to take the military oath in front of the standards and idols.⁴⁹⁴ “I threw down my arms because it was inappropriate for a Christian serving in the army of Christ the Lord to do the same in the armies of this world.”⁴⁹⁵ Here the centurion struggled with the concept of serving two masters, the emperor and Christ. While both men were sentenced to death, we do know that Marcellus was punished for insubordination, an act of military discipline, not for his beliefs.⁴⁹⁶ It seems as though, in the late third century, being a Christian soldier was permitted, as long as associated rituals were respected by them.

We are lucky enough to have commentary on a Roman legion, the *legio XII Fulminata*, from both Christian and non-Christian historians. The twelfth legion, under

⁴⁹²*The Acts of Maximilian* 1-2 from *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, ed. Musurillo, Oxford Early Christian Texts, 244 in Swift, 73.

⁴⁹³Swift, 74.

⁴⁹⁴Ibid., 74-75.

⁴⁹⁵*The Acts of Marcellus* 4.3 from *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, ed. Musurillo, Oxford Early Christian Texts, 250 in Swift, 75.

⁴⁹⁶Ibid, 75.

Marcus Aurelius, became trapped by the Germans and Sarmations they were in battle with in the late second century.⁴⁹⁷ Dio describes the rain miracle, which occurred while the twelfth legion was in battle with the Quadi people, as follows.

The Quadi had surrounded them at an opportune spot and the Romans were fighting valiantly with their shields locked together: and the barbarians ceased fighting, expecting to capture their enemies easily by heat and thirst. So they posted guards all about and hemmed them in to prevent their getting water anywhere, for the barbarians were far superior in numbers. The Romans fell into dire distress from their fatigue and wounds and the sun's heat and their thirst, and for these reasons could neither fight nor march in any direction but were standing and being scorched in line of battle and at their several posts, when suddenly numbers of clouds rushed together and a great rain, certainly of divine origin, came pouring down.⁴⁹⁸

What is important to note is that this event, according to all ancient sources, did occur, despite credit being given to a variety of deities or men.⁴⁹⁹ According to the Christian historian Eusebius, the legion prayed for help from God to save it from thirst and hunger after it was cornered in battle.⁵⁰⁰ In response to these prayers, "lightning drove the enemy to flight and destruction, and a shower [fell] on the army which had prayed to God, refreshing them all when they were on the point of destruction from thirst."⁵⁰¹ This idea, however, is opposed by the column of Marcus Aurelius, which was contemporary to

⁴⁹⁷Helgeland, 31.

⁴⁹⁸Cassius Dio, Roman History, 6 vols., trans. Herbert Baldwin Foster (Troy, NY: Pafraets Book Company, 1906), 72.8.

⁴⁹⁹Ido Israelowich, "The Rain Miracle of Marcus Aurelius: (Re-) Construction of Consensus," in Greece and Rome, 55, no. 1 (2008): 86.

⁵⁰⁰Helgeland, 31.

⁵⁰¹Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.4.3-5.7 in Helgeland, 31. Sources vary as to whether this incident occurred in 173 or 174 CE.

the actual event, and illustrates Jupiter Pluvius as the rain god,⁵⁰² therefore giving credit to the pagan deity. Israelowich, however, notes that the deity pictured on the column is not easily identifiable, and that this was likely an intentional act.⁵⁰³ Dio, himself, credits the miracle to an Egyptian magician.⁵⁰⁴ Regardless of who is credited with saving the legion, it is important to note that Christian writers believed that the Christians were in the military and fighting in battle.

What is even more intriguing is that Christian writers were proud of this event. This may be because it shows how God helped Christians in their time of need. Helgeland describes how even the pacifist Tertullian took pride in this occurrence, despite the fact that it took place during battle. Tertullian “claimed the victory as evidence that the Christians had always been loyal to the empire and that their loyalty indeed had positive consequences for the empire.”⁵⁰⁵ This statement is difficult to understand because it condones military involvement for Christians, as well as participation in battle, two points which Tertullian had disagreed with in the past. Tertullian, however, cannot be overly criticized. Although he opposed military life because of the extent that the army focused on pagan religion,⁵⁰⁶ he was likely addressing

⁵⁰²Ibid., 33.

⁵⁰³Israelowich, 101. The purpose of the depiction on the column, Israelowich suggests, is to illustrate divine support of Marcus Aurelius’ reign.

⁵⁰⁴Dio, 72.9.

⁵⁰⁵Tertullian, *Apology 5* in Helgeland, 33.

⁵⁰⁶Ibid., 23.

a common Roman criticism of Christians. This criticism, as voiced by the pagan critic Celsus, was that the Christians did not act on their civic responsibilities to protect the empire.⁵⁰⁷

Pagan Reactions to Christian Soldiers

Because the leaders of the Christian community were pacifists, the contemporary pagan critics and philosophers questioned the Christian's lack of civic duty. As mentioned above, Celsus was one of the strongest adherents to this viewpoint. Celsus saw the Christian refusal to serve in the military as an unwillingness to protect the empire and as a sign of disrespect to the emperor.⁵⁰⁸ Wilken argues, however, that the pagan critics at the time were concerned about more than a sense of loyalty to the empire; they were concerned at the lack of respect and honor given to pagan gods. Not only did Christians worship a different cult, they would not worship the pagan ones as well. And further, "Christians had contempt for these ancient and hallowed ways."⁵⁰⁹ In pagan sources, including those of Dio and Pliny, there is evidence that pagans believed that Christians doubted the sincerity of pagan worshipers. According to Wilken, "the Christians were seen as religious fanatics, self-righteous outsiders, arrogant innovators,

⁵⁰⁷Celsus, *True Doctrine* 8.73 in Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 115-117.

