

1 | Introduction

Rob Collins and Matthew Symonds commented that, in recent Roman frontier studies, ‘treatment of the vibrant societies that called the frontier zone “home” seems to be missing’ (Collins and Symonds 2010: 655). The traditional perception of Roman military bases of the early empire has been of ‘quasi-monastic institutions’ (James 2001: 80), with freeborn male soldiers living inside walled forts and fortresses, and tradespersons and servants living outside, as ‘peripheral parasites’. While this perception still persists, recent studies of these institutions have become increasingly concerned with their social complexity (e.g. Gardner 2007a), the focus having moved on considerably from an emphasis on the duties of a Roman soldier to exploring the integration of non-combatants into life on these military bases. Such people could include regimental servants (e.g. personal slaves and servants), other support personnel (e.g. craftspersons, tradespersons, prostitutes and animal handlers), as well as the families¹ of officers and soldiers, who accompanied the military on campaign and depended on it economically (see e.g. Speidel 1989; see also James 2001, 2006).

Despite this development of more social-historical approaches to military communities,² though, there was still a widely held perception that, during the early empire at least, the space inside the fortification walls of these military bases was ostensibly a military zone, with the only non-service personnel accommodated within these walls being the households of senior officers (e.g. Sommer 1999b: 90). All other non-military personnel would have been housed outside the fort walls. Research in the last two decades have presented evidence to suggest that the ‘picture of army camps of all-male bastions is now obsolete’ (Haynes 1999: 12). Most notable are studies of the evidence from the first-century legionary fortress at Vindonissa which

¹ The term family, in the Roman concept of ‘*familia*’, comprises all women, children and household members under the power of the *paterfamilias*, which can include sisters, widowed mothers, concubines and male and female slaves, including ‘pleasure’ slaves.

² The terms ‘community’ and ‘military community’ are used to describe the people and activities, and the material remains that document these in, but also at times around, Roman military bases (see Haynes 1999: 9–11). For further discussion on the use of the term ‘community’ in archaeology see also Mac Sweeney 2011; Harris 2012.

includes: wooden tablets indicating that a barmaid, a female innkeeper and craftsperson worked within the fortress proper (Speidel 1997, 1999); infant burials beneath centurions' houses (Trumm and Fellman Brogli 2008); and small-sized shoes on the fortress rubbish dump (Trumm and Fellman Brogli 2008: 103–4). Even more significant are the small-sized shoes, too small for adult males, identified inside soldiers' barracks in the second-century fort at Vindolanda (van Driel-Murray: 1994, 1995), and also reported at Bar Hill on the Antonine Wall (Robertson, Scott and Keppie 1975: 64 and fig. 21 nos. 28–30). Because of entrenched concepts of Roman military communities, however, some scholars still down-play, and even argue away, such finds as inaccurately or over interpreted, or as anomalies from contaminated archaeological contexts (see James 2002: 11). A more holistic approach to the investigation of the full range of available evidence can potentially provide a more comprehensive understanding of socio-spatial practices both inside and outside early imperial military bases, and counter such critiques.

Traditionally, understandings of the organisation of space and of the activities which took place inside the structural remains of excavated military bases have been guided by formal approaches to building function in the ancient texts. Such sources focus on these institutions as part of the military machine, and are little concerned for any members of these communities who are not soldiers or their officers (Speidel 1997: 53). Nevertheless, other written sources (e.g. papyri, military diplomas, epitaphs and wooden tablets) provide evidence for the notable presence of such personnel as members of military communities (see Phang 2001), but this evidence has little to say about the spatial contexts in which such people lived and carried out their daily lives.

For a more comprehensive approach to socio-spatial behaviour in these military contexts, and to consolidate more 'ad-hoc' observations of evidence for non-service personnel, this study combines documentary and structural evidence with the evidence provided by artefacts and artefact assemblages found inside military bases. The distribution patterns of artefacts excavated from inside the walls of a sample of five early imperial military bases in the German and Raetian provinces have been analysed to investigate the spatial distribution of the activities carried out within the various areas and buildings inside these establishments, and the types of people who carried out these activities – both soldier and non-soldier, male and female, slave and free members of these communities. While the sample is admittedly small, and not the most ideal given the excavation procedures, it covers different types of military bases within a specific region. Thus, rather than producing generalised conclusions, it provides base data and a model approach for the

investigation of socio-spatial behaviour at other military sites to explore the fine structure of these ‘vibrant societies’.

