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# MILITARY UNREST IN THE AGE OF PHILIP AND ALEXANDER OF MACEDON: DEFINING THE TERMS OF DEBATE

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The armies created and employed by Philip II and Alexander III of Macedon were undeniably superior implements of conquest.<sup>2</sup> Despite the military successes they enjoyed, both kings occasionally had disciplinary trouble with their soldiers, including several significant outbreaks of collective unrest. The famous incidents at the Hyphasis and Opis remain the best-known examples of such episodes. Other, smaller episodes abounded but have received limited attention from historians. Waldemar Heckel devoted much more attention to the Hyphasis mutiny in his recent work,<sup>3</sup> so it is only fitting to honor him by refining the terms necessary to debate and discuss what actually occurred at the Hyphasis River in 326.

Military unrest is a topic that, until recently, seemed beyond the interests of historians of the pre-modern world. However, unrest in the military, both of individuals and collectively in groups, was a problem with which every officer had to contend at some point. Incidents large and small occurred in every army. While limited primary sources have been an impediment to studies of ancient military unrest, an even greater basic stumbling block has been establishing the vocabulary for discussing military unrest. This chapter addresses that dilemma by refining the terms necessary to identify and discuss military unrest, especially in regard to ancient soldiers.

Military discipline need not be defined by formal rules, or brutality, (or both), nor be maintained by the same in order to be effective. When modern readers think of discipline, it is often in terms of punishments and regulations, especially the necessity of following commands. It is important to recognize that military discipline, ancient and modern, is more complex than adherence to orders or punishment for infractions; it is a means of control that includes physical, mental, and social components reinforced with positive as well as negative sanctions.<sup>4</sup> This discipline could, as C. Julius Caesar recognized, be

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<sup>2</sup> See most recently, Sekunda 2010, 446–71; and Brice 2011, 137–47.

<sup>3</sup> Heckel 2003, 165–73. I thank the editors for inviting me to honor Waldemar in this way.

<sup>4</sup> For recent discussions of discipline in ancient armies see Phang 2008; Lendon 2005, 177–231; and Carney 1996, 20–31. On classical Greek military discipline see Pritchett 1974, 232–45.

enforced effectively through willing compliance and maintaining morale in combination with clear expectations and regulations.<sup>5</sup> No such laws that promoted discipline survive from Alexander's period, although Elizabeth Carney's examination of Philip's and Alexander's disciplinary practices and punishments demonstrates that there were certainly explicit expectations, and probably also regulations.<sup>6</sup> Training soldiers to maintain ranks, maneuver collectively, and even remain in battle requires that they learn and are accustomed to a certain level of discipline. Military discipline is acquired and reinforced through various parts of service including training and learning how the unit works in battle, getting to know one's comrades in arms, and getting accustomed to the society of the army.<sup>7</sup> That the Macedonian army under Philip II and Alexander III was generally a well-disciplined army is beyond doubt (e.g., Arr. *Anab.* 1.1.8–9, 6.1–3; Polyæn. *Strat.* 4.2.2).

Examinations of military unrest in Macedonian armies have referred to all such incidents as either 'mutiny' or something nebulous, as if mutiny was the only form of unrest.<sup>8</sup> Privileging the modern term 'mutiny', or the Latin *sedition*, or even the Greek *ataxia*, has hamstrung the debate. Not every incident was a mutiny. Ancient authors in all periods used an array of terms in Greek and Latin to describe varieties of military unrest and so must modern historians examining those events. Military-sociologists and modern military historians have developed a varied and useful vocabulary for treating unrest by soldiers.<sup>9</sup> This vocabulary provides a level of distinction and standardization that allows differentiation of scale and significance which is currently lacking from many discussions of unrest in ancient armies.

Military unrest emerged in one of several forms including military conspiracy, mutiny, expression of grievances, and insubordination.<sup>10</sup> The first two categories are the more serious manifestations of indiscipline. The other categories are not necessarily threatening in and of themselves and are, thus, not well attested in the sources, but they do reflect problems within the military and the complexities of unrest. Additionally, historians recognize that military leaders usually treated sleeping on duty and panicked flight in battle as serious forms of military unrest. Listed in roughly descending order of size and seriousness, these terms permit a more nuanced and realistic discussion of unrest in any military context, including that of the ancient world. What follows is a brief discussion of the terms 'military conspiracy', 'mutiny', 'expression of grievances', and 'insubordination'. What will become

<sup>5</sup> Wheeler 2011, 70–71.

