CHAPTER 10

Soldiers’ Families in the Early Roman Empire

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1 Introduction

Until recently, Roman military scholars viewed the military sphere as a male domain, a combat zone at the edge of the civilized world. Archeological investigations of military sites have concentrated on the evidence they provide for military strategy and for Roman power and authority over local populations (for example, Groenman-van Waateringe (1997); see also Jones (1997) 190). These military bases have been considered as communities of active soldiers. Roman authors wrote about the inappropriateness of families here and of women being involved in military affairs. Juvenal (Satires VI.398–405) was sharply critical of those women who “with unflinching face and hard breasts” participated in military matters and Herodian (Histories 3.8.4) considered wives to be “alien to military discipline and an efficient readiness for war.” Such views are used to support a perception among modern scholars that the frontier was no place for families. Van Driel Murray commented ((1995) 7) that “a typically nineteenth-century notion of segregated [male] military communities pervades thought on Roman military life.”

Despite the perspectives of some ancient authors and modern scholars, there is ample evidence that forts on the Roman frontier acted as habitation spaces, involving a community that included wives, families, and concubines. Caesar mentioned baggage trains of the carts of camp followers (On the African War 75) and Dio Cassius (56.20.2–5) noted that “not a few women and children and a large retinue of servants” followed the marching column of Varus when he led the Roman legions to disastrous defeat in 9 BCE.
2 Traditional Perspectives and the Augustan Marriage Ban for Ordinary Soldiers

It has long been acknowledged that, from early imperial times, governors, commanders and senior officers were accompanied by their families when on campaign. Agrippina accompanied her husband Germanicus while he was commander in Germania Inferior (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.69, 2.55.5). Their son, the later Emperor Gaius (Caligula), was born in a military camp. However, participation in their husbands’ military duties, by both Agrippina and Plancina, the wife of Cn. Calpurnicus Piso (governor in Syria in 17 CE), led to complaints being brought against them (21 CE) which started a debate in the Senate. The senators felt that there would be much less corruption if such wives and families remained in Rome while their husbands were serving on the frontier (Evans (1991) 27). Events such as this no doubt led to Juvenal’s satirical comments, and consequent modern views that women and families were rarely members of Roman military communities.

In addition, there was a ban on the marriage of ordinary soldiers on active service during the early Empire. This ban has been attributed to Augustus (see Watson (1969) 134; Wells (1998); cf. Phang (2001) 16–17), to explain why Claudius needed to grant the privileges of married men to “the men who served in the army, since they could not legally have wives” (Dio Cassius 60.24.3). Tacitus commented (*Annals* 14.27) that veterans who settled around Tarentum (59/60 CE) lacked the habit of marrying and rearing families. However, Livy (43.3) had commented on the ineligibility of soldiers for marriage in the second century BCE. In 197 CE Septimius Severus lifted the ban, allowing ordinary soldiers to “wear the gold ring and live [in marriage?] with their wives” (Herodian, *Histories* 3.8.4–5). This marriage ban has been taken to explain the lack of reference to women who were dependent on the military and to indicate a complete absence of soldiers’ families from the military sphere, prior to the end of the second century (for example, Garnsey (1970) 46; Smith (1972) especially 497; Southern and Dixon (1996) 85).

3 Changing Ideas about Military Communities

Some nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars were indeed aware that soldier families were part of Roman military communities during the early Empire. Mispoulet argued ((1884) especially 115) that it would have been impossible for Augustus to have made celibacy obligatory for 200,000–300,000 men while they were on duty for some 25 years. Liebenam also observed ((1909) 1676) that a strict law prohibited ordinary active soldiers from marrying, but lax handling of discipline permitted them to live together with women. However, for the last 100 years Roman scholars have assumed that the marriage ban required that soldiers were indeed celibate (for example, Watson (1969) 133).

Since the 1980s, a more social-historical approach to Roman military life has developed, with a growing interest into the community associated with, and often
economically dependent on, the military (see James (2002) 42–43). Scholarly attention has turned from an overwhelming concern for military strategy to investigating these communities, especially the interactions between military and non-military personnel (for example, Bowman (1994); Goldsworthy and Haynes (1999)). Greater attention has been paid to the archeological evidence for settlements outside the fort walls (so-called *vici* and *canabae*) (for example, Haalebos (1991), (1998); Sommer (1997), (1999a), (1999b)). And papers in Goldsworthy and Haynes’ *The Roman Army as a Community* (1999) have investigated the people who made up, and supported, the Roman military. For example, Alston (1999) discussed early second-century CE papyrus letters that illuminate the social networks of soldiers stationed in Egypt and their relationships with surrounding communities. And Speidel (1989) discussed literary and epigraphical evidence, from the first century CE, for soldiers’ servants who accompanied their masters and carried out many of their daily chores, and who could outnumber the soldiers themselves. Other scholars have stressed the range of textual and epigraphical evidence concerning the civilians associated with military bases (for example, Eck and Wolff (1987); Maxfield (1995); Wesch-Klein (1998)).

Some research has also been focused on women and families in these communities. For example, Wells observed (1997) that, even during the ban on soldier marriages, veterans were permitted to marry and their children were granted citizenship. Their sons and daughters would therefore have been part of these military communities, the daughters providing citizen wives and offspring for further veterans and officers. And Phang has taken a critical approach to the significance of the marriage ban and its relationship to the actuality of Roman military life (for example, Phang (2001)). Essentially, the legal ban on marriage did not result in the absence of soldiers’ wives – “wives,” in the *de facto* sense – or of their families from the military arena.