⁵⁰⁸Ibid., 117-118.

⁵⁰⁹Ibid., 118.

who thought that only their beliefs were true.”⁵¹⁰ The Romans had, over time, adopted numerous cults from various regions and provinces into the Roman pantheon. It is clear, however, through the many persecutions that had occurred due to the Christian refusal to honor the gods, that the Romans did not take their beliefs lightly. Wilken concludes that “the religion of Romans was, to be sure, inextricably bound up with the life of the state, with the idea of Rome and the fortunes of the empire, but such was the case with most religions in the ancient world.”⁵¹¹

There are some surviving texts of pagan and Christian dialogues. Some, like the one discussed below, were recorded by Christians. It is important, when studying primary sources, to have an understanding of the authors and their possible biases. At the start of the third century, in the dialogue between a Christian and a pagan, written by the Christian lawyer Minucius Felix, some of the opinions of pagans at this time are illustrated. The pagan, Caecilius, believes “since the consent of all nations concerning the existence of the immortal gods remains established, although their origin remains uncertain, I suffer nobody swelling with such boldness, and with I know not what irreligious wisdom, who would strive to undermine or weaken this religion, so ancient, so useful, so wholesome [...]”⁵¹² This pagan argument seems to illustrate an annoyance

⁵¹⁰Ibid., 63.

⁵¹¹Ibid.

⁵¹²Minucius Felix, “The Octavius of Minucius Felix” in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol.4, eds. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 177. Referred to in Stephen Benko, Pagan Rome and the Early Christians (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984), 55.

with Christians, who follow a new religion, and reject older gods, who have proven their value to Rome and its people. Caecilius felt that Romans should be concerned about this lack of respect for Roman gods. He continued: “They despise the temples as dead houses, they reject the gods, they laugh at sacred things. [...] Assuredly this confederacy ought to be rooted out and execrated.”⁵¹³ If this account is accurate, then it is clear that this opinion goes beyond a complaint about the Christians. It seems to imply a desire to rid the empire of them. This text seems to reflect the views of the emperor Decius, whose desire was to “restore Rome to her ancient glory,”⁵¹⁴ a glory that saw pagan worship at its height.

Decius tried to make Christians recant their beliefs and practice emperor worship and other acts of idolatry. An imperial decree was announced stating that a sacrifice had to be made before the gods and a statue of Decius.⁵¹⁵ This emphasis on pagan ritual in third century civilian Rome, while it only lasted from 250-251 CE,⁵¹⁶ seems to resemble the pressure that Christians faced in the military all of the time. The response of Christians varied, from those who worshiped the pagan gods immediately in order to avoid persecution, to others who remained steadfast in their beliefs.⁵¹⁷ Christians, such as

⁵¹³Ibid.

⁵¹⁴Gonzalez, 85.

⁵¹⁵Ibid., 86.

⁵¹⁶Charles Freeman, Egypt, Greece and Rome: Civilizations of the Ancient Mediterranean, (New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 1996), 496-497.

⁵¹⁷Gonzalez, 86.

Origen, who was tortured for not surrendering his beliefs,⁵¹⁸ would rather suffer on earth than practice idolatry and face the eternal consequences. The accounts of Christian persecution in the military are not as numerous as one might expect during this persecution. This lack of accounts, however, may not indicate a lack of Christian martyrs in the army.

One of the strongest examples of Roman reaction to Christians is persecution. The persecution of Christians within the military under Diocletian in 299 CE is an example of this practice, and helps to illustrate why persecution occurred. First, Robin Lane Fox emphasizes that “the persecution was born from success. Victory [over the Persian king] gave a new force to the ideals of Roman discipline and Roman god-given glory.”⁵¹⁹ A victory for the imperial army was a victory for the pagan gods. The pagan gods helped the Romans in battle, so the army, in turn, became more dedicated to the gods. A Christian in the military would not be praying to the pagan gods, so therefore, he would not be looking out for the best interests of the military. Diocletian, according to Lane Fox, also objected to rumored Christian social practices, such as incest, which he felt were disrespecting the morals and religion of his gods.⁵²⁰ As a result of these beliefs, Diocletian’s desire to keep his army pure, and because of bad omens, he began his persecution. The Christians were blamed for the poor state of a sacrifice’s entrails, and

⁵¹⁸Ibid.

⁵¹⁹Robin Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1987), 594.

⁵²⁰Ibid..

were therefore expelled from the army.⁵²¹

Christian writers, like Arnobius, mentioned above, address the issue that Christians did not hinder the empire through their presence.⁵²² Rome had seen numerous successes during the last three centuries, when Christianity came into existence. In his text, *Against the Pagans*, Arnobius defends Christianity. “With at least some degree of satisfaction he [Arnobius] claims that during the three hundred years of Christianity’s existence, ‘there were countless victories over conquered enemies, the empire’s boundaries were expanded, and nations which had never been heard of were brought under our control.’”⁵²³ Arnobius’ use of the word ‘our’ when referring to the Romans, suggests that he sees Christians as a part of Rome, even after the treatment that the Christians received during the Great Persecution. This persecution lasted, off and on, until 312 CE in the west, with the victory of Constantine, and until 324 CE in the east.⁵²⁴ During this period, many Christians were martyred.

The Roman imperial army was a complex entity. Its structure was hierarchical, and a soldier’s duties to his superiors and the emperor were of primary importance to a military career. The twenty-year span in the army required commitment and obedience.