<sup>6</sup> Carney 1996, 24–31. The Antigonid inscriptions recording military regulations regarding discipline and punishments are products of a later period and cannot be assumed to derive from any regulations or laws in effect in the fourth century; they may derive from earlier precedents, but to date there is no epigraphic evidence that they do; see Hatzopoulos 2001, esp. 151–67.

<sup>7</sup> MacMullen 1984, 440–456; Phang 2008, 37–73. Although both discussions focus on the Roman army, aspects of their discussion can apply to other ancient militaries including the Macedonian.

<sup>8</sup> Carney 1996; Holt 1982, 33–59; Bosworth 1988, 160; contra, Brice 2015, forthcoming.

<sup>9</sup> Kaegi 1981; Rose 1982; Brice 2003, 65–76; and idem 2014. Cornelis Lammers's work (1969; 2003) on strikes and mutinies is important to understanding how a mutiny can progress, but because his research is limited to modern naval mutinies some of his conclusions do not apply to incidents in ancient armies. For example, the type of mutiny/strike he called (1969) a "promotion of interest protest" would lump together most mutinies and all expressions of grievances in ancient militaries and so is too imprecise to use effectively.

<sup>10</sup> Discussed and defined in Brice 2003, 65–76, esp. n.203 (currently under revision for publication).

clear is that the definitions are sufficient to cover all instances of indiscipline and are consistent with modern military history and military-sociology.

### *Military conspiracy*

Conspiracy was, from a leader's perspective, the most dangerous manifestation of military unrest. Other forms of unrest may have threatened discipline in the camp or in a battle in exchange for achieving a limited goal, but conspiracies were intended to result in a leader's (or king's or officer's) removal or death, or both. When Kaegi defined 'military conspiracy' as "the conscious combination of [military] men, often generals or their subordinate officers, for a *coup d'état* or revolt in the field," he had the entirety of the Byzantine Empire in mind.<sup>11</sup> If one accepts that a revolt in the field could include a plot by subordinates to remove a superior officer lower in rank than the king or emperor, then Kaegi's definition is broad enough to encompass plots of all sizes and targets. Military institutions in Macedon were structurally conducive to conspiracies due to the autocratic nature of the monarchy, the hierarchical distribution of power among officers, and the importance of the army in society. Even where the death of a king was not the goal, the potential for broader disruption of the kingdom was clear.

Various commanders faced such conspiracies among their officers. Reports that Alexander III was the victim of conspiracy by several of his generals have been discounted (Diod. 17.117.5–118.2; Arr. *Anab.* 7.27; and Plut. *Alex.* 77), but the longevity of the reports arises from the plausibility of military conspiracy and its later effectiveness. Kings were not the only persons who needed to be concerned about conspiracy in the army: the much-debated, alleged conspiracy against Philotas, seems to have been a military conspiracy by men seeking his position or power;<sup>12</sup> and Perdikkas was not the last of the Diadochoi to fall victim to a military conspiracy by his subordinates (Diod. 18.33–37; Arr. *Succ.* 1.28; Plut. *Eum.* 8.2–3).

### *Mutiny*

Of the terms employed to describe resistance within the military, 'mutiny' is perhaps the most problematic. Although 'mutiny' evokes a wealth of vivid images of insubordination or violence by lower ranks against commanders, no broad consensus exists among ancient historians for its historical definition and specific usage. On the basis that it is a modern term and potentially anachronistic, some authors question application of the word 'mutiny' to any type of unrest in ancient armies.<sup>13</sup>

Refusal to employ 'mutiny' in this context, however, is neither necessary nor appropriate. There is no simple alternative in the English language that can easily be substituted if 'mutiny' is abandoned. Indeed, without the word 'mutiny', the Latin term *sedition* is difficult to translate with any reasonable and consistent sense, for the use of 'sedition' will not work for *sedition*, because it now carries for readers a connotation of overthrowing or undermining

<sup>11</sup> Kaegi 1981, 4.

<sup>12</sup> For discussions and historiography see Badian 2012, 434–39; and Heckel 1992, 23–33.

<sup>13</sup> Carney 1996, 19–21, esp. 20; and Chrissanthos 1999, 4, 7–12.

the established constitutional authority.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, if historians of any period find that an event meets all the criteria for a modern term, then the modern term should be employed, especially if it is not something that is chronologically dependent. No one would suggest that the word 'government' or 'marriage' should be rejected outright just because it is a modern word. Neither these words nor 'mutiny' are chronologically dependent in the same way as are terms like 'radar' or 'margin call'. In the end the term 'mutiny' can be defined broadly enough to be chronologically open, while remaining sufficiently narrow to be useful in delineating the scale of particular incidents.

