NEW APPROACHES TO BYZANTINE HISTORY AND CULTURE

Justinian's Men

Careers and Relationships of Byzantine Army Officers, 518-610

DAVID ALAN PARNELL

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David Alan Parnell

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Byzantine army, like most professional armies, had in theory a rigid command hierarchy in which soldiers and officers were ranked and divided into units. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the army operated in practice the way it was drawn up on paper. The military hierarchy was conditioned and occasionally subverted by powerful social issues, including the way officers identified themselves and others, and particularly by the relationships officers formed with each other. These social issues within the Byzantine military are especially apparent in and around the reign of the emperor Justinian I (r. 527–565). The army was quite busy during this period as it fought in all corners of the Mediterranean world, from Visigothic Spain to the Persian Empire. These wars inspired considerable commentary from contemporaries, and these observations shed light on the army that portrays it as a vibrant and lively social community. This book considers the Byzantine army of the sixth century as a complex web of social relationships. In this army, the identity of an officer and the people that officer knew and counted as friends were of just as much importance, if not more, as the officer's official rank and position. These officers were not simply names and ranks on a roster or protagonists in a battle narrative, but people: Justinian's men. Their relationships with each other, with their subordinate soldiers, and with their emperor were complex and subject to change. The depth of detail available on these men and their relationships may startle some who are accustomed to Justinian's

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wars being summarized as a series of generals being appointed and battles being fought. Two brief examples demonstrate the importance of identities and social relationships to the functioning of the army.

The most important cultural identity of the sixth century was that of the Romans, which was usually contrasted with that of non-Roman 'barbarians.' Byzantines identified themselves as Romans and in fact were Romans, being not simply heirs in some loose sense but direct continuators of the Roman Empire.[1] Therefore in this book, the terms Byzantine and Roman will be used interchangeably. These Romans served side by side in the army with non-Romans, whom they sometimes labeled barbarians. Centuries of cultural contempt lay behind the term 'barbarian' and for many Romans using that label on a non-Roman would have been almost second nature. Despite the weight of historical precedent, many non-Romans in Byzantine military service seem to have escaped both contempt in general and the label of 'barbarian' in particular. The sixth-century historian Procopius described Pharas, an important non-Roman officer in the Byzantine army, in this fashion:

> Pharas was energetic and thoroughly serious and upright in every way, although he was a Herul by birth. And for a Herul not to give himself over to treachery and drunkenness, but to strive after uprightness, is no easy matter and merits abundant praise.[2]

The term 'barbarian' is conspicuous by its absence in this description. Procopius confirms here the weight of the general negative view of Pharas' people, the Heruls, but admits that in his experience the Herul that he knows is not at all as barbaric as he might have expected. In this case, personal knowledge of an individual impacts the assessment of that individual. Identity becomes more complex than prejudicial overarching judgment when it is placed in the realm of a personal relationship.

Relationships between officers dramatically impacted the way the army functioned. In the face of deep personal ties, whether affectionate or antagonistic, the formal hierarchy of the army counted for little. The more prominent an army officer, the easier it is to untangle the web of social networks that tied him to other officers in the army. For this reason it is easiest to chart the relationships of Belisarius and Narses the Eunuch, the two

[1] For a thorough discussion of the Byzantines' Roman identity, see Chap. 3.
[2] Procopius *Wars* 4.4.29–30.

most famous generals who fought in the wars of Justinian. Traditionally considered immensely powerful men, the two were often painfully dependent on the approval and support of subordinate officers. As Belisarius prepared to enter Ravenna in 540, he had reached the zenith of his success in the Ostrogothic War. He had driven the Ostrogothic army to seek refuge behind the walls of Ravenna, and had convinced them to surrender the city to him. Surely if Belisarius was ever in a powerful position, this was it. Yet while preparing for his great moment, Belisarius found it necessary to create a pretext to send away four senior army officers whom he suspected of being opposed to him.[3] That Belisarius, the commander-in-chief of the army in Italy, on the cusp of his greatest success in the war, did not feel like he could proceed without first sending away some personal enemies speaks volumes to the importance and power of social relationships in the functioning of the army.

