The Archaeology of Rome and the Roman provinces

Lecture 5. The Roman army camp (castra)
Literature
The Roman Empire in 117 AD

- Senatorial provinces
- Imperial provinces
- Client states
Legatus Augusti pro praetore, imperial legate: commander of two or more legions in a given province. Governor of the province.

Legatus legionis, commander of a legion. Usually a senator appointed by the emperor. Governor of a province with only one legion.

Tribunus laticlavus, Tribune of the broad scarf. Nominated by the senate or emperor.

Praefectus castrorum, commander of the camp. Usually a veteran who had earlier been primus pilus.

Tribuni angusticlavii, Tribune of the narrow belt. Every legion had 5 lower ranked tribunes from among the equites. They oversaw the administration.

Centurion

Primus pilus, "first row": The Primus Pilus was the officer commanding the first centuria of the first cohort and had various important administrative tasks, including logistics.

Pilus prior: Commander of any of the other 9 first centuries.

Optio: adjutant of a centurion

Tesserarius: (chief of the guard). Helps the optio.
Senior officers
Legatus Augusti pro praetore, Imperial Legate: The commander of two or more legions.

Legatus legionis, Legion Legate: The overall legion commander. The post was usually filled by a senator, appointed by the emperor, who held command for 3 or 4 years, although he could serve for a much longer period.

Tribunus laticlavus, Broad Band Tribune: Named for the broad striped tunic worn by men of senatorial rank, this tribune was appointed by the emperor or the Senate.

Praefectus castrorum, Camp Prefect: The Camp Prefect was third in command of the legion. Generally he was a long serving veteran from a lower social status than the tribunii whom he outranked, and who previously had served as primus pilus and finished his 25 years with the legions. He was used as a senior officer in charge of training a legion.

Tribuni angusticlavi, Narrow Band Tribunes: Each legion had five lower ranking tribunes who were normally from the equestrian class and had at least some years of prior military experience. They often served the role of administrative officers.[6]

Centurions

Primus pilus, literally First File: The Primus Pilus was the commanding centurion of the first century, first cohort and the senior-most centurion of the entire legion.

Pilus prior: The "front file" centurions were the commanders of the 10 1st centuries within the legion, making them senior centurions of their respective cohorts.

Optio: One for each centurion (59–60), they were appointed by the centurion from within the ranks to act as his second in command and were paid twice the basic wage. Equivalent to a modern Lieutenant.[7]

Tesserarius: (Guard commander) One for each century. They acted as seconds to the Optios and were paid one and a half times the basic wage. Keeper of the watchword, administrative assistant to HQ Staff, third in command of a century. Equivalent to a modern First Sergeant or Staff Sergeant.
Agrimensor – geodesist (immunes).
Aquilifer – carrying the eagle of the legion.
Aquatores – water supply
Architecti – engineer, builder.
Armicustos – Man-at-arms.
Ballistarius – operate the ballista.
Beneficiarius – soldier with a particular task, e.g. “policeman”.
Centurion
Clinicus - medic.
Cornicen - hornblower
Doctor - trainer, from combat to music
Frumentarii – working on supply lines
Hastilarius – weapons instructor.
Imaginifer – carrying the standard.
Immunes – soldiers exempt from camp chores, with special skills
Legatus – the boss
Lignatores – collecting wood
Medicus – a doctor, such as surgeon (medicus vulnerarius), ophthalmologist (medicus ocularius) or veterinarian (medicus veterinarius).
Miles or Miles Gregarius – common soldier
Optio – second to the centurio
Praefectus Castrorum.
Primus Pilus
Quaestionarius – investigator, conducting interrogations.
Signifer – carrying signs of the legion
Speculatores and Exploratores – reconnaissance and intelligence
Tesserarius - watch commander
Venator – hunter (immunes)
Vexillarius – carried a vexillum
Fabri: smith
Lapidarii: mason
Librarii: writer
Naupegi: shipwright
Sagittarii: bowman

Nomenclature

- In the Latin language of the ancient Roman Empire, castra (singular castrum) were buildings or plots of land reserved for or constructed for use as a military defensive position.
- In classical Latin the word castra means "great legionary encampment" and included "marching", "temporary" and "fortified permanent" ones, while the diminutive form castellum was used for the smaller forts, which were usually, but not always, occupied by the auxiliary units and used as logistic bases for the legions, as explained by Vegetius.
- In English, the terms "Roman fortress", "Roman fort" and "Roman camp" are commonly used for the castra. However, scholastic convention tends toward the use of the word "camp", "marching camp" and "fortress" as a translation of castra, and the use of the word "fort" as a translation of castellum. These conventions are usually followed and found in scholarly works.
Nomenclature

