History

Military Institutions and Warfare Graecoroman

The nine centuries or so covered in this chapter can usefully be divided into three periods, Ptolemaic (to 30 bc), the Roman Principate (30 bc–c.ad 284) and Late Antiquity (c.ad 284–c.ad 400). The division between Ptolemaic and Roman is obvious, involving a change from Egypt as the center of a Mediterranean empire, with its own armed forces and foreign wars, to Egypt as part of a larger world empire, garrisoned by the army of an external imperial power. One can trace a high degree of continuity through to the reigns of the Severan emperors (to ad 235) but the definition of Late Antiquity here is a more difficult one. Certainly the Roman army changed, in Egypt as elsewhere, in the period ad 235–284, but the reign of Diocletian (ad 284–305) provides an important turning point, as the emperor's own presence in Egypt seems to have served as a catalyst for change in the defence and garrison of Egypt. In theory, one might follow Late Antiquity through to the Arab conquest of Egypt, but the compilation of the relevant portions of the Notitia Dignitatum (a crucial source of information) in the last decades of the fourth century ad provides a convenient end-point.

There are many differences in the military establishments covered in these three periods, but there are also some common themes. By far the most important of the latter is the degree to which the army of Egypt served as an army to control Egypt itself, regardless of the location of its rulers. Another theme is the balance between Egyptians and outsiders in the garrison of Egypt.

The Ptolemaic Period

Introduction

Egyptians encountered Greek approaches to warfare long before Alexander's conquest, Greek hoplites having served as mercenaries, allies and enemies of Egyptian armies. However, establishment of the Ptolemaic monarchy saw the introduction of a new, Macedonian-style army similar to those of its Seleucid and Macedonian rivals (Sekunda 59). The key elements of the army created by Philip II of Macedon were the phalanx of close-order infantry equipped with the sarissa (pike), armored cavalry equipped with xyston (lance), and contingents (often more lightly equipped) of subjects, allies and mercenaries, cavalry and infantry. In Alexander's battles, such as Issos and Gaugamela, typically the phalanx fixed the enemy center, the left flank fought a defensive battle and Alexander led a decisive cavalry charge from the right. The use of elephants in battle was a late innovation in Alexander's army, but common among his successors.

Ptolemaic armed forces (including the navy) fulfilled two major functions. One was maintaining the kingdom's possessions beyond Egypt, in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, while contending for control of Syro-Palestine against their Seleukid neighbors. The second important role was internal security in Egypt itself, suppressing large-scale revolts when necessary and otherwise carrying out other duties involving control and policing.

The Ptolemaic Army in Battle

Our most detailed account of a Ptolemaic army is Polybios' description of that of Ptolemy IV, reorganized for the Fourth Syrian War, against the Seleucid king Antiochos III, culminating in the battle of Raphia (217 bc). He notes (5.79) that the army consisted of 70,000 infantry, 5000 cavalry and 73 elephants. His account of the mustering of the army (5.63–65) provides more detail on its composition, noting the names of the commanders of each contingent (for example, Sokrates the Boeotian with the peltasts, Echecrates the Thessalian with a cavalry contingent) and their place of origin. The cavalry consisted of 700 royal guard, about 3000 Libyan and “native” (enchoroi) cavalry and approximately 2000 Greeks and other mercenaries. Undoubtedly the “native” cavalry included Graeco-Macedonian settlers in Egypt (kleruchs – discussed below) recalled to active service and perhaps regular cavalry (misthophoroi hippeis) based in the garrisons of Egypt itself (Clarysse & Thompson 20; vol. 2, 153).

The infantry included 3000 royal guard (agema), and a phalanx of 25,000 plus 20,000 Egyptian phalangites. 3000 Libyan troops were “armed in Macedonian fashion,” so perhaps phalangites like the Egyptians. 8000 “Greek mercenaries” who trained with the phalanx may have been equipped in the same way. There were 2000 peltasts (lighter infantry, typical of
Hellenistic Greek armies), and 3000 Cretans, 1000 of them “Neo-Cretans,” perhaps recently recruited, or troops fighting in Cretan style (typically archers). Finally there were 6,000 Thracians and Galatians. Thracians had long provided peltasts for Macedonian (and Greek) armies, and Galatians were eastern Celts who had settled in Anatolia in the third century bc, widely recruited as mercenaries. Polybios states that 2,000 of the 6,000 Galatians had been recruited recently, presumably as mercenaries, while the rest were settlers (katoikoi) and their descendants (discussed below). Elephants had been a regular component of Successor armies since Alexander's use of Indian elephants late in his reign. Indian elephants had been captured by the Ptolemies in past victories (Diodoros Sikeliotes 19.84.4 records some were taken after the battle of Gaza, against Demetrios in 312 bc) but typically theirs were smaller African forest elephants, described by Polybios (at Raphia, 5.84) as weaker than opposing Seleucid Indian elephants. Inscriptions and papyri record the activities of Ptolemaic elephant hunters.  

OGIS 54, originally set up at Adoulis on the Arabian Gulf (c.246 bc), notes that the army of Ptolemy III Euergetes included “Troglodytic and Ethiopian elephants which he and his father were the first to hunt from these lands, and, bringing them back to Egypt, to fit out for military service” (tr. Bagnall and Derow 6, no. 26).

For the battle of Raphia itself, the Ptolemaic army was drawn up with the phalanx in the center, flanked by the other infantry such as peltasts, Galatians, and Thracians. Cavalry from Egypt and Libya were on the left flank, with Greek and other mercenary cavalry on the right (Polybios 5.82). Thus far the dispositions of the armies might have been typical of Alexander himself. However, elephants were deployed in front of the friendly cavalry on each flank, to intimidate the enemy's horses. While both commanders attempted to emulate Alexander with a decisive cavalry charge, the symmetrical character of the armies' strengths and deployments led to the flanks neutralizing one another, the Ptolemaic force being victorious on their right, the Seleucids on the left (Polybios 5.84–85; see Sekunda 59; 347). Thus the decisive clash of the battle, unlike those of Alexander, was between the respective phalanxes, with Ptolemy himself leading the center, emphasizing the importance of infantry trained in Macedonian fashion, and the king's new willingness to enhance his army's phalanx by incorporating Egyptians (Polybios 5.83; 85). Polybios (5.107) regards this as a radical innovation, but a two-edged one, providing the Ptolemaic army with a short-term advantage but longer-term problems feeding into the internal conflicts that plagued Egypt in the second and first centuries bc.