The era in which Belisarius and his fellow officers served Justinian is a particularly appropriate period in which to study the Byzantine army in action. While the army was central in all periods of Byzantine history, in the sixth century its importance was underlined by the wars of conquest that Justinian directed. The conquests of North Africa, Italy, and a portion of Spain put enormous pressures on the army and the emperors who commanded it. In addition to these wars, warfare and diplomacy with Persia, the only nearby state of comparable strength, remained a major concern of the government. The devastating effects of the plague from 541 on taxed the army's ability to maintain its many projects. All these activities and events put the army under significant stress and make the period particularly useful for examining how it operated under pressure. Fortunately for the interested historian, contemporaries realized the importance of their era and were careful to write accounts of what was happening. This period is particularly blessed with the amount and variety of its source material, especially compared to the less-documented fifth century before it and seventh century after it. Still more helpful is that so many of these sources were men who were interested in what the army was doing and how its officers behaved, which makes an examination of this army as a collection of identities and social relationships even more fruitful.

The reign of Justinian (Fig. 1.1) was both lengthy and busy. Convinced that it was his mission to bring about a restoration of the empire, Justinian

[3] Procopius *Wars* 6.29.29–31 and see Chap. 5, 'Populating the Social Networks in Italy, 538–539.'

Fig. 1.1 Justinian and his men in a mosaic from the church of San Vitale, Ravenna. The emperor stands in the middle, with Belisarius to his right, Narses to his left, and a group of imperial guardsmen on his far right. Image via Wikimedia Commons; ©The Yorck Project: *10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei*. DVD-ROM, 2002. ISBN 3936122202. Distributed by DIRECTMEDIA Publishing GmbH.

embarked on a number of projects almost immediately, starting with revamping the law code. Justinian tapped a prominent jurist, Tribonian, as his legal minister (*quaestor*) and tasked him with producing a new compilation of laws, which became the *Justinian Code*. In 532, however, Justinian faced a serious challenge to his rule when he maladroitly handled the complaints of the Blue and Green sports fans in Constantinople. The city mob rallied with the combined fan factions in a major revolt against Justinian, known as the Nika Riot after the slogan of the rioters, *nika*! ('Win!'). Justinian put down the uprising, mostly thanks to soldiers under the leadership of Belisarius and other generals. That same year, Justinian was able to sign a treaty with King Khusrau I of Persia, the 'Perpetual Peace.' This freed Justinian's armies to embark on campaigns of conquest

in the West. In a quick war, Belisarius was able to conquer the Vandals and bring their entire kingdom in North Africa under Byzantine control (533–534). This success was followed by war against the Ostrogoths in Italy, which took much longer but eventually resulted in the conquest of the entire peninsula (535–554).

Justinian kept occupied while his generals were conquering lands in the western Mediterranean. In Constantinople itself, he built the great church of Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom), which was the largest cathedral in the world at the time. Justinian also pursued religious issues, seeking to reconcile Monophysite Christians with the Orthodox Church. In all these projects, Justinian worked in concert with his partner and wife, Theodora, much to the chagrin of some of the Byzantine elite. Justinian faced severe challenges in the early 540s that represent a turning point in his reign. In 540, the Persians broke the peace and sacked Antioch, putting the empire in the difficult position of waging war on more than one front (as the war in Italy was still ongoing). The plague arrived in 541, killing a significant portion of the empire's population and therefore altering the demographic and financial basis of the government. In 541, Justinian was also forced to sack his most important minister, the praetorian prefect John the Cappadocian, who had been outmaneuvered by his rivals into appearing to plot against the emperor. These disasters and changes combined to grind military advances to a halt. By the 550s, the situation had stabilized. The Ostrogothic war in Italy came to a close under the leadership of Narses, and a peace was signed with the Persians that at least limited the Persian war to certain theaters. Justinian added to his conquests a small portion of Spain, and then spent the remainder of his reign stabilizing what he had won and fighting defensive wars in the Balkans. By the time he died in 565, the emperor had greatly expanded the size of the Byzantine Empire despite the debilitating effects of the plague. But the events of Justinian's reign had also made the enlarged empire much more difficult to control and defend. Ruling it successfully required a prudent blend of diplomacy and moderation in spending that few of his successors practiced.