⁵²¹Ibid.

⁵²²Swift, 61.

⁵²³Arnobius, *Against the Pagans* 1.14 in Swift, 61.

⁵²⁴Lane Fox, 597.

Roman religion was intricately tied into the imperial military. An oath, or the *sacramentum*, was required to enter the army and become a soldier. Worship of the military standards and of the emperor's cult was more than routine: it held the units together. While the military was often used to Romanize provincials, it was quite common, however, for the Romans to adopt foreign cults. It is clear that the role of the military extended past the security of the empire. Religious cults seemed to flourish in a military environment. While the units did have contact with the outside, civilian world, it seems that the focus remained inward. A particular cult within a unit, especially if it were a mystery cult that required initiation, could help form a brotherhood among the soldiers, a camaraderie that was needed on the battlefield.

This dedication to Roman cults, or cults accepted or endorsed by Roman authorities, made being a Christian soldier difficult. Christians had to compromise their beliefs in order to serve in the army. Although there is little evidence of Christian soldiers in the first one and a half centuries CE, there is no doubt that there were Christians in the Roman military. It appears that early Christians tended to remain quiet about their beliefs. It was not until the mid-third century, when Christianity as a religion was growing in both size and confidence, that we find records of Christian soldiers standing up to Roman authorities, with some becoming martyrs. The Christian attitude of being killed rather than worshipping a pagan idol often offended and puzzled pagans.

Christianity was seen as a scapegoat for any crisis in the empire, for it had failed

to carry out its responsibilities to the empire, both spiritually and defensively. Christian writers that advised against military service were opposed to the killing and to the strong pagan religious aspect of the army. Yet the glory of a military victory by the hands of God did not escape the Christian soldier. The purported success of the Christians in the twelfth legion draws attention to the idea of a just war and a military campaign supported by God. Increased tolerance towards Christians, in the empire, and in the military, seemed to change the views held by Christians about war and the army. Over time, Christian symbols became the standards followed in battle, a cross rather than an eagle. The military, although no longer pagan by the end of the fourth century, did not lose its ties to religion. The persecuted, beginning with the reign of Constantine, became the leaders.

Chapter #6 - Jews in the Military

When one examines the religious practices within the Roman military in the first three centuries of the Roman empire, Judaism cannot be overlooked, especially in regards to the eastern empire. Jewish soldiers are often not acknowledged by the modern scholar in the consideration of religion in the Roman army. This oversight may be due to the prevalence of paganism and an emphasis on emperor worship amongst the troops, which is generally the focus of study. Roman history, in regards to political relations with the Jews, often presents a picture of intolerance, an intolerance which sometimes resulted in revolution. There is, however, literary evidence of a Jewish presence in the military that cannot be ignored. While the number of Jews in the Roman military may have varied depending on which emperor was in control and the period under discussion, the fact that Jews did serve in the Roman military is incontestable.

At various times, and for various reasons, Jewish participation in the military may have been limited. Traditional religious practices could be said to be the cause for avoidance of military participation by Jews. For example, Newsome states that, in the first half of the first century CE, “Jews were exempt from service because of their unwillingness to fight on the Sabbath.”⁵²⁵ The Romans were lenient towards Jewish

⁵²⁵James D. Newsome, Greeks, Romans, Jews: Currents of Culture and Belief in the New Testament World, (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 294.

customs being practiced throughout the entire empire, not just in the province of Judea.⁵²⁶ While Christian worshipers at the time remained underground, Jewish practices were not only permitted, but were carried out publicly.

The issue of emperor worship, which became a major focus of prominent Christian writers in the imperial period, was already sorted out in a sense for the Jews by that time. Newsome writes that “as long as Jews were willing to pray and sacrifice to God for the emperor’s welfare, as they did twice each day in the Jerusalem Temple, Roman authorities were content, for the most part, not to push too hard on the matter of emperor worship.”⁵²⁷ If this were the case, and emperor worship was not an issue for Jews in the Roman empire, then one of the major obstacles for non-pagans in the army was dealt with for the Jews.

The next issue to address when explaining a Jewish presence in the Roman military is that of killing, which was undeniably a controversial aspect of the military, and was known to present problems for some Christians, for example. As discussed above, in regards to Christian military involvement, it was the issue of non-violence that was a major concern of Christian writers. This was not the case for Jews in the province of Judea. In fact, Jews have had a long history of militarism. In the fifth century BCE, with

⁵²⁶Ibid., 295.

⁵²⁷Ibid.

Egypt under Persian rule, there were Jewish soldiers located at Elephantine and Syene.⁵²⁸ Here, Jewish troops settled with their families and were expected to pass on the military profession to their children.⁵²⁹ What is important about the garrison at Elephantine is a record of the troops celebrating Passover.⁵³⁰ Therefore, these troops were practicing Jews and soldiers at the same time.

Flavius Josephus, a first century CE Jewish historian, elaborates on the practices and belief systems within various groups of Jews. One such group, the ‘fourth philosophy,’ as termed by Josephus, was the Zealots.⁵³¹ The Zealots were associated with militarism. While most Jewish practices and belief systems were formulated prior to the common era, the Zealots were actually quite a modern group, as they originated only a few decades before Josephus wrote. The Zealots held a strong military policy, as well as an association with political activism.⁵³² These individuals believed so strongly in their cause that they would not rule out military action to defend it. The Zealots were anti-Roman, and their first century CE leader, Judah the Gaulanite (or Galilean), was a rebel.⁵³³ What we can draw from this information is that some Jewish philosophies active

⁵²⁸Bezalel Porten, Archives From Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 29.