The general understanding is that most, if not all, non-military personnel, including any women and families, were housed in the settlements outside the forts.

4 The Evidence for Families of All Ranks

Evidence that serving men of all ranks had wives and families who accompanied them while on duty is found among the ancient authors. Epigraphical evidence – inscriptions, particularly epitaphs on tombstones, papyri, military diplomas and also inscribed wooden tablets found within military sites – provides more information (see Phang (2001)). In addition, there is a considerable amount of other archeological evidence – the arrangements of structural remains, skeletal remains and other artifacts in context. Different types of evidence tend to provide information on different military ranks. The ancient authors provide information on the wives and families of the higher ranks and sometimes, at least the potential for, evidence of families of the lower ranks. Inscriptions, particularly on tombstones, inform us about senior officers’ families, as can the associated sculptural remains (i.e. relief depictions of the people mentioned in the epitaph), but we also find tombstones put up to, or by, the families of centurions and ordinary soldiers. Particularly important information on senior officers’ families is found on the
inscribed wooden tablets found in the early forts at Vindolanda, on Hadrian’s Wall (see Bowman and Thomas (1994)).

Papyri (petitions, contracts, judicial records, receipts, accounts and personal letters) tend to provide evidence that is most pertinent to the families of lower ranking soldiers (Phang (2001) 22). Particularly important documents on soldiers’ families are bronze military diplomas, copies of the imperial constitutions that granted privileges to soldiers who had completed their statutory term of service with an unblemished record. These granted them Roman citizenship and conubium (the right for legal marriage to non-Roman women) and citizenship for their children (Maxfield (1987)).

Material remains can also provide evidence for soldiers’ families across all ranks, and are important for understanding of how these families were accommodated and what roles they may have played within the military community.

### 5 Commanders’ and Senior Officers’ Families

Augustus’ legislation, promoting marriage among the elite, would have included equestrian and senior officers (see Phang (2001) 129). The negative rhetoric against Agrippina and Plancina, far from indicating that senior officers’ wives and families were not part of frontier life, actually documents the opposite reality. According to Suetonius (Augustus 24), Augustus allowed legates’ wives to visit the forts during winter when the army was not generally at war. However, Dio’s reference to the people following Varus’ marching column (56.20.2–5) suggests that senior officers’ families and households went on active campaigns.

Senior officers’ families are commemorated in tombstones (Allason-Jones (1989) 55). There is ample evidence for the later Empire, such as Julia Lucilla, who was of senatorial rank and who accompanied her equestrian husband Rufinus to High Rochester during the Severan campaigns north of Hadrian’s Wall at the turn of the third century (Collingwood and Wright (1965) No. 1271; see Allason-Jones (1999) 41). There are also examples of officers’ families on the frontier during the first and second centuries. The family of Fabius Honoratus, tribune of the first cohort of Vangiones, a large infantry unit stationed at Chesters in the late second century, is known from the tombstone of his young daughter, Fabia Honorata, as is the name of his wife, Aurelia Eglectiane (Collingwood and Wright (1965) No. 1482; see Allason-Jones (1999) 42).

Our best evidence for the relatively permanent presence of senior officers’ families in the farthest parts of the empire is found among the inscribed wooden tablets excavated from the fort at Vindolanda. These tablets included letters between Sulpicia Lepidina, wife of Flavius Cerialis (commanding officer at Vindolanda, ca. 100–104 CE) and Claudia Severa, the wife of Aelius Brocchus (commander of a nearby fort). One letter, in which the former was invited by the latter to a birthday party (Bowman and Thomas (1994) No. 291), provides glimpses of the social lives of elite women in remote military spheres.

Thus, there is no doubt that the families of commanding and senior officers existed and spent much of their time in distant parts of the empire.
6 Centurions and Principales

Evidence for families of junior officers, such as centurions, or of principales, who were non-commissioned officers or high-grade specialists recruited from ordinary soldiers and on double pay (see Campbell (1994) 28–29), is less obvious. Phang noted (2001) 129 that there is no direct textual evidence to indicate exactly which ranks the Augustan marriage ban affected. She argued that centurions, although being “a cut above the common soldier in terms of ability and sometimes birth,” would have come under the ban, only being “permitted legal marriage upon reaching the same length of service as that at which the common soldiers were discharged” (Phang (2001) 130–32). At the same time, she noted that many epitaphs referred to the families of centurions and principales. Allason-Jones also observed that centurions’ families were acknowledged in tombstones ((1989) 57–59). An example, probably dating to the second century, was Flavius Verecundus, a Pannonian centurion of the VIth Legion Victrix posted on the Antonine Wall, who had an African wife, Vibia Pacata (Wright (1964) 178; see Allason-Jones (1999) 44).

Thus, these minor officers did indeed “marry” prior to the end of the second century, whether or not these marriages were legal, and their families were members of military communities. As Phang noted (2001) 131), these officers were wealthier than ordinary soldiers and so had the means not only to support a family but also to create the tombstones that record their existence. Phang suggested that commanders may have tolerated such “marriages” because centurions were fewer in number than ordinary soldiers and would have been able to maintain a family on their higher wages. Such “marriages” would not have been a drain on the public purse, as would have legal marriages.