This significant employment of Egyptians marks a major difference between the army of Raphia and that of earlier battles, such as Gaza in 312 bc, with Ptolemy I allied with Seleukos I against Demetrios. Diodoros (19.80.3) records that the Ptolemaic army of 18,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry included Macedonians and mercenaries, along with a “mass” (plethos) of Egyptians, some of them carrying baggage, some with missile weapons and some “properly equipped for battle.” Their heterogeneous equipment, and their description almost as an afterthought reminds one of the poor-quality subject troops employed by Achaemenid Persian rulers rather than the properly trained machimoi employed at Raphia. At Gaza, Demetrios deployed most of his cavalry on his left along with most of his elephants. Initially Ptolemy and Seleukos concentrated their cavalry on their left, but shifted it to match the enemy, using a palisade and missile-armed light troops to counter the enemy elephants (Ptolemy had none). Again, efforts to launch a decisive Alexander-like flank attack were stalemated by the symmetrical deployments and the failure of the elephants on the rough ground. Ultimately, however, Demetrios' cavalry was defeated and the Ptolemaic army won (Diodoros Sikeliotes 19.80.3–84). Diodoros says little about the role played by infantry in this battle, reflecting the importance of cavalry in (particularly) earlier Ptolemaic armies, despite the difficulty of achieving a decisive break-through. This importance is emphasized by the depictions of Macedonian-style horsemen in third century tomb paintings from Alexandria (Venit 76: 55–8, fig. 42).

Later Ptolemaic Military Reform?

There is no reason to suppose that the organization, equipment, and tactics of the Ptolemaic army remained unchanged over some three centuries, and there is evidence for changes in detail in all these areas. However, Sekunda 58 has attempted to demonstrate complete reform of the Ptolemaic infantry under Roman influence in the 160s bc (Ptolemy VI). He proposes that new units called sēmeiai (“standards”) and hekatontarchiai (“units of a hundred”) in documents after that time reflect the adoption of organization based on Roman legionary sub-units: maniples, and centuries. He proposes that the organizational change was accompanied by radical changes in equipment and tactics, including adoption of a shield like the oval Roman scutum, Roman-style military footwear, the Roman pilum (heavy javelin) and, in some cases, the chain-mail tunic worn by some Roman soldiers. He bases these conclusions on a re-reading of contemporary images of soldiers, notably the painted stele of Dionysios the Bithynian (Alexandria Museum 20919) and painted loculus slabs presumed to relate to the Ptolemaic garrison of Sidon. In detail, much of this evidence is quite tenuous, with problems of dating and interpretation. For example, in discussing the Roman scutum found at Kasr el-Harit in the Fayum, Sekunda himself (58: 80–2) draws attention to the differences between the Roman shield and the Hellenistic thureos. However, the
shields depicted in the monuments cited as evidence of Roman influence appear closer to his description of the *thureos* than the *scutum*. One suspects that the troops depicted are the peltast-like *thureophoroi* found in other later Hellenistic armies. Sekunda's ideas highlight a number of interesting issues in the evidence, but his overall picture of reform is less convincing than that proposed in the same volume (from rather stronger evidence) for the contemporary Seleukid army.

The Ptolemaic Navy and Overseas Garrisons

Ptolemaic interests outside Egypt were not confined to Syro-Palestine, and particularly in the third century bc kings of Egypt also ruled possessions in Asia Minor and the islands of the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. Many of these territories had Ptolemaic garrisons, documented in (particularly) epigraphic sources. Notable among these garrisoned territories were Cyprus, with a Ptolemaic *strategos* commanding naval and land forces, and Thera in the Aegean, whose garrison is particularly well documented (Bagnall 4: 38–57; 123–34; Van't Dack 74; 75). The troops based at Thera typically were drawn from southern Asia Minor (Bagnall 4: 127), as mercenaries or regulars (the distinction is not always clear).

In order to maintain these overseas possessions (and also to patrol the Nile) the Ptolemies retained a substantial navy (Van't Dack 73: 95–103). The Alexandrian poet Theokritos (17.86–92; admittedly a somewhat prejudiced source) praised Egypt's ships and Ptolemy II's control of land, sea, and river. Like other Hellenistic kingdoms, Egypt ultimately participated in a late fourth century “arms race” to construct larger warships, the triremes of the Classical Greek world being supplemented and replaced by ships known as “fours,” “fives,” “sixes” and so on, up to “tens” (on a regular basis at least), the names deriving from the number of rowers on each oar (de Souza 64; 65).

However, at the naval battle off Salamis (Cyprus) in 306 bc, Demetrios, Ptolemy I's opponent, appears to have had larger ships than the Egyptians. Diodoros (20.49–52), providing the most detailed account of a Ptolemaic naval battle, records that Ptolemy had 140 ships in the battle itself, all “fives” and “fours,” with another 60 blockaded in Salamis. Demetrios' fleet, perhaps somewhat smaller in numbers, nevertheless included a number of “sevens” and “sixes.” The battle itself had some similarities to a contemporary land battle, with the centers fixing one another and each leader strengthening his left flank in an attempt to make a decisive breakthrough. Each left flank routed the opposing right, but Demetrios was more effective in exploiting the breakthrough to strike the Egyptian center, and so Ptolemy was defeated and withdrew. While each fleet's tactics included ramming, the extensive use of artillery, lighter missile weapons, and boarding tactics recorded by Diodoros emphasize further similarities to contemporary land warfare.

Given the cost of building ships with imported timber and the number of rowers required (recruited from the Aegean, Asia Minor, and Phoenicia, as well as Egypt itself), a fleet of this size was a major undertaking. As Egyptian control of overseas territories diminished through the third century bc and later, the fleet diminished in importance (Van't Dack 73: 100–3). However, even at the time of Caesar's war against Pompey and the subsequent Alexandrian War Egypt was a significant naval power, able to equip and man large numbers of ships (Van't Dack 73: 102–3, with refs.). Plutarch (*Antony* 56.1) records that Kleopatra VII provided 200 ships for Antony's fleet at Actium in 31 bc, although these included cargo ships.