⁵²⁹Ibid.

⁵³⁰Ibid., 128-130.

⁵³¹George W. E. Nickelsburg and Michael E. Stone, Faith and Piety in Early Judaism: Texts and Documents, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983), 39.

⁵³²Ibid.

⁵³³Ibid.

in the imperial period were very familiar with militarism, and did not object to violent practices.

One question that needs to be addressed, however, is why a Jewish soldier would fight for the Roman army. This question becomes especially relevant when one considers that the armies of both the Jews and Romans fought against one another at times throughout the first two centuries of the empire. One case in particular was the Jewish war with Rome fought from 66-74 CE. During this war, Jerusalem, and the Temple within, were destroyed in 70 CE. The Temple was central to Jewish life at the time making this attack devastating. During this war, the Jews attacked the Romans on the Sabbath, and as a result, carrying weapons on the Sabbath became prohibited by the Mishnah.⁵³⁴ Another major war in the Roman province of Judea was the Bar Kochba revolt of 132-135 CE. This war was a result of the Jewish reaction to the city of Aelia Capitolina being founded by Hadrian on the site of Jerusalem.⁵³⁵ This act illustrates the dislike, or disapproval, by the emperor Hadrian of religious beliefs and cultures other than those of Roman or Greek origin.⁵³⁶

Given that the Romans had destroyed the Jewish temple and capital city, some may question why any Jew would join the army of the Romans. One of the most

⁵³⁴See Jewish War II.19.2, 517 and Shab, 6:2, 4 in Porten, 128.

⁵³⁵Fergus Millar, ed., The Roman Empire and its Neighbours, 1st American ed. (New York: Delacorte Press, 1968), 46.

⁵³⁶Ibid.

apparent reasons for a Jew to join the Roman military was to gain social standing in the empire. For a Jew in the eastern provinces, gaining citizenship was not a certainty. Andrew Schoenfeld suggests that citizenship was indeed a motivation for service. “Prior to the implementation of the *Constitutio Antoniniana* in 211, military service was one of the few ways that Jews could achieve Roman citizenship.”⁵³⁷ This was an impediment that the Jews shared with anyone else not born a citizen. And, likewise, this citizenship was awarded only after decades of service.⁵³⁸ Advancement in the ranks was usually only possible for elite members of society. The majority of non-citizen Jews in the military were recruited to the auxiliary units. There were exceptions to this rule, however, which will be discussed further below when examining the roles of Jews with Roman citizenship.

Besides volunteering for service so as to gain citizenship, Jews joined the military through other means as well, such as conscription. Schoenfeld presents evidence from the works of Josephus that affirm this. “In the year 19, Emperor Tiberius forcibly conscripted 4,000 Roman Jews for military service on the island of Sardinia.”⁵³⁹ Applebaum, however, suggests that conscription would be unlikely, due to the

⁵³⁷Andrew J. Schoenfeld, MD, “Sons of Israel in Caesar’s Service: Jewish Soldiers in the Roman Military.” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 24 no. 3 (2006): 118.

⁵³⁸Ibid. Schoenfeld states that it took 26 years in the military to gain citizenship.

⁵³⁹See Josephus *Jewish Antiquities*, 18:84 in Schoenfeld, 118. Here, it must be noted that those conscripted were referred to as ‘Roman Jews,’ which may suggest that they already had citizenship.

revolutionary behavior of such Jewish groups as the Zealots.⁵⁴⁰ It must be noted, however, that the Zealots, as discussed above, were only one of many Jewish sects in Judea. As well, the Zealots seem only to be prominent in history during the mid-first century, though there are revolutionary tendencies among some Jewish populations from time to time. Not all Jews during the imperial period were revolutionary and, further, not all were orthodox. Thus, Jews might serve in the army willingly and be allowed to serve.

Many authors have noted this diversity within the Jewish religious culture. Schoenfeld illustrates this point clearly, when he states: “Jewish practice in the Imperial period encompassed a broad range of religious activity: from the “orthodoxy” of rabbinic academies to the syncretism of Jews who had Latin names and employed pagan motifs in synagogal decoration.”⁵⁴¹ Some Jews clearly partook more fully in aspects of Roman society. It becomes apparent that some of the issues facing non-pagans in the military would not have been as serious of a concern as originally assumed, if the religious aspects of Roman culture were accepted. According to Schoenfeld, this assumption that all, or most, Jews would be opposed to military service and its religious connections originates in part from the dependence of historians on rabbinic texts for the views of Jews in the imperial period.⁵⁴² This information, however, cannot be considered reliable for those

⁵⁴⁰Shimon Appelbaum, “Jews and Service in the Roman Army,” Roman Frontier Studies, 1967; The Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress held in Tel Aviv (1971): 181.

⁵⁴¹Schoenfeld, 117.

⁵⁴²Ibid.

who were not orthodox believers. The orthodox views of rabbis would not coincide with the beliefs and practices of other Jewish groups. In fact, some Jews had Latin or Greek names common to the period,⁵⁴³ thus making them more difficult, or impossible, to identify as Jews. Therefore, looking for Jewish names in the archaeological record and inscriptions may not relate the actual number of Jewish troops in the Roman army.

