

Roman Military Wives: The Epigraphic Evidence

The regular and sustained presence of women in the environment of the Roman army was long considered anathema to military discipline. The ban on marriage for soldiers of the Roman imperial army has been held up as evidence that women would not be found in the military sphere (Phang 2001), even after evidence to the contrary has shown that social reality was far different from formal law. It has now been shown that women were present in the community and may even have lived within the forts themselves (van Driel-Murray 1997, 1994; Allison 2006). Though much work has been done on this subject over the past two decades (e.g. Brandl 2008; Goldsworthy and Haynes 1999; Wells 1997; Debrunner Hall 1994) the topic of women in the Roman military community has idled somewhat, and not moved beyond proving the presence of women, to a more nuanced understanding of the role of wives and family within the social structure of the community. This stagnation is partially due to the unwillingness of some to accept the presence of women within military forts (James 2006), but also because the debate has primarily focused on archaeological evidence. In many cases it is difficult to prove with certainty the 'sex' of an artifact and therefore arguments that are centered solely on this evidence can falter (Allason-Jones 2001, 1995).

The proposed paper develops the thesis that women were active in the military community and strengthens the argument by considering some compelling epigraphic evidence. To date epigraphy has been brought into the debate by only a few scholars (Roxan 1991; Saller and Shaw 1984). Roman military diplomas suggest that the wives and children of auxiliary soldiers were living within the military community and most likely traveled with the units in some capacity. The *origo* of wife and soldier named on these documents suggests that in several cases the relationship originated before service began and, with several children named for citizenship, it becomes probable that these women traveled with the soldier for the duration of his *stipendium*. Inscriptions and diplomas suggest that sisters and daughters of soldiers were also part of the community and were probably available for marriage to other soldiers of the units. Epitaphs and diplomas identify soldier's origins as *in castris*, a prerequisite of which must be that families were living within the military community. An investigation of the epigraphic evidence set against the background of the archaeological debate illuminates the complex nature of the Roman military community and highlights the need to incorporate non-combatants into our understanding of military settlement, supply and the impact of the army on the frontiers of the Empire.

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