The Ptolemaic Army in Egypt: Kleruchs, Standing Forces, and Garrisons

The emphasis of the evidence for the nature of the Ptolemaic army discussed above was on armies outside Egypt. However, much of the evidence for the army comes from Egypt itself, and relates to two important groups, on the one hand mercenaries and standing troops (*misthophoroi*), including guard units and units based in garrisons (*phrouria*) throughout Egypt and, on the other, reservists (*klerouchoi*) with a liability to serve when needed, settled on allotments of land by royal authority. Polybios (15.25.17) draws this fundamental distinction.

The distinction between short-term mercenaries and long-service regulars is not always clear, and evidently the Ptolemaic army at certain times included both. Van't Dack (73: 90–4) proposed a development, with foreign mercenaries of the traditional kind playing an important role in earlier Ptolemaic armies, substantially replaced by cleruchs (below) through the third century, the cleruchs being supplemented by significant numbers of locally recruited professional troops in the later second century bc. He suggests on the basis of their names that these troops were largely Egyptians or culturally
mixed individuals, although, as Clarysse has pointed out, names employed by individuals in the army and administration may be as much a reflection of context and role as of culture.

Garrisons of regular soldiers were located in great part to ensure royal control of territory against internal revolt, a phenomenon of particular significance in the second and first centuries BC. For example, the end of the great uprising of 207–186 BC in the Thebaid (see Manning: 164–71) was marked by the establishment of new garrisons at Krokodilopolis and Pathyris (Manning: 169). Soldiers serving in garrisons appear in the documentary record as a privileged group and as individuals with substantial landholdings (Manning: 191; Clarysse and Thompson: 148–54 on misthophoroi hippeis in the Arsinoite nome).

The other major group of military men in the Egyptian chora were klerouchoi, military settlers (Uebel; Crawford: 53–84; Van't Dack: 82–90; Serrata: 472–3). These were colonists established on allotments of royal land to provide a body of reservists for service when required. This practice, with Pharaonic precedents (Herodotos 2.168 with Lloyd: 200; Diodoros 1.73.7–8), had the potential advantages of providing manpower with a personal stake in the kingdom in place of mercenaries; of reinforcing royal control throughout the kingdom; and of promoting the cultivation of marginal land (Crawford: 53–4; Manning: 56, 117).

In the third century BC, kleruchs were predominantly individuals of Graeco-Macedonian origin, settled in particular areas as katoikoi (especially the Fayum, but also the Oxyrhynchite nome of Middle Egypt – although the copious evidence from these areas may distort the picture). A high proportion of these kleruchs were attracted from areas beyond direct Ptolemaic control, including Macedonia (Bagnall: 5–9). The documentary evidence suggests a third-century preoccupation with establishing a reliable cavalry force for the army, and Clarysse and Thompson (vol. 2: 151–3) estimate, on the basis of mid-third-century documents, that the Arsinoite nome alone could have provided about 1,000 kleruchic cavalry and 400 regular cavalry, nearly half the “native” cavalry recorded in the Ptolemaic army at Raphia in 217 BC. Allotments were made according to military rank and status, and typically these kleruch cavalry were (nominally at least) holders of 100 arouras. In the first instance, the land remained crown property, reverting to royal cultivation on call-up or death, but by the end of the third century allotments were being granted to holders and their descendants, and over the next two centuries the inheritance and disposal of cleruchic land became normal. These large allotments often were leased out and cultivated by others (Crawford: 55–57, 76).

With the enhanced importance of Egyptians within the army after Raphia, they too begin to appear as recipients of kleruchic allotments. In contrast to the mid-third century documents studied by Clarysse and Thompson, the latter's study of the Kerkeosiris land survey documents shows that all the new kleruch settlers in the period 130–120 BC were Egyptians (at least inasmuch as one can judge from their names), giving rise to the situation in 119–8 BC when there were 63 kleruchic holdings by Egyptians compared to 41 held by foreign cavalry and officials (Crawford: 53–4; Manning: 56, 117). Typically these allotments were much smaller than the earlier ones made to cavalry, and typically cultivated by the holders themselves. Crawford (70) notes that the Kerkeosiris documents record a single 30 aroura grant in 129 BC, seven of 20 arouras (to machimoi hippeis – “Egyptian” cavalry) and thirty of seven arouras (to machimoi, presumably infantry).

Various categories of paramilitary police were stationed in the chora, with titles like phylakitai (“guards”), ephodoi (“men doing the rounds”) and eremophylakes (“desert-guards”). Clarysse and Thompson (vol. 2, 169) estimate that they made up between 1% and 5% of the adult population of the Arsinoite nome in the mid-third century, suggesting a heavily policed society. From the reign of Ptolemy V (205–180 BC) they began to receive kleruchic allotments of 10 or 24 arouras, reflecting their varied statuses (Clarysse and Thompson: vol. 2, 165–77).

**The Roman Period: The Principate, 30 BC–c.AD 284**

**Introduction**

The Roman military presence in Egypt differed from that of the Ptolemaic Period in a number of ways. First of all, Roman troops in Egypt (even those recruited locally) belonged to a larger military institution encompassing the entire empire, and served a mostly distant ruler. Secondly, aside from a brief conflict in the south in the reign of Augustus, taking Roman
The Size, Structure, and Deployment of the Roman Garrison

The Roman army in Egypt, as in other parts of the empire, was a professional standing force organized into legions and auxiliary units. The former were units approximately 5000 strong, made up of heavy infantry largely (but not exclusively – see below) recruited from Roman citizens, with full Roman legal rights. Auxiliary units provided supporting lighter infantry and cavalry, largely recruited (to begin with, at least) from free non-citizen (peregrine) inhabitants of the empire. They were organized in cohorts (infantry) and alae (cavalry), with a nominal strength of 500 men. There were also mixed units (cohortes equitatae) of infantry with a cavalry detachment. As part of a centralized imperial military establishment, Roman soldiers received pay and bonuses at notionally standard rates. The papyrus pay record P. Gen. Lat. I recto, showing sums received, deductions made for clothing, and supplies and money set aside as savings by two soldiers in Egypt (ad 81), has been used by scholars to argue about empire-wide rates of army pay. Retired Roman soldiers received (typically) cash retirement bonuses from the state, but many settled in rural communities (see Alston, in a process that perhaps had similar effects to Ptolemaic kleruchic settlement.