Justinian's reign did not exist in a vacuum, and understanding the operation of his army requires an examination of most of the sixth century, including the period before his reign, which produced him, and the period after, in which the full impact of his policies and wars were felt. The chronological boundaries of this book are therefore set to include the prelude to the reign of Justinian, that of his uncle Justin I (r. 518–527). Though Justin did not rule for long, he successfully seized power from the family

of Anastasius I (r. 491–518), who had ruled before him, and bequeathed it to Justinian. The century covered by this book also encompasses the reigns of Justinian's successors. Justin II (r. 565–578) and Tiberius II (r. 578–582) faced wars on multiple fronts, including Italy, Persia, and the Balkans and spent heavily, stretching the empire's finances perilously thin. Maurice (r. 582–602) cleared up these wars and economized as much as possible, to the point that he provoked the army into a mutiny that cost him his life. His usurper, Phocas (r. 602–610), could not control the army or government effectively and suffered disastrous losses in a war against the Persians, to the point that Justinian's system of administration definitively disintegrated.[4] His reign therefore is the bookend of this study. The army changed dramatically in the remainder of the seventh century in the cauldron of emergency and disaster in wars with the Persians and Arabs.[5] The sources that make possible this examination also become fewer and less detailed in the seventh century.

Fortunately, Justinian's reign attracted considerable attention from contemporary authors of history, the most significant of whom was Procopius of Caesarea. Assessor (legal adviser) and private secretary to Belisarius, Procopius accompanied the general in campaigns in the East, Africa, and Italy in the 530s. After leaving Belisarius' service, he authored the *History of the Wars,* the *Secret History*, and the *Buildings.* While his proximity to the important people and events of the period make him a knowledgeable source with particular information about the relationships of officers, it also makes it likely that his work is tinged with his own bias and possibly with that of his patron Belisarius as well.[6] In spite of this criticism, Procopius is easily the most important source for the operation of the army in this period and should generally be trusted unless there is particular reason to be suspicious of his motives.[7] However, it is appropriate to keep in mind the role Procopius played in shaping the narrative of particular passages while analyzing the information he pro-

[4] For narrative histories of this period, see Stein 1949 and Treadgold 1997.

[5] Among many fine studies on the convulsions of the seventh century, see Haldon 2016 and Kaegi 2003.

[6] See Cameron 1985, 134–8 and Kaldellis 2004, 12.

[7] On Procopius as 'the single most important source for his age,' see Kaldellis 2004, 4. For sympathetic views of Procopius' trustworthiness, see Treadgold 2007, 176–226, and, especially as a military source, Lee 2004, 115. For Procopius as a teacher of combat technique, see Whately 2015.

vides.[8] Agathias of Myrina, who worked as a lawyer in Constantinople, continued the narrative of Procopius to 558.[9] His civilian position in Constantinople means he was less likely than Procopius to be biased in favor of individual officers, but also means he had less direct information about officers' lives and relationships. Menander Protector, the continuator of Agathias, wrote a history covering the period from the end of Justinian's reign through that of Tiberius II.[10] The final historian in this chain of storytellers was Theophylact Simocatta, who carried the tale through the reign of Maurice (582–602).[11] So the entire sixth century is covered by four historians who wrote in some detail, although none in as great of detail or with as much focus on the army as Procopius. In addition to these histories are chronicles which, although more sparse, are also of some value in describing the army.[12] Marcellinus Comes, who was a scribe for Justinian during the reign of Justin, wrote a chronicle covering the period from 379 to 534. An anonymous continuator brought the chronicle up to 548.[13] John Malalas, a midlevel bureaucrat who seems to have alternately served in the local bureaucracy of Antioch and the imperial bureaucracy in Constantinople, wrote a world chronicle that probably originally extended to the end of Justinian's reign, although the extant manuscripts cut off in 563. Fortunately, though the chronicle is of little value for its earlier years, it becomes more detailed for Justinian's reign, of which Malalas was a contemporary.[14] These chronicles tend to paint history in broad brushstrokes and do not often contain detailed information on individual soldiers and officers in the army, but they do occasionally offer a glimpse into the army's impact on the civilian world. This short review is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of sources used in this book but merely a brief introduction to the principal sources for the army and its operations in the sixth century.[15]

[8] Cameron 1985, 136.

[9] Agathias *Histories*, translated by Frendo 1975. See also Kaldellis 2003 and Cameron 1970.

[10] Menander *History*, translated by Blockley 1985.