Inscriptions, however, are not without value when they are used to track the presence of Jews throughout the empire. While many Jews partially assimilated into Roman culture and had Latin or Greek names, there are numerous other indicators present in inscriptions that reveal the presence of a Jewish community. Raphael Patai mentions some of these indicators, which are as follows: the use of the word *judeus* (Jew) or the phrase 'God is one' in Greek alongside the inscription of a name; the presence of Jewish religious iconography; or a listing of the individual's role in the particular Jewish community.⁵⁴⁴ These indicators are especially relevant when studying the specific location of Jews throughout the empire, outside of Judea where adoption of Greek or Latin names was commonplace. A sizable quantity of these indicators found in one location may reveal a settlement with an established Jewish community. Patai, in his study of the Roman province of Pannonia, believes that the presence of these inscriptions indicates an assimilated Jewish population that was large enough to have a synagogue.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴³Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴Raphael Patai, The Jews of Hungary: History, Culture, Psychology, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 22.

⁵⁴⁵Ibid.

The presence of an established Jewish community complete with a synagogue, a permanent place of worship on the Roman frontier, causes one to question the significance of its location. Why would a large community of Jews have been located in another province? How was that beneficial to them and to their survival as a group? The solution is simple: it is known that two thousand troops from Syria were relocated to Pannonia in the later second century, both to quell rebellion in Syria and to assist against nomadic invasions on the Roman frontier.⁵⁴⁶ This fact, taken along with the finding that two-thirds of the Jewish inscriptions found in Pannonia were left by Jewish soldiers,⁵⁴⁷ indicates that not only were there Jewish soldiers in the Roman military, but that they were relocated to the provinces. Patai has argued that one reason for the use of Syrian soldiers on the frontier, among whom were Jews, was their fighting style, which was similar to that of the invaders.⁵⁴⁸

The formation of a Jewish community around these particular soldiers indicates a sense of permanence. While two-thirds of the above mentioned inscriptions in Pannonia pertained to soldiers, the other one-third included the rest of the Jewish community. These include family members of the troops, such as wives and children.⁵⁴⁹ It is often through the inscriptions of family members that the Jews in the military, and their rank,

⁵⁴⁶Ibid, 24.

⁵⁴⁷Ibid., 22.

⁵⁴⁸Ibid., 24.

⁵⁴⁹Ibid., 22.

can be identified. One such inscription reveals a centurion dating somewhere from the second to fourth century CE. “Thanoum, son of Simon, grandson of Beniamin, the *centenarius* from Parembole. Peace (Shalom)!”⁵⁵⁰ Like the above example, these inscriptions can be found at various sites in the Empire, illustrating the extent of the Jewish diaspora, and therefore, the extent of Jewish military relocation.

Another valuable inscription which indicates the presence of Jews outside of Judea was found in Aphrodisias, and dates to the fourth century.⁵⁵¹ The inscription is in Greek and denoted, in part, the role of a charitable group living and working in Aphrodisias. The list of names was found on one side of a marble stone. Gilbert believes, based on the “patronymic or professional designation,”⁵⁵² that the fifty-five members on the record appear to be Jewish. One of the members, Theodotos, is denoted as having the role of *palatinus*. Gilbert first defines this position as “an administrative office in the Roman imperial court”⁵⁵³ and later elaborates by stating that “those who held that title performed one or more of a variety of diplomatic, military, and financial functions.”⁵⁵⁴ The example in Aphrodisias illustrates the presence of Jews that may have

⁵⁵⁰Margaret Williams, ed. The Jews among the Greeks and Romans: A Diasporan Sourcebook, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 97. This particular example was found at Jaffa.

⁵⁵¹Gary Gilbert, “Jews in Imperial Administration and Its Significance for Dating the Jewish Donor Inscription from Aphrodisias.” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 35:2 (2004): 171-177. Gilbert presents a thorough discussion of the date of the inscription.

⁵⁵²*Ibid.*, 170.

⁵⁵³*Ibid.*, 176.

⁵⁵⁴*Ibid.*

served in the army.

Some reasons for Jewish involvement in the Roman army, such as the desire for citizenship or conscription, have been discussed. But it is also important to examine what level of advancement could be reached by a Jewish soldier in the Roman military. As already mentioned, there is evidence of a Jewish centurion. But one of the most notable Jewish soldiers, Tiberius Julius Alexander, rose almost to the top - to the level of governor - and it is likely because he held such a position of authority that we have such detailed accounts of his role in the military. The fact that a Jew was able to climb to such an elite rank in the Roman army may suggest that being Jewish in the empire was not necessarily a hindrance to both political and military success. But Tiberius Alexander was perhaps more an apostate Jew than a practicing Jew. As discussed above, many Jews were assimilated into Roman culture. Josephus reports that Tiberius Alexander “did not abide by the native traditions (of the Jews).”⁵⁵⁵ He was also a Roman citizen. This was an advantage he had, which most other Jews in the army did not share, as they would have had to begin their service in the auxiliary units. Tiberius was both wealthy and assimilated into Roman culture.⁵⁵⁶ These qualities were probably part of, if not the major, reason that he was able to reach such elevated status. He is an important example, nonetheless, as he was a Roman Jew.

⁵⁵⁵Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.100 in Williams, 95.

⁵⁵⁶Williams, 95.