THE FRAMEWORKS

The study concentrates on artefactual remains that document the range of activities carried out, and range of types of dress worn, within the walls of these military bases. The essential questions are: how were these activities distributed around the various components of a military base; what kinds of people were likely to have been associated with them; can we discern whether these people were non-military personnel, and, if so, what can we learn about the roles, statuses and habitation patterns of such personnel; were women and families prominent in first- and second-century Roman military forts, and, if so, in what capacities?

This approach to artefact distribution patterns at Roman military sites draws in part on analyses of artefact assemblages in Roman Italy, particularly in Pompeian houses (e.g. Allison 2004a, 2006a). This Pompeian research investigated artefact function and the use of space in domestic contexts. Many of the types of artefacts found in Pompeian houses have also been found in Roman military bases on the north-west frontier, but are often differently interpreted in these different contexts. These varying interpretations are frequently based on traditional perspectives that the latter were essentially soldier communities, rather than on any specifically regional or ethnic differences between Italy and the north-west. Like Pompeian houses, Roman military bases are, in large part, domestic contexts used by groups of people in various ways, but which use is generally understood through their structural remains alone. Emphasis on the distribution of the objects left behind at these sites, and their role in our understanding of the social interactions which were enacted in these spaces, has been limited.

For artefact distribution patterns to be useful for investigating socio-spatial practices ‘interpretative links’ need to be made ‘between these objects and social roles and identities’ (see Stig Sørensen 2006: 28). As a first step, an understanding is needed of the activities, or rather the range of activities, with which particular artefacts might have been associated. As a second step, an understanding is needed of the types of people associated with these activities. Finally, an understanding of how these activities and their associated identities were dispersed among the various components of military bases can be used to investigate the communities inside the walls, and the different types of people involved.

Identifying artefact function

Artefacts provide the material signatures of the activities which once took place in the material conditions of these excavated military bases (see Stig Sørensen 2006: 29). To understand these signatures and to ascribe activities to these artefacts this study relies, to a certain extent, on the ascriptions of artefact specialists, including those who catalogued the artefacts in this study. At the same time the study takes a critical approach to such ascriptions, drawing on previous investigations of the functions and assemblages of Roman artefacts (e.g. Allison 2006a) to interrogate often simplistic functional ascriptions, and ascriptions that are over-reliant on a general concept of a 'military assemblage' (cf. Allason-Jones 1999b). While, 'the contexts of action' (Conkey 1991: esp. 66–7) indeed provide evidence for how artefacts were used, in some respects this approach has been overplayed in the Roman military arena and can tend to become circular. An assumption that the inhabitants inside a military base were essentially combatants has led to a focus on the many artefacts found there that can be ascribed to combat activities. Essentially artefact assemblages within military bases also provide the signatures of a range of non-combat activities – industrial, commercial and domestic – and types of dress which can all be classified as 'military' because of their context but which are not essentially 'military' dress.

Identifying social identity

These ascribed activities provide signatures for the different types of people who were likely to have been members of these communities, and also for their roles within these military bases. Identifying individuals through these activities requires associating them with specific status and gender groups, with awareness that such associations are not inherently obvious and also awareness that, in the Roman world, these groups are by no means dichotomous. Indeed, they can include freeborn citizens, free provincial subjects (*peregrini*), freedmen and freedwomen, as well as male and female slaves, whose social status could often cross-cut their gendered identities (see Gardner 2007a: 299), none of whom can necessarily be excluded from the military sphere and whose social status might not be readily understood.

