



MAVORS-INSTITUT

für antike Militärgeschichte

Lindenberg 23,
CH-4058 Basel, Schweiz.

Tel.: +41 (0)61 411 7368

Fax: +41 (0)61 413 9157

Internet: www.mavors.org

Email: info@mavors.org

The Roman Army and Imperial Extractive Operations

Alfred M. Hirt

The main duty of the Roman army units (auxiliaries and legionary vexillations) seconded to Imperial quarries or mines most certainly was the protection of these extractive operations from external threats such as local tribes or brigands. The preponderance of units equipped with cavalry elements suggests that the protection not only covered the mining and quarrying districts alone, but also included the overland transport of metal ingots as well as the supplies for these districts.

The Roman army was instrumental in ‘mobilizing’ and guarding forced labour used in certain *metalla*. The population of freshly conquered territories, for example in Northwestern Spain or in Pannonia, could be forced to work in mines. Convicts condemned *ad metalla* in Northern Africa were guarded by military personnel.

Apart from this core role of military units, military personnel was also employed in the administration of mining and quarrying districts. Soldiers either joined the civilian administration of districts as *librarii* (as at Ampelum, Dacia) or were solely responsible for mining districts (as at Timacum Minus, Moesia superior). A specific role in providing a link between the financial administration of the province and the mining administration in particular might have been burdened on *beneficarii procuratoris*, while *beneficarii consularis* perhaps functioned as liaison between the mining procurators and the provincial governors (?). Administrative tasks were also performed by army officers seconded to Imperial quarries. Particular in the quarries of the Eastern Egyptian Desert they were involved in formulating the demand of soldiers and workers for provisions and other supplies

and requesting them from the due authorities. Progress reports from quarry workers were sent to the commanders of the auxiliary units. Moreover, Roman army medics and ‘hospitals’ occasionally supplied the medical infrastructure not only for soldiers but for quarry workers as well.

Besides providing personnel for administrative purposes, the Roman army appears to have dispatched skilled quarrying engineers to imperial districts. Owing to regular deployments to various construction and quarrying activities (mostly connected with specific building projects), the Roman army commanded a significant pool of well trained and experienced civil engineers. Legionary centurions with technical expertise appear to have been sent to Imperial quarries either by the emperor himself or by provincial governors. Although there is no written evidence for the involvement of army engineers in mining procedures, the magnitude of the hydraulic infrastructure particularly in the opencast mining zones of Northwestern Spain would allow for the involvement of experienced army engineers.

A strict division of tasks between civilian officials and army personnel within mining and quarrying districts appears not to be possible. The military and civilian personnel employed in Imperial extractive operations perhaps formed a far more homogenous administration than hitherto expected. A publication by Alfred M. Hirt is forthcoming.