Anthony Kaldellis/Marion Kruse: The Field Armies of the East Roman Empire, 361–630. Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press 2023. XXII, 205 p. £ 85.00/$ 110.00. ISBN: 978-1-009-29694-6.

Students of the organization of the imperial Roman military are blessed with a relative abundance of sources, from the career inscriptions of countless legionaries that elucidate not just the *Rangordnung* of the military but often the displacement of its units, to a plethora of military diplomas which illuminate the movements of the auxiliaries.[1] Students of the late Roman military are not so fortunate, for though the production of inscriptions in the eastern Mediterranean increased significantly in Late Antiquity, the Latin epitaphs that are so valuable to our understanding of the earlier organization drop off.[2] As a result, scholars have had to rely on the *Notitia Dignitatum* to come to grips with many of the organizational changes in the military in Late Antiquity. This problematic document sets out the command structure of the military in both the western and eastern empires, and under each commander lists their units. Questions over its structure, purpose, date, context, and audience have taxed scholars, and while some have argued that the document can be used with profit (Dietrich Hoffmann), others have posed se-

1 For the legions, see: Y. Le Bohec/C. Wolff (eds.): Les Légions de Rome sous le Haut-Empire. Actes du Congrès de Lyon (17–19 septembre 1998). 3 vols. Paris 2000–2003 (Collection du Centre d'études romaines et gallo-romaines. N. S. 20,1–2/27). For the auxiliaries, see J. E. H. Spaul: Ala 2. The Auxiliary Cavalry Units of the Pre-Diocletianic Imperial Army. A Revision and Updating of the Article Written by Conrad Cichorius and Originally Published in Part 1 of Band 1 of Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft, 1893. Andover 1994; J. E. H. Spaul: Cohors 2. The Evidence for and a Short History of the Auxiliary Infantry Units of the Imperial Roman Army. Oxford 2000 (BAR International Series 841); I. Haynes: Blood of the Provinces. The Roman Auxilia and the Making of Provincial Society from Augustus to the Severans. Oxford 2013. For the imperial rank structure, A. von Domaszewski: Die Rangordnung des Römischen Heeres. Einführung, Berichtigungen und Nachträge von B. Dobson. 2nd edition. Cologne/Graz 1967 (Beihefte der Bonner Jahrbücher 14).

2 Note the discussions of M. Absil: L'armée romaine de Dioclétien à Valentinien I dans l'épigraphie. In: Y. Le Bohec/C. Wolff (eds.): L'armée romaine de Dioclétien à Valentinien Ier. Actes du Congrès de Lyon (12–14 septembre 2002). Lyon/Paris 2004 (Collection du Centre d'études romaines et gallo-romaines N. S. 26), pp. 117–126. L. Di Segni: Late Antique Inscriptions in the Provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia*: Realities and Change. In: K. Bolle/C. Machado/C. Witschel (eds.): The Epigraphic Cultures of Late Antiquity. Stuttgart 2017 (Heidelberger althistorische Beiträge und epigraphische Studien 60), pp. 287–320.

rious issues about its value (Michael Kulikowski).[3] Into the fray steps Anthony Kaldellis and Marion Kruse, who, in the book under review here, offer a revisionist study of the development and transformation of the east Roman field armies, especially from the fifth century on, which is presented in tandem with a significant analysis of the *Notitia Dignitatum*.[4] The authors arrive at a late date for the document, which is out of keeping with most recent scholarship, though less so with work on other potential fifth century sources, like Vegetius' *Epitoma Rei Militaris*, and wider changes carried out by Theodosius II, exemplified for many by his legal codification.[5] Though not everyone will agree with their radical reappraisal of late Roman military organization and how to make sense of the *Notitia Dignitatum*, this book has made an important contribution to these wider discussions.