As with activity ascriptions, the identity associations in this study are often dependent on the ascriptions of artefact specialists, but they also draw on the wider available corpus of information on gender and status

behaviour in the Roman world, including textual and pictorial sources. With the exception of the association of specific activities and dress with soldiers, though, it is difficult to isolate the activities of this group from those of other groups, through the artefacts found at these sites. One reason for this is that specialist craftsman soldiers (the *immunes*), who probably used many of the tools found in military sites (e.g. for metalworking, stonecutting or woodworking), were usually part of the military unit and so may have used both non-combat and combat equipment. Another reason is that it is often unclear which tasks were carried out by soldiers and which were the responsibility of their support personnel, or indeed what dress was worn by these different status groups. According to Josephus (*BJ* 3.69), personal servants, in vast numbers, shared in military training. And, while Harald von Petrikovits (1975: 97) assumed that ordinary soldiers cooked together in their *contubernia* (see also Carroll 2005), Michael P. Speidel (1989: 242) concluded that soldiers' personal servants would have done many of the daily chores, including cooking. It is also possible that some weapons could have been used by non-combatants for hunting.

It is a simpler, although by no means a straightforward, task in such contexts that essentially lack sexed physical or representational bodies (see Stig Sørensen 2006: 31; Roth 2007: 57), and which were no doubt male-dominated, to distinguish activities according to sex. For example, clothing is 'of fundamental significance in relation to the manner in which identities become materialized' (Tilley 2011: 352), and certainly in the Roman world the types of dress and adornment of men and women, both Italian and provincial modes of dress, are the most easily distinguishable. However, other activities which can also be used to identify the presence of different sexes within these military bases, with degrees of certainty, include combat activities, associated with men, and some cloth-working and the production and rearing of children, associated with women. As Andrew Gardner has argued (2002: 341), personal items such toilet activities, are also important for understanding status and gendered identities. This study therefore has a particular focus on such gendered activities and their relevant identities but it also explores how gendered identities can cross-cut, and be cross-cut by, other status identities.

Identifying socio-spatial practices

Investigations of the use of space in Roman military bases have traditionally combined the archaeological residues of the structural remains of these

sites – the buildings and other fixtures and spaces, and their arrangement and size – with the descriptions by ancient authors that prescribe labels for such components. Where the structural remains at a specific site are too poorly preserved to identify these ‘labelled’ components, they are often projected from an aggregation of the remains from a number of forts, on the basis that the particular buildings within a type of fort, and their functions, are relatively systematic and uniform across the Roman world. In other words, much of our understandings of the socio-spatial practices in extant Roman forts are based on analogical approaches to their layouts. However, analyses of specific textual and structural remains can give very prescriptive views of how space was used (Allison 1999a: 3–5; see also Allison 2001: 185–92). The views propounded by the writers of the texts and by the builders of the structures have become cemented by the modern scholars in the desire for a systematic, structuralist approach to human behaviour and, in this case, a desire for formulaic military behaviour.

This study incorporates analyses of the artefact assemblages left behind in these structural remains as the materialisation of the activities of the people who used these spaces. It critically evaluates the relationships between all types of evidence to develop better understandings of socio-spatial practices inside Roman military bases. As Carol van Driel-Murray has stressed (1997: 55), ‘It is to whole packages of attributes that we must look’ to understand the statuses and roles of the various inhabitants in these, long-considered, soldiers’ domains. An important theoretical precondition for distinguishing the spatial patterns of activities and people in the archaeological record is that the material conditions facilitate the negotiation of status and gender distinctions and that the archaeological record provides the spatial signatures of these historical processes, recognised in the organisation and characteristics of the material remains. However, the basic premise that status and gender relations are constituted in historically specific ways means that particular categories of material cannot be assumed to have always had a particular identity without detailed consideration of the assumptions being deployed in that reasoning.

The approach taken in this study highlights the potential fluidity of gender relationships in a sphere which, while perceptually male dominated, was more complex in practice. It is by no means a comprehensive approach but it represents a significant step in using artefact distribution patterns to contribute to our understanding of the complexity of Roman military communities in the early empire and to contribute to our understanding of the diverse people who inhabited these military spaces (cf. Gardner 2007a: 231). Understanding how non-service personnel were integrated into the

workings of these spaces, within these bases, contributes to a more informed understanding of Roman military practices.