His role far surpassed that of a centurion. Tiberius, at separate times, governed both the Roman provinces of Judea and Egypt.⁵⁵⁷ Tiberius was not only a powerful military figure in the first century CE, but he was influential amongst the ruling figures of Rome at the time. He received the majority of his military promotions and positions either directly from the emperors of Rome, or through recommendations by influential generals, such as that of Corbulo after Tiberius' participation in the military campaign in Armenia.⁵⁵⁸ Tiberius was involved in the military throughout the reigns of Claudius, Nero, Vespasian and Titus. He remained loyal to the empire through the Roman war with Judea that resulted in the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.⁵⁵⁹ The fact that Tiberius Alexander fought on the side of Rome against the Jews more than demonstrated his loyalty to the Empire. Schoenfeld suggests that it was partly because he was Jewish that he was chosen by Titus to be an integral part of the Judean invasion.⁵⁶⁰

While Tiberius Alexander was Jewish, it seems that his role as a Roman citizen far outweighed his cultural role as a Jew. During the siege of Jerusalem, he is described as “merciless”⁵⁶¹ towards revoltors in Judea. While Tiberius Alexander was sympathetic to the Jews in attempting to avoid the destruction of the temple,⁵⁶² the fact remains that

⁵⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸Schoenfeld, 119.

⁵⁵⁹Ibid., 119-120.

⁵⁶⁰Ibid., 119.

⁵⁶¹Ibid., 120.

⁵⁶²Ibid. We do not know Tiberius' reasons for attempting to spare the temple.

the temple was burned and, in turn, Tiberius was rewarded with a more prestigious position in the army.

Tiberius was Jewish, and held prominent positions in the military. He was, however, far from being an ideal example of a practicing Jew. It appears that he valued his citizenship and role in Roman society much more than his religious commitments. This is not to say, however, that one could not be a Roman soldier and a practicing Jew.

It is certain that Tiberius Alexander became who he was, in part, due to his family's wealth and role in Roman society. Had Tiberius not been a Roman citizen of high standing, it is quite probable that he would not have achieved as much in his military career. It is difficult to categorize him as a Jew in the military. He was from Alexandria, and, like many other Jews, was a devotee of Greek culture, speaking Latin and Greek, but not Hebrew.⁵⁶³ His military action against Jews, however, seems to verify the above point. While being of Jewish descent, Tiberius waged numerous wars against those in Judea. In these circumstances, he was a Roman, seeing the Jews of Palestine as a rebellious nation that had to be quelled.

In his own hometown of Alexandria, Tiberius Alexander employed lethal force against rebelling Jews. Josephus states that Tiberius attempted to deal with the situation

⁵⁶³Joseph Meleze Modrzejewski, The Jews of Egypt: From Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian, trans. Robert Cornman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 190.

peacefully, but when “the seditious made a jest of the entreaties of Tiberius,”⁵⁶⁴ he dealt with them by force. Josephus describes the severity of this event in great detail.

Now when he perceived that those who were for innovations would not be pacified till some great calamity should overtake them, he sent out upon them those two Roman legions that were in the city, and together with them five thousand other soldiers, who, by chance, were come together out of Libya, to the ruin of the Jews. They were also permitted not only to kill them, but to plunder what they had, and to set fire to their houses. These soldiers rushed violently into that part of the city that was called *Delta*, where the Jewish people lived together, and did as they were bidden, though not without bloodshed on their side also; for the Jews got together, and set those that were the best armed among them in the forefront, and made resistance for a great while, but when once they gave back, they were destroyed unmercifully, and in various ways, some being caught in the open field, and others forced into their houses, which houses were first plundered of what was in them, and then set on fire by the Romans; wherein no mercy was shown to the infants, and no regard had to the aged; but they went on in the slaughter of persons of every age, till all the place was overflowed with blood, and fifty thousand of them lay dead upon heaps; nor had the remainder been preserved had they not betaken themselves to supplication. So Alexander commiserated their condition, and gave orders to the Romans to retire [...]⁵⁶⁵

Joseph Modrzejewski believes that while the number of Jews killed during the rebellion in Alexandria in 66 CE was probably much lower than the figure stated by Josephus, it was still a terrible event.⁵⁶⁶ Modrzejewski also notes that it was those of high social standing in the Jewish community that were to be spared by Tiberius from the

⁵⁶⁴Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2:7:493 in Josephus, The Jewish War: Newly Translated with Extensive Commentary and Archaeological Background Illustrations, ed. Gaalya Cornfeld, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 2:7:493.

⁵⁶⁵Ibid. 2:7:494-497.

⁵⁶⁶Modrzejewski, 190.

massacre.⁵⁶⁷ Again, it seems evident that Tiberius saw himself as a member of the Roman elite, and therefore placed greater value on class than on religious or cultural background. This point seems especially relevant considering that Tiberius, a Jew, commanded an attack on the Jewish community of Alexandria, his hometown. While many modern researchers and writers consider him to be “the most successful Jew to serve in the ranks of the Roman Army,”⁵⁶⁸ it seems evident that Tiberius Alexander did not, and instead, saw himself as a successful Roman serving in the military.

What is apparent is that while the majority of religions practiced in the military during the empire were of pagan origin, one cannot discount Jewish worship within the ranks of the Roman army. The evidence of Jews serving in the Roman military is greatly increased as we study Roman inscriptions and histories. Jewish soldiers appear to have been valued by Rome for their fighting styles and techniques, having been sent to the frontiers of the eastern empire. It also seems that when Jews were in the army, they were together in groups, most likely conscripted together. Entire communities developed around the Jewish military camps. This was not the case, however, with Tiberius Alexander, who was highly regarded for both his abilities as a leader and for the fact that he was Jewish. He proved to be a valuable asset to the Roman military, but he was not an outstanding example of the Jewish faith coexisting with military life. While his achievements are impressive from both a military and political standpoint and quite

⁵⁶⁷Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸Schoenfeld, 120.

different from the service rendered by other Jews in the military, many Jews did serve in the military, and some may have advanced beyond being just common soldiers.