The first part of the book charts changes in the eastern field armies through the course of Late Antiquity, with their reconstruction diverging from the consensus beginning in the years after Julian's disastrous Persian expedition. They credit Theodosius I with making three significant "innovations" (p. 21) regarding military organization, the first being changing the names for magisterial commands. The second is the creation of a specific command for *Oriens*, while the third is an increase in the use of barbarians. Collectively, these changes laid the foundation for the creation of the *Notitia Dignitatum* system, rather than being responsible directly for its establishment. Two other significant periods of change were the years around the Hun invasion

3 D. Hoffmann: Das spätrömische Bewegungsheer und die Notitia Dignitatum. 2 vols. Düsseldorf 1969–1970 (Epigraphische Studien 7,1–2); M. Kulikowski: The *Notitia Dignitatum* as a Historical Source. In: Historia 49, 2000, pp. 358–377.

4 While writing this review, I listened to the episode of Kaldellis' podcast, "Byzantium and Friends," in which he and Marion Kruse discuss both the book and revisionism in historical scholarship (A. Kaldellis: Byzantium and Friends. No. 100: Our New Book on the Armies, and on Revisionism in History, with Marion Kruse; URL: https://byzantiumandfriends.podbean.com/e/100-our-new-book-on-the-armies-and-on-revisionism-in-history-with-marion-kruse/). That episode offers (unsurprisingly?) a very good overview of their book and an insightful discussion of revisionism. Here, I want to make it clear I do not use the phrase 'revisionist study' in any pejorative sense!

5 For a fifth century date for Vegetius, see: M. B. Charles: Vegetius in Context. Establishing the Date of the *Epitoma Rei Militaris*. Stuttgart 2007 (Historia-Einzelschriften 194); M. Colombo: La datazione dell'*Epitoma rei militaris* e la genesi dell'esercito tardoromano. La politica militare di Teodosio I, Veg. *r. mil.* 1.20.2–5 e Teodosio II. In: AncSoc 42, 2012, pp. 255–292.

of the empire in the middle of the fifth century, the potential date for the *Notitia Dignitatum*, and the actual date for the system that it describes. They make a strong case that there is no evidence that the army we find in the eastern half of the *Notitita Dignitatum* came into effect before the 440s. Instead, they argue that the field armies we find in the fourth and early fifth centuries were more *ad hoc* than much scholarship has let on. They did not yet have the titles we find in the *Notitia Dignitatum*. So, when we find generals leading armies in particular locales, this does not presuppose that he led a specific regional army, like a Thracian army (p. 37). Rather, the impetus for the creation of the more permanent field armies were the attacks of Attila and the Huns: their absence before 441 in the face of significant invasion led to their creation in subsequent years (p. 41). Thus, it was Theodosius II who created the army of the *Notitia Dignitatum* in the wake of the earlier demobilization of units and the incursions of the 440s.

The period from the death of Theodosius II to Anastasius I is characterized as the "classic" phase of the eastern field armies. This was also the only period when we have clear evidence for the operation of praesental armies (p. 59). By 492, there was a system in place for transferring praesental units to support other commands, a practice which gathered momentum during the reign of Justinian. Thus, it was only for a short period of time that praesental armies were based in and around Constantinople before they started getting shipped to hotspots around the eastern Mediterranean in the wake of Justinian's major changes to the empire's military. Indeed, another big transformation came in the sixth century due to Persian threats in the east and Justinian's reconquest of the west. This led to the reallocation of the praesental armies to the new armies of occupation, such as the African army described in 1.27 of the code of Justinian, as well as the new eastern, *per Armeniam*, army. Kaldellis and Kruse argue that these transfers did not come with the recruitment of new soldiers, however (p. 71–72, Cod. Iust. 1.29.5). This contradicts Justinian's explicit statements to the contrary, namely that his new armies led to a net gain of soldiers, a view followed by scholars like Warren T. Treadgold and Clemens Koehn.[6] In Kaldellis' and Kruse's eyes, Justinian enlarged the state, but he did not follow this up with a meaningful increase in the number of soldiers under arms (p. 88), which contributed to

6 W. T. Treadgold: Byzantium and Its Army, 284–1081. Stanford, CA 1995, p. 15; C. Koehn: Justinian und die Armee des frühen Byzanz. Berlin/Boston 2018 (Millennium-Studien 70), p. 43.

some of the foreign policy challenges faced by his successors. Ultimately, the field armies survived into the seventh century and beyond in the names of the later thematic armies (p. 103).