[11] Theophylact *History,* translated by Whitby 1986. See also Whitby 1988.

[12] Scott 2012 makes an argument for the importance of chronicles for providing a mindset of sixth-century Byzantium that cannot be found elsewhere.

[13] Marcellinus Comes, *The Chronicle*, translated by Croke 1995.

[14] Joh. Mal. *Chronicle*, translated by Jeffreys, Jeffreys, and Scott 1986. See also Jeffreys, Croke and Scott 1990.

[15] For a thorough review of the Byzantine historians of the sixth century and an evaluation of their value, see Treadgold 2007.

Previous studies of the Byzantine army in this period have made use of these sources but with different objectives in mind. There have been many fine examinations of the formal structure of the Byzantine army on questions including its size, organization, recruitment and degree of loyalty.[16] Historians have also shown considerable interest in the identity of soldiers and officers within it, often questioning the degree to which the army was 'barbarized' in this period.[17] Most of this examination has however focused on the bare facts—as much as they can be determined—of identity, especially the questions of how great a percentage of the army was of non-Roman origin, whether that percentage increased as the sixth century wore on, and what that means. The study of social networks, or the relationships between individuals, is still relatively new in the field of Late Antique studies; the most prominent use of such techniques is that of Adam M. Schor on ecclesiastical networks.[18] This book is a general social analysis of the sixth-century Byzantine army and the first work to focus on this century in particular.[19] It considers officers not merely as actors on the battlefield or names in a story but as participants in a variety of social issues and relationships that significantly influenced the operation of the army.

The second chapter of this book lays the foundation for the study by describing the framework, that is the structure and functioning of the Byzantine army, in the sixth century. The army was versatile and structurally diverse with many different units including the field armies (*comitatenses*), border armies (*limitanei*), federates (*foederati*), and guardsmen (*bucellarii*). The ranks and positions within each unit are also examined. Finally, attention is paid to the processes, as much as is known, of recruitment and promotion in the army. These descriptions introduce necessary vocabulary and provide the setting for the discussion of officers in the rest of the book.

Chapter 3 introduces the question of identity in military service and argues that the cultural and ethnic identity of soldiers and officers was generally of less importance than their behavior and service record. As many modern historians (for example, John Teall, Michael Whitby, and Hugh Elton) have pointed out, the Byzantine army of the sixth century, particu-

[16] Special mention should be made of these particularly important pieces of scholarship: Sarantis and Christie 2013, Elton 2007, Whitby 2007b, Rance 2005, Lee 2004, Whitby 2000b, and Treadgold 1995.

[17] See Teall 1965, 296 and Greatrex 2000, 274.

[18] Schor 2007 and Schor 2011.

[19] Lee 2007a is an excellent introduction to the social history of war in Late Antiquity in general.

larly in the reign of Justinian, made considerable use of non-Romans.[20] This chapter considers the prominence of non-Romans in Byzantine military service and argues that while they made up a significant portion of the army, they were by no means in the majority. Also central to this chapter is the term 'barbarian' itself and the way it is used in the sources of the sixth century. Authors such as Procopius and Agathias use the term regularly, although perhaps not as liberally as some would expect. The term is primarily used in battle scenes and other wartime scenarios to describe the military enemies of the Byzantine Empire such as the Ostrogoths or Vandals. However, the term could also be used for non-Romans in Byzantine military service and it is important to assess when and why this happened. In this context, the word 'barbarian' seems to have been primarily applied to individuals who were behaving poorly and to have been withheld from those non-Romans who had a good service record.

The fourth chapter begins a series of examinations of the relationships, both familial and social, of Byzantine army officers that impacted their careers. This chapter starts with the most obviously important relationship for each army officer: the one that he had with the emperor. This examination generally focuses on the relationship between the emperor and the most senior officers of the army, because the evidence of these interactions is much more plentiful than that of the emperor and junior officers. Central to this topic are the relationships of Belisarius and Narses to Justinian, for which sources like Procopius and Agathias provide the most evidence, but less famous generals such as Artabanes, Bessas, and Martin are also considered. An examination of promotions, assignments, and transfers helps to explain the complicated relationship between emperor and officers. The emperor transferred most officers no less frequently than every few years; this was an intentional strategy, not merely an accident of bureaucracy. It demonstrated both a will to use good talent in multiple theaters and a desire to ensure that a powerful general did not get too comfortable in one geographical area. The emperor prioritized loyalty first and competency second for his senior officers. Since good behavior ranked a distant third, many officers could get away with misbehavior in both their private lives and even in military matters as long as they assured the emperor of their loyalty.