Conclusion

In studying ancient religious beliefs and practices, we must accept that definite conclusions cannot always be reached. Many cults changed over time; geography and politics affected the emphasis of worship; and the interpretation of archaeological evidence varies. What is very relevant to the study of ancient religion in the imperial army is modern scholarship. Through interpretation and study of the primary evidence, valid opinions are formed, and discussion and further discoveries allow for the advancement of these ideas. Throughout this paper, I have presented many of the current opinions on the adoption, movement and worship of eastern cults in the imperial Roman army.

While examining the religious practices in the Roman military, there were many questions to consider. First, which cults were most commonly worshiped? Next, were these cults officially accepted by Rome, or were they even permitted? Thirdly, did the geographic location within the empire influence which cults were worshiped? Also, how did the military become introduced to these cults? And lastly, in what ways was the military responsible for the spread of non-Roman cults to the rest of the empire?

The questions above are important to researchers, as religion in the empire was, in a sense, quite fluid, yet at the same time, there was a solid foundation. Rome was built on tradition which can be seen in the state religion, for example. Also, in times of upheaval,

there was something to fall back on: an accepted pantheon. There was also a sense of expectation. Everyone was to adhere to the basics. In terms of the army, the *genii* were to be honoured, as well as the standards. The fluidity comes into play when referring to cults above and beyond the accepted norm. A freedom of belief, so to speak, was permitted, as long as respect was shown to traditional practices. This allowed for a versatility in the religion of the time. Jupiter, for instance, took on many forms, such as Jupiter Dolichenus discussed above.

It is evident that Rome was quite open to new variations on current cults, or different ideas all together, as long as respect was shown to the deities of the empire. This is especially relevant when discussing eastern cults. Religious practices from Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine were all present within the Roman military. The fact that these cults were present at all is very telling, especially in regards to Christian and Jewish soldiers, because their membership would seem to be a contradiction of Roman beliefs. Literary and epigraphical evidence, however, confirm that these groups were present in the army.

There is a marked difference, nonetheless, between toleration, encouragement and official acceptance. It appears as though the reaction to the aforementioned cults varied based on the time period, and the emperor in power. It seems that until the time of Constantine, when Christianity was accepted, the cult of Sol Invictus was the only officially accepted cult from the eastern territories. Therefore, this acceptance meant that

the cult was not only encouraged in the legions, but was officially promoted empire wide. This is a very important point. In the span of three hundred years, only two cults from the eastern territories of the Roman empire, were ever officially accepted. A lack of acceptance of the other discussed eastern cults, however, does not diminish the presence they had within the camps.

Geographically, it appears that evidence of the eastern cults addressed within this study has been found at sites throughout the empire. It does seem, however, that many of the so called 'oriental' cults were strongest in the frontier camps, such as those in Germania and Pannonia, for example. Of course, this conclusion is only based on evidence found to date. Future discoveries will help to paint a clearer picture of the spread and prominence of eastern cults throughout the empire.

The Roman army was huge, and the soldiers themselves were as diverse as the empire. Recruitment from eastern provinces helped to introduce eastern cults to soldiers. These cults were also spread though the empire by traders, thereby making eastern cults accessible to Romans, not just those living in close proximity to the east. The Roman army was also introduced to new cults through its own commanders, and even the emperor. Changes in leadership at various levels was frequent, and therefore influences changed. Provincial emperors brought their religious beliefs with them to Rome. This is especially evident regarding the Severi.

Finally, when examining religious diversity within the Roman military, it is important not to overlook the army's role in aiding the spread of these cults. As a unit was stationed in a provincial territory, it was introduced to local tradition. Troops were often replenished from local recruits, who would bring their beliefs with them into camp. The relative openness to new cults allowed for their adoption. Many eastern cults appealed to soldiers for the protection they offered, as well as, according to some scholars, the promise of an afterlife. Transferred and retiring troops took their adopted beliefs with them, thus aiding in the movement of the cults.

It is clear from the above discussion that religion played a prominent role within the imperial Roman military. Cults of eastern origin, such as those Jupiter Dolichenus and Sol Invictus, Romanized versions of eastern cults, such as Mithraism, as well as the beliefs of Christians and Jews, were all present in the Roman army. This was a symbiotic relationship between the cults and the soldiers. These religious ideas helped the soldiers through their service, and yet, the military helped these cults as well. Not only did the army move troops throughout the empire, and soldiers help to introduce these foreign beliefs throughout the empire, but they strengthened the cults by solidifying their relevance to Romans, and giving them a base of committed adherents.

Bibliography

- Appelbaum, Shimon. "Jews and Service in the Roman Army." Roman Frontier Studies, 1967; The Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress held in Tel Aviv (1971): 181-184.
- Bainton, Roland H. Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-evaluation. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983.
- Beck, Roger. Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988.
- Benko, Stephen. Pagan Rome and the Early Christians. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Birley, Anthony. Septimius Severus: The African Emperor. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1972.
- Campbell, Brian. The Roman Army, 31BC-AD337: A Sourcebook. London: Routledge, 1994.
- "Caracalla (198-217A.D.)." Mount Allison University. (1997), On-line article: <http://www.mta.ca/faculty/humanities/classics/Course_Materials/clas3031/projects/bennett_et_al.html> [28 August 2005].
- Carter, Jesse Benedict. The Religious Life of Ancient Rome: A Study in the Development of Religious Consciousness from the Foundation of the City until the Death of Gregory the Great. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1972.
- Coulter, Charles Russell and Patricia Turner. Encyclopedia of Ancient Deities. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1997.
- Cumont, Franz. The Mysteries of Mithra. 2nd revised French ed. Trans. Thomas McCormack. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956.
- . Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism. New York: Dover Publications, 1956.
- Davies, Roy W. Service in the Roman Army. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.
- Dio, Cassius. Roman History. 6 vols. Trans. Herbert Baldwin Foster. Troy, NY: Pafracts Book Company, 1906.