Legions

There were from one to three legions based in Egypt in the Principate, when the Roman army empire-wide totalled 25 to 30 legions. Strabo (17.1.12), writing under Augustus, records three in Egypt, but Tacitus (Annals 4.5), writing about the year ad 23, notes only two. By the early third century, when Cassius Dio (55.24) described the deployment of the legions throughout the empire, there was only one, named as II Traiana (see Ritterling 49). The legions of the first and early second century can be identified as III Cyrenaica and XXII Deiotariana (see Ritterling 20, 51).

Strabo describes where the three legions of his day were based, one “in the City” (in the camp at Nikopolis, on the outskirts of Alexandria) and two in the chora (two legions). One of the legions of the chora was at Babylon/Old Cairo and the other probably at Thebes/Luxor (Strabo 17.1.30 for Babylon; Speidel 66 for Thebes). These locations made strategic sense. Alexandria was a major population center and link between Egypt and the wider Roman Mediterranean. Babylon was a crucial node of land and water transport at the apex of the Delta and Thebes a site for controlling Upper Egypt and securing the southern frontiers. All three were the sites of legionary bases in the later Roman Period, and the surviving archaeological remains date to that later period. Subsequently the remaining two legions were concentrated at Alexandria, which emphasizes the importance of the internal security role of the army.

Funerary epitaphs of individuals, along with a few collective inscriptions, provide evidence for the origins of legionaries. Of particular importance is a fragmentary inscription from Koptos (ILS 2483 = CIL III 6627) recording the names, filiation, and origins of thirty-six legionaries engaged in construction work in the Eastern Desert (Alston 1: 29–31 provides a useful discussion). Each soldier has the same praenomen (first name) as his father, an unlikely coincidence unless, as Mommsen (the editor) suggested, this was a legal fiction to disguise the fact that these men were not Roman citizens on their recruitment. As a general rule, Roman legions were recruited from Roman citizens, but the eastern legions had often recruited peregrines (non-citizens), a practice dating back to Mark Antony, and reflecting the relative lack of Roman citizens in many eastern provinces, particularly Egypt (Mann 38, 45). Nearly half of the men in this inscription came from Asia Minor, particularly Galatian cities such as Ankyra (Ankara). Only three soldiers came from the West (Gaul and Italy), reflecting the culturally Greek character of the eastern Roman army. Seven men were recruited in Egypt (six of them in Alexandria) and two more state their origins as castris (“from the camp”), suggesting that they were sons of soldiers, possibly (but not necessarily) serving in Egypt. Unfortunately the date of the document is disputed, and there are grounds for advancing both Augustan and Flavian dates (Alston, cit. sets out the arguments). Whichever date is accepted, the number of men from Egypt is relatively high and has been taken as an indication that more localized recruitment of legionaries, and increasing recruitment of the sons of soldiers (empire-wide trends) developed earlier in Egypt than elsewhere (Mann 38: 44–5).

This impression is reinforced by an ad 194 inscription from Alexandria (CIL III, 6580) that lists the origins of 41 men of II Traiana who would have been recruited some 25 years earlier. They include eight men from Egypt and 24 castris. If we assume that these recruits' fathers had served in specifically Egyptian legions, this suggests a very high degree of local recruitment. On the other hand, a dedication of ad 157 from Alexandria by 130 men recruited to II Traiana in ad 132–3
(AE 1955: 238 + AE 1969: 633) shows an overwhelming predominance (two-thirds) of men from Africa. Mann (38: 46–7) argues that this evidence is unrepresentative, reflecting emergency recruitment relating to the Bar-Kochva revolt in Judaea, while Alston (1: 44–8) advances an argument that this reflects normal recruitment, and that the importance of Africa as a recruiting ground for the Egyptian legions has been underestimated.

**Auxiliaries**

Strabo (17.1.12) is also our earliest source for the auxiliary component of Egypt's Roman garrison. He records that, in the reign of Augustus, there were nine cohorts, three of them in Alexandria, three in the chora and three at Syene (Aswan) on the border with “Aithiopia” to defend that region. He also mentions three cavalry units, with a similar pattern of deployment. Beyond this, ancient literary sources do not provide much information about the cohorts and alae deployed in Egypt, and our best sources for an overall picture of the auxiliary garrison of the province are military diplomas. These were bronze certificates issued by the Roman authorities to auxiliary soldiers on their discharge, confirming the legal rights granted to them as a result of their service. Typically these provide not only the name and unit of the soldier to whom the diploma was granted but also list some or all of the other units stationed in the province. Fortunately we have a good spread of diplomas from Egypt, dating to ad 83 (CIL XVI 29), ad 105 (Roxan 53: 40–1, no. 9 = RMD 9), ad 156–61 (CIL XVI 184) and ad 179 (Roxan 54: 311–2 = RMD 185, see Römer 52), providing a listing of most of the units based in Egypt over the years. A few more units are known from other documentary evidence. Alston (1: 24–7) provides a useful summary and tables of the data provided.

The ad 83 diploma records three alae and seven cohorts, that of ad 105 three alae and nine cohorts. The ad 156–61 document, while fragmentary, appears to list four alae and 12 cohorts (see the reconstruction of Römer 52: 150), and that of ad 179 four alae and nine cohorts. If we draw all the evidence together, the number of units known changes over time, but not dramatically so, ranging from nine (in Strabo's time) to thirteen (in ad 105). This represents a total ranging from c.4,500 auxiliaries (on paper at least) at a time when there were about 15000 legionaries, to c.6,500 with, probably, two legions (c.10,000 men) in ad 105.

The identities of the auxiliary units change somewhat, although there is a fairly high degree of continuity. To take the ad 105 diploma as an example, the units named are: alae: Augusta, Apriana, Vocontiorum; cohorts: I Augusta Lusitanorum, I Pannoniorum, I Flavia Cilicum, II Thracum, I Thebaeorum, II Thebaeorum, II Ituraeorum, III Ituraeorum, I Hispanorum. Typically the unit names include an ethnic that indicates where the unit was first raised. For example, this list includes units composed nominally at least of Vocontii from Gaul, Spaniards and Lusitanians (modern Portugal) from the Roman west, Pannonians and Thracians from the Balkan provinces, Ituraeans from modern Lebanon and Thebans from Egypt itself. However, as nominally foreign units moved away from their place of recruitment, they tended to draw on a wider range of manpower, including (in this case) Egypt itself (Holder 30: 109–39, esp. 121), and so lose any ethnic distinctiveness they may once have had. Some of the units named here were based in Egypt for a very long time, the ala Apriana, and cohort II Ituraeorum being attested in there in the first century ad and also in the late fourth century Notitia Dignitatum (discussed below), and one imagines that they were substantially Egyptian from a fairly early date. We also know from other inscriptions that a high proportion of the cohorts in Egypt (six in the ad 105 list) were part-mounted ones, probably reflecting the nature of potential enemies and the paramilitary patrolling performed by soldiers (Maxfield 41: 17).