So, the crux of the book is their reconsideration of the development of the eastern field armies, as the title implies. A central part of the argument comes down to the 'chicken or the egg' paradox: did the military we see first come into being around the time of the publication of the *Notitia Dignitatum* or at some point beforehand. Is it the dawn of a new era or a reflection of a host of earlier changes? They argue that much previous scholarship saw it as the latter (p. 24), while they argue for the former, particularly when it comes to assigning a command to Roman generals whose sphere of influence is otherwise well-attested. In other words, there are plenty of *magistri militum* in the sources, but few with appellations like 'Illyricum', which scholars then append to the titles based on what we find in the *Notitia Dignitatum*. But as important as this discussion is, their reappraisal of the dating of the eastern list of the *Notitia Dignitatum* will also attract a lot of attention. They include a detailed discussion of the big issues with its dating namely: inconsistencies in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, the transfer of Dalmatia, the *comes* of Pontus, Macedonia Salutaris, the order and status of the *correctores*, Hoffmann's thesis, unit order and status, and the units labelled *nuper constituta*. Having evaluated each of these points in turn, they show that there are no firm *termini ante quem* before the reign of Leo I (r. 457–474). Even the most concrete of material, the papyrological evidence from Egypt, they argue fits with their later dating of the eastern list. Whether everyone will agree with their arguments for dating or not, their detailed appendices are invaluable for anyone who uses the *Notitia Dignitatum* ["The Roman High Command at Adrianople (378)", pp. 105–112; "*Magistri militum* under Theodosius I (379–395)", pp. 113–126; "A Revised Fasti of the Eastern Praesental Generals (MMPs)", pp. 127–151; "The Date of the *Notitia dignitatum*: *Oriens*", pp. 152–179]. It could well serve as an introduction to this important document to anyone approaching it for the first time, or even those who have not done so in some time. Perhaps too, someone might do the same for the western list (and field armies), even though this might prove to be a more difficult task. Ultimately, the differing character of the two large lists (east and west) reflects the "divergent evolution between east and west" (p. 177). The book also includes some revised

entries for "The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire,"[7] which echoes a major pan-European research project concerned with digitizing and updating this essential resource.[8]

Overall, this book could be the foundation for a radical reappraisal of the military – and hopefully it will usher in all sorts of exciting new work on the late antique military. In the conclusion, they highlight a host of issues that bear future consideration, like why the praesental armies were based round Constantinople in the first place, and where the money came from for all the reforms carried out by Theodosius II (pp. 94–95). They argue too that the transformations of the military in the late fourth century have been undertheorized (p. 98). Although they are most interested in changes in the field armies, this book might spur work on other underdeveloped or misunderstood parts of the late Roman military, like the *limitanei*. The rehabilitation of these long-maligned soldiers is well underway (even complete, on some levels), but this book might encourage a re-evaluation of their origins, development, and transformation, even though the issue is complicated by the comparative lack of attention which these soldiers attract in the works of late antique historians like Ammianus and Procopius – that is, not a lot.[9]

Inadvertently, perhaps, this book also serves to draw more attention to an emperor whose stature has been slowly growing over the past decade or two, namely that of Theodosius II. Books by Fergus Millar and Christopher Kelly have gone some way towards revising some established views of the reign of the emperor.[10] What is more, although we have long known the role the emperor played in the codification of a wide swath of Roman law, with

7 A. H. M. Jones/J. R. Martindale/J. Morris (eds.): The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire. Vol. 1: A. D. 260–395. Cambridge 1971; J. R. Martindale (ed.): The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire. Vol. 2: A. D. 395–527. Cambridge 1980; id (ed.): The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire. Vol. 3: A. D. 527–641. Cambridge/New York/Oakleigh 1992.

