

Hadrian's *Adlocutio* at Lambaesis

The Emperor Hadrian is often remembered for halting the expansion of the Roman Empire, as symbolized by his eponymous wall across Britain. He was also, however, the most well-traveled of all Roman emperors, visiting nearly every province, beginning construction projects, and inspecting the readiness of the Roman army. In the course of his visit to the province of Africa (mostly modern-day Tunisia) in the summer of AD 128, he observed the legion stationed there at Lambaesis, the *III Augusta*, as well as the attached *auxilia* in many various forts along the frontier. After observing each unit, Hadrian addressed the soldiers in a speech (*adlocutio*) praising their preparation and skill, and criticizing any mistakes. The speeches were memorialized on a monument in Lambaesis that has partially survived through the centuries. We are fortunate to have a record of some of the words spoken by Hadrian in the inscriptions on the monument, which remain the only surviving example of a speech from a Roman emperor to his soldiers. In this paper, I will examine in detail one part of the inscription which addresses two units of *auxilia*, the *Ala I Pannoniorum* and the *Cohors VI Commagenorum*, and attempt to explain what it is describing. To put this in the proper context, I will first provide a brief overview of training in the Roman army, as well as the nature of the monument itself and the speeches to units on its other surviving inscriptions.

While there is certainly not an over-abundance of information on training in the Roman army, there are some important primary sources as well as archaeological evidence that shed light on this issue. The Jewish writer Josephus in his *Jewish War* describes the intense and habitual training that Roman legions conducted, even while on the move and in time of war. In

one illustrative passage he writes: “Indeed, no one would be wrong in saying that their training maneuvers are battles without bloodshed, and their battles maneuvers with bloodshed” (*BJ* 3.75). Both Frontinus, governor of Britain from 73-77, in his *Strategems*, and Vegetius, active during the reign of Theodosius I (383-395), in his *Epitome of Military Science*, also give many details about how military training was conducted by past Roman armies and its value to the current army. Most importantly for our purposes here, however, are the writings of Arrian, a Greek from Nicomedia who was a Roman citizen, Senator, and a close friend of Hadrian. While he was governor of Cappadocia from 131-137, he wrote three works that were either addressed to Hadrian or written with the emperor in mind: *The Art of Tactics*, *Order of Battle Against the Alans*, and *Circumnavigation of the Black Sea*.¹ His *Tactics*, among other things, describes the five phases of the Roman cavalry maneuvers (*hippika gymnasia*) that, as we will see, are directly relevant to the events inscribed at Lambaesis. The five phases are: games of skill (such as the Cantabrian maneuver) using light spears (*hastae*); shooting exercises by individuals wearing cuirasses and using heavy spears (*lanceae*); maneuvers with special weapons such as cross-bows, javelins, slings, and rocks; exercises of jumping onto horses; and maneuvers newly-learned from foreigners like Persians, Sarmatians, and Celts. In addition to these literary sources, archaeological evidence helps us to understand more about the actual training of the army. Some examples include preserved outer parade grounds (Lambaesis, Caerleon, and Hardknott), possible training fortresses (Woden Law and Burnswark), and weapon-related artifacts like an ox skull used for target practice (Vindolanda).

¹ Stadter (1980) 43-45.

The parade ground where Hadrian observed the maneuvers was located two kilometers west of the main fortress at Lambaesis, on 200-square-meter level ground. In the center was a tribunal with a square base two meters high, four and a half meters wide, and capped by a Corinthian column crowned with a statue of Hadrian.² The inscription is written on this square base on 16 stone blocks contained 32 total fields of writing. Only eight of these 32 possible fields remain intact (or at least partially legible), with over a hundred small fragments scattered around the area as well. Speeches delivered to the legion are inscribed in fields 1-16, and those delivered to the *auxilia* comprise fields 17-32.³ Hadrian observed and addressed different groups of the legion separately, using the nomenclature of the old Republican army, over the course of three days around the first of July. The *pili* (fields 1-2), *principes* (9-10), and *hastati* (13-16), as well as the *equites legionis* (6-7) are all represented in the surviving inscriptions. The *auxilia* appear to be inscribed in the order they were observed. Some units, like the *Cohors II Hamiorum* (21), were seen prior to the legions on the route from Carthage to Lambaesis. Others were seen later, such as an unknown cohort at Zarai near Mauretania on the seventh of July (26-27), and the *Ala I Pannoniorum* (29) and *Cohors VI Commagenorum* (30) in southern Numidia on the 12th or 13th of July.⁴

In his address to the *pili*, Hadrian demonstrates his detailed knowledge of each unit such as troop movements within the legion and sent to augment other legions, and the recent building of new fortresses. He praises them for continuing their training at a high standard and not lacking in anything despite these hindrances. To the legionary cavalry, we see a glimpse of Hadrian's

² Speidel (2006) 3-4.

³ Speidel (2006) 21-22.

⁴ Speidel (2006) 61.

own expertise in horsemanship. He states how they threw spears while wearing the cuirass, a difficult task which sacrifices gracefulness for utility. To the *principes*, he praises how they built, much more quickly than usual and at a high standard, a stone wall and a straight ditch through hard ground, followed by exhibitions of proper camp procedures. This shows that, even for legionaries, much more than mere weapons training was expected of the soldiers, including manual labor. In addition, many of Hadrian's speeches include praise for the unit officers, especially the legate, Catullinus, mentioned several times as a noble and distinguished man responsible for the high level of training. As Campbell notes, this must have been quite authentic praise because Catullinus was rewarded as the *consul ordinarius* two years later.⁵

An *ala* of the *auxilia* was the largest cavalry unit of the Roman army throughout the Republic and early Principate, composed of 512 horsemen when at full-strength. The *Ala I Pannoriorum* was stationed somewhere near the Numidian border, where it probably conducted longer range patrols and policing duties across the vast desert region. It was a well-trained and skilled unit, as we can see from Hadrian's remarks, and was probably raised originally in Pannonia some time during the previous century (although the actual troops could have easily been locally-recruiting Africans by this time). He begins by saying "You did everything according to the book: you filled the training ground with your wheelings, you threw spears (*hastae*) not ungracefully, though with short and stiff shafts."⁶ Wheelings were the basic maneuver of galloping in a circle in a close-knit, coordinated formation, from which more complicated battle simulations could be staged. With such a large number of horsemen, the *ala* clearly had the capability to fill the entire training ground in an impressive initial display of

⁵ Campbell (1984) 78.