Chapter 5 continues the theme of relationships of Byzantine army officers, this time with each other. Officers built up social networks during their careers and used these networks to advance their own interests.

[20] Teall 1965, Whitby 1995, Elton 2007.

This phenomenon is particularly observable in the lives of the top generals of the period. This chapter explores multiple examples in Italy, North Africa, and on the eastern frontier in which generals such as Belisarius, Narses, Peter, Sergius, and John (the son of Sisiniolus) sought to marshal support among their fellow officers. The failure of the emperors to provide unequivocal support or to declare unambiguous chains of command probably encouraged generals to develop de facto hierarchies by assembling social networks. These networks benefitted top generals by helping them to amass support for their opinions in war councils and benefitted junior officers by giving them a patron who might help to advance their career. These networks were also highly personal, so animosities and affections could impact them just as much as career ambition. In short, the Byzantine army of the sixth century cannot be understood solely in terms of a strict command hierarchy because of the presence and importance of competing and sometimes overlapping social networks.

The sixth chapter narrows the focus of the social networks of army officers to their families and their most personal relationships. It addresses the issue of nepotism within the Byzantine army by examining several families in military service. There is little evidence to suggest that an officer with a family member already in the army was preferred for high rank (with the exception of members of the imperial family), but there is ample evidence that multiple members of a family tended to serve in the military both at the same time and across generations. There is also evidence to suggest that a particular family might gain a reputation for a certain type of service, such as the family of Vitalian, who had rebelled against the emperor Anastasius (513). In the decades after the downfall of Vitalian (520), seven of his descendants (nephews, sons, and grandsons) served in the army. In addition, this chapter considers the immediate family, that is the wives and dependent children, of military officers. Most officers were married and many probably had children. Sometimes military men let concerns for their wives and children take precedence over their military duties, much to the irritation and condemnation of authors like Procopius. Belisarius' relationship with his wife Antonina is the most detailed example of such behavior, but the existence of other examples suggests Belisarius was not as unusual as Procopius made him out to be.

Chapter 7 ends the series of chapters examining the relationships of Byzantine army officers by addressing the relationships between officers and the soldiers they commanded. Officers, and the authors who often wrote from their viewpoint, most typically viewed soldiers in groups and

addressed them as such, but occasionally they dealt with individual, named soldiers. While officers likely had more meaningful relationships with other officers, they did occasionally single out soldiers for special treatment. This treatment could include praise in a speech, the promise of monetary reward, or the recruiting of the soldier into the officer's personal guardsmen (*bucellarii*). Far more common than these individual relationships was a sort of formalized group relationship in which both officers and soldiers viewed each other as faceless collections of individuals. Each side had expectations of the other ranging from obedience and loyalty to ensuring the flow of pay and the distribution of booty, and means of enforcing these expectations if they were not met.

The eighth chapter takes a step back from these relationships within the army to consider the wider relationship between army and society as a whole, particularly public perception of the army as an institution and army officers individually. Evidence for these attitudes is perhaps more plentiful than some would imagine, but it is widely scattered. Soldiers and officers seem to have generally approved of their army service as a whole, although they could be pushed to disobedience if normal operations were suspended for some reason, as happened occasionally in this period. Authors such as Procopius provide a viewpoint that could probably best be described as that of the elites. While these elites were intensely interested in the army, their opinion often seems to have been critical of both individual officers and the performance of the army as a whole. It is likely that average civilians spent much less time thinking or worrying about the army as an institution than those of higher socio-economic status. They were, however, quick to point out the misbehavior of officers and soldiers, which ranged from petty harassment to serious mistreatment and appalling violence. Evidence drawn from the available sources suggests that the popularity of the army varied wildly depending on whom it affected.

The book wraps up with a brief conclusion that recapitulates the social issues that influenced the organization and functioning of the Byzantine army in the sixth century. Although identities and various types of relationships are described in separate chapters, they of course existed side-by-side in an officer's life. The average Byzantine officer juggled treatment based on perceptions of his identity, his relationship with the emperor, other officers, his subordinate soldiers, civilians, and his family all at once. This meant that the army was much more complex in reality than it would have appeared on paper, all thanks to the way identities and relationships impacted the careers of Justinian's men.