7 Immunes and Ordinary Soldiers

The scant attention paid by ancient authors to families of soldiers and immunes (specialist soldier craftsmen) who were not among the elite (see Phang (2001) 16) has, in large part, contributed to modern scholars’ assumptions that such families did not exist. However, more critical reading of the texts often indicates that these families were indeed members of military communities from the late Republic. As mentioned above, Livy (43.3) noted that when an envoy was sent to Spain in 171 BCE he reported some 4,000 children of Roman soldiers and Spanish women, between whom legal marriage could not exist. This implies that these were not senior officers and probably not centurions, but ordinary soldiers who had children with Spanish women. Caesar’s “camp-followers” and the women and children who followed Varus’ legions could also have included the families of ordinary soldiers.

Tombstones have been found that were set up by ordinary soldiers’ families to commemorate the death of their soldier father or husband, or vice versa, by a soldier to commemorate a family member. For example, on a reused tombstone at Cawfields on Hadrian’s Wall (Figure 10.1), an auxiliary soldier, Dagvalda, was mourned by his wife,
Another soldier, Aurelius Marcus in the century of Obsequens, set up a tombstone to his wife at Carvoran (Collingwood and Wright (1965) No. 1828; see Allason-Jones (1999) 46). Some scholars have argued that such tombstones could only have been erected after the lifting of the marriage ban (for example, Collingwood and Wright (1965) 567). However, Allason-Jones noted ((1989) 59; (1999) 46) that there is no precise evidence to date these epitaphs. Indeed, Varon’s survey of inscriptive evidence dating to the second century (1994) indicates that ordinary soldiers could buy female slaves and, while still in service, could then free them for the purpose of marriage and produce children with them. Varon noted ((1994) 191) that many inscriptions indicate “warm kind relationships between the serving soldier and his freedwomen.”

Phang’s analyses (2001) of epitaphs, papyri and bronze military diplomas, dating to the period 13 BCE to 235 CE, demonstrate the existence of a marriage ban for serving soldiers during the early Empire, but also show that ordinary soldiers indeed “married” in the de facto sense while on active service. For example, early second-century Greek papyri from Roman Egypt, the Cattaoui Papyrus and BGU 140 (Hadrian’s edict of 4 August 119 CE), provide evidence for the illegitimacy of such “marriages” but, at the same time, demonstrate that they took place and that children resulted from them (Phang (2001) 22–55). These papyri indicate concern for the acceptance of the
children as legal heirs of their soldier fathers by discussing the dowries of such “wives” and the status of the children born of such unions. A military diploma, dated 30 June 107 CE (CIL 16.55), records that Trajan granted to the cavalry and infantry who had served 25 years or more in Raetia “citizenship to their children and the right to marry their “wives,” the women whom they had when citizenship was granted them” (translated in Phang (2001) 55). This particular diploma is that of a common soldier, Coelenus, of the cavalry wing (ala) of I Hispanorum Auriana, and mentions his wife Verecunda and his daughter Matrulla. In other words, Coelenus already had an acknowledged “wife” and daughter before he was granted the right to a legitimate marriage. As Phang noted (2001) 50), the authorities were unable to prevent soldiers from forming such unions and did not punish them, nor confiscate the dowries. Essentially, while the Roman administration did not permit the legal marriage of soldiers during the early Empire, these unions did exist and were sanctioned by the authorities. The “wives” and children were emotionally and financially bonded to their soldier husbands and fathers and were heirs to their possessions.

Women who married ordinary soldiers are widely assumed to be peregrine, but the evidence from epitaphs show that only about 10 percent were neither Roman nor Greek (Phang (2001) 191). As Phang noted, though, this figure may have been masked in the second century when Roman citizenship and the use of the duo nomina (i.e. a Latin family name (the gentilice) followed by a Greek or Latin cognomen) was spread more widely. A more significant number of soldiers’ “wives” appear to have been freedwomen, as noted by Varon. Sometimes they are identified as both the liberta and coniux of an individual soldier, but many may have been freedwomen of other soldiers.

8 Late Marriages of Soldiers

If soldiers had to wait until their discharge – some 25 years for legionaries and auxiliaries – to marry and have families, they would have then been in their 40s or even older. As Phang noted, it seems unreasonable to expect them to wait this long, which would explain, in part, why soldiers had families while they were still on active service. Even so, many soldiers probably had these families later than elite Roman males, who usually married in their early 20s (Phang (2001) 164). Phang suggested that soldier “marriages” probably took place around the age of 30, a pattern that is found among non-elite males (Phang (2001) 164–90). By surveying the epitaphs from North Africa, the Danubian provinces and the Praetorian Guard, she found that, prior to the age of about 37, soldiers were more likely to be commemorated in epitaphs set up by their parents than by their spouses and children, although not exclusively, and that this pattern was reversed after that age. This suggests that even though soldiers were forming unions while in active service they probably did this later rather than earlier. These late “marriages” would have meant fewer legal difficulties for the families of active soldiers, but also that the soldiers did not have to wait until their discharge to marry legally. Possibly more important factors influencing these late marriages centered around the economics of having a family. In the first century ordinary soldiers were more poorly paid than in the second century. In the first century the
purchase price of a slave woman would cost some two years’ pay for a legionary and eight years’ pay for a fleet soldier. Phang observed (2001) 3 that, although these unofficial “marriages” existed throughout the imperial period, they appear to have been less frequent in the first century and more prevalent in the second and the third centuries. Promotion, such as to a centurion, a principalis or an immunis, would also have meant higher pay and so would have made it easier to support a family (Phang 2001) 185–86). Legionary soldiers had to serve some ten to 15 years before they could be promoted to a centurion. Cavalry soldiers in the auxiliary had to serve 12 to 20 years. The administration may well have discouraged “de facto” marriages among younger soldiers but encouraged them for older, promoted, ones who could afford them (Phang 2001) 176).

