

ART. VII.—*The Birdoswald hoard: the pay and the purse.* By G. R. WATSON, M.A., M.Litt.

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PROFESSOR RICHMOND'S interesting discussion of the relation of the amounts of money in the Birdoswald and Thorngraston hoards to the pay of centurions, legionaries and auxiliaries,<sup>1</sup> raises a number of problems.

The first is, what proportion of his pay a man might reasonably be expected to have on his person? It is well known that a military savings-bank system operated, and was apparently so popular that Domitian was forced to impose certain restrictions in order to prevent too dangerously large a sum from being accumulated at legionary headquarters.<sup>2</sup> Yet we have Vegetius's testimony that the Roman soldier—like the modern one—was always ready to spend all he could lay his hands on.<sup>3</sup> What evidence we have for the actual working of the savings-bank system comes mainly from papyri, and refers specifically to Egyptian conditions. It is not unreasonable, however, to postulate similar procedure elsewhere. The Egyptian documents reveal, as might have been expected, very considerable differences between the credit balances of individual soldiers, some of whom, even auxiliaries, had substantial amounts to their credit, whereas others appear to have been in debt to their units.<sup>4</sup> The troops in Northern Britain, we may be sure, would exhibit differences equally striking. Some

<sup>1</sup> Art. VI, above.

<sup>2</sup> Suet., *Dom.*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Veg., *de re mil.*, II, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. esp. P. Berlin 6866 and P. Fay. 105 (both second century). For these see now R. Marichal, *L' Occupation romaine de la Basse Égypte*, Paris, 1945. The Domitianic restriction either soon become a dead letter or never applied to Egypt. The former hypothesis seems the more probable.

would be content to leave most of their pay in regimental custody, others would prefer to live for the day and carry as much as they could on their persons. Administrative action seems to have been necessary to ensure that members of the latter group should have any savings at all. From one papyrus it appears that in some auxiliary units the *viaticum*<sup>5</sup>—an award of three gold pieces presented on enlistment, the Roman equivalent of the “Queen’s shilling”<sup>6</sup>—was retained in the regimental bank as a compulsory deposit; and from a passage of Vegetius,<sup>7</sup> which seems to be confirmed by this document, we learn that one-half of each imperial donative was sequestered in the same way. These compulsory savings in the case of auxiliary troops would support the general thesis that many soldiers had little desire, even when they had the opportunity, to save. The exhortation of the Augustan History, *Aurelian*, 7, 6: “stipendium in balteo, non in popina habeat”,<sup>8</sup> though it concerns a later period than that of this discussion, is significant of an attitude which has probably persisted among soldiers of all ages. Our problem is one, therefore, which does not admit a general solution: some soldiers would carry about with them only a small proportion of their pay—what Professor Richmond calls their “current cash”—whereas others, we may be sure, would carry all their available wealth, and occasionally, if they were particularly lucky or unscrupulous,<sup>9</sup> amounts larger even than their quarter’s *stipendium*.

The second problem concerns the wearing of the arm-purse itself. The Roman military uniform was not well adapted to the carrying of money, and various special means had to be contrived. One such was the *balteus*, as in the passage cited. Elsewhere, the Augustan History illustrates the carrying of money in the *zonula*, a very

<sup>5</sup> P. Berlin 6866.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. BGU II 423 (= Wilcken, *Chrest.*, 480).

<sup>7</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> “He should keep his pay in his belt, not in the cook-shop”.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. St. Luke, 3, 14.

safe, though perhaps inconvenient, practice. (S.H.A., *Alex.*, 52, 3: "miles non timendus est si vestitus, armatus, calciatus, et satur, et habens aliquid in zonula.")<sup>10</sup> The arm-purse proper seems to be described by Nonius (p. 78): "bulga est folliculus omnis, quam et cruminam veteres appellarunt. et est sacculus ad brachium pendens."<sup>11</sup> In support of his definition of the *bulga* he cites a passage from Lucilius admirably indicative of its function:<sup>12</sup>

*Cui neque iumentum est nec servus nec comes ullus,  
bulgam et quidquid habet nummorum secum habet ipse;  
cum bulga cenat dormit lavit; omnis in una est  
res homini bulga; bulga haec devincta lacerto est.*

From Fëstus we learn that *bulga* was a Gallic word,<sup>13</sup> and there is a further example in Varro (*Men.* 492): "ut viaticum ex arcula adderet in bulgam."<sup>14</sup> The word survives in the modern French *bouge* and *bougette*, and English "bulge". It would seem to have belonged to the popular speech of the Western provinces.