A 'mutiny' is defined here as collective, violent (actual, potential, or threatened) opposition to established military authority. Events included in this variety of unrest are riots, tumults, disturbances, and similar incidents, as well as the incitement of these outbreaks. In this definition, 'mutiny' is always a collective action and nearly always refers to actions by regular soldiers – although some low-level officers might participate in special cases. Mutiny was merely one type of military unrest and was not even the most common or most dangerous variety, but because of its occasional notoriety and potential for damage, it merits attention. Because soldiers were trained to fight, were usually armed, and were accustomed to working together, they represented a much greater threat to stability when they engaged in collective dissent than did typical crowds of non-soldiers. In addition to its potential for violence, because a mutiny damaged military order in the units where it occurred and could undermine discipline among military units that did not even participate, it was obviously a great threat to military stability.

Through use of this definition, it becomes easier to identify certain incidents of military unrest and discuss them with more precision. The so-called mutiny at the Hyphasis has been recognized previously as not having reached the stage of a mutiny, but since no agreed upon definition existed, debate has continued.<sup>15</sup> This definition will settle the debate, allowing historians to focus on other aspects of the event. The unrest at Opis in 324 and at Babylon after Alexander's death can now be discussed in terms of mutinies, just as various other events and close-calls during the Hellenistic period.<sup>16</sup> Macedonian leaders' responses to mutiny are also easier to investigate and understand when the examination is made on the basis of consistent and coherent definitions. The king or commander had authority to deal swiftly with such events.<sup>17</sup> Although mutiny does not appear to have been a genuine threat to the Macedonian kingdom during Philip's and Alexander's reigns, it did become a problem for the Diadochic kingdoms.

### *Expression of grievances*

Not every form of unrest by soldiers was violent, or threatened the use of violence. Although the surviving sources distinguish military conspiracies and mutinies as 'greater'

<sup>14</sup> Kaegi 1981, 4; Chrissanthos 1999, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Badian 2012, 445; Holt 1982, 33; Spann 1999, 67 and n. 38.

<sup>16</sup> Arguing that Opis is not a mutiny see Carney 1996, 40–42; and Bosworth 1998, 160; contra, Roisman 2012; Brice 2015. On events at Babylon see Bosworth 2002, 29–57 and Brice 2015, both of whom agree it was a mutiny.

<sup>17</sup> Brice 2015.

forms of unrest, there were other types of indiscipline that were usually non-violent. Among these 'lesser' forms of unrest, an expression of grievances was the most peaceful. These less notorious varieties were often agitated, but non-violent, vocal confrontations or communications in which soldiers, often acting collectively, sought to protest various grievances, real and illusory, and to protect their interests.

The expression of grievances was distinct from mutiny and insubordination, even if there were only shades of difference between this type of episode and some other forms of insubordination. Like a mutiny, an expression of grievances was collective, but the latter could include both soldiers and officers, whereas a mutiny was nearly always confined to non-officers. Also, in addition to being peaceful, an expression of grievances did not include a total resistance to authority through a refusal to follow orders or engage in combat. An expression of grievances could emerge in an assembly, but was not limited to such gatherings.<sup>18</sup> Such peaceful forms of unrest were important because they could be larger in breadth and scale than any other manifestation of indiscipline, and were most likely to be successful without resulting in punishment or retribution for their participants. They were important because they could be broader in breadth and scale than any other manifestation of unrest, and were most likely to be successful.

Compared with their Roman counterparts, Macedonian soldiers seem to have been less inclined to employ this peaceful form of unrest, but it did occur. The most famous Macedonian example of an expression of grievances is the unrest in Alexander's army at the Hyphasis River in 326.<sup>19</sup> A careful examination of our sources will reveal several more examples during the period after Alexander's death. The limited number of episodes is probably as much a function of the few extant sources as of the nature of Macedonian leadership.<sup>20</sup>

### *Insubordination*

The most common type of unrest, insubordination, includes a variety of lesser crimes and misdemeanors by individuals and groups. Officers and soldiers alike could take part in all these lesser forms of unrest. Chief among these crimes were disobedience or failure to follow orders, defection, desertion, and dereliction of duty.<sup>21</sup>

Disobedience could include an act of purposeful intent to commit unrest, similar to

<sup>18</sup> On expressions of grievances in general, see Kaegi 1981, 4; and MacMullen 1984, 449–50 and 454–56.