To offer more balanced perspectives on the social use of space in the military sphere, and on the activities and statuses of the different personnel in this context, the principles of archaeology and material culture studies are integrated with a critical assessment of all relevant sources – textual, epigraphical, representational, structural and other artefactual remains. A holistic approach to the interrelationships of this evidence that focuses on the role of artefacts in identifying the use of space, and that concentrates on the ways in which the activities of combatants and non-combatants, and of men, women and children, are both segregated and integrated spatially, in these emblematically ‘male’ institutions, can provide frameworks for contextualising socio-spatial behaviour across the Roman world.

THE DATA

This study concentrates on early imperial military bases as the organisation of these institutions is considered to be identifiable through their structural remains and their communities are widely considered to have been more segregated than those of the later empire. Sites in the western provinces are used because the material remains of military sites in this part of the empire are generally better preserved, and have been more comprehensively excavated, recorded, and published, than have similarly dated sites in other parts of the empire. The specific data used are archaeological reports from excavations carried out in Germany, and in particular the artefact catalogues in these reports.

Five sites in the Rhine and Danube regions – Vetera I (Hanel 1995), Rottweil Forts I and II (Franke 2003), and the forts at Oberstimm (Schönberger 1978), Ellingen (Zanier 1992) and Hesselbach (Batz 1973) – have been selected for this study (Figure 1.1). These sites were all essentially systematically recorded and have published analysable artefact assemblages that are not merely typologies of selected artefacts but include contextual information. With the exception of Hesselbach, which is used as a control site, they all experienced relatively rapid abandonment, were short-lived and show little or no apparent extensive reuse. Although Vetera I was first excavated a century ago, the artefacts were re-analysed in the 1990s. While the excavations and recording of these forts are generally not up to today’s standards, these sites were all more comprehensively excavated than is

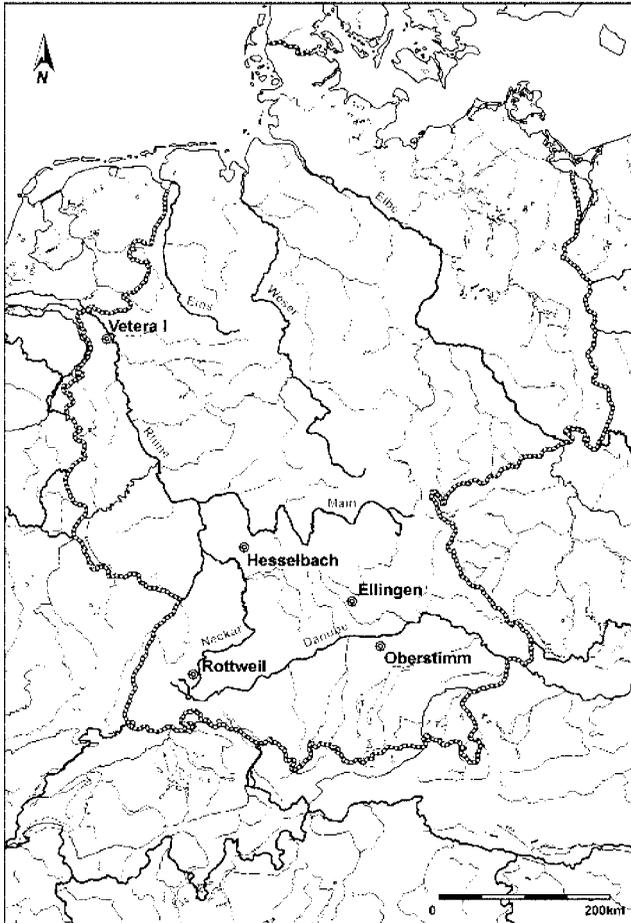


Figure 1.1 Map of Germany showing locations of the sites in study.

current practice for sites of this scale. This means that they have the potential to include considerable artefact assemblages with meaningful provenances across large areas of these sites.

The reason for choosing these particular published and printed reports was also for a relatively consistent level of recording across considerable areas of the sites. Few sites with already digitised and geo-referenced data have adequate, and easily accessible, information for analyses of site-wide patterns. The strong tradition of detailed and increasingly comprehensive publication of the data from excavations of Roman sites in Germany, including publication of artefact assemblages, makes these sites appropriate for

this study.³ It is hoped that the approaches taken in this study will also be applied to more recent excavations and will become part of the agenda of future excavation programmes to increase the body of information on socio-spatial practices in Roman military contexts.⁴

STRATEGY AND APPROACHES

While these five military sites were carefully selected for this investigation, none provides an ideal data set, in an ideal format. For example, the published reports of all these sites present structural remains separately from the artefacts, and in some the latter are separated into typological groups that do not always include all the finds of a particular type. Therefore, the relevant information for each site needed to be compiled, reorganised and recontextualised, and its comprehensiveness assessed, so that spatial contexts for the analyses of artefact distribution could be recreated. This was done by digitising the artefact catalogues and the site plans; importing this information into spreadsheets and relational databases; adding interpretative activity and identity categories discussed above; and then importing these now digital data and categories into a 'GIS-type' environment so the spatial distribution patterns of these interpretative categories could be analysed (see Allison *et al.* 2008).

By these processes socio-spatial information on military life, largely lacking from the written sources, was gathered, and the distribution patterns of the artefacts, and their associated activity and identity categories were analysed. As it was not always feasible to ascribe a specific category to each excavated artefact, uncertain – or 'fuzzy' – activity and social values were often ascribed.

In archaeology it has long been acknowledged that spatial analysis is the best approach, to date, for exploring the 'fuzziness' that is the archaeological

³ The data for a comparable set of sites in Britain is much more sporadically available and less easily digitised (see e.g. the various publications of the excavations of Usk – e.g. Manning 1989, 1993).

⁴ A number of recent projects have used similar approaches to those in this study which means that a good body of comparative data may soon become available (e.g. Franzen 2009a, 2009b). Andrew Birley (n.d.) applied the principles of this study to data from both intra- and extramural excavations at Vindolanda. Also papers presented at the conference RACIX/TRACXX (University of Oxford, March 2010) by Agnieszka Tomas (n.d.) (University of Warsaw) and Lóránt Vass (n.d.) (University of Cluj-Napoca) show a developing interest in using this approach to artefact assemblages to identify women within military bases in Dacia and the Lower Danube region, and Anna Walas (PhD candidate, University of Leicester) is currently analysing the artefact distribution patterns at Elginhaugh, in Scotland (see Hanson 2007).

record (Kirkinen 1999: 255). In its use of socially defined values this study takes a qualitative approach, but one which can be tested, at certain levels, by quantitative means. It includes data and information of varying reliability but it is the association of the more reliable data with the less reliable, and the accumulative and recurrent patterns, that are significant, not the specific spatial attributes of each specific artefact. This study therefore uses, primarily, GIS techniques to separate out and compare different socio-spatial practices in the different occupational phases of these sites.

SUMMARY

The first five chapters in this book, including this introduction, discuss the background to the questions this study poses, as well as the theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches that are used to answer them. They review past approaches to military communities and the current state of our knowledge of the roles of non-combatant personnel in the Roman military sphere. They also discuss consumption approaches to artefacts and artefact assemblages, and to spatial and contextual analyses of these assemblages for understanding human practice. Chapters on the specific methodological approaches taken include discussion on the criteria used for selecting sites for these types of analyses, and on the approaches by which activity and identity categories have been ascribed to particular types of artefacts. The processes for digitising, spatially plotting and analysing the artefact distribution patterns at these sites have been discussed elsewhere (Allison 2008a; see also Allison *et al.* 2008).

The next five chapters (Chapters 6–10), comprise the main analyses for each of the five military bases used in this study. For each site this includes a short introduction to the site's history, excavation history and depositional condition; a short discussion on the categorisation of any further specific artefacts from this site; detailed analyses of the artefact distribution patterns across the various buildings and spaces, according to their activity and identity categories; and any conclusions that can be drawn from these analyses about the uses of the various components of this military base and the community that lived there.

Chapter 11 comprises a comparative analysis across the four main sites – Vetera I, Forts I and II at Rottweil, and the forts at Oberstimm and Ellingen – to compare the distribution of activities and to identify the uses of the various components across these sites. Chapter 12 focuses on the evidence for women and families, and their comparative numbers and roles within