CHAPTER 2

Byzantine Army Structure

The Byzantine army was versatile and structurally diverse.[1] It has been the subject of several excellent studies, and it is not intended to review all of their conclusions here.[2] Instead, this chapter provides a brief overview of the army to establish the setting for the examination of the careers and relationships of the men who served in it. The sixth century Byzantine army was administratively continuous with the army of the early Roman Empire, which has been thoroughly studied.[3] The Roman army evolved steadily over centuries, with the most radical changes coming first during the third-century crisis (235–284) and then again in the fourth century under the Constantinian dynasty (293–363).[4] While it is possible to present a good picture of the army in the sixth century, it is more difficult to explain exactly how it reached this form. Lack of evidence makes it challenging to assess the development of the army in the later fourth and fifth centuries. One of the best sources for the army of the period is itself

[1] Due to the nature of the sources, it is difficult to completely detail the organization of the army. Even when they actually discuss military structure, most of the time sources fail to specify numbers of soldiers in a unit, ranks of soldiers and officers, or even the official name of the unit. See Jones 1964, 1:654–5.

[2] Important monographs include Southern and Dixon 1996, Treadgold 1995, and Sarantis 2016. Among edited volumes with many fine contributions, see Cameron 1995, Maas 2004, Sabin, Van Wees, and Whitby 2007, Haldon 2007, and Sarantis and Christie 2013.

[3] See, for example, Webster 1985.

[4] For a summary, see Southern and Dixon 1996, 6.

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highly problematic. The *Notitia Dignitatum*, a list of civil and military officials by rank and location, is an official and authoritative but not necessarily comprehensive document. Moreover, its date of composition is variously estimated. It is generally agreed to represent the army after 395, but the information is not uniform, with western officials and troops being updated more recently than eastern units.[5] Even this problematic evidence, which is among the best available, chiefly covers the very late fourth century. By the sixth century, sources like Procopius and his fellow historians give a good impression of the army, but even they do not provide the same specific detail on units that the *Notitia Dignitatum* had provided for the late fourth century. Naming every unit and detailing its history and where it was stationed at any particular time in the sixth century is therefore not possible. Still, a review of the army's structure and the way it functioned, as much as is known, provides a useful setting for the individuals and relationships described in the remainder of this book. This examination begins with a survey of the sixth-century army's basic divisions.

Basic Divisions

The key distinction in terms of the divisions of the army of the sixth century was that between field armies (*comitatenses*) and frontier armies (*limitanei*). The field armies were the backbone of the army and were primarily responsible for wars of conquest or significant defensive campaigns. They were mobile armies, kept separate from the frontier forces, and stationed in particular regions of the empire. They descended from the units of soldiers who were companions of the soldier-emperors in the third and early fourth centuries (*comitatus*). For most of the sixth century, there were four field armies stationed in specific regions of the empire, each commanded by a general known as a master of soldiers (*magister militum*). These regional field armies were stationed in Illyricum, Thrace, Mesopotamia, and Armenia.[6] Following the conquests of Africa, Italy and a portion of Spain, each was provided with a regional field army as well.[7] Two more field armies were designated as in the emperor's presence (*prae-*

[5] Southern and Dixon 1996, 1.

[6] The Army of the East was responsible for the entire swath of the Eastern frontier ranging from Mesopotamia to Egypt. The Army of Armenia was a creation of Justinian, designed to supplement the Army of the East and responsible for lands to the north of Mesopotamia. See Jones 1964, 1:655.

[7] Treadgold 1995, 15–17.

sentales), and were stationed near Constantinople, probably in Thrace and northwest Asia Minor. These field armies, although permanently based in a particular region, were in theory still mobile and could be sent anywhere they were needed.[8] For example, Belisarius took portions of the Army of the East to Africa in 533, and generals of Illyricum frequently led portions of their army to fight in the Italian theatre during the Ostrogothic War.[9] Whether at their home station in their assigned region or on campaign elsewhere, the field armies did the bulk of the heavy fighting, participated in large battles, and were typically the units described whenever a contemporary author wrote generally about soldiers or armies.