- The commonest Latin adjectives for the term castra are:
  - castra stativa: permanent camp/fortresses
  - castra legionis: legionary fortress
  - castra aestiva: summer camp/fortresses
  - castra hiberna: winter camp/fortresses
  - castra navalia or castra nautica: navy camp/fortresses
- In Latin the term castrum is frequently used as a proper name for geographical locations: e.g. Castrum Album, Castrum Inui, Castrum Novum, Castrum Truentinum, Castrum Vergium.
- The plural was also used as a place name, as Castra Cornelia, and from this come the Welsh place name prefix "Caer" and English suffixes "Caster" and "Chester"; e.g. Winchester, Lancaster.
The best known type of castra is the camp, a military town designed to house and protect the soldiers and their equipment and supplies when they were not fighting or marching.

Regulations required a major unit in the field to retire to a properly constructed camp every day. "...as soon as they have marched into an enemy's land, they do not begin to fight until they have walled their camp about; nor is the fence they raise rashly made, or uneven, nor do those that are in it take their places at random; but if it happens that the ground is uneven, it is first leveled: their camp is also four-square by measure, and carpenters are ready, in great numbers, with their tools, to erect their buildings for them."

To this end a marching column ported the equipment needed to build and stock the camp in a baggage train of wagons and on the backs of the soldiers.

The camp allowed the Romans to keep a rested and supplied army in the field. Neither the Celtic nor Germanic armies had this capability: they found it necessary to disperse after only a few days.
castra legionis: legionary fortress
castra stativa: permanent camp/fortress
castra aestiva: summer camp/fortress
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castra navalia or castra nautica: navy camp/fortress

More permanent camps were castra stativa, "standing camps". The least permanent of these were castra aestiva or aestivalia, "summer camps", in which the soldiers were housed sub pellibus or sub tentoriis, "under tents". Summer was the campaign season. For the winter the soldiers retired to castra hiberna containing barracks and other buildings of more solid materials, with timber construction gradually being replaced by stone.
Ideal plan of a temporary/marching camp:

Even from the most ancient times Roman camps were constructed according to a certain ideal pattern, formally described in two main sources, the De Mutatione Castrorum or De Munitionibus Castrorum by either Hyginus Gromaticus or Pseudo-Hyginus and the works of Polybius. Vegetius has a small section on entrenched camps as well. The terminology varies some but the basic plan is the same.

According to Polybios, 2nd c. BC
2 legions with supporting units (auxilia)
ca. 600 x 600 m.
18600 soldiers

Camp according to De munitionibus castrorum, 1/2 AD.
687 x 480 m
Playing card
Theoretically 40000 soldiers (3 legions, auxilia, praetorian guard)
Camps were the responsibility of engineering units to which specialists of many types belonged, officered by architecti, "chief engineers" and mensores (agrimensores, gromatici), who requisitioned manual labor from the soldiers at large as required. They could throw up a camp under enemy attack in as little as a few hours.

Judging from the names, they probably used a repertory of camp plans, selecting the one appropriate to the length of time a legion would spend in it: tertia castra, quarta castra, etc., "a camp of three days", "four days", etc.

Laying it out was a geometric exercise conducted by experienced officers called metatores, who used graduated measuring rods called decempedae ("10-footers") and gromatici who used a groma, a sighting device consisting of a vertical staff with horizontal cross pieces and vertical plumb-lines. Ideally, the process started in the centre of the planned camp at the site of the headquarters tent or building (principia). Streets and other features were marked with coloured pennants or rods.

The crossing of via principalis and via praetoria was called locus gromae, the groma being the geodetic instrument for measuring right angles.
General Layout of a Roman Camp
The Praetentura ("stretching to the front") contained the Scamnum Legatorum, the quarters of officers who were below general but higher than company commanders (Legati). Near the Principia were the Valetudinarium (hospital), Veterinarium (for horses), Fabrca ("workshop", metals and wood), and further to the front the quarters of special forces. These included Classici ("marines", as most European camps were on rivers and contained a river naval command), Equites ("cavalry"), Exploratores ("scouts"), and Vexillarii (carriers of vexillae, the official pennants of the legion and its units). Troops who did not fit elsewhere also were there.

The part of the Retentura ("stretching to the rear") closest to the Principia contained the Quaestorium. By the late empire it had developed also into a safekeep for plunder and a prison for hostages and high-ranking enemy captives. Near the Quaestorium were the quarters of the headquarters guard (Statores), who amounted to two centuries (companies). If the Imperator was present they served as his bodyguard.
The first permanent fortresses of the Augustan era were not necessarily even always modified to suit the terrain and the circumstances. Each camp discovered by archaeology has its own specific layout and architectural features, which makes sense from a military point of view.