Thus, all ranks could have families during their military service, with women of all social statuses and levels of dependency. Acknowledgment that soldiers’ families were an integral part of a Roman military community, before the lifting of the marriage ban, is taking root.

9 Housing for Military Families

What is not apparent from the evidence discussed above, however, is where such families, or any other women who accompanied the military, would have lived. The documentary evidence gives no information on the spatial arrangements for the accommodation of these families. Phang stressed that the question of where soldiers’ families resided is not relevant to the legal status of soldier “marriages” but is a question for the archeological evidence (2001) 18). Essentially, historians have been unconcerned about the spatial accommodation of soldier families, whether legal or illegal. Phang commented (2001) 18) that it is unclear whether Septimius Severus’ reforms in 197 CE granted ordinary soldiers legal marriage or permitted them to live with their concubine “wives” outside the fort walls. She felt that the latter was unlikely as they had already been doing this for two centuries. Like many other military scholars, she argued that such “wives” and families would not have resided inside the fort walls before the Severan reforms (2001) 18, 124–29).

Roman marching camps, legionary fortresses and auxiliary forts were reportedly laid out in an organized fashion, details of which are provided by Polybius (6.27–42), writing in the second century BCE, and Pseudo Hyginus who probably wrote in the third century CE. It has been widely assumed that this prescribed, formulaic layout provided little or no space for non-military personnel and no facilities for women and families, particularly for ordinary soldiers’ families.

The archeological evidence gives us good information on the layouts of individual forts and these layouts have been used to identify the type of fort and what sector of the army it housed. For example, the layout of the fortress at Inchtuthil, in Scotland, has been used to conclude that it housed a whole legion (Webster 1985) 114, fig. 34), while that at Vetera I on the lower Rhine has been used to argue that it housed two legions (Hanel 1995) 5–7). Smaller forts have been identified as cohort or auxiliary forts, such as that at Ellingen in the Danube region which, Zanier argued
((1992) 166–70), probably held some 200 men. However, the actual occupancy of each fort was not static and troops could be moved between military bases if necessary. There is no reason to assume that all forts operated to full capacity at all times, and therefore could not have accommodated non-military personnel, not least because soldiers died in battle and new recruits may not always have been readily available.

For the interpretation of the use of space and the functioning of the various buildings inside Roman military bases, von Petrikovits (1975) has been most influential. His detailed study of fort components is derived from combining Polybius’ and Pseudo Hyginus’ descriptions of fort layouts with the evidence from excavated structural remains. He used this combination to extrapolate the functions of the various fort components and, notably, who was accommodated within each of these components. Consequently, the traditional view is that the residential accommodation inside the fort walls consisted of: the commanding officer’s house (praetorium), which was usually near the center of the fort, next to the administrative headquarters (principia), and accommodated his household; senior officers’ houses, which were nearby and accommodated their households; and the barracks buildings, which were found around the outer parts of the fort and which comprised the quarters of ordinary soldiers and, at one end, the houses of centurions. Scholars have generally accepted that all other non-military personnel lived in settlements outside the forts (for example, Maxfield (1995) 5; Eck and Wolff (1987) 5).

10 Senior Officers’ Residences

The ancient authors indicate that commanding and senior officers’ families very probably lived inside the fort walls (see Allason-Jones (1989) 50–56; Debrunner Hall (1996) 213–19). For example, during a mutiny on the lower Rhine in 14 CE, according to Tacitus (Annals 1.41), Germanicus persuaded the pregnant Agrippina, together with their son Caligula, to leave camp, accompanied by the tearful wives of Germanicus’ staff officers, who were also forced to leave their husbands.

It is widely accepted that senior officers’ residences are easily recognizable in the archeological remains. According to von Petrikovits (1975), during the early Empire the commander of a legion lived in a praetorium, near the camp forum, which was a richly furnished Mediterranean-type peristyled house. Within excavations of both auxiliary forts and legionary fortresses, a centrally located courtyard building is often found that is laid out and fitted in a manner seemingly appropriate for accommodation for the household of a commanding officer that consisted of a wife, family, servants, and slaves (Birley (1977) 90). In established legionary fortresses these could be substantial buildings, sometimes even palaces, with many of the amenities found in elite civilian houses in the Roman period. For example, at the double legionary fortress of Vetera I, in the lower Rhine, there were two extensive legates’ palaces, each with a hippodrome-like garden (Hanel (1995) 54–59, pl. 169). In many excavated forts the appointments of such residences included colonnaded courtyards, hypocaust flooring for heating, wall-painting, sculpture, and private bath suites.
At Chesters on Hadrian’s Wall, where Fabius Honoratus probably lived with his wife, Aurelia Eglecticiane, and daughter, Fabia Honorata, the *praetorium* was a large multi-roomed house, with hypocaust under-floor heating in many of the rooms and a private bath suite (see also the *praetorium* at Housesteads: Allason-Jones (1989) 56; Building I at Weissenburg: Grönke (1997) 74–75). Inside legionary fortresses, other courtyard houses have also been found, which were probably the residences of senior officers and would have provided appropriate accommodation for their families. Three such courtyard houses at Vetera I, houses K, J and M, have been identified as those of the tribunes (Hanel (1995) 61–65). Thus, structural remains within excavated forts and fortresses appear to bear witness to the living standards of officers’ families and households.

### 11 Centurions’ Quarters

According to von Petrikovits ((1975) 62) centurions lived in their own houses at the street end of the barracks buildings. He observed that these were mostly rectangular houses with an entrance in the long side and were seldom courtyard houses. These centurions’ houses sometimes also had hypocaust under-floor heating, kitchens and baths, painted walls and mosaic floors, and were larger than the accommodation of ordinary soldiers. Von Petrokovits observed the increasing luxury of these houses, not only in the internal furnishings, but also in the size.

Allason-Jones suggested that, while it is not clear where centurions’ families lived, these barracks houses were of a suitable size to accommodate a family ((1989) 58). Hoffmann (1995) has since stressed that the elaboration of these centurions’ dwellings during the Principate was often comparable to that of senior officers’ houses. She argued that their form and decoration document a standard of living that would have made a petty officer’s family feel “at home” and, therefore, indicates that such families were probably accommodated inside the fort. Hassall ((1999) 35) also included the “functional “bungalows” of centurions … situated at the end of the barracks blocks” among the married officers’ quarters within legionary fortresses. More recently, the skeletal remains of at least three infants have been excavated in association with a centurion’s house inside the legionary fortress of Vindonissa, at modern Windisch/Brugg in Switzerland (Trumm and Fellman Brogi (2008); see also Pauli-Gabi and Trumm (2004)). Trumm and Pauli-Gabi identified these remains as the children of the centurion who lived in this house with his “wife” and family at the end of the first century CE.

Thus, there is increasing evidence, both implicit and explicit, that centurions very probably lived inside military bases with their families who, in many cases, might include mothers and sisters. Even during the early Empire, space was taken up inside these forts not only by senior officers’ households but also by those of more junior officers. This could mean that there could have been at least ten families for whom the military authorities provided accommodation. If space within the fort was taken up by such non-military personnel then this would have had major implications, not only for the capacity of fighting personnel which each fort could house, but also for the concept of a strict military life often attributed to the Roman army.
12 Housing for Other Camp Followers and Non-Military Personnel

As discussed above, it is evident that ordinary soldiers’ families undoubtedly accompanied their husbands and fathers into combat zones but it is unclear where they were domiciled. The widely held perception is that most, if not all, of non-military personnel, such as tradespersons, concubines and illegitimate families, and other support personnel, were housed in settlements outside these forts and fortresses – in the so-called *vici* (for auxiliary forts) and the *canabae* (for legionary fortresses) – as no allowance for their accommodation is evident in the fort layout.

Evidence for accompanying settlements outside the fort walls has been noted (for example, Vindolanda: Birley (1977) 31–72; Housesteads: Crow (2004) 73–82; see also Sommer (1997)). These settlements, for the most part, grew up at the same time as the camp. They were often laid out by the army as an integral part of its surroundings (Sommer (1999a) 176). Buildings which would have been constructed in these settlements as part of the fort included bath complexes and possibly housing for army veterans (for example, at Vindolanda: see Birley (1977) 34–37, 46–48). The traditional belief that the fort was a segregated male space (for example, von Petrikovits (1975) 62) has led to assumptions that these settlements housed all of the camp followers and also members of the local population who found economic advantage in living in close proximity to these Roman centers, where up to 12,000 men would be on regular pay. It is assumed by most military scholars that, after the lifting of the marriage ban, soldiers’ families would also have been housed in these settlements (for example, Watson (1969) 140; Smith (1972) 497). Phang argued that before the end of the second century any “de facto” families of ordinary soldiers would also have lived there.

In 134 BCE Scipio Aemilianus had expelled “hetairai,” traders and soothsayers from a camp in Numantia (Appian, *The Wars in Spain* 85). This reference led to an assumption that, during the Republic and early Empire, the only women in the military sphere, other than members of senior officers’ households, would have been tradeswomen and prostitutes (for discussion, see Debrunner Hall (1996) especially 208–209; Rudán and Brandl (2008) 4, 6). However, the word “hetairai” may have been deliberately chosen by Appian as it refers to women of unknown status but who, for whatever reason, were not able to marry the man they may have been living with. This reference can be taken to refer to the *de facto* “wives” and illegitimate families of ordinary soldiers residing inside the fort walls. However, the general perception has long been that it implies the opposite – that military forts were no-go zones for such individuals. For example, Liebenam presumed ((1909) 1676) that, even although soldiers would have had families in the early Empire, these families would not have been allowed to come into the camp, as they would have been a hindrance there.

Excavations of the rubbish dump belonging to the legionary fortress of Vindonissa produced a number of wooden tablets that probably originated from the fortress and refer to life inside it. On some tablets Speidel (1996) found numbers of houses associated with individuals’ names. These demonstrated that, opposite the main baths inside
this fortress, there had been a tavern or inn where a female barmaid or innkeeper called Belica worked (Speidel (1996) 55, 80). Next door there had been another inn, run by a female landlady. Speidel reported ((1996) 186–87) that gaming stones, dice and kitchen utensils were found in the area, documenting entertainment and perhaps public eating and drinking here. It seems improbable that such women were members of officers’ families. It is perhaps more likely that they were associated with ordinary soldiers, although this cannot be verified. Also, this evidence does not verify the residency of these women within this fortress, but it suggests that they were employed in, or perhaps even owned, establishments within the fort walls that would have provided accommodation for their staff.

13 Soldiers’ Barracks

According to von Petrikovits ((1975) 36), the barrack buildings that housed ordinary soldiers were systematically laid out, usually with 10–14 pairs of rooms. Each pair had a front room (ca. 3m by 3m) and a back room (ca. 3m by 1.5m), forming a dormitory, or *contubernium*, in which six to eight men would have lived together and shared domestic duties, including, von Petrikovits argued ((1975) 97), preparing their own food. No elaborate furnishings or structural variations have been reported in such barracks.

Von Petrikovits also argued ((1975) 35) that special quarters, found near the *principia* or the workshop buildings, would have housed the *immunes*. Barracks buildings found in the remains of excavated forts that are less regular in plan than infantry barracks, but still composed of rows or series of small rooms, have often been identified as *immunes’* barracks.

Von Petrikovits ((1975) 62) felt that it was self-understood that the slaves of ordinary soldiers, *immunes* and *principales* had no space in these barracks and that any women would certainly not have been allowed to live here.

14 Artifacts and Soldiers’ Families

The archeological evidence discussed so far has mainly been structural. Artifacts found within Roman forts can play a more important role in identifying the presence and activities of soldiers’ families inside Roman military bases and probably their residence there.

Van Driel Murray ((1995), (1997)) has shown how artifacts found within barracks buildings indicate that they held more than just the eight serving soldiers who made up a *contubernium*. She investigated leather shoes found in a number of first- and second-century military sites in the Netherlands and Britain (van Driel Murray (1994), (1995), (1997)), analyzing their size ranges and comparing these with the size distribution patterns for modern male and female shoes (for example, van Driel Murray (1995) fig. 1.1). In Augustan forts she identified predominantly male footwear, while
she found that the second-century forts, with mixed fort and vicus material, showed a more mixed population (van Driel Murray (1994) 345–47). She also found that, like the graphs of modern shoe-size ranges, those from the various periods at Vindolanda showed a double-peak either side of size 34 ((1995) figs 1.3–1.4), which she interpreted as separating the shoes of women and children from those of adult males. At Vindolanda she noted predominantly male footwear from the commanding officer’s quarters during Period II (ca. 90 CE) but an increased range in shoe sizes in these quarters in Period III (ending ca. 104 CE), when Flavius Cerealis and his wife Sulpicia Lepidina were in residence (van Driel Murray especially (1995) 8–19; (1997) 56–57). In Period IV (ca. 104–120 CE) van Driel Murray found concentrations of what she identified as women’s and children’s shoes in the ordinary soldiers’ barracks, in what she suggested was rubbish left behind by departing troops. These findings present a strong argument for the existence, and perhaps habitation, of women and children within the ordinary soldiers’ barracks at Vindolanda during the early second century. Van Driel Murray acknowledged that the bimodality in these graphs of shoe-size ranges and the small shoes could conceivably point to the presence of boys and youths as male prostitutes ((1995) 19; see also James (2006) 34), although this would not explain their apparent absence in earlier periods.

There has been considerable resistance to van Driel Murray’s interpretations. Phang felt ((2001) 128) that archeological evidence, such as van Driel Murray’s, is “difficult to interpret and to generalize from” and suggested that this evidence indicates only “occasional presence of women in the barracks.” James (2006: 34–35) highlighted van Driel Murray’s distaste for the concept of young male prostitutes in the barracks and Reuter has queried ((2008) 94–95) the reliability of the contexts at Vindolanda. Phang called for a “full survey [to be] undertaken with careful attention to the archeological context and dating” (Phang (2001) 128). My recent study of the distribution of gendered artifacts has attempted this (for example, Allison (2006), (2007), (2008), (n.d.); Allison et al. (2004), (2008)).

15 Artifact Distribution Studies

The distribution patterns of gendered artifacts found inside five early imperial forts in the German provinces (Figure 10.2) – Vetera I (Hanel (1995)), Rottweil (Franke (2003)), Oberstimm (Schönberger (1978)), Hesselbach (Baatz (1973)) and Ellingen (Zanier (1992)) – have been studied to investigate for the presence and activities of women and children inside these forts, particularly in areas frequented by ordinary soldiers. Vetera I, in the lower Rhine region, was a double legionary fortress, abandoned ca. 70 CE. The forts studied at Rottweil, on the Neckar near the upper Rhine, consisted of a legionary fortress that was replaced in 85 CE by a smaller double cohort fort, abandoned ca. 110–120 CE. The other three forts were all auxiliary forts. That at Oberstimm, in the upper Danube, was occupied between 40 CE and 120 CE. That at Hesselbach, between the Neckar and Main and dating to the second century, was included in this study as a control. The auxiliary fort at Ellingen, also in the upper Danube region, was occupied from ca. 120 CE until probably the end of the second
Figure 10.2  Map of Germany showing locations of forts in this study. Adapted by Patrick Faulkner.
century. Thus, these forts form a sample of types of military forts in the Roman provinces during the early Empire.