8 For a summary of the work on this project, see: https://news-archive.exeter.ac.uk/homepage/title_953010_en.html.

9 Rob Collins (Newcastle University) is currently editing a large, edited volume that will address many of these very issues, for example.

10 F. Millar: A Greek Roman Empire. Power and Belief under Theodosius II (408–450) Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 2006 (Sather Classical Lectures 64); C. Kelly: Rethinking Theodosius. In: C. Kelly (ed.): Theodosius II. Rethinking the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity. Cambridge et al. 2013 (Cambridge Classical Studies), pp. 3–64.

Kaldellis' and Kruse's arguments for a mid-fifth century date for the *Notitia Dignitatum* offered here, we now have two key pieces of evidence for the late Roman military which (potentially) fall squarely during the reign of this emperor. Both Vegetius and the *Notitia Dignitatum* have long been attributed to Theodosius I, or thereabouts, by most scholars. The relative abundance of military evidence – the seventh book of the *Theodosian Code*, Vegetius, and the *Notitia Dignitatum* – could well trigger a major shift in how we understand the late Roman military. Many treatments are often divided between the fourth century and the sixth century, with the fifth the silent and ill-understood century in the middle. The case in point is Arnold H. M. Jones' magisterial discussion in his "Later Roman Empire," which has substantial sections on the fourth and sixth centuries, but not the fifth.[11] If all these sources do date to the fifth century, then, these sorts of studies will need reconsidering, and our overall understanding of the late Roman military might become more balanced. Challenges remain, however, for a mass of legal pronouncements, an archaizing military manual, and an administrative list can only address specific questions, not those that usually rely on narrative histories like the *Res Gestae* and the *History of the Wars of Justinian*.

That last point brings up another important issue: having to rely on literary sources like Ammianus, Zosimus, and Procopius for understanding the organization of the late Roman military complicates our understanding, for all their intrinsic value. They rightly note the challenges the "informal military argot" used by Ammianus poses (p. 5). I think this issue – the language of our late antique historians – is a topic that deserves more attention. But it is also one that I think is not developed as thoroughly as it could be in this book. On this matter, Zosimus usually comes off much the worse than Ammianus, though the evidence is not always so clear cut. To give one example, when they mention some of the commanders involved in the disastrous withdrawal from Persia following Julian's death, they criticize Zosimus' use of the term στρατηγός (p. 5, n. 17) for Victor (3.13.3 – στρατηγὸς τοῦ πεζοῦ), Hormisdas, and Arinthaeus (both στρατηγὸς τῆς ἵππου), especially in light of Ammianus, who they note did not use the term *magister* for those individuals. As it happens, however, Ammianus rarely uses the term at all in book 25, and when he does it is usually to identify a Master of Offices (25.3.14 – *officiorum magister*). Ammianus prefers to use a form of *dux* in this book to

11 A. H. M. Jones: The Later Roman Empire, 284–602. A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey. 3 vols. Oxford 1964.

identify important generals, but elsewhere too. In book 26, when naming Arinthaeus in the context of the conflict around Byzantium, he does not call Arinthaeus *magister* but *dux* (26.8.4 – *Arintheum lectissimum ducem*), as they readily admit (p. 5, n. 17). It is only a book later that Arinthaeus is called *magister*, in this instance *magister peditum* (27.5.4 – *Arintheo magistro peditum*). Was he promoted in the interim or is Ammianus simply varying his vocabulary? If it is the latter, and Arinthaeus had been *magister* earlier, then Zosimus' account is right. Ultimately, to my mind, then, whether Ammianus calls a commander *magister* is not sufficient for accepting or denying the account of authors like Zosimus, given his own generalities. Ammianus is not the bastion of technicality he is made out to be (as they admit); conversely, perhaps Zosimus is not so unhelpful as he seems. Just as Zosimus' military language deserves more attention, this issue also underscores the need for a complete study of Ammianus' own military language.[12]