⁶ Translations are from Speidel (2006) 14-15.

horsemanship, while wearing colorful uniforms, silver face masks, and large dragon standards billowing in the wind. Mention of the *hastae*, the light-weight throwing javelin, seems to place the activity described by Hadrian with phase one of the *hippika gymnasia* according to Arrian: games of skill involving such wheelings and use of the *hasta*. The speech continues, “Several of you hurled *lancea* spears with skill.” This was the heavier, thrusting spear (or lance), and it appears that only a select group of horsemen participated. This seems to correspond with Arrian’s second phase, consisting of individual shooting exercises using the *lancea* and wearing a cuirass. This would have been a full-speed gallop across the length of the training ground (200 meters at Lambaesis and probably similar size here) throwing as many of the heavy spears as possible before finishing. Arrian says that a good horsemen could throw 15 spears, while 20 spears was the absolute maximum possible--if anyone exceeded this number he would have cheated or slowed down considerably before the end. It is, thus, probable that only the very best were even chosen for this phase, including, at a minimum, the *decuriones*. Next, Hadrian continues with, “Your jumping onto the horses here was lively and yesterday swift.” This obviously matches up with phase four of the *Tactics*, the “exercises of jumping onto horses.” This was a series of leaping, with weapons, helmet, and full armor, onto the horse from various positions, and while it was moving. This was definitely a useful skill within the context of battle, and seemingly even more difficult owing to the fact that stirrups were not used.⁷ The detail about “yesterday” tells us that Hadrian observed the unit over the course of a day, or afternoon, and addressed them the next day, maybe first thing in the morning before he moved on to the next camp. His final comments emphasize his direct, soldierly speech and keen eye for military ability: “Had anything

⁷ Hyland (1993) 162-164.

been lacking, I would note it; had anything stood out, I would mention it. You pleased equally throughout the whole maneuver.” This inscription is rounded out with praise of “Noble Catullinus” as the man responsible for their training.

The *Equites VI Cohortis Commagenorum* was the cavalry of a mixed auxiliary cohort, with a likely ratio of 128 horsemen and 480 infantry. This unit was raised in the former kingdom of Commagene, between Syria and Armenia, possibly upon its final annexation into the empire by Vespasian in 72. According to the date on the inscription, either the 12th or 13th of July, it was addressed on the same day as the previously discussed unit, although Hadrian may have observed them on separate days (especially if the two camps were within a short ride of each other) on the frontier. The inscription begins by saying, “It is hard for horsemen of a cohort to please, even as they are, and harder still not to displease after a show by horsemen of an *ala*: the training field differs in size, spear throwers are fewer, the right-wheel is tight, the Cantabrian formation is cramped, the condition of the horses and the maintenance of the equipment in keeping with the pay level.” Hadrian places much emphasis on the difference, and smaller scale of the mixed cohort compared to the *ala*. There was a smaller parade ground and fewer horsemen, which led, by no fault of their own, to a less impressive appearance. Hyland makes the case that the skill and training of these horsemen were by no means inferior, but that the breed of horses was different and affected the overall appearance and uniformity of gait.⁸ Indeed, it is hard to imagine that inferior training would be tolerated. In addition, there is a hint that the pay level of the mixed cohort was less than that of the *ala*, and that this would have reflected on the quality of equipment (there were possibly less silver face masks and colorful uniforms as

⁸ Hyland (1993) 19.

well). The mention of the right-wheel and the Cantabrian formation places this part of the exercise, once again, in phase one of Arrian's *Tactics*. The Cantabrian formation was one in which two teams galloped in two adjacent right-wheelings and met in a violent clash of mutual spear throws against the shields of the other rider. It was a fast-paced exercise that demonstrated skill in riding in step, coordinating a spear-throw on target while simultaneously blocking an incoming projectile with the shield, all perfectly timed to happen immediately in front of the tribunal.⁹ Hadrian again shows his direct, no-nonsense approach by saying, "But you have banished weariness by your eagerness, by doing briskly what had to be done." He follows this with, "Moreover, you shot stones from slings and fought with javelins; everywhere you jumped nimbly onto your horses." Here, we see phase three of "maneuvers with special weapons such as cross-bows, javelins, rocks, and slings," and, once again, phase four of jumping onto the horses. The mention of the slings is notable in that it is one of the main pieces of evidence that slinging was part of the training of the *auxilia* in general as a secondary (or tertiary) skill needed for specific occasions, rather than the discipline of specialized units.¹⁰ This inscription, as expected, concludes with praise for Catullinus, the legate.

The inscriptions of Hadrian's *adlocutio* to the legion and *auxilia* of Africa, the only extant speech of its kind, give us much information that we would not otherwise know. It gives a better picture of this emperor, his expertise in training and horsemanship, knowledge of units and attention to detail, and personal speaking style. It also gives us but one example of how training and performances could have been conducted on a daily basis by highly skilled and impressive soldiers and cavalry during the apex of Roman power in all its grandeur.

⁹ See Hyland (1993) 135-138 for more on this formation.

¹⁰ Cheesman (1914) 132.

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