There does not seem to be any evidence of restrictions being placed on the wearing of arm-purses, though they must surely have appeared slightly incongruous as articles of military apparel, and this may perhaps justify Professor Richmond's belief that the ordinary soldier was unlikely to have carried such a purse. The *balteus* or *zonula* would be a far more practical receptacle for a man who required the unencumbered use of his arms. The same objections, however, would still apply, though with less force, to the carrying of an arm-purse by a centurion. The most likely person, if psychological grounds may be

<sup>10</sup> "You needn't be afraid of a soldier if he's decently clad, fully armed, has a stout pair of boots and a full belly, and has something in his belt".

<sup>11</sup> "A *bulga* is any sort of little bag: the ancients also called it a *crumina*. It is also a small satchel hanging tied to the arm."

<sup>12</sup> E. H. Warmington, *Remains of Old Latin III*, Lucilius, 278-81 (= Marx 243-6). We may translate: "The man who has no beast, slave, or any attendant, keeps on his person his purse and all the money he has; he's never parted from his purse even when he's eating, sleeping, or washing; in that one purse is all his wealth: this purse hangs tied to his arm".

<sup>13</sup> Paul. Fest., p. 35: *bulgas Galli sacculos scorteos appellant*. ("The Gauls called leather satchels *bulgae*".)

<sup>14</sup> "To take the travelling-money out of the chest and put it into his purse."

admitted, would be a newly-promoted, rank-conscious *principalis*, such as Apollinaris at Bostra,<sup>15</sup> who was anxious to let people know that he need no longer cut stones like the rest, but could now stand around doing nothing. Since a *principalis* received considerably more pay than an ordinary soldier,<sup>16</sup> Professor Richmond's other point, that it was unlikely that an ordinary soldier would carry so much money about with him as is contained in the Birdoswald and Thorngraston deposits, and that these look much more like the current cash of a centurion,<sup>17</sup> loses some of its force and becomes rather a matter of surmise.

One final point may be raised about the actual coin content of the pay instalment. Suetonius, describing Domitian's increase of legionary pay,<sup>18</sup> writes, "addidit et quartum stipendium militi, aureos ternos." With this we may compare the letter of Apion, the recruit in the Misenum fleet, to his father in Egypt,<sup>19</sup> in which he writes, "and when I came to Misenum I received my *viaticum* from Caesar, three *aurei*." Instalments of three *aurei* seem to have been maintained in legionary pay at least to the time of Severus, and increases of annual pay effected by increasing the number of instalments. This has been denied by Brunt,<sup>20</sup> but Domaszewski's arguments still appear convincing.<sup>21</sup> At least a *prima facie* case may be made out for the theory that *cohortales* and *alares* received, in the basic grades, pay instalments of one and two *aurei* respectively.<sup>22</sup> What, however, are

<sup>15</sup> *P. Mich.* VIII 465, 14-17 (repeated in 466, 18-24), A.D. 107.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Domaszewski, *Rangordnung* 70-72.

<sup>17</sup> *P.* 58, above.

<sup>18</sup> *Suet., Dom.*, 7, 3. ("He added a fourth instalment to the soldier's pay, of three gold pieces.")

<sup>19</sup> *BGU* II 423, cf. n. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. P. A. Brunt, "Pay and Superannuation in the Roman Army", *Papers of the British School at Rome* XVIII, p. 54, who bases his case on Dio, lxxvii, 3, 5 (= Zon., xi, 19), but Dio seems merely to be describing Domitian's action in terms of third-century procedure. Professor Richmond does not seem to accept this part of Brunt's argument (cf. his n. 4).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. A. von Domaszewski, "Der Truppensold der Kaiserzeit", *Neue Heidelberger Jahrbücher*, X, 1900, 218-241.

<sup>22</sup> I have attempted to prove this in *Roman Military Bookkeeping*, (diss., Durham, 1953), pp. 213 f.

we to understand by the term *aureus*? Does it refer to the actual coin, or merely to its value, just as in the days of the gold standard the word "sovereign" often meant "pound sterling", and not necessarily the actual gold coin? The latter meaning would appear to be the more feasible, since it would obviously have been absurd for all military payments to have been in gold, and it would have surely involved a chronic shortage of small change. This is borne out by the Birdoswald finds, which are purely of silver. The Thorngrafton hoard, however, contained, besides a large quantity of silver, three pieces of gold. Would it be pure surmise to imagine that these represented the *viaticum*, which for reasons of tradition or prestige was paid in gold, whereas normal payments were made in silver?