The vagaries of late antique historians bring to mind a potential issue with their overreliance on charting the movement of armies based on the identification of the ranks and movements of commanders named in those very literary sources. They devote most of their energy to the commanders of units rather than the units themselves. To some degree this make sense; the book focuses on changes on a large scale – the eastern field armies. It is also a reality of the sources. As with commanders, late antique historians speak in vague terms when it comes to units – even if Ammianus uses the word legion sometimes when discussing late Roman armies, it is sporadic and often inconsistent. Similar patterns apply to Procopius and his penchant for using his Procopianism, *katalogos*.[13] It could be that more work on the language of late antique authors might go a long way to remedying this, as suggested above, but even incorporating the evidence of Maurice, and more inscriptions and papyri, would help, at least a little. Indeed, for all that this is a revisionist study, this book is traditional in that it relies heavily on familiar

12 The multi-volume commentary on Ammianus is full of insightful discussions of his vocabulary, but scattered over the parts of the books where they appear in the text – that is, not consolidated in one place (for obvious reasons).

13 Ammianus: C. Whately: Ammianus' Identification of Named Legions and Its Literary Significance. In: M. Hanaghan/D. Woods (eds.): Ammianus Marcellinus from Soldier to Author. Leiden/Boston 2022 (Historiography of Rome and Its Empire 16), pp. 140–169; Procopius: C. Whately: Procopius on Soldiers and Military Institutions in the Sixth-Century Roman Empire. Leiden/Boston 2021 (History of Warfare 134), pp. 58–94.

literary sources like Procopius and others, like Malalas and Theophanes. While paying due attention to Ammianus Marcellinus, for example, makes a lot of sense despite the reservations I noted above, there are some surprises scattered about, like their use of the much later evidence of Agathias, which they hold – to my mind rightly – in high regard (pp. 83–84). On the other hand, other important textual sources, like Maurice's *Strategikon*, are strangely absent. Though Maurice may not describe a field army per se, he provides a wealth of material on unit types and sizes, and by most reckonings is an extremely reliable source. In other words, he includes just the sort of material (units and numbers) not found in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, or even authors like Ammianus and Procopius. Where inscriptions exist, they note the difficulty with locating units based on a soldier's epitaph, a practice perhaps a bit too common for earlier periods (p. 57), but which is hard to do for Late Antiquity. They draw on the limited papyrological evidence for field army units in Egypt, like the *Transtigritani* (p. 62), and the *Balistarii Theodosiaci* in the Negev (p. 64), so discussing whether the evidence shows the presence of entire units or just a few men (pp. 60–62). But there are occasional gaps. The important Anastasius edict from Perge, Pamphylia, which lists a legion, possibly a field army legion, possibly a praesental legion, is mysteriously absent.[14] There are dozens of other inscriptions from the Balkans to Syria that name soldiers and units, which could have been drawn upon, like the tribune from the Numerus Dacae from Apamea in Syria.[15] There are other parts of the book that are likely to draw the ire of readers. For one, I think they engage insufficiently with modern scholarship, even if they give their reasons for this early on.

Yet, despite my reservations, this little book is packed with insight, and well worth reading for anyone with an interest in its subject matter. Indeed, although in another context (podcast episode) they cautioned against the readability of the work, the book is not long, its technicality is tempered, and the discussion relatively succinct. To my mind, this makes the book more readable than a book on an esoteric topic like this – granted one that I love – might be expected to be. Even if not everyone will agree with their arguments, all students of the late Roman military will have to engage with this

14 F. Onur: The Anastasian Military Decree from Perge in Pamphylia: Revised 2nd edition. In: Gephyra 14, 2017, pp. 133–212.

15 IGLSyr 4.1356: ἐνθάδε κῖται Ἀστέριος, τριβοῦνος νουμέρου Δακῶν.

book. Yet again (as with Procopius, Byzantine identity, and much else besides), Kaldellis – this time with Kruse – deserves our thanks for pushing an important subject forward. I hope too, for all that the subject has not been underserved lately, that this book leads to an exciting new age of research.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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