If, for example, the camp was built on an outcrop, it followed the lines of the outcrop. The terrain for which it was best suited and for which it was probably designed in distant prehistoric times was the rolling plain. The camp was best placed on the summit and along the side of a low hill, with spring water running in rivulets through the camp (aquatio) and pastureland to provide grazing (pabulatio) for the animals. In case of attack, arrows, javelins and sling missiles could be fired down at an enemy tiring himself to come up. For defence troops could be formed in an acies, or "battle-line", outside the gates, where they could be easily resupplied and replenished, as well as being supported by archery from the palisade.
Inchtuthil (Pinnata Castra, "Fortress on the wing")
Brick stamps
Army intelligence
*exploratores, speculatores*

Supply lines

Autochthonic settlers

Towns

Province administration

Vici, canabae, municipia, stationes

Trade and resources

*frumentarii and lixae*

Infrastructure

Roads and bridges

Waterways & the fleet

Water supply

*Horrea*

*mensores, architecti, gromatici*
The location of limes sites in Lower Moesia near the mouths of Danube tributaries
The central region of the Via Principalis with the buildings for the command staff was called the Principia (plural of principium). It was actually a square, as across this at right angles to the Via Principalis was the Via Praetoria, so called because the praetorium interrupted it. The Via Principalis and the Via Praetoria offered another division of the camp into four quarters.
Novae
Valetudinarium
For sanitary facilities, a camp had both public and private latrines. A public latrine consisted of a bank of seats situated over a channel of running water.

One of the major considerations for selecting the site of a camp was the presence of running water, which the engineers diverted into the sanitary channels.

Drinking water came from wells; however, the larger and more permanent bases featured the aqueduct, a structure running a stream captured from high ground (sometimes miles away) into the camp.
Thermae:
Changing room (apodyterium)
Basin with cold water (frigidarium)
Basin with warm water (tepidarium)
Basin with hot water (caldarium)
Leisure room (tepidarium)
Across the central plaza (principia) to the east or west was the main gate, the Porta Praetoria. Marching through it and down "headquarters street" a unit ended up in formation in front of the headquarters. The standards of the legion were located on display there, very much like the flag of modern camps.

The Via Principalis went through the vallum in the Porta Principalis Dextra ("right principal gate") and Porta Principalis Sinistra ("left, etc."), which were gates fortified with turres ("towers"). Which was on the north and which on the south depends on whether the praetorium faced east or west, which remains unknown.
Fortification walls (vallum)
Width: 2-3.5 m
Height ca. 5-6 m.

The base (munimentum, "fortification") was placed entirely within the vallum ("wall"), which could be constructed under the protection of the legion in battle formation if necessary. The vallum was quadrangular aligned on the cardinal points of the compass. The construction crews dug a trench (fossa), throwing the excavated material inward, to be formed into the rampart (agger). On top of this a palisade of stakes (sudes or valli) was erected. The soldiers had to carry these stakes on the march. Over the course of time, the palisade might be replaced by a fine brick or stone wall, and the ditch serve also as a moat. A legion-sized camp always placed towers at intervals along the wall with positions between for the division artillery.

Intervallum
Around the inside periphery of the vallum was a clear space, the intervallum, which served to catch enemy missiles, as an access route to the vallum and as a storage space for cattle (capita) and plunder (praeda). Legionaries were quartered in a peripheral zone inside the intervallum, which they could rapidly cross to take up position on the vallum. Inside of the legionary quarters was a peripheral road, the Via Sagularis, probably a type of "service road", as the sagum, a kind of cloak, was the garment of soldiers.
Aqueducts
Aqueducts of Novae

S. Stefanov, Rimskite vodoprovodi na Nove, IAJ 6, 1930/1931.
Thermae
Both channels have a cover made of large limestone slabs, ca. 90 x 45 x 12 cm and slightly smaller ones, 40 x 40 x 12 cm. The depth measures ca. 60 cm, the width of the drain 20-30 cm. The width of the entire construction measures around 60 cm.
Barracks, based on a contubernium

- When the soldiers were in camp, each century was divided into groups of 8 men who formed a Contubernium. This was a tent group, who bunked together and ate together. They were responsible for cooking their own meals and keeping their own tent in order. The soldiers in the Contubernium usually became very close friends.
Legionary barrack block at Noviomagus (Nijmegen), c. AD 100
Sector XII – „the centurio’s house”

Sieges
canabae
and
vicus
Deva (Chester)
Urbanistic role of legionary fortresses
Londinium