<sup>19</sup> Roisman 2012, 32–40. Contra Howe and Müller 2012, who argue that there never was any mutiny, unrest, or expression of grievances at the Hyphasis, and that Alexander did not in fact ever cross the river. Though Howe and Müller's argument benefitted greatly from responding to an earlier version of the present paper, given at two 2012 conferences in Calgary and Athens, Greece, space here does not permit a rebuttal of their conclusions. A full response and a detailed study of the unrest at the Hyphasis is forthcoming by the author.

<sup>20</sup> The language in the Antigonid military regulation (Hatzopoulos 2001, 151–67) suggests that by the time of Philip V there were official mechanisms through which soldiers could protest, but the evidence for such practices during the Argead dynasty is still a matter of debate, see Adams 1986, 48–50; and Anson 1991, 233–34.

<sup>21</sup> All the forms of insubordination have seldom been treated together as a single category of unrest, although some have been recognized (Carney 1996, 22–24) as indiscipline; see Brice 2015. On these offenses in classical Greece see Pritchett 1974.

mutiny, but by an individual, or it could be as simple as a man leaving his post. One could argue that in the event that an officer exercised his own initiative without intending to commit disobedience and it turned out badly, he could be charged with a lesser crime, but it was still considered to be insubordination. There were many possible reasons for disobedience, including a desire to assert one's own judgment or an excess of caution, as well as negligence or basic incompetence; in all the cases the offender made a choice of commission or omission. Although individuals often engaged in these actions, they could involve groups of men and units. Desertion is a form of insubordination usually conceived of as an individual action and is more typical of soldiers than of sailors. Desertion was certainly considered to be unrest and was treated accordingly, but it actually provided soldiers with an alternative to more serious forms of unrest. Soldiers could walk away from growing tensions, if they could get away unseen. Sailors, however, were stuck aboard ship or in lands far from home and so usually had to mutiny to achieve relief from onerous service. Defection could be by an individual or include entire units.<sup>22</sup> During the Diadoch wars entire armies occasionally defected. Since sources more readily report details of these large-scale actions, defections dominate the record of lesser forms of unrest.

Furthermore, there were some incidents that ancient leaders treated as insubordination even though these actions did not really involve a rational choice and action on the part of the offender. When a man panicked in battle, it might have an impact only on the individual or it could contribute to a larger unit panic. Although some soldiers do make a calculated decision to flee, other soldiers are not necessarily making a rational choice to panic. Neuroscientists have now shown, that military panic is in large part caused by neurophysiological responses to perceived stimuli on the battlefield and that the way these are manifested for one man may be different for others.<sup>23</sup> That physiological fact does not make panic any less of a problem for armies, but at least it explains why some men panic when others do not. Similarly, for some men, sleeping at a post was a physiological response rather than a choice. Regardless, they all faced the insubordination charges because their act was contrary to good discipline and ancient commanders assumed that the men had made rational choices. Punishment set an example, but was not going to stop a physiological response.

Examples of insubordination in the Macedonian army of Philip II and Alexander III do survive. During his battle against Onomarchos in 353, parts of Philip's army panicked and fled (16.35.2). Diodorus does not report the punishment, if there was any. Alexander had some troubles but the best examples of insubordination were: the 'indisciplined company' following Parmenio's execution (Diod. 17.81.1; Curt. 7.2.35-38; Just.12.5.4-8); the execution of Menander in Bactria for deserting his post (Plut. *Alex.* 57.2); and Alexander's punishment of malingerers at the assault on Aornus in 326 (Arr. *Anab.* 4.29.7). Despite the problems in our sources we do learn about enough incidents of insubordination and about some punishments to draw some conclusions about discipline in the Macedonian army. The importance of this unrest by soldiers lay in the potential for unexpectedly broad consequences despite what seemed like minor insubordination.

<sup>22</sup> Brice 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Heidenreich and Roth 2014, forthcoming.

We can visualize the types of military unrest along a matrix:

Types of Military Unrest	Aims	Participants	Collective	Violence
Military Conspiracy	Removal or death (or both) of leader(s) or superior officer(s)	Officers	Initiated by a small nuclear group	Yes
Mutiny	Opposition to established military authority	Soldiers, and sometimes low-ranking officers	Always	Yes
Expression of Grievances	Protest grievances (real and illusory)	Soldiers, and sometimes officers in support	Always	No
Insubordination	Disobedience, cowardice, defection, desertion, and dereliction of duty	Any military personