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In the Service of the Empire: Continuity of Jewish Military Service in the Armies of Rome

The main debate regarding Jewish soldiers serving in the Roman armies is still focused on the question whether these Jews actually existed. Unfortunately, this debate is not only limited, but at times it also misses the larger picture. The current article will conclusively show that Jews served in the Roman armies, even in large numbers, and that the main debate we must conduct is whether they served in accordance with their percentage of the general population, or even in higher numbers. Furthermore, the article will irrefutably prove that Jewish military service was a continuous phenomenon from the last decades of the Republic until the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century AD, and possibly continued, to some extent, in the Eastern Roman Empire until the first half of the 6th century AD.

Keywords: Ancient Judaism, Roman military, Roman Empire, Military History, Jewish soldiers, The Great Jewish Revolt

Even now, there are still scholars who promote the idea that Jews did not serve in the armies of the Roman Empire.¹ This idea continues to persist in academia, even though the issue of Jewish military service was at the centre of scholarly works, especially in the last two decades. Therefore, all these latest publications were forced to continue the debate on one thing and one thing only: whether Jews served in the armies of Rome.²

¹ Example for a book that claims Jewish military service did not exist, is: GRAINGER (2018: 77, n. 71); GICHON's (2009) article did not even mention Jewish military service in the Roman army, which is very surprising in light of its subject; an example for an article claiming that Jewish units did not exist, is: SPEIDEL (1996).

² The articles and chapters that offered a wider perspective (presented in chronological order), are: CASTRITIUS (2002); SALINERO (2003); OPPENHEIMER (2005a: 183–191); OPPEN-

On the other hand, this article will try to prove that Jewish military service was a continuous phenomenon, stretching from the Late Republic until the 5th or 6th century AD.³ This continuity will be illustrated via numerous and varied materials, spread out across the relevant centuries. Since the corpus of evidence is much too large for one article, I will try to show this continuity by bringing forth some of the best evidence from each century in a chronological manner.⁴

In order to tackle this issue, it is important to first note that Jews had served in non-Jewish armies even before the Romans arrived in the east. We can find evidence for Jewish service in the armies of the Hellenistic kingdoms,⁵ the Persian Empire,⁶ and even the Assyrian Empire.⁷ Moreover, the notion of continuous military service amongst the Jews in the armies of antiquity raises the possibility that the military profession was a main profession among Jews during antiquity.

Another matter that must be kept in mind when trying to deal with Jewish service in the Roman Army is the complexity of Judaism. The Jewish religion was, and still is, composed of numerous sects and groups which differed in their beliefs and customs. The Bible, as we know it, was not fully canonised during the Second Temple period and there were debates regarding which books should be included and whether the texts should be open to interpretation.⁸

HEIMER (2005b); SCHOENFELD (2006); ROTH (2007); CHOMIAK (2008); ROCCA (2010); WEISMAN (2012); OLSHANETSKY (2018a); other articles from the last 20 years that deal with specific or a few finds, but do not deal with the general phenomenon of Jewish military service: WOODS (1992); SCHARF (1997).

³ There were claims, that Jews did not serve after the first half of the 5th century: SCHOENFELD (2006: 125).

⁴ The current article will show that the evidence is not rare and scarce as suggested in: BARCLAY (2004: 61).

⁵ Regarding Jews in Hellenistic armies, there are only a few works that concentrate on the subject: HENGEL (1974: 12–18); HENGEL (1980: 85–92); OLSHANETSKY (2016); OLSHANETSKY (2019).

⁶ Regarding service in Persian armies, the Jewish garrison in Elephantine is the most researched. See, for example: PORTEN (1968).

⁷ DALLEY (1985); OLSHANETSKY (2017a).

⁸ There are numerous books about the formation and changes in Judaism, for example: DAVIES (2004); ELIAV (2006); GRABBE (2000), to name a few. But if someone were to

By proving the Jewish people's continuous military service, several things will come to light. Firstly, their military service can successfully highlight Judaism's diversity and raise the possibility that Hellenistic Judaism was the most widely practiced form. Secondly, continuous Jewish military service throughout the centuries would indicate that Jews serving in the army were not an insignificant minority as was suggested in the past.⁹ Thirdly, it will prove that Jews served no matter what changes there were in the ancient world, the Roman Empire or Judaism.

Rome, the Jews and their Service from 49 BC to 19 AD

The Roman Empire ruled over large Jewish communities for more than 600 years.¹⁰ The Romans ferociously subdued Jewish rebellions during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, yet this reaction was not crueller than the way the Empire dealt with other rebellions. Nevertheless, there were some instances in the history of the Roman Empire where the Jews were harassed, such as the expulsion of some of the Jews from the city of Rome in 19 AD.¹¹ But for the most part, the Roman government and its different regimes and leaders were lenient towards the Jews and their faith, and more than once offered them great privileges.¹² The origin of this lenient attitude could have stemmed from the common perception in Rome: the more ancient, the better.¹³

delve into this very vast subject for the first time, the best place to start is the new addition to the series Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World, titled: *A Companion to Late Ancient Jews and Judaism: 3rd Century BCE - 7th Century CE*: KOLTUN-FROMM-KESSLER (2020).

⁹ OPPENHEIMER (2005a: 425).

¹⁰ Jews were under Roman rule before 139 BC as in this year Jews were expelled from the city of Rome: Val. Max. *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*, 1, 3, 3; Serv. Com. in *Vergilii Aeneida*, 8, 187.

¹¹ On the matter, see: ROCCA (2010).

¹² We can see this lenient attitude in Greek and Roman documents preserved in Josephus' writings. The most comprehensive research on the matter is: BEN-ZEEV (1998); the changes in Roman attitude are most evident in the Roman laws and edicts that are referring to the Jews. The most comprehensive research that tried to gather all of them in one book, is: LINDER (1987).

¹³ OLSHANETSKY (2018a: 12–13).

The lenient attitudes of the Romans allowed the Jews to observe their faith freely during the Republic and most of the period of the Roman Empire. As a result, the Jews sometimes paid lower taxes, were exempt from the Imperial cult for religious reasons and while the Temple in Jerusalem existed, the Romans' only stipulation was that the Jews were required to sacrifice to God for the glory of the Emperor.¹⁴ In some instances, the Jews received further privileges such as exemption from military service.

The exemptions are the first, and maybe even some of the best evidence for Jewish military service, especially in the Late Republic. All these exemptions were given to certain Jewish subgroups in specific Jewish communities in Asia Minor, or to Jews living in the vassal kingdom of Judaea. The way these exemptions were phrased and repeated show that most of the Jews, especially the majority who were not Roman citizens, were obligated to serve.¹⁵ For example, the first of these exemptions only included the Jews of Ephesos with Roman citizenship and was given in the year 49 BC by the consul Lucius Cornelius Lentulus Crus,¹⁶ yet it may have even been rewritten and expanded later to include all Jews in the province of Asia with Roman citizenship.¹⁷ Another exemption was given in October, 47 BC, in which Gaius Julius Caesar proclaimed and forbade any recruitment of *Auxilia* units from Hyrcanus' kingdom (Judaea).¹⁸ Five years later, Dolabella renewed one of the exemptions given to the Jews before his time in office, according

¹⁴ OLSHANETSKY (2018a: 12–13).

¹⁵ SMALLWOOD (1976: 127–128) claims that Lentulus only exempted the Jewish citizens, a group that was "infinitesimally small". In addition, she ignores the evidence regarding Jewish service in the armies of Rome while claiming that Jewish recruitment was impractical. Moreover, she asserts that the exemption given to Hyrcanus, by Dolabella, was for all Jews. The possibility of the exemption given to the Jews of Ephesos as an indicator for past recruitment, and for partial exemption only, see: WEISMAN (2012: 27); BARCLAY (2004: 61) claims that there was never a general exemption but does it without giving an explanation for his statement; SALINERO (2003: 45) states that the Jewish exemption from military service is evidence that sometimes the Romans acted in contrast to their own good and to their own interest.

¹⁶ *Jos. Ant.* 14, 228–229; *Jos. Ant.* 14, 234; *Jos. Ant.* 14, 236–240.

¹⁷ *Jos. Ant.* 14, 230–232.

¹⁸ *Jos. Ant.* 14, 202–204.

to the request of Hyrcanus II.¹⁹ However, it is important to note that the exemptions were given only to those with Roman citizenship in a few Jewish communities. There was never a general exemption for all the Jews in the Empire, not even to all Jews who had Roman citizenship. Therefore, the need to constantly renew these local exemptions would mean that either they expired, or the exemptions were ignored and the few Jews who were supposed to be exempt from service were recruited. Flavius Josephus wrote about these exemptions extensively, yet even he, who lived in Rome in the late second half of the 1st century AD where he had access to all the archives of the Empire, was unable to trace any exemption dated after 14 BC.²⁰ Therefore, it seems that most Jews until 14 BC, and the entire Jewish population of the Roman Empire after that year, were subject to the same laws and rules of conscription relating to any other resident of the Empire.²¹

Except for the exemptions, the earliest evidence of Jewish military service indicates that Jews not only served as individuals but also, in some periods, within Jewish units, or at least in units which had a Jewish majority.²² This can be seen in *Jewish Antiquities*, where Josephus pre-

¹⁹ Jos. *Ant.* 14, 223–227.

²⁰ Jos. *Ant.* 16, 27–29; 60–61.

²¹ The last renewal of a local exemption occurred in 14 BC in Ionia, given by Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa: Josephus, *Ant.* 16. 27–29; there are a lot of peculiar suggestions regarding these exemptions that have no basis in the historical documentation that is available to us. For example, Eck has recently claimed that Jews were exempt from service until the reign of Constantine. In his article, there is no evidence or explanation for this statement. Eck neither cites nor refers to the exemptions in Josephus in his article, and does not even refer to any publication which deals with Jewish service in the armies of Rome, and so this claim needs to be disregarded: ECK (2021: 248); as was stated in the main text, there is no indication of any exemption after 14 BC and there was never any general exemption for all the Jews. The exemptions are not the focus of the current article, yet an extended article that is entirely focused on this is being finalised.

²² The current article will refer to the armies of the Vassal Kingdoms when supporting the Roman army as an integral part of the Roman army due to several reasons. Firstly, these armies fought many times for Rome's cause and assisted its forces. Secondly, the Vassal Kingdoms' armies were often under direct Roman command. Thirdly, this would mean that the Roman commanders chose when to fight and when to march, including deciding to do so or not during the Shabbat and Jewish holidays. Fourthly, when under Roman command or part of a Roman campaign, the Vassal Kingdoms' army was subju-

sents a letter from Julius Caesar to Hyrcanus, son of Alexandrus and ruler of Judaea.²³ In this letter, Julius Caesar thanks the latter for his bravery and the bravery of the 1500 men from the Judaeian army who assisted him in the Alexandrian campaign.²⁴ A further example can be found in Josephus' book *The Jewish War*, where he details the military support Herod provided to Antonius during the Roman civil war until his defeat at Actium in 31 BC. After Antonius' final defeat, Herod rushed to the Isle of Rhodes to meet the victorious Octavianus to persuade him to let the Jewish ruler stay on the throne in Judaea even though he had supported Octavianus' rival. One of Herod's main arguments towards Octavianus was that he always stayed, at any condition and at all times, loyal to his benefactor. He tried to prove it by mentioning his assistance in sending auxiliary units and logistical support to Antonius' army throughout the war.²⁵ It is true that many mercenaries served in Herod's army, but it is sound to assume that at least some of the troops sent to Antonius were Jewish. It may be that some of the units were entirely Jewish, very similar to the composition of Herod's army.²⁶

gated to the Roman logistical system, including what food was supplied. Lastly, all the Herodian dynasty's Vassal Kingdoms including Judaea and Batanaea, were eventually annexed by Rome. When they were annexed, their armies were absorbed into the Roman army and entire units of the annexed army often continued to serve in the Roman army as Auxilia units. On the matter, see, for example, chapter 4 in: APPLEBAUM (1989); and also: APPLEBAUM (1970); an article that deals with this aspect of Jewish service, and with Jewish units in the Roman army as a whole, is under preparation.

²³ Jos. *Ant.* 14, 190–195. This is one of three testimonies Josephus offers regarding the assistance offered by the Judaeian Kingdom to Julius Caesar during the Alexandrian campaign. According to *Ant.* 14, 127–139, Antipater, the general of Hyrcanus, brought 3,000 men to assist Julius Caesar in the campaign. According to APPLEBAUM (1989), this was the most accurate testimony to the Judaeian assistance during the Alexandrian campaign; the third testimony can be found in *Ant.* 16, 52–53.

²⁴ In Julius Caesar's book, *The Alexandrian War*, he does not record or mention Hyrcanus or any force from the Kingdom of Judaea. A possible suggestion for the difference between Josephus' and Julius Caesar's accounts is that Caesar's account on the Alexandrian Campaign was actually written by Aulus Hirtius.

²⁵ Jos. *War.* 1, 30, 1.

²⁶ STERN (1992: 62–64); for more information on Herod's army, its composition and the fact that the Jews consisted of the main bulk of the army, see: SCHALIT (1960: 94–101). Regarding the composition and the framework of Herod's Army, see also: SHATZMAN (1991).

Additionally, Josephus mentions the recruitment of a large Jewish unit from one geographical origin. This testimony can be further backed up by the writings of Suetonius and Tacitus. According to the three ancient writers, in the year 19 AD,²⁷ Emperor Tiberius ordered the recruitment of 4,000 Jewish residents of the city of Rome to serve in Sardinia.²⁸ This recruitment was due to the concern of Senators and other wealthy Romans, who feared the influence of Judaism and the growing trend of many wealthier residents, especially women, who started to adhere to Judaism or to donate money to the Jewish community.²⁹ Moreover, this recruitment could indicate that Jews were recruited into units composed of their own inside the imperial army. The number 4,000 is approximately the number of men who served in a legion, thus hinting at the existence of an entirely Jewish legion. However, we do not possess any evidence for a new legion to be formed during that year.³⁰ In my opinion, it is more probable that the Jewish residents of Rome were sent to serve in different Jewish cohorts. These cohorts were pulled from their stations or legions in order to serve as one force to deal with the ad hoc problem of pirates in Sardinia.

It is important to note that to tackle the problem of Roman wives converting to Judaism, the Romans enforced the existing laws of com-

²⁷ See Samuel ROCCA'S article that deals with this recruitment and its sources: ROCCA (2010); he was not the first to deal with this recruitment, as it is often mentioned in literature that deals with Jewish military service. The first article that was entirely focused on this recruitment is: MERRILL (1919).

²⁸ Josephus mentions that they were sent to fight in Sardinia; *Jos. Ant.* 18, 83–84; Tacitus explains that they were sent to Sardinia to fight brigands: *Tac. An.* 2, 85; Suetonius mentions that Jews were sent to serve in regions where the climate was bad for health; *Sue. Tib.* 36.

²⁹ *Jos. Ant.* 18, 81–84; *Tac. An.*, 2, 85; *Sue. Tib.* 36; *Dio, His.* 57, 18, 5a; even on the first occasion in which we learn about the Jewish community in Rome from the year 139 BC, we find out that at least some of the members of the community were expelled from the city for spreading their belief among non-Jews: *Val. Max. Facta et Dicta memorabilia*, 1, 3, 3; *Ser. Com. in Vergilii Aeneida*, 8, 187.

³⁰ In his article, that deals with the recruitment in Rome in 19 AD, ROCCA raises the possibility and mentions the problem that we do not know any legion that was recruited during this year: ROCCA (2010: 21).

pulsory military service when needed, as was in this case. This highlights to us the strictness with which the Romans observed and obeyed the rules and laws of the Empire, and their complete unwillingness to modify any existing laws or create new ones. Even in the case highlighted above, they did not break or modify any laws but rather used the laws which existed to suit their purpose. Therefore, as they did not create anything new in the legal field, it is implied that there was no uniqueness regarding this recruitment to the military, nor were any new kinds of military units created. Consequently, this means that Jewish subunits and cohorts in the Roman army were already in existence before 19 AD. However, as this can be considered a large recruitment, we can safely assume that the Roman military suddenly received a large influx of Jewish soldiers, as well as an increase in the number of Jewish cohorts.

From the case study above, we can infer the number of Jews and their percentage in the city of Rome, and have a clear notion whether Jews served equally compared to other communities in Rome, and thus disprove the claims that Jews barely served compared to their percentage in the population. As we know, most of the Jewish population, which composed 5%-15% of the residents of the Empire,³¹ were not Roman citizens, and so could only serve in the auxiliary forces. The number of recruits, 4,000, should be regarded as relatively accurate, not only because it is small, but because both Josephus and Tacitus mention it.³² Hence, if 4,000 men were indeed drafted from among the Jewish community of the city of Rome alone, and all recruits were between the ages of 18 to 42,³³ as the ancient sources state that they were of military age,³⁴ it seems that the Jewish community in the city of Rome was quite large and consisted of at

³¹ Regarding the scale of the Jewish population and the different figures, see: MCGING (2002); ISRAEL (2020).

³² *Jos. Ant.* 18, 83–84; *Tac. An.* 2, 85.

³³ There are only a few testimonies to the recruitment of under 18 year olds, and even then it seems that it was against the norm, and we do not have any evidence for the recruitment of men older than 42 during enlistment: HERTZ (2007: 306–307); WESCHKLEIN (2007: 439).

³⁴ Tacitus says that the Jewish recruits were of military age: *Tac. Ann.* 2, 85; Suetonius does not mention the number of Jewish recruits but claims that all those of military age were drafted: *Sue. Tib.* 36.

least 50,000 people. As a result, in a city that numbered 500,000 to 1,000,000 people, the Jewish community would have consisted of at least 5%-10% of the general population of the city.³⁵ This number is quite surprising as during this period, most Jews lived in the Eastern part of the Empire (mainly in Judea, Syria and Egypt)³⁶ and those territories were only conquered a relatively short time before. As most of the Jews of the Roman Empire did not live in the city of Rome, it is safe to assume that at least two or three Jews from the rest of the Empire served in the military for every Jew who was recruited from the city of Rome. This would indicate that a considerable number of Jews served in the Roman army and that Jews may have served as their percentage in the general population, perhaps even more. In addition, even though we know there were Jews in the city of Rome before the annexation of these areas, their numbers are unknown, but they are most probably significantly lower than in 19 AD. This suggests that after the Romans vassalized and conquered Judaea and Egypt, there was a massive Jewish migration to the city of Rome and elsewhere in the Empire, although the reasons for this are uncertain.

Jewish Service a Short Time Before and During the Jewish Revolts: 19 AD – 136 AD

As we have seen, Jewish service in the Roman military was neither a unique nor an alien phenomenon. However, their service in the Roman military during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, when Jewish revolts were upending the Empire, may surprise some. There are numerous textual pieces of evidence for their continuous service during these troubling

³⁵ ROCCA (2010) dedicates an entire article to this recruitment and the testimonies depicting it in Tacitus, Suetonius and Josephus, but he does not tackle the usage and the information that could be learnt about the Jewish community and its size in the city of Rome, according to the number of Jewish conscripts; further testimonies regarding this expulsion can be found in the writings of other authors and historians of Antiquity, but they usually speak only of the expulsion itself. For example: Dio, *His.* 5, 18, 5a.

³⁶ The main Jewish communities at the time were in Judea, Syria, Egypt, Asia Minor and Babylon. But Jews spread further, and their presence existed in many places. It is interesting that Josephus quoted Strabo, who had said that Jews were present in all the cities, and it was difficult to find a spot in the inhabited world that Jews had not reached or settled in: Jos. *Ant.* 14, 114.

decades, such as the release document of a soldier named Mattaeus,³⁷ from 68 AD,³⁸ which was found in Stebae, near Naples. He and three of the witnesses in the document were residents of Syria. More importantly, the name Mattaeus was frequently used amongst Jews as a shortened version of Matityahu and the spelling of his name on the papers was one commonly used by Jews, different from the spelling used by gentiles. Furthermore, as it is explicitly stated that Mattaeus received Roman citizenship on his release from the army, it implies that he was not a Roman citizen on his recruitment. According to the document, at the start of his service Mattaeus was part of a marine unit, where service was not restricted to citizens of the Empire. From there he was later transferred to a legion in which he served until his retirement.

Another example from the time of the 'Great Jewish Revolt' is when a Jewish army representing a client state joined the Romans in their campaign to quell the revolt. This was the army of King Agrippa II, who resisted the revolt, and even tried to crush it before it began. After he failed, he merged his forces into the Roman army under the command of Cestius Gallus and later into the armies of Vespasian and his son Titus.³⁹

In these Roman armies which fought to suppress the revolt, we can even find a Jew in a senior commanding position. Josephus, whose testimony is supported by the writings of other ancient historians, tells us the story of the man who might be the most successful Jewish general in history. His name was Tiberius Julius Alexander, a Roman citizen and a descendant of a wealthy Jewish family from Alexandria, whose most notable family member was Tiberius' uncle, the Jewish philosopher Philon. The citizenship and the family wealth granted him a favourable start in life and the civil service. He was appointed governor of Judaea in 46 AD and stayed in that capacity for two years.⁴⁰ In 63 AD he was stationed in the staff of General Corbulo in

³⁷ CIL 16, 8; CIL 10, 771; RMD 4 p. 615–616; AE (1994: 387).

³⁸ The one who raised it in the context of Jewish military service was APPLEBAUM in 1971, the rest only cite from him; he received a short mention in: SCHOENFELD (2006: 118); and in: ROCCA (2010: 27).

³⁹ Regarding the early attempt to quell the revolt: *Jos. War.* 2, 17, 4-5 and 8; for Agrippa's army assisting Cestius Gallus: *Jos. War.* 2, 18, 9; for the description of the forces in Vespasian's army including the mention of Agrippa's army as part of it: *Jos. War.* 3, 4, 2.

⁴⁰ *Jos. War.* 2, 11, 6.

his campaign in Armenia, and in 66 AD he was moved and promoted to the governorship of Egypt by Emperor Nero.⁴¹ During his term as the governor of Egypt, the Great Jewish Revolt erupted in Judaea, as well as religious turmoil in Egypt between Jews, Egyptians and Greeks in the city of Alexandria (66 AD). To combat this, Tiberius decided to brutally crush the Jewish community in Alexandria, his own community, to quickly solve the situation.⁴² He saved only the rich among the community, suggesting his social awareness was stronger than his Jewish identity, or most probably because they were his family, the friends of his family or the social circle he knew and grew up in. Josephus described him as a Jew who did not follow the way of his ancestors,⁴³ although this assertion seems more like a political view than a fact.⁴⁴ There could be some reasons for this. Firstly, Josephus' claim was possibly written after Tiberius' death, which means he could write whatever he desired with no fear of repercussions. Secondly, the Judaism of the period was very diverse, and its main faction was Hellenistic Judaism. This was especially true in the city of Alexandria, where Jewish Hellenistic philosophy dominated the Jewish community, for example the writings of Tiberius' uncle, Philo. Furthermore, Josephus does not bring concrete evidence to explain his statement. And lastly, Josephus seems to be politically motivated as the way that he refers to Tiberius in a negative light is very similar to the way he wrote about the Jewish supporters of the Seleucids while they were fighting the Hasmoneans.⁴⁵

During the Great Jewish Revolt, Tiberius Julius Alexander joined forces with Vespasian and his son Titus in the Roman civil war that erupted in the year 69 AD (the Year of the Four Emperors).⁴⁶ After the

⁴¹ Regarding his appointment by Nero: *Jos. War.* 2, 15, 1.

⁴² According to Josephus, the Jews were not the main instigators in this conflict. Taking this into account, it seems that Tiberius decided to crush the Jews as an easy solution to the conflict. But it is also possible that Josephus gave us only a partial picture of the events. Regarding the quelling of the Jews of Alexandria: *Jos. War.* 2, 18, 7.

⁴³ CHOMIAK (2008: 152–155); MODRZEJEWSKI (1995: 185–190); WILLIAMS (1998: 95–96).

⁴⁴ On the matter see also: ROTH (2007: 410).

⁴⁵ Although he used these and other derogative definitions to represent the Jews who served the Seleucids during the Hasmonean rebellion, he mostly mentions their Jewishness: *Jos. Ant.* 13, 37–39; *Jos. Ant.* 13, 42; *Jos. Ant.* 13, 121.

⁴⁶ On the matter, see: OLSHANETSKY (2018b).

latter won the war, they granted Tiberius the position of second in command of Titus' army that campaigned to conquer Jerusalem in 70 AD.⁴⁷ Tiberius' forces used cruel measures against the revolting Jews, yet according to Josephus' writings, Tiberius, like Josephus, opposed the destruction of the Second Temple.⁴⁸ His stance may have been developed due to his religious beliefs or because his father contributed the gold coating of nine of the gates of the Temple of Jerusalem.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, after the campaign in Judaea, the last assumed position that Tiberius held was the role of Praetorian Prefect (*Praefectus Praetorio*), the commander of the praetorian guard,⁵⁰ which was the most significant military position one could achieve and was second only to the emperor. With all these military achievements, Tiberius was most probably one of the most successful Jews in the Roman Empire and one of the most successful Jewish commanders ever.⁵¹

The example of Tiberius Julius Alexander is one of the best and greatest examples of Jewish military service in the Roman army during the Jewish Revolts. Regarding the next revolt, the Diaspora Revolt (116-117 AD), an ostracon in Egypt dated to the 18th of May 116 AD, the eve of the revolt, contains evidence of Jewish military service and says the following:

Thermauthos, a slave of Aninius, a centurion, in respect of the Jewish tax for the 19th year of our lord Trajan Optimus, 3 obols. Year 19, Pachon 23.⁵²

The payment that the ostracon mentions is the Jewish tax which a Jewish servant, or slave, was not compelled to pay but a Jewish master was, which in this case is the centurion.⁵³ Thus, according to the above in-

⁴⁷ Jos. *War.* 5, 1, 6.

⁴⁸ Jos. *War.* 6, 4, 3.

⁴⁹ Jos. *War.* 5, 5, 3.

⁵⁰ P.Hib. I, 215; CPJ II, 418b.

⁵¹ Tiberius is relatively often mentioned in the research on Jewish military service. See, for example: MODRZEJEWSKI (1995: 185–190); SCHOENFELD (2006: 117–120); WEISMAN (2012: 25); OLSHANETSKY (2018a: 15).

⁵² CPJ.II 229.

⁵³ CPJ.II 229.

scription and what we know about the Jewish tax, the centurion must have been Jewish. Even though the abbreviation used to describe the master (κεντ) is not a normal abbreviation for the word *centurion*, there is no other logical way to complete the abbreviation. This ostrakon is unique in that it speaks about a Jewish centurion and is one of the best pieces of evidence from all the papyri, ostraca and inscriptions available for Jewish soldiers, because we can be almost certain that the one mentioned was both a Jew and a member of the Roman military.

Even in the next revolt, the Second Jewish Revolt, which is most commonly known as the Bar Kochva revolt, there is evidence for Jewish military service in the Roman army. This evidence comes in the form of a release document of a soldier. The soldier has an undoubtedly Jewish name and geographical origin: Bar Shimsho Cleisthenes (Cleisthenes is the Greek translation for Bar Shimsho) from Caesarea who was part of an *auxilia* unit named *Cohors I Vindelicorum*. His release document is dated to 157 AD and was found in Romania, ancient Dacia.⁵⁴ If Bar Shimsho served for 25 years, as was accustomed in the ranks of the *auxilia* forces, it would mean he was recruited in 132 AD, during the Bar Kochva Revolt. At this time, his *auxilia* unit, that was originally from Germania, was camped in Judaea. From this, one can deduce that the Romans continued to recruit Jews to their ranks and even to the units that were sent to quell the Jewish revolts.⁵⁵

Jewish Service in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries: 137 AD – 300 AD

As we have seen, Jews served in the Roman army and were enlisted during the Jewish revolts. Therefore, it should not be surprising that the Romans continued to enlist Jews after these uprisings. This can be seen in Dio Cassius' *Historia Romana*, a composition that he worked on in the first three decades of the 3rd century AD. In it, he brings a version of a speech delivered by Marcus Aurelius to his men before marching to the

⁵⁴ CIL.III.II, p.882, Dip. XL

⁵⁵ The one to bring it forward was APPLEBAUM in 1971, the rest only cite from him; he received a short mention in: SCHOENFELD (2006: 120).

East to fight against the rebelling Avidius Cassius in the year 175 AD.⁵⁶ The Emperor spoke about Cassius' Eastern Roman army:

You, at least, fellow-soldiers, ought to be of good cheer. For surely Cilicians, Syrians, Jews, and Egyptians have never proved superior to you and never will, even if they should muster as many tens of thousands more than you as they now muster fewer.⁵⁷

Marcus Aurelius wanted to raise his men's morale by showing them that Avidius Cassius' army that they were about to march against, was composed of manpower from the Eastern Roman armies and was inferior to the Western Roman army under his command. If it was delivered as Dio wrote, then it is clear that there were Jewish soldiers in the Eastern Roman army, since there is no reason for a military commander to lie to his men in such a manner before a battle, especially when they would know that it was a lie.⁵⁸ Lying to his soldiers would have caused two things. Firstly, Marcus Aurelius would have lost their trust. Secondly, he would not have achieved his goal by lying in his speech. If the speech was not delivered in the same way as written by Dio, it is most probable that Dio, like other ancient authors, wrote the speech as it was supposed to be delivered.⁵⁹ This highlights a few deductions. Firstly, during this period Jews must have served in large numbers since he would not have mentioned them in his speech if they had not been such a vital part of the manpower of the enemy army, i.e. the Eastern Roman army. As a result,

⁵⁶ This source was once brought as evidence for Jewish military service, but it took the mention of Jews as fact. Moreover, Rocca suggested that maybe some of the Jews mentioned, had been part of Jewish auxilia units, of which we have no evidence whatsoever. This mention was in an appendix to an article: ROCCA (2010: 26).

⁵⁷ Dio. *His.* 72, 25, 3–6. (Trans. Earnest Cary, *LCL*).

⁵⁸ It is not plausible that at least a good portion of any Roman army would not know the demographic composition of at least some or large parts of the Roman army. As troops in all units moved through the Empire to various regions, they met different units from all over the Empire. Also, if indeed the four groups mentioned above were one or the main source of manpower for the Eastern Roman Army, this would mean they were a main source of manpower for at least a third of the Roman army. Thus, their presence must have been felt through the whole army.

⁵⁹ This was common practice, as the ancient writers and historians tried to mimic Thucydides: Th. 1, 22.

with such a large part of the army being Jewish, their service must have been common knowledge. As Marcus Aurelius had no reason to lie in his speech, then Dio would have written it as so only if there were a considerable number of Jewish soldiers at the time, as he wrote the speech in the manner it was supposed to be delivered.

After general citizenship was granted by Emperor Caracalla in the year 212 AD, a significant amount of evidence for Jewish service can be found. This may be due to the growing number of Jews serving in the army, or just because it is closer to our time. For example, in the *Historia Augusta*, it is written that soldiers erected a monument for Emperor Gordian the Third in the year 244 AD,⁶⁰ near the camp at *Circesium*, on the then border between the Roman and Persian Empires.⁶¹ We can learn this fact from a passage in the *Historia Augusta*:

The soldiers built Gordian a tomb near the camp at Circesium, which is in the territory of Persia, and added an inscription to the following effect in Greek, Latin, Persian, Jewish, and Egyptian letters, so that all might read.⁶²

This is clear evidence for Jewish military service and it also teaches us that there was a significant number of Jews serving in the army. For a language associated with the Jews to be used on the monument was a great honour and privilege which could not have occurred otherwise.⁶³ It is true that the *Historia Augusta* is considered a less reliable source, and it was claimed that the author may have invented some of the content and the sources.⁶⁴ However, this does not detract from the importance of this source as evidence for considerable Jewish military service in the 3rd cen-

⁶⁰ There were only two scholars who emphasized the fact that Jews were mentioned. Only ROCCA (2010: 28) referred to it in connection with Jewish military service; STERN (1980: 634).

⁶¹ *Circassium* is most probably the city known as the city of Buseira in today's Syria, at the confluence of the Khabur and the Euphrates.

⁶² *Historia Augusta, Gordiani Tres* 34 (trans. David Magie, *LCL*).

⁶³ It is not clear if the language attested was Hebrew or Aramaic, but it was attributed to the Jews. The translations, which translate it as Hebrew, are interpreting it anachronistically, as did David GOLAN (2014: 139) in his translation of the text into Hebrew.

⁶⁴ JOHNSON (2013: 355).

AD. This is because even if the author invented some of the content, he had to base it on existing phenomena of his period. There is no reason as to why the author would think it necessary to write that one of the languages on a military dedication belonged to the Jews unless it was feasible, as Jews served in large numbers during the 3rd century AD.

A different source from the 3rd century is the synagogue at Dura Europos. Dura Europos was a military town on the Roman frontier, bordering with Persia. Since a significant part of the population was the garrison, it was proposed that the synagogue served as a place of worship for Jewish soldiers.⁶⁵ The argument was further elaborated when the wall paintings inside the synagogue were discussed in an even more comprehensive way. The wall paintings supposedly show scenes from the Bible, but in some of the scenes there are men wearing Roman military uniforms and equipment from the 3rd century. One suggestion for these artistic decisions was that either members of the Jewish community, or the painter himself, served in the military.⁶⁶ However, there is also another possible reason. Since Roman soldiers were a visible part of the daily life in Dura Europos, it is possible the painter drew what he saw out of the window. Yet, the fact that the synagogue is located near the camp of the garrison, makes it very probable that at least some of the men attending the services were Roman soldiers. Although some will define this evidence as inconclusive, when taking into account the other available evidence, it makes this option quite definitive. In any case, it is also of great interest because it shows the diversity of the materials that one must work with when tackling the question of Jewish military service.

Similarly, another piece of evidence, which is most probably dated to the 3rd or beginning of the 4th century AD,⁶⁷ is from a burial cave in

⁶⁵ ROSENFELD–POTCHEBUTZKY (2009: 195–222); in the appendix to ROCCA'S article, he mentioned the former: ROCCA (2010: 26).

⁶⁶ WEISMAN (2012).

⁶⁷ As I have suggested in the past based on the tunic of the graffito: OLSHANETSKY (2017b: 28); OLSHANETSKY (2018a: 18); MAZAR, who originally excavated the place, did not offer a date for the graffito and inscription but claimed that the burial cave in which it was found, number 4, is dated to the 1st or 2nd century AD due to some of the sarcophagus designs in the first chamber of the burial cave: MAZAR (1973: 182); his dating cannot be considered accurate as almost no ceramic finds were found. There-

Beit She'arim, known as the burial cave of Germanus (son of) Yitzchak the Tadmorian (ΓΕΡΜΑΝΟCΙΚΑΚΙΟΥ | ΠΑΛΜΥΡΗΝΟΥ). Because of the burial place and the name of the deceased, the accepted conclusion claimed Germanus to be a Jew who originated from the city of Tadmor (Palmyra), in modern day Syria.⁶⁸ At the entrance to the burial cave, the "Israel Nature and Park Authority" put a sign stating that this is the cave of the Jewish gladiator. This was assumed due to the inscription and graffito at the entrance to the burial cave.⁶⁹ I believe that he was not a gladiator. When comparing the figure in the graffito to stuccos and frescoes depicting gladiators, one can see that his weapons and tunic differ from theirs.⁷⁰ Thus, I came to the conclusion that he was not a gladiator but either a *venator* (a specialist in fighting animals in the ring, considered second to a gladiator),⁷¹ or a soldier.⁷²

Germanus is a good example for the problem we are facing with the non-textual material. It is very hard to prove that someone was a Jew and, if we manage to prove this, it is very hard for us to prove he was a

fore, his artistic dating is not reliable for Germanus' graffito, especially when remembering that it was dated according to a sarcophagus from a different chamber. On the other hand, my dating is based on what actually can be seen in the graffito itself. A picture of the graffito and its condition as of 2011 can be seen in: STERN (2018: 108).

⁶⁸ SAFRAI (2001: 74).

⁶⁹ OLSHANETSKY (2017b: 27–28); OLSHANETSKY (2018a: 18).

⁷⁰ The spear was not a weapon that was usually used by gladiators. Moreover, gladiators had protective gear while the Germanus graffito lacks one. Regarding the equipment of gladiators, see: NOSOV (2009: 44–79); regarding the importance and use of protective gear and armour by gladiators, and as a symbol of the status of gladiators, see: HAXBY et al. (2018: 172–174).

⁷¹ The *venatores* seem to have used all kinds of polearms and spears. Usually, they did not wear armour, but some of the mosaics, frescoes and stuccoes suggest that at least in some cases they wore a manica (armguard) on one of their arms. Sometimes, the only thing they wore to battle was a type of loincloth, but the most common dress was a tunic with clavii, very similar to the one the person engraved in the graffito is wearing: NOSOV (2009: 48–54).

⁷² Mazar originally excavated the place and was first to suggest that Germanus was a soldier, yet he did so without much explanation: MAZAR (1973: 182–183, plate 136); The graffito in Germanus' cave is almost identical to the depiction of Roman soldiers from the mosaics that were found in the Villa Romana Del Casale, a Roman villa uncovered near the town of Piazza Armerina in Sicily. The mosaics can be seen in: MISTRETTA (1998).

soldier, and vice versa. But even if we question some of the material, we are still left with so many certain pieces of evidence that show that Jews participated in military service. We can use the ones we are not certain of to back the ones that we are certain of. Additionally, we can safely assume that we have the remains of many Jews, among them Jewish soldiers, that because of their name, we could never know for certain if they were Jews.

From the 4th century, we have two pieces of evidence for Jewish service in units that were entirely composed of Jews. However, the Jewish nature of these two units is contested. The earlier of the two was highlighted by Lucifer of Cagliari, a zealot, anti-Aryan Christian. The same incident was also documented by Bishop Athanasius himself, the head of the anti-Aryan stream of Christianity in the Empire. According to Lucifer, a Jewish military unit (*Iudaeorum militem*) was stationed in Alexandria and attacked the church of St Theonas, where Bishop Athanasius found refuge, in the year 356 AD.⁷³ According to Athanasius' writings, he and his followers were attacked by legionnaires, with no mention of their ethnic identity. Lucifer is the one who refers to the unit in the incident as Jewish. However, from his words we can deduce that he himself is not certain whether the soldiers, or units, that were involved in the incident were Jewish. Besides, it seems that Lucifer's speech was meant to rebuke Emperor Constantius II. Regarding the incident, Lucifer said the following to the Emperor:

Prove, that it wasn't you, but Jews that sent a force to Alexandria, a force of Jews which besieged the doors of the house of God, and Syrianum⁷⁴ was the commander of the Jewish soldiers. Prove the Jews entered the Basilica with their weapons and killed a certain number (of people).⁷⁵

⁷³ Regarding Athanasius, his escape from Alexandria and his hiding in rural Egypt, see, for example: ELTON (2018: 74–75).

⁷⁴ Syrianum could be either a name, a title or an origin, i.e. Syrian. But in this case, it seems to refer to the name of the *dux Aegypti*.

⁷⁵ *Patrologia Latina*, 12, 916.

On the one hand, it is possible that the Emperor also blamed the Jews and, in doing so, effectively washed his hands from the blood that had been spilt. Therefore, we can assume that Lucifer's proclamation was to imply that a different (non-Jewish) unit was responsible for the crack-down. On the other hand, it is possible that by suggesting a Jewish unit was involved, Lucifer had an ulterior motive: to create friction between the anti-Aryan movement, which will become Catholicism, and the Jews.⁷⁶ Even if Lucifer's words had an ulterior motive, they do not contradict the possibility that Jewish units were included in the Roman forces involved in this incident. Nevertheless, Lucifer's words are strong evidence for Jewish units, since if there were no Jewish units in the Roman army, such units would not have been blamed for what had happened. Every good lie has some aspect of truth in it.

Another find that many have claimed as proof for Jewish units is the grave of Flavia Optata. The inscription on Flavia's grave is dated to the end of the 4th century or the beginning of the 5th century AD.⁷⁷ The grave is located in the cemetery in Concordia – today's Portogruaro – a military camp, not far from Aquileia in Northern Italy.⁷⁸ Most scholars have claimed that Flavia was either the wife or the daughter of a soldier serving in the *Regii Emeseni Iudaei*. The translation of the unit's name is "the Jewish Royal Soldiers from Homs". It was even suggested that this was the same Jewish unit that Lucifer had mentioned in relation to the raid of St Theonas, which was dealt with above.⁷⁹ It is important to note that in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, which counts all the units existing in both the Eastern and Western Roman Empires at the beginning of the 5th century AD, there is no mention of a unit with the exact name as the one that is supposedly inscribed on the grave. However, the *Notitia* does mention two units that were called *Regii* and it is possible that one of them is the

⁷⁶ On the matter, see also: SCHARF (1997: 347); WOODS (1992: 404–405); CASTRITIUS (2002: 60) accepts SCHARF's opinion.

⁷⁷ CIJ I, 640; CIL V, 8764; This was most probably the most notable and mentioned source for Jewish military service: WEISMAN (2012: 26); see also the next footnotes.

⁷⁸ The inscription is also mentioned in: IJO I, p.34; and was also published as: JIWE I, 6.

⁷⁹ The scholar doing so was WOODS (1992: 404–407); WOODS' suggestion was mentioned in: IJO, III, p.69; this opinion is contradicted by SCHARF (1997); CASTRITIUS (2002: 60) accepts SCHARF's opinion.

one referred to in the inscription, if this reading is correct. One possibility for the difference in the unit's name, or its omission from the *Notitia*, is that the *Notitia* was completed in the year 420 AD. This would mean two years after the creation of a clause we find in the *Codex Theodosianus*, which was issued in 418 AD. This clause prohibited Jewish and Samaritan military service.⁸⁰ It is possible that the authors of the *Notitia* had to amend units' names for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it could have been done in order to stay in accordance with the spirit of the *Codex*. Secondly, the Jewish units could have either been disbanded or the Jewish members serving in the units were replaced.⁸¹

There are also two main arguments against the identification of the unit as a Jewish one. Firstly, there are a few who claim that it was not common to give so many attributes in a unit's name as were given to the unit in the inscription. As a result, they said that it makes no sense that they would use the two attributes about the origin of the unit, as Jewish and from Homs.⁸² On the other hand, I think that this is not the strongest of arguments as we know that a lot of units in many periods managed to obtain a large number of titles and attributes at the same time.⁸³ Moreover, when you examine the *Notitia Dignitatum*, you can see that it was indeed common for a unit's name to be composed of a few parts and attributes. Secondly, the strongest argument against the Jewish identification of the unit, was made by the historian and epigraph Michael Speidel.⁸⁴ Speidel claims that the scholars of the past made a mistake when they added the letter "o" to the word Iud(a)eoru(m). Without the letter "o", the ending of the word would be seen as grammatically incorrect. According to him, the inscription does not include the words Jew or Jewish. Speidel adds that instead of the way other scholars read the inscription - Regi(orum) Emes(enorum) Iud(a)eoru(m) – we should actually read - Regi(orum), emi(t) sib(i) de R(e) v(iri). His reading of the

⁸⁰ *Cod. Th.* 16, 8, 24.

⁸¹ WOODS (1992: 404–405); SCHARF (1997: 359); SCHOENFELD (2006: 123).

⁸² SCHARF (1997: 347); WOODS (1992: 404–405).

⁸³ Regarding the many names and honorific epithets units had in different times, see: HEBBLEWHITE (2017: 189–191).

⁸⁴ SPEIDEL (1996: 164).

inscription takes into consideration the omission of the letter “o” and is based on very common phrases that were found in other inscriptions at the same cemetery in Concordia. According to that, Optata was not a Jewish woman and her husband was not in a Jewish unit, and the inscription actually says that Optata was the wife of a soldier in the royal unit (*Regii*) who bought her own headstone from her husband’s fortune.⁸⁵ It seems that Speidel’s argument is robust and should be accepted, yet even without Optata’s inscription, we still have plentiful evidence for Jewish military service.

A stronger proof for Jewish service was found in a Christian text from around the year 400 AD. It is the sacred history of Sulpitius Severus. He said:

And it is also evident that barbarous nations, and especially Jews, have been commingled with our armies, cities, and provinces; thus we behold them living among us, yet by no means agreeing to adopt our customs.⁸⁶

According to the text, Sulpitius is not satisfied with the many non-Christian nations living in the Empire, especially the Jews. It is clear from his words that Jews were not only present everywhere, but they were also easily recognisable. This meant that they were able to keep their way of life, religious symbols and rituals in a manner which was easily noted by their Christian neighbours. Moreover, Sulpitius not only mentions day-to-day life but also the military sphere. This does not only strengthen the assertion that Jews were exempt from religious rituals and the imperial cult while serving in the civil service, but it also probably means that Jews were exempt in the same manner within the ranks of the army, as it seems their service was recognisable to all. It is probable that during ceremonies, parades and religious events, Jewish sol-

⁸⁵ It is important to note that since SPEIDEL’s article, there were only three articles from all the articles published since, that mentioned SPEIDEL’s article: SALINERO (2003); OLSHANETSKY (2018a); ECK (2021).

⁸⁶ Sul. Sev. *Chr.* 2, 3, 6: the translation was taken from: *The Sacred History of Sulpitius Severus*. In: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series II Volume 11, ed. Philip Schaff, Grand Rapids MI, 241. The translation was amended slightly by me.

diers would have either been exempt from participating or would have stood apart from their comrades. That would be the best explanation for their service being well known by both civilians and military personnel. Sulpitius mentioned Jews serving in the army most probably because there were Jewish soldiers and Jewish service was a fact well known by all. It would not be in his interest to lie as he would not want to give ammunition to anyone that is trying to delegitimise his words. Anyone who heard or read his words and knew that Jews did not serve in the army, would have deemed Sulpitius a liar. Yet, there is always the chance that Sulpitius was mistaken or even lied. However, I feel that this is the less probable option, due to the large evidence and numerous materials that we have about Jews in the Roman army, as well as evidence for the religious observance of Jews in the military which will be presented later.

Contrarily, a different inscription with a high probability of having a reference to a Jewish soldier in the Roman army was found in the grave of Tanhum in Jaffa, dated to the 5th century AD.⁸⁷ The inscription on the tombstone is in Greek with one word in Hebrew and it says the next: "Thanhum, son of Simon, grandson of Benjamin, the Centenarius of Parebole. Shalom."⁸⁸ It is important to note that the word *shalom* at the end of the inscription was written in Hebrew. There is no doubt that the buried person and his grandfather were both Jewish. The grandfather most probably served before the year 418 AD.⁸⁹

The reason why it was presumed that he had served before 418 AD is because in the first half of the 5th century, we find one of the best pieces of evidence for Jewish military service in the form of the *Codex Theodosianus*. There we find two clauses which ban Jewish and Samaritan military service. One clause, from 404 AD, forbids service in the *Sacer Comitatus*.⁹⁰ The second clause, from 418 AD, forbids Jewish service in

⁸⁷ CIJ, II, 920; CIIP, III.2240.

⁸⁸ CIJ, II, 920.

⁸⁹ This is one of the most mentioned inscriptions: APPLEBAUM (1971: 182); OPPENHEIMER (2005a: 187); HORBURY-NOY (1992: 239–240).

⁹⁰ *Cod. Th.* 16, 8, 16.

all branches of the military.⁹¹ Since you do not ban something which does not exist, this is one of the best examples referring to the existence of Jewish military service.⁹²

In the *Codex Justinianus*, Jews and Samaritans were re-banned from military service.

...as well as the pagans who tried to introduce polytheism, the Jews and the Samaritans, we intend not only that what was already laid down in the laws shall be recalled and made firmer through this present law, but also that more shall be declared...We order, therefore, that none of the above-mentioned shall share in any honour whatsoever, nor shall he put on an official belt, neither civil nor military, nor belong to any office, with the exception of that of the so-called Cohortalins...⁹³

This law is pre-529 AD as other clauses that refer to it are clearly from that date or earlier.⁹⁴ This is one of the most elusive texts that deal with Jewish military service.⁹⁵ This is because there is a difference between the 19th century academic editions of the *Codex Justinianus* and the *Basilicorum Libri*, and the more modern editions.⁹⁶ In addition, the few that

⁹¹ *Cod. Th.* 16, 8, 24.

⁹² This notion was raised by some of the scholars that tried to prove Jewish military service: SCHOENFELD (2006: 123–124); WEISMAN (2012: 28); but sometimes these clauses got a mere insignificant mention like in: BARCLAY (2004: 61).

⁹³ The translation is taken from: LINDER (1987: 360–361); the original Greek can be found as *Cod. Jus.* 1, 5, 12 in the edition edited by Paul KRUGER (1877), pages 79–81 and not pages 53–55, as quoted by LINDER; the same clause can be found as *Basilicorum Libri LX*, 1, 1, 30 in the edition edited by Ernest HEIMBACH (1833: 21–23) which identified the clause as *Cod. Jus.* 1, 5, 12; in the 1955 academic *Basilicorum Libri LX* edition edited by SCHELTEMA and VAN DER WAL (1955) both *Basilicorum Libri* 1, 1, 30 (identified as *Cod. Jus.* 1, 5, 21) and *Basilicorum Libri* 1, 1, 26 (identified as *Cod. Jus.* 1, 5, 12) are totally different compared to what you find in KRUGER's and HEIMBACH's editions. The difference in the 1955 edition may be traced back to VON LINGENTHAL's essay (1877).

⁹⁴ *Cod. Jus.* 1, 5, 18.

⁹⁵ It was mentioned only twice in the context of Jewish military service: OPPENHEIMER (2005b: 188); OLSHANETSKY (2018a).

⁹⁶ See the previous three footnotes.

did mention this legislation either quoted the wrong pages,⁹⁷ or for the most part did not provide a footnote at all.⁹⁸ This leads to situations where at times scholars were unable to find the text at first.⁹⁹ In any case, this legislation is a clear indication that the former ban announced in 418 AD was not well enforced, or ceased to be enforced sometime after its publication. This is a clear indication that Jews could still be found in the ranks of the late Eastern Roman army/Early Byzantine army up to 529 AD.¹⁰⁰ If this were not so, Emperor Justinian would not have created this clause. This is strong proof because, as mentioned before, you do not ban something which does not exist. Yet, it is safe to assume that Jewish military service after 418 AD was a mere shadow of the extensive service the Jews had provided to the Empire before.

The Capability of Jewish Soldiers to Keep their Jewish Rites and Way of Life

One of the most fundamental issues related to Jewish military service, is the nature of the Jewish faith and the Jews' capability to observe their way of life, their religious beliefs and rights as they deemed fit. As we said earlier, regarding the *Historia Romana* and Sulpitius Severus' writings, it seems that Jewish military service was well-known not only among the ranks, but also among the broader public. It is probable that this was due to the ability of Jewish soldiers to observe their way of life in a visual manner, so that it would be obvious and recognisable by those around them. It is even highly probable that the Jewish exemptions from the Imperial Cult existed and were also implemented among the Jews serving in the army. And so, Jews in the ranks would have been a

⁹⁷ LINDER wrote that *Cod. Jus.* 1, 5, 12 is on pages 53–55 in the Paul KRUGER edition, but it is actually on pages 79–81; the same mistake can be found in SALINERO (2003: 91).

⁹⁸ RABELLO claims that Jews were dismissed from military service, but does not support his claim with a footnote, and so it is uncertain which clause or law RABELLO relied on. The closest footnote to this statement, refers to Novellae 45, which has nothing to do with the matter at hand: RABELLO (1987: 89–90).

⁹⁹ OLSHANETSKY (2018a: 21).

¹⁰⁰ Regarding the debate from which year we should stop referring to the Eastern Roman Empire as Roman, and start calling it Byzantine, see: ELTON (2018); HEATHER (2018); OLSHANETSKY (2021: 38).

well-known fact as Jews may have been fully or partially exempt from participating in ceremonies, festivals, parades and so on. It is certain that the Roman logistical military system was built to supply a rich diet that would allow for every person to keep his faith in terms of food. The Jewish dietary laws were no exception, and any Jew could have served without breaching his faith in this respect. It is even possible that the Romans went to a great extent to allow the Jews to keep their rites and holy days in term of food, as can be assessed from O.KA.LA. INV. 228.¹⁰¹

Texts like the one of Lucifer of Cagliari and the event of the recruitment of the Jewish community of Rome in the year 19 AD, which is attested in both Josephus', Tacitus' and Suetonius' writings, bring forth the option that at least some of the Jews served in separate units. If indeed Jews served in separate units, it would mean that we have to re-evaluate what we know and what we think about the Roman army and its treatment of minorities, and the existence of religious tolerance within its ranks. There is a chance that those large Jewish units are a testimony to a Roman way of dealing with the Jews. This means that due to the exemptions and their special beliefs and rites, Rome intended to put Jews in separated units or sub-units. For example, in a Roman Legion, if there were a lot of Jews, they would put them in their own cohort, if not, then in their own *centuria*. If there were not enough of them to put in their own *centuria*, they would put them in their own *contubernium*.

We get a glimpse of the ability of Jews in keeping their faith and way of life, through inscriptions from the end of the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th century AD. From these inscriptions, if indeed they are referring to Jews who are serving in the army, we could infer that some of the Jews serving, or their relatives, took part in the local Jewish community where they were serving, and even had religious duties as archisynagogos. The most famous example, even though it is a problematic one, is Ioses' tombstone which is dated to the 4th century AD.¹⁰² It was found during excavations in Oescus, a city in ancient Moesia, in today's north-western Bulgaria. The top of the tombstone is missing due

¹⁰¹ On the matter, see: CUVIGNY (2014); OLSHANETSKY (Forthcoming 2022).

¹⁰² This tombstone was mentioned several times. You can see it in: CIJ I, 681; and it can also be seen alongside a further debate, in: BARCLAY (2004: 58–60); and also: IJO, I, 31–34.

to secondary use over the years. According to scholars, the missing top row of the inscription in Latin housed the majority of the name of the deceased person. Scholars believe that the second row, the first of the surviving rows, should be split to *Ioses arcisina*. It was claimed that *Ioses* is a common semitic name which was very popular among the Jews, both in the land of Israel and the diaspora, usually as a shortening of Joseph. It was further claimed that because of the error of a stonemason, who miscalculated the space needed, the last letters of the word were omitted. As a result, instead of *arcisina* it should have been *archisynagogos*. The difference between the two is most probably because *archisynagogos* was not normally written in Latin and there is no standard spelling for it. It appears that the letters *SINA* appeared to be written over an erasure. This was possibly due to an attempt at rewriting the word. The markings at the end of the word, on the frame around the inscription, were possibly done for the same reason. The markings are possibly the Greek letter gamma (Γ), that only the earlier scholars referred to, and a definite circle (maybe omicron). If the scholars are right, it is important to note that the word *archisynagogos* in the inscription is not spelt in the usual way, but stonemasons' spelling mistakes are well attested. Another assumption made by the researchers is that the title and position of the one buried, *Principalis*, was used to describe a military position and not an administrative one. This question rose because in the Roman Empire, the same definitions were sometimes used for both military and non-military positions. In *Ioses'* case, their decision to prefer the military option was due to the fact that *Oescus* was the home of the 5th Legion *Macedonia*, in which educated individuals served in the position of *Principalis*.¹⁰³ Due to all of these assumptions, it is better to be careful with the importance given to this inscription, yet it is still possible that he indeed held both that office in his Jewish community and a military position.

However, there are other examples of Jews serving in both the military and their community. For example, there is a Jewish *Comes* named Paulus, who is known to us from the 5th century mosaic floor in Sardis'

¹⁰³ For the inscription and debate: BARCLAY (2004: 58–60).

synagogue. The mosaic says, "The vow of Paulus the comes."¹⁰⁴ *Comes* was a name for high officials in many different branches of the civil service at the time, and not only in the army.¹⁰⁵ We cannot know for certain if he was a military or civil *Comes*. Yet, Paulus is another good example of Jews in high ranks in the civil administration and the army, showing their assimilation and integration in Roman society. It is clear that he kept his Jewish belief and, even while serving, was an active participant in the Jewish community.

In a different synagogue, in Meroth, a floor mosaic was found which is dated to the 4th or 5th century AD.¹⁰⁶ The mosaic depicts a young man in a tunic, commonly used by the Roman military at the time. Next to the figure, equipment commonly used by Roman soldiers of the period is portrayed: a shield, a long sword and a helmet.¹⁰⁷ Near the figure, there is an inscription which says in Aramaic or Hebrew "יודן בר שמעון מני" (Yodan bar Shimon ma'ny). The original excavators suggested that the figure in the mosaic was David after the battle with Goliath and the equipment surrounding him belonged to the fallen Goliath. In addition, the inscription was thought to be the signature of the man who constructed the mosaic.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, it was once later suggested, in connection to Jewish military service, that the name and the figure depicted an important donor to the synagogue and a prominent member of the community, who had been a Roman officer.¹⁰⁹ In my opinion, this is a much more reasonable and acceptable suggestion since it would make no sense for the man who constructed the mosaic to put his name randomly near the image of King David.

¹⁰⁴ First published together with a photo of the mosaic: RAMAGE (1972: 20–22); second mention: HANFMANN et al. (1983: 171).

¹⁰⁵ Regarding the position of *Comes*: TREBILCO (1991: 48).

¹⁰⁶ ILAN (1988: 108); ILAN (1991: 41); ILAN (1994: 262).

¹⁰⁷ Can be seen in: HACHLILI (1996: 120).

¹⁰⁸ HACHLILI (1996).

¹⁰⁹ ROCCA suggested this in his appendix. On the other hand, he was mistaken when saying that the inscription is from the 6th century, as the excavators are talking about the 5th century, and in my opinion the helmet in the mosaic can even be from the 4th century: ROCCA (2010: 29).

There is doubt about Ioses holding the role of archisynagogos while having a post in the Roman army, there is also no evidence for the way the Jews kept their way of life and beliefs while serving in the army. However, it seems certain that they were able to keep to their faith and rites. If they were not able to continue to be Jewish in accordance with their laws, they would not have served in such great numbers and their existence would not have been so well attested. In addition, we cannot ignore the fact that there is not a single piece of evidence for Jews being forced to participate in pagan rituals and ceremonies while serving in the army or outside the army. And so, it seems that Jews were indeed exempt from such rituals and it was possible for them to continue being Jewish and still serve.

Conclusion

This article brought varied material that included the writings of the main historians of the Roman empire, of Christian writers, of inscriptions and papyri and clauses in both the *Codex Theodosianus* and *Codex Justinianus*. All of them relate, or possibly show, Jewish military service in the Roman army. Although there is doubt concerning some of the inscriptions, regarding whether the person mentioned is both Jewish and a soldier, they have significance when supporting more reliable evidence.

When analysing the evidence cautiously, it is still clear that we have both textual and epigraphical evidence for Jewish service in every century from the 1st century BC to the 6th century AD. When taking into account that the presented evidence, although numerous, is just a fraction of the material available, then we must come to the conclusion that Jewish military service was a significant and continuous phenomenon throughout this period. This may suggest that most of the time, the percentage of Jews among army servicemen was no less than their percentage in the population. As we have seen, the best evidence to support such a claim is the recruitment from the Jewish community of the city of Rome in 19 AD, which its numbers are supported by both Josephus and Tacitus. Moreover, there is evidence for Jewish units in the Roman army, at least during the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD. We also have evidence for Jewish units from other centuries, yet examining the extent and the continuity of this would be part of a future publication.

From the volume of evidence available, which is larger than most of the evidence available for most aspects of antiquity, it can be deduced that the military profession was most probably considered not only acceptable, but also favourable, by many Jews. It is also clear, especially from inscriptions in the 4th and 5th centuries, that Jews could serve in the army and hold a position in their Jewish congregation. It is clear from those cases that Jews could have served in the army while observing their faith and keeping their Jewish identity.

Sources and Abbreviations

AE	<i>L'Année épigraphique</i> . Paris.
CIIP, III	W. AMELING – H. M. COTTON – W. ECK – B. ISAAC – A. KUSHNIR-STEIN – H. MISGAV – J. PRICE – A. YARDENI: (eds.) <i>Corpus inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae, III: South coast 2161–2648</i> . (Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae. A multi-lingual corpus of the inscriptions from Alexander to Muhammad.) Berlin–Boston 2014.
CIJ, I	P. JEAN-BAPTISTE FREY: <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum</i> . Vol 1: Europe. Roma 1936.
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
CPJ, II	A. TCHERICKOVER: <i>Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum</i> . II. Jerusalem 1960.
HEIMBACH 1833	E. HEIMBACH (ed.): <i>Basilicorum Libri LX</i> . Lipsiae 1833.
IJO, I	D. NOY – A. PANAYOTOV – H. BLOEDHORN: <i>Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis</i> . Vol. 1: Eastern Europe. Tübingen 2004.
IJO, III	D. NOY – H. BLOEDHORN: <i>Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis</i> . Vol. 3: Syria und Cyprus. Tübingen 2004.
JJWE, I	D. NOY: <i>Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe</i> . Vol.1: Italy, Spain and Gaul. Cambridge 1993.
KRUGER 1877	P. KRUGER (ed.): <i>Codex Iustinianus</i> . Berlin 1877.
LCL	<i>Loeb Classical Library</i>
P. Hib. I	B. P. GRENFELL – A. S. HUNT: <i>The Hibeh Papyri</i> . London 1906.
RMD	<i>Roman Military Diploma</i>
SHELTEMA–VAN DER WAL 1955	H. J. SHELTEMA – N. VAN DER WAL (eds.): <i>Basilicorum Libri LX</i> . Groningen and Djakarta 1955.

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