Although the frontier armies (*limitanei*) used to be discarded by historians as little better than an ill-equipped frontier militia, most modern scholarship ranks them higher. While these units were on the whole sometimes of inferior quality to those in the field armies, their troops were still trained and professional soldiers.[10] The frontier soldiers were stationed on all the major borders of the empire, and were usually grouped in armies commanded by dukes (*duces*). The forces of a duke could span several provinces and the military hierarchy he commanded was separate from the civilian, provincial hierarchy.[11] Although by the sixth century some of these soldiers lived on government lands, and many probably farmed to supplement their income, they were still paid a salary for their work as soldiers.[12] They served, as their name implies, on the frontiers and had responsibility for guarding roads and manning frontier forts. The frontier armies at times fought alongside units of the field armies against the same enemies, particularly on the eastern frontier against the Persians.[13] These frontier troops were considered important enough to the stability of a region that they were reconstituted in Africa following the Vandalic War.[14] Even if inferior to the field armies, the frontier armies were not expected to repel major

[8] Jones 1964, 1:660.

[9] For Belisarius and the Army of the East, see Procopius *Wars* 3.11.1–21 and Treadgold 1995, 15. For the generals of Illyricum, see Procopius *Wars* 6.13.17, 7.10.2.

[10] Jones 1964, 1:649; Treadgold 1995, 11; Isaac 1992.

[11] Treadgold 1995, 9.

[12] Jones 1964, 1:653, 661–2.

[13] Rhecithancus was the duke at either Damascus or Palmyra in 541 when he and his troops accompanied Belisarius on an invasion of Persian Mesopotamia (Procopius *Wars* 2.16.17–19). Malalas relates that the dukes of Phoenicia and Euphratesia joined elements of the Army of the East to bring Alamundarus to battle in 528 (Joh. Mal. 18.16). See also Jones 1964, 1:651.

[14] Jones 1964, 1:663; Southern and Dixon 1996, 65.

invasions by themselves and played an important role in maintaining security and order as well as serving as a garrison for critical border fortresses.[15]

In the literary source material, even in Procopius—our best military source of the whole century—the distinction between field army and frontier army is not always easy to follow. The soldiers of the field armies are often merely called 'soldiers' (στρατιῶται) or 'Roman soldiers.' In fact, there is a considerable prejudice in most literary sources in favor of the field armies, which were typically the bulk of the forces involved in the campaigns of conquest in the West or the major battles against the Persians in the East. Other sources, most notably papyri, tend to emphasize the frontier armies, which were the only troops permanently stationed in Egypt.[16] The lack of distinction in the sources between the two types of soldiers is probably partly due to the fact that the difference was so obvious in context that it was not necessary to point it out, and may also have been to avoid bogging down the narrative with such detail. In some instances, however, soldiers of the field and frontier armies would fight alongside one another in the same campaign, and in these cases only the specification of the title of their commanding officer would identify the soldiers of the different units.

The federates (*foederati*) of the sixth century were somewhat like special forces. In the fourth century, federates were non-Roman soldiers serving under their own officers by treaty with the Roman government. These arrangements were desirable because these units could be hired temporarily for a specific campaign and then sent back to their homes afterward with no long-term commitment or expense. Units of this type continued to exist and to play a major role in supplementing Roman armies in the sixth century, but by then they were known as allies (*symmachoi*). These allied forces can be found in most major conflicts: Belisarius brought a unit of Huns to Africa in 533, Narses had a close relationship with a unit of Heruls in Italy, and Arab forces under their own chieftains served with the Army of the East against Persia.[17] The federates of the sixth century had changed dramatically, having lost their identity as units of ethnic non-

[15] Benjamin Isaac has expertly described the *limitanei* in Palestine in Isaac 1989. See also Isaac 1992. In defense of the importance of the *limitanei*, see Whitby 2007a, 523.

[16] As explored in Isaac 1992.

[17] Belisarius brought 600 Massagetae (Huns) to Africa (Procopius *Wars* 3.11.11–12). Narses had a close relationship with the Heruls, and was even able to select their own commander from among them (Agathias *Histories* 1.11.3). On Narses and the Heruls, see also Whitby 1995, 106. The Ghassanid Arabs under Arethas fought with Belisarius at Callinicum (Procopius *Wars* 1.17.47, 1.18.7).