Strabo's account suggests that some of the auxiliary units in Egypt were deployed in discrete concentrations. A Latin dedication to the emperor Trajan of ad 99 (CIL 14147.2 = ILS 8907) records construction work at Syene (Aswan) by three of the cohorts named in the ad 105 diploma, namely I Hispaniorum, II Ituraeorum equitata and I Thebaeorum equitata. This represents a regular concentration of three cohorts in that area, as suggested by Strabo's account of the Augustan situation, although by ad 99 the limits of Roman control lay far to the south (Speidel 67). However, most of the documentary and archaeological evidence we have emphasizes a pattern of dispersed deployment of auxiliaries similar to that attested for Britain by the Vindolanda tablets and for Syria by papyrus duty rosters from Dura-Europos. Uneven conditions of survival and preservation mean that much of our evidence for this dispersal and out-posting comes from relatively marginal parts of Egypt such as the Eastern Desert, as well as from the Dodecaschoinos of Nubia.

**The Functions of the Roman army in Egypt**
Maxfield (41: 10) has recognized four functions of the Roman army in a province such as Egypt, namely defence of frontiers against external threats, maintaining the internal security of the core of the province, supervision of imperial estates and monopolies, and ensuring the security of travelers. To this one might add, by analogy with the activities of the Ptolemaic armed forces, contribution to imperial military activities beyond Egypt; for the Roman garrison of the province contributed complete units and legiary detachments ( vexillations) to actions such as the suppression of the revolt in Judaea in ad 66–70 and the annexation of the province of Arabia in the reign of Trajan, as well as wars of expansion and defence against the Parthian Persian empire (summarized in Alston 1: 72–3).

Defence of the frontiers against external attack was a relatively unimportant function of the Roman army in Egypt, as external threats were limited for almost all of the Principate. The only conflict of any significance took place in the south at the very beginning of the period, in 25–22 bc. Strabo (17.1.53–4 = Eide et al. 25, no. 190) records that the “Aethiopians” attacked the Thebaid, defeated the three Roman cohorts based at Syene (Aswan), and captured that town along with Philae and Elephantine. In response, the prefect C. Cornelius counter-attacked with 10,000 infantry and 800 cavalry against 30,000 enemy, leading his army into enemy territory. If Strabo's account is to be believed, the Aethiopians did not provide significant opposition for Roman legionsaries. He describes them as poorly armed and led. He also describes (17.1.53) the nomads of the region as “neither numerous nor warlike.”

As a result of Petronius' activities, Roman control subsequently extended c.130 km into Lower Nubia, the territory known as the Dodekaschosinos. This control took the form of detachments out-posted from the cohorts at Syene, stationed at important centers such as Talmis/Kalabsha, Pselcis/Dakka and Hierasykaminos/al-Maharaqqa (and, more briefly, at Primis/Qasr Ibrim). The presence of these detachments is attested primarily by dedicatory inscriptions set up by their members in the first and second centuries ad, including a series at the temple of Mandulis at Talmis, although there are some relatively insubstantial remains of military installations too (Speidel 67; Alston 1: 202–3).

The internal security role of the Roman army in Egypt is emphasized by the great concentration of forces at Alexandria throughout the Principate. As already noted, for much of this period the entire legiary presence in the province was located there, along with a number of auxiliary units. Unrest in Alexandria and beyond, requiring military intervention, is mentioned by ancient writers on a number of occasions. For example, Josephus (BJ 2.487–498) records that the ad 66–70 revolt in Judaea provoked even worse conflict than usual between Alexandria's Jewish, Greek, and Egyptian populations, and that the prefect Tiberius Alexander unleashed the city's two legions against the Jews. Other major disturbances in Egypt in the Principate included the diaspora Jewish revolt in Trajan's reign and the boukoloi revolt of c. ad 171/2. At a much lower level of internal security and policing, in the villages of the chorae, we see a good deal of papyrological evidence for Roman centurions as recipients of petitions relating to local disputes and crimes, many of them entirely lying in the civil sphere (Alston 1: 86–96). Here the army is effectively acting as the lowest level of imperial control.

The roles of the Roman army in guarding and supervising imperial possessions and monopolies, and in providing security for travelers are best exemplified by the wealth of evidence from the Eastern Desert, much of which was obtained in the course of fieldwork conducted over the last two decades. Evidence from the quarry sites at Mons Claudianus and Mons Porphyrites, including installations, inscriptions, and ostraka, provides vivid evidence for relatively small garrisons (Maxfield 41: 18–19, on the basis of ostraka relating to water supply) on detached duty from the major auxiliary units, guarding the installations and supervising the civilian labor force (Maxfield 41: 18–19; Maxfield and Peacock 42, 43, 44, 45; Bingen and Cuvigny 13–2000). The written evidence ranges from the formal dedication of a temple to Isis by an officer of the ala Vocontiorum at Mons Porphyrites in ad 113 (AE 1936, 60) to a dipinto on an amphora shoulder by a cavalryman of cohors I Flavia Cilicum (Maxfield and Peacock 45: 180–1, no. 9).

While the roads to the quarry sites provide evidence of the army's role in policing the routes through the Eastern Desert, these duties are best demonstrated by the evidence from the roads from Koptos to the Red Sea ports of Myos Hormos (Qoseir el-Qadim) and Berenike. Again, the evidence is partly archaeological, with numerous relatively well-recorded fortlets and hydreumata (watering-places) along the routes, and partly written, with a selection of formal inscriptions as well as ostraka recovered in the course of fieldwork (for a recent study with references to past work, see Cuvigny 22; selected earlier works include Maxfield 41; Zitterkopf and Sidebotham 78; Golvin and Reddé 27). As already noted, the inscription from Koptos (ILLS 2483 = CIL III 6627) mentioned above shows legiary and auxiliary troops engaged in the construction of cisterns and forts on the Berenike route in the first century ad. On a more personal level a rock-cut inscription from el-Mweih on the Myos Hormos road by a cavalryman of the ala Vocontiorum (a unit well-attested in ostraka from sites on this route) records his five months' duty at the fort there (ILLS 9142). Undoubtedly the Roman state's
involvement in these activities was motivated by revenue protection rather than altruism toward the merchants who used the roads, since the provision of protection and infrastructure on well-defined routes not only prevented goods from being stolen but also ensured that they remained within the lucrative imperial regime for taxation of imported goods.

The Roman Navy in Egypt

While the major bases of the Roman fleet lay at Misenum and Ravenna in Italy, the importance of securing Egyptian grain supplies and of supporting Roman forces along the Nile Valley meant that there was a component of the fleet based at Alexandria in the Principate, as the *classis Alexandriæ* or *Alexandrina* (Saddington 55: 215).

The Roman Period: Late Antiquity, ad 284–c.ad 400

Introduction

The second half of the third century ad, a time of broader political and military upheaval in the Roman Empire, saw a number of threats to the security of Roman Egypt emerge. One of these factors was the first external invasion of Egypt for three centuries, undertaken from the north-east by independent Palmyra in ad 270–2 – although much of the evidence relating to this attack suggests that it was made with the collusion of Roman officials in the province. A second issue was that of large-scale internal revolt in Upper Egypt (ad 293) and throughout the whole province (ad 297–8), the latter suppressed in person by the emperor Diocletian. The third problem was conflict in frontier areas with nomadic peoples, particularly the Blemmyes in the south, leading Diocletian to abandon the *Dodekaschoinos* of Lower Nubia in (probably) ad 298. As a result of these, and other, empire-wide, problems and reforms, the Roman military presence in Egypt in the fourth and fifth centuries ad was somewhat different from that of the earlier period, although some common themes remained, notably the importance of internal policing duties.

The Size, Structure, and Deployment of the Roman Garrison in Late Antiquity

The most comprehensive source for the late Roman army in Egypt, or, indeed, anywhere in the Roman empire at that time, is the *Notitiae Dignitatum*. This document, preserved in the medieval manuscript tradition, lists military units (and Roman officials) throughout the empire on a region-by-region and province-by-province basis. In the case of military units it indicates the type and title of the unit and its place of deployment. The document as a whole was probably compiled c.ad 429, with the eastern (Orients) sections, including Egypt, being finalized somewhat earlier, probably c.ad 395 (Carrié 18: 451). However, the changes which saw the emergence of the “late Roman army” began amid the military and political crises of the mid-third century ad, nearly two centuries before the final compilation of the *Notitia*, and intensified in the reigns of emperors like Diocletian and Constantine. In order to view the changes that took place through that period, it is necessary to extrapolate backwards from the *Notitiae Dignitatum* with the aid of contemporary (but less comprehensive) documents such as the Diocletianic papyri from Panopolis (*P. Beatty Panop.* – Skeat 63). The *Notitiae* divides the garrison of Egypt into two sections, troops under the command of the *comes limitis Aegypti* in Aegyptus (essentially Lower Egypt – Or. XXVII) and those under the *dux Thebaidos* (Upper Egypt – Or. XXXI). In addition to the regular garrison set out in these sections of the document, other units, from regional and central field armies (*comitatus*), might be deployed in Egypt for a particular campaign or on a longer term basis. For example, documentary sources attest to the presence of *comitatenses* (troops from the field armies) at Oxyrhynchus and Antinöe (Carrié 18: 458–9).

Some of the unit types appear familiar from the Principate, for example, there are units termed legions and lower status units called *alae* and cohorts, clearly the notional (at least) descendants of the legionary and auxiliary units of earlier Roman history. However, there are also new unit types, notably those titled *equites*, high-status cavalry units, reflecting the increased importance of that element of the Roman army from the third century ad. However, it is clear from careful reading of the documentary evidence as well as from the sizes of military bases that most, if not all, late Roman units were much smaller than their namesakes of the Principate. Legionary units typically may have had 1000 men at most, and legionary detachments (vexillations) recorded in the Diocletianic Panopolis papyri probably were about 500 strong. Duncan-Jones’ 24 interpretation of the same document reveals auxiliary cohorts and *alae* of c.160 and 120 men respectively. Thus, while the *Notitiae* lists significantly more units in Egypt in late antiquity than in the Principate (12
As noted above, the *Notitia Dignitatum* provides us with a picture of the late Roman army as it evolved over a century and more. Some units have imperial titles such as *Theodosiana*, *Arcadiana*, *Valentiniana* and (equites) *Honoriani* that show they were raised in the later fourth century AD. However, it is clear that the reign of Diocletian (AD 284–305) was a time of significant reform, when, in many respects, the late Roman army of Egypt was “created.” Not only do we have literary evidence for Diocletian's presence in Egypt and his personal interest in its defence, along with archaeological evidence of military construction in, or close to, his reign (both discussed below), but also the titles of several of the units in Egypt in the *Notitia Dignitatum* suggest tetrarchic origins. For example, there are multiple elements of the two legions *III* *Diocletiana* (*ND Or.** XXXI.37)* and *I* *Maximiana* (*ND Or.** XXVIII.18; XXXI.31, 33, 38), named after Diocletian and his tetrarchic colleague, and some auxiliary units titled *Herculia* (*ND Or.** XXXI 50, 54), after Maximian's patron deity Hercules.

With regard to the general character of the late Roman army in Egypt, it is clear from the unit titles that infantry, both legionary and auxiliary, remained an important component. However, cavalry units were more numerous than in the Principate, and, despite the relatively small size of these late-antique cavalry formations, it seems likely that overall numbers were somewhat greater too. There is also some evidence of local specialization, especially in Upper Egypt. Of particular note is the large number of units described as *equites sagittarii indigenae* on both sides of the Nile on and around the Koptos bend, at sites such as Tentyra (Dendera), Koptos itself, Diospolis Parva (Hiw), Latopolis (Esna), and Maximanopolis/Kaine (Qena). Presumably such troops would have been particularly well suited to controlling nomadic peoples such as Blemmyes (but see Barnard 8 on the problem of Blemmye identity) and may well have been recruited from them. There are also a number of specialized camel units (*alae dromedariorum*), including one at Qena, again, of particular value in policing desert areas. There is only one unit of heavy armored cavalry (*catafractarii*) attested in the *Notitia*, in the Thebaid, (although a papyrus also refers to such a unit of the *comitatus* at Antinoe – Carrié 18: 458–9), probably reflecting the lack of suitable enemies for such troops in Egypt, in contrast to the Persian frontier.

Many auxiliary units bear ethnic names, although typically (again) these reflect the units' origins rather than necessarily continued recruitment from those peoples. A number of titles reveal at least a nominal connection with units already in Egypt in the Principate. These include the *ala Apriana* (*ND Or.** XXVIII.32)* *ala veteranæ Gallorum* (*XXVIII.28)*, *cohors II Iltuaeorum* (*XXVIII.44)*, *cohors II Thracum* (*XXVIII.45)* in Aegyptus and the *cohors scutata civium Romanorum* (*XXX.59)* and *cohors I Apamenorun* (*XXXI.60)* in Upper Egypt. Other ethnic titles suggest recruitment from among Germanic peoples including the *cohors IX Alamannorum* (*ND Or.** XXVIII.63)*, *cohors VII Francorum* (*XXVIII.67)* and *cohors IV Iuthugorum* (*XXXI.43)*. Probably these were raised and moved east during the reigns of fourth-century emperors like Constantine and Constantius II, although presumably they began recruiting more locally after their arrival and eventually lost any ethnic distinctiveness they once may have possessed.

On the surface, the deployment of the Roman garrison of Egypt in late antiquity appears more balanced and dispersed than that seen through much of the Principate, with the latter's heavy concentration of troops (legionary and auxiliary) in and around Alexandria. The *Notitia Dignitatum* reveals a substantial concentration of all troop types on the southern frontier, a significant presence in the strategically important Cairo (Babylon-Memphis) area, and dispersed bases throughout the Nile Delta, along the major route to Syro-Palestine, down the Nile valley and in outlying locations such as the Fayum and the western oases. This pattern of dispersal is confirmed by the evidence of excavated late-antique military bases (discussed below). However, this apparent change from the earlier situation may be more illusory than real. As noted above, the army of the Principate was actually more dispersed than the purely literary evidence suggests, and the later imperial situation depicted in the *Notitia Dignitatum* is probably a formal recognition and crystallization of the de facto dispersed deployment of the Principate (I am grateful to Valerie Maxfield for this suggestion). In some cases sites named as military bases in the *Notitia Dignitatum* also provide evidence for military deployments in the Principate, even beyond the major concentrations of troops like Alexandria, Babylon, and the Thebaid. For example, Latopolis (Esna) is named as the base of a unit of horse archers in the *Notitia* (*Or.** XXXI.28)*, but there is also evidence for the presence of a part-mounted detachment there in the second century AD (Bagnall 3).
Military Bases in Late Antique Egypt

On the whole, the archaeological evidence for major military bases in Egypt is much better for late antiquity than for the earlier periods, but not without its problems. Most of the known examples provide evidence of origins during the reign of Diocletian or close to it, emphasizing that the tetrarchic period was one of military reform in Egypt.

Legionary Fortresses

There are three legionary bases of this period known from archaeological evidence. Perhaps the most impressive is the legionary camp created in the Luxor temple at Thebes (El-Saghir et al. 26). The fabric of the temple was incorporated into a slightly trapezoidal, largely mudbrick, wall circuit, with projecting square corner towers and horseshoe-shaped interval towers (typical features of later Roman fortifications). We know relatively little about the internal arrangements of the fortress, but there are remains of two monumental tetrastyles marking street crossings, dated by dedicatory inscriptions to ad 301 and ad 308/9 respectively (El-Saghir et al. 26: 20–21; 122). The origins of the camp as a whole may lie a little earlier, perhaps in ad 298, when Diocletian himself was in Egypt. Diocletian's adventus (procession of arrival) may be what is depicted by the paintings in the temple ante-chamber, which was converted into a chapel for military standards when it was incorporated into the camp (Deckers 23; Kalavrezou-Maxeiner 33). The total area enclosed by the walls is 3.72 ha. comparable to other late Roman legionary bases but small compared to the fortresses of the Principate, which, as discussed above, housed larger legions. The late Roman legionary fortress at Babylon (Old Cairo) was similar in size to that of Luxor, and there are also some similarities of plan, such as the horseshoe-shaped towers and gates. Standing remains of the camp have long been visible, but more intensive investigation and recording of the walls took place in the 1990s (Lambert 34; Grossmann et al. 28, 29; Sheehan 61), and study of the sub-surface remains more recently still (Sheehan, forthcoming). The visible evidence and the similarities to Luxor suggest a tetrarchic date. Finally, the remains of the Roman legionary base at Nikopolis (Alexandria), which survived until the late nineteenth century, clearly belonged to a late antique structure, as is made clear by contemporary descriptions of its plan and construction (Murray 46, 141, cited and discussed in Alston 1: 192–3).

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Reconstruction of the Roman military camp at Luxor incorporating the Pharaonic temple of Amun which was no longer in use. After El-Saghir et al. 26; pl. xx. Courtesy IFAO Cairo.

Auxiliary Forts

Construction of auxiliary forts in ad 287–8 (Diocletian's third year) at el- Kantarah (Silē) on the Suez Canal and Deir el-Gebrawi (Hierakon) in Upper Egypt, for ala I Thracum Mauretana and cohors I Augusta praetoriana Lusitanorum respectively, is attested by inscriptions from those sites (CIL III 13578 and CIL III 22–see CIL III 6626 n.22), perhaps reflecting a general reform of Egypt's defences in or about that year. In addition, there are more substantial archaeological remains from other sites, notably Dionysias (Qasr Qārūn) in the Fayum, and Abu Shaar on the Red Sea coast of the Eastern Desert. The former has a largely mud-brick rectangular wall circuit c.94 m by c.80 m, with projecting square corner towers and semi-circular bastions at gateways and on curtain walls (Schwartz and Wild 57; Schwartz et al. 56). The internal plan, with barracks and a central command/administrative block, has been recovered, although its chronological development is uncertain, and the excavators' views that it represented a single construction of the reign of Diocletian have been challenged by Carrière (17: 839–840) who (not entirely convincingly) redates it to the period of Palmyrene occupation of Egypt in ad 270–2, on the basis of architectural parallels. It is very likely that this fort was the one occupied for much of the fourth century by the cavalry unit the ala V Praefectorum, known very well, along with its commander Abinnaeus, from an archive of documents found at Philadelphia (discussed below – Bell et al. 12; Schwartz et al. 56: 2).

The fort at Abu Shaar was excavated in 1990–1 by a group from the University of Delaware, directed by Steven Sidebotham (Sidebotham 62). It had a roughly rectangular wall circuit c.77.5 m by 64 m, constructed primarily of local cobbles, with baked- and unbaked brick and gypsum employed in the towers and gates. Like the other late Roman fortifications discussed, Abu Shaar had numerous projecting towers, at the corners and on the curtain walls, and catapult balls were found in one of them, emphasizing their importance as artillery platforms at this period. The internal
arrangements were broadly similar to those of Dionysias. A fragmentary inscription found in the course of excavation suggests a tetrarchic date (c.ad 309–11) for the primary military occupation of the site and provides evidence for the garrison as an ala nova Maximi[ana], an auxiliary cavalry unit, and Sidebotham characterizes the installation as a satellite of the legionary fortress at Luxor (Sidebotham 62: 143, 157–8; Bagnall and Sheridan 7: 159–63). Neither the fort nor its garrison can be identified in the Notitia Dignitatum.

The Functions of the Roman Army in Late Antique Egypt

As noted above, Egypt was invaded from the north-east in ad 270 by Palmyra, which had temporarily broken away from the Roman Empire in the aftermath of the defeat and capture of the emperor Aurelian by the Sassanian Persians. The ancient sources (SHA Divus Claudius 11.1–2; Probus 9.5; Zosimus 1.44.1–2) present rather confused accounts of the Palmyrene takeover as a foreign military invasion, although there is a good deal of evidence of continuity and collusion between the Roman and Palmyrene administrations (see Potter 47: 167, 170). Whatever its exact nature, this was the last external attack on Egypt from the north until the Arab invasions, and, as in the Principate, repelling external invasion was not required of the late Roman army in Egypt. Nevertheless, concern about invasion from the north may have influenced the deployment of the units named in the Notitia Dignitatum for Aegyptus (Lower Egypt), with bases on routes from Syro-Palestine, along the east and west sides of the Nile Delta and major routes across it, and at centers of strategic importance such as Babylon and Alexandria (Price 48).

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The Roman fort in the settlement of Dionysias, built or reactivated in the Tetrarchic Period. After Schwartz 56. Courtesy IFAO, Cairo.

Conflict with nomadic peoples on the borders of the Egyptian provinces was more significant. There is only limited and scattered evidence for such conflict with nomads from the west (P. Princeton II, 29, ll. 5–7 on the Fayum, ad 258; P.Oxy. 46.3292 on the Oxyrhynchite Nome, ad 259–64; see Wagner 77, 394–400 on these, and attacks on the western oases). However, the situation in the south was much more serious, as significant conflict with the peoples known to Graeco-Roman writers as Blemmyes and Nobotai seems to have developed in the mid-third century ad (SHA Probus 17.2, 6 = Eide et al. 25, no. 284. Zosimus 1.71.1 = Eide et al. 25, no. 323, all discussed in detail in Eide et al. 25: 1052–66), to the point where Diocletian was forced to abandon the Roman presence in the Dodekaschoinos and establish the Roman frontier at Syene (Aswan) (Procopius, Wars 1.19.27–37 = Eide et al. 25: no. 328). Continuing threats from the south and the Eastern Desert provided one rationale for the concentration of troops in the Late Roman Thebaid and cavalry units deployed along the eastern Nile Valley.

Another rationale for the dispositions of troops in the Thebaid and, indeed, throughout Egypt, was internal security. Diocletian's reforms took place in the aftermath of two major revolts, the first apparently restricted to Upper Egypt, perhaps in ad 293–4 (Jerome, Chronicle ed. Helm 226a mentioning Koptos and “Busiris”/Boresis; Barnes 9: 180–1; 1982: 62; 11: 542; Bowman 14: 26–7; 15: 316). The second was the revolt of L. Domitius Domitianus throughout Egypt, probably in ad 297/8, and brought to an end by a siege of Alexandria commanded by Diocletian himself (Jerome, Chronicle ed. Helm 226e; Thomas 68; 69; Bowman 14; 16: 316; Barnes 10: 54–5; 11: 543–4). As in the Principate, Egypt remained a potentially turbulent part of the empire in late antiquity, and the Notitia Dignitatum's picture of an army spread through Egypt with concentrations in strategically important locations such as Alexandria, Babylon, and the Thebaid probably reflects that perception.

On an even lower level, the day-to-day activities of the ala V Praelectorum and its commanding officer, Flavius Abinnaeus, based at Dionysias in the Fayum, are described in considerable detail for the years ad 342–51 by the papyrus documents of the Abinnaeus archive (Bell et al. 12). Many of these documents show the army performing basic administrative tasks, such as administration of the tax system and low-level policing. Abinnaeus himself is shown judging disputes between civilians as well as cases involving civilians and soldiers. On the basis of this and similar evidence, Van Berchem (71: 69–71, and also in Bell et al. 12) argued that the primary functions of the auxiliary alae and cohorts in Egypt at this time were essentially nonmilitary, and only the higher status legionary and cavalry units were actually intended to engage major threats to the security of the provinces. In fact, the absence of major external enemies over much of Egypt throughout the Roman Period probably enabled units to take on a range of functions that they were not originally intended...
to perform. As in the Principate and the Ptolemaic Period, control of Egypt itself, its population and resources, was always perhaps the most important role played by the army.

### Further Reading

There are no comprehensive modern monographs on either the Ptolemaic or Roman armed forces to rival the scope of Lesquier's (35, 36) work, and the French scholar's work still includes much of value, as does Van Berchem's (71, 72) subsequent work on late antiquity. Besides addressing the theme of soldier-civilian relations, Alston 1 provides a valuable introduction to the Roman army in Egypt, with some consideration of most major issues. Various sections of the *Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare* (de Souza 64, 65; Sekunda 59; Serrata 60) provide very general but useful background on Ptolemaic issues, and Van't Dack 73 an overview of the development of Ptolemaic military institutions. Otherwise there are specialist studies, with Clarysse and Thompson 20 providing fascinating detail on kleruchy, and the work of Cuvigny, Maxfield, Sidebotham and others supplying new perspectives on the Eastern Desert. For a broad-ranging survey account of the Egyptian frontier areas see Jackson 31.

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