Inside the fortress at Vetera I the artifacts most likely to have been associated with women and children (for example, particular types of brooches, jewelry, hair pins and toilet items) tend to cluster in the main gateways and cross street, and in the commanding officer’s palace and senior officers’ houses (Figure 10.3). This distribution pattern conforms to the view that women and children within this first-century legionary fortress were most probably members of officers’ households. The clustering in the main streets may indicate female traders from outside the camp frequenting the main market areas. However, the finds from a building with a large number of small rooms just off the main street, Building a (between Buildings Y and H), consisted of the remains of
a number of dress-related items, including 21 beads of a woman’s necklace, a number of coins and a quantity of tableware and food preparation items (see Allison et al. (2004) section 8.7.3d; Allison (2005) figs 5, 6). It is tempting to see this building as an inn or guest house like those documented on the wooden tablets from Vindonissa. The women identifiable through these finds could conceivably have worked here. It is conceivable that they were members of soldiers’ families.

Rottweil was even less comprehensively excavated than Vetera I and probably less dramatically abandoned, so the forts here have much less material remains to analyze. That said, artifacts associated with women and children were relatively prolific in the central area, which could have been the location for a commanding officer’s residence (Figure 10.4). They were also associated with a building in the southeast corner of the fort, identified as a tribune’s residence through its position and layout (Franke (2003) 44). Most notable here were the remains of a silver mirror casing decorated with a
Thus, the first-century military bases at Vetera I and Rottweil conform to the traditional view that senior officers’ families resided inside these forts in relatively extensive, mostly courtyard, houses, no doubt with household staff as they had in civilian life. Other women who frequented these forts may have been traders who lived outside, although it is not inconceivable that they could have lived inside the fort, perhaps as members of soldiers’ families. There is insufficient evidence for the ordinary soldiers’ barracks at either of these sites to reach any conclusions about the presence or otherwise of families in such areas.

At Oberstimm there is a more extensive distribution of artifacts associated with women and children (Figure 10.5). As at Vetera I and Rottweil, there is a high concentration of such material in a courtyard building identified as the commander’s residence, the praetorium (Schönberger (1978) 80–90). This suggests that the commander’s family and household were accommodated here. There was also a concentration of female-related material near the main gate to the west, together with a number of coins. This may have been a commercial area just inside the main gate and may reflect the presence of women traders, as in the previous two forts. Artifacts associated with women and children were also concentrated in the area of Building 3, in the northwest part of the fort, which Schönberger argued ((1978) 68) was used for accommodation for craftsmen (immunes) and for soldiers who served in the nearby hospital (valitudinarium). In addition, they were found between Buildings 12 and 14, identified respectively as taverns and soldiers’ barracks (Schönberger (1978) 118, 120). Some that were possibly associated with women and children were found scattered across the barracks, Building 6. If Schönberger’s identifications of the various buildings and areas are correct, then the craftsmen in Building 3 and the troops in the barracks, Building 6, and possibly in the barracks, Building 14, may have resided with their families inside this fort. Either these women or possibly other women were involved in commercial activities near the gate and in Building 12. Given that this fort is identified as a supply station (Schönberger (1978) 148) and was unlikely to have housed an active garrison, it is perhaps not surprising to find women and children integrated into this community as they would have been in a civilian community. These women may well have been the wives and family members of serving soldiers.

At the later auxiliary fort at Ellingen the most substantial evidence for the presence of soldiers’ families consists of the remains of up to 11 infant skeletons (Figure 10.6). Some of these were found beneath Building C (building in northeast corner of fort), which Zanier suggested could have been a soldiers’ barracks (Zanier (1992) 64–65), but in what was thought to have been redeposited material from outside the fort (Zanier (1992) 69–70, 72, 93). However, half of the skeletal remains inside the fort were not from this building and some were found in burial pits. From the state of preservation of these skeletal remains it is not possible that they could have been redeposited (Allison (2007) 410). The infant remains therefore present very strong evidence for the presence of mothers and their children, probably residing in Building C. It was common practice for newborn infants to be buried under their house floors (see Watts (1989) 372–73; Scott (1999) especially 1, 4, 90–108; for cupid in relief (Franke (2003) pl. 16, No. 225). As at Vetera I, artifacts associated with women and children were also found in the main street of the Rottweil forts.
further references, see Allison (2007) 411). Female- and child-related artifacts, including spindle whorls, were excavated from various areas inside this fort, but these finds were concentrated in the two buildings identified as soldiers’ barracks – Buildings C and B. They were virtually absent from the building identified as a workshop, Building D (Zanier (1992) 76–77), and relatively rare in the commander’s house, Building F. Zanier argued (1992) 165–66) that the troop stationed here may have been a service troop, involved in the construction of the Limes. There is much evidence that metal-working was carried out inside this fort (Allison (2007) 418, fig. 24). The artifact distribution implies that, while a commander’s family could conceivably have been resident here, a number of the ordinary soldiers stationed here also had wives and families living with them inside their barracks. From spindle whorls found under the porticoes around the barracks buildings, some of those women can be visualized spinning here. They were probably not involved in the heavier industrial activities carried out in workshops, but finds related to women and children in the streets and open areas indicate that their movements around this fort were probably unrestricted.
Figure 10.6 GIS plot showing distribution of women’s and children’s items inside the second-century auxiliary fort at Ellingen (CH = infant skeletal remains).
Thus, while the structural remains of barracks buildings have been used as evidence that soldiers’ families could not have lived inside the fort walls, the artifactual evidence, including infant skeletons at Ellingen and leather shoes at Vindolanda, paints a different picture. While soldiers’ quarters may have been more cramped than those of centurions’ families, this should not preclude the concept of a soldier family residing as a unit and providing support for each other. As van Driel Murray has noted ((1995) 12–15), despite an official ban, the Dutch soldiers in Indonesia in the nineteenth century had families who were acknowledged by the authorities and who lived with them in their barracks.