Eliade, Mircea. ed. The Encyclopedia of Religion. 16 vols. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987.

Ferguson, John. The Religions of the Empire. Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970.

Finn, Thomas M. From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.

Freeman, Charles. Egypt, Greece and Rome: Civilizations of the Ancient Mediterranean. New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 1996.

Gilbert, Gary. "Jews in Imperial Administration and Its Significance for Dating the Jewish Donor Inscription from Aphrodisias." Journal for the Study of Judaism 35:2 (2004): 169-184.

Godwin, Joscelyn. Mystery Religions in the Ancient World. London: Thames & Hudson, 1981.

Gonzalez, Justo L. The Story of Christianity. 2 vols. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1984.

Hadas, Moses, ed. The Complete Works of Tacitus. Trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb. New York: The Modern Library, 1942.

Halsberghe, Gaston H. The Cult of Sol Invictus. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972.

Harnack, Adolf. Militia Christi: The Christian Religion and the Military in the First Three Centuries. Trans. David McInnes Gracie. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.

Helgeland, John, et. al. Christians and the Military: The Early Experience. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

Henig, Martin. "The Veneration of Heroes in the Roman Army: The Evidence of Engraved Gemstones." Britannia 1 (1970): 249-265.

Herodian. Herodian in Two Volumes. 2 vols. Trans. C. R. Whittaker. London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1969.

Hinnells, John R., ed. Mithraic Studies: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies, 2 vols. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975.

Hoey, Allen S. "Official Policy towards Oriental Cults in the Roman Army." Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association 70 (1939): 456-481.

Israelowich, Ido. "The Rain Miracle of Marcus Aurelius: (Re-) Construction of Consensus," in Greece and Rome, 55:1 (2008): 83-102.

Josephus. Josephus, The Jewish War: Newly Translated with Extensive Commentary and Archaeological Background Illustrations. Ed. Gaalya Cornfeld. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982.

Kantorowicz, Ernst H. "Gods in Uniform." Proceedings of the American Philological Society 105:4 (15 August 1961): 368-393.

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna. "Dolichenus Find from Mauer an der Url." <<http://www.khm.at/system2E.html?/staticE/page1564.html>> [28 August 2005].

Lane Fox, Robin. Pagans and Christians. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1986.

Le Bohec, Yann. The Imperial Roman Army. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1994.

Le Glay, Marcel, et. al. A History of Rome. 3rd ed. Trans. Antonia Nevill. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Liebeschuetz, J.H.W.G. Decline and Change in Late Antiquity: Religion, Barbarians and their Historiography. Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006.

MacMullen, Ramsey. Paganism in the Roman Empire. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981.

—. Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400). New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.

David Magie, trans. The *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*. 3 vols. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962.

Millar, Fergus, ed. The Roman Empire and its Neighbours. 1st American ed. New York: Delacorte Press, 1968.

Modrzejewski, Joseph Meleze. The Jews of Egypt: From Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian. Trans. Robert Cornman. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Moore, Clifford H. "The Distribution of Oriental Cults in the Gauls and the Germanies." Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association 38 (1907): 109-150.

“Mystery Religion.” Britannica Concise Encyclopedia. (2006), On-line encyclopedia: <<http://britannica.com/ebc/article-9372935>> [28 August 2005].

Newsome, James D. Greeks, Romans, Jews: Currents of Culture and Belief in the New Testament World. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992.

Nickelsburg, George W. E. and Michael E. Stone. Faith and Piety in Early Judaism: Texts and Documents. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983.

Nock, Arthur Darby. “The Roman Army and the Roman Religious Year.” The Harvard Theological Review 45:4 (October 1952): 187-252.

North, J.A. Roman Religion. London: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Parker, H.M.D. The Roman Legions. Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, Ltd., 1958.

Patai, Raphael. The Jews of Hungary: History, Culture, Psychology. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996.

Porten, Bezalel. Archives From Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968.

Powell, Barry B. Classical Myth, 4th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004.

Price, S.R.F. Rituals and Power: The Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Roberts, Rev. Alexander and James Donaldson, eds. The Ante-Nicene Fathers. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972.

Schoenfeld, Andrew J., MD. “Sons of Israel in Caesar’s Service: Jewish Soldiers in the Roman Military.” Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies 24:3 (2006): 115-126.

Southern, Pat. The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2006.

Speidel, Michael P. The Religion of Iuppiter Dolichenus in the Roman Army. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978.

—. Mithras-Orion: Greek Hero and Roman Army God. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980.

- . Roman Army Studies: Volume One. Amsterdam, J.C. Gieben, 1984.
- Swift, Louis J. The Early Fathers on War and Military Service. Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983.
- Turcan, Robert. The Cults of the Roman Empire. Trans. Antonia Nevill. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1996.
- Ulansey, David. The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology & Salvation in the Ancient World. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1989.
- Vermaseren, M.J. Mithriaca I: The Mithraeum at S. Maria Capua Vetere. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971.
- Watson, G. R. The Roman Soldier. Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969.
- Webster, Graham. The Roman Imperial Army of the First and Second Centuries A.D. 3rd ed. London: A&C Black Publishers Ltd., 1985.
- Wilken, Robert L. The Christians as the Romans Saw Them. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
- Williams, Margaret, ed. The Jews among the Greeks and Romans: A Diasporan Sourcebook. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998.