16 The Women and Families inside the Fort

The documentary evidence points to the existence of families of soldiers of all ranks during the early Empire. As Phang noted, the evidence for the families of ordinary soldiers seems to increase during the second century. The archeological evidence indicates that these families could be housed inside these military bases and tolerated by the authorities. In cases like Oberstimm they may well have contributed to the main military enterprises of these non-combatant forts.

The families of senior officers in large legionary fortresses on the Roman frontier appear to have lived in considerable comfort, even luxury. Despite these home comforts, however, the women may have suffered some hardship and boredom not least because of the social and family connections they may have left behind to follow their husbands, fathers, sons, or brothers, in their line of duty (Allason-Jones (1999) 42). Nevertheless, this hardship would only have been short-lived, given that a commanding officer’s tour of duty usually only lasted three years.

For women and families further down the social scale this life would have been harsher. The families of centurions would have lived in reasonable comfort, but may well have lived in these barracks houses for some 10 years before their husbands and fathers received their discharge or promotion. The families of ordinary soldiers, those who had followed their husbands, sons and fathers, or local women who had entered into a liaison with a soldier, would have had to live on lower pay and in very cramped barrack conditions. However, it may be that “married” soldiers did not live with seven comrades but had more space for their own families. Van Driel Murray found that the small-sized shoes from the Period IV barracks building at Vindolanda were concentrated in and around only four of these 14-roomed barracks (van Driel Murray (1997) fig. 4). If indeed some of these barracks rooms were given over to soldiers’ families this could radically change ideas about the fighting strength of these military bases.

The work of van Driel Murray ((1995), (1997)) on artifacts from Roman military sites, the finds such as the wooden tablets from the forts of Vindolanda (Bowman and Thomas (1994)) and the legionary fortress of Vindonissa (Speidel (1996)), and the study of artifact distribution at German military bases indicates that we need to take a much more critical look at how Roman military bases were run and the roles that soldiers’ families would have played. These families should not be viewed as merely a burden on their father’s or husband’s pay packet but may well have been productive members of these communities, from within these military bases.
17 Those Who Were Left at Home

So far, this chapter has dealt with soldiers’ families who accompanied them on campaign. However there were also families who were left behind while their husbands, fathers, and other male family members left to join the military. This applies not only to the families left behind in Italy (see Evans (1991) especially 106) but also to many families throughout the empire.

Van Driel Murray noted (2008) that many of the men from provincial communities also joined the army and would have left their wives and families at home. The three local tribes in the lower Rhine region, the Cananei, the Batavians and the Sugambri, were heavily recruited for the Roman army. These were self-sufficient agricultural societies whose families would have had to continue to produce food and clothing while their able-bodied men were in the army. Van Driel Murray argued that these, mainly women and children, developed agricultural strategies to cope with these absences. She identified archeological evidence, particularly the ecological remains, that agriculture was refocused on a horticultural mode of production with small, intensively fertilized and cultivated plots of land. This type of production was more suitable for women and children. Van Driel Murray therefore posited that the production and marketing strategies, and maintenance of land, had been left in the hands of women, their subsistence supplemented by their soldier husband’s pay packet. During the early Empire this pattern was no doubt repeated across much of the empire, including in Italy.

18 Conclusions

While evidence for senior officers’ families is not disputed, much scholarly concern for the evidence for the families of junior officers and ordinary soldiers in the military sphere has centered on the meaning of the marriage ban and its relationship to the actuality of Roman military life. Phang’s study, in particular, showed that this ban did not result in the absence of soldiers’ families from the military arena. Epigraphical evidence has helped us identify these families and has enriched our understanding of them. While Phang argued that there is inadequate evidence for the domicile of such families within the fort proper, van Driel Murray found hints of their presence inside soldiers’ barracks and other buildings. The excavations at Vindonissa have also provided evidence of centurions’ families and other women inside the fortress, and further material traces of women and children inside early imperial forts in Germany provide a strong argument for the residency of soldiers’ families within these forts.

FURTHER READING

The main evidence for soldiers’ families in the early Empire is found in Phang (2001), which is a study of mainly epigraphical evidence for the unions of Roman soldiers during the early Empire and particularly prior to the lifting of the ban on marriage in 197 CE; van Driel Murray
Penelope Allison (1995), which is a good source for her study on leather shoes; and Speidel (1996), which includes epigraphical evidence for women in the legionary fortress at Vindonissa. James (2002) takes a critical view of studies of the Roman military; and further studies of the complexities of Roman military communities are found in Goldsworthy and Haynes (1999). Brandl (2008) includes a number of papers on the evidence for the presence and roles of women in the Roman military sphere, although not specifically during the early Empire. Allison (n.d.), *Frontier Communities in the Early Roman Empire* (working title), will give a more detailed account of artifactual evidence for Roman families in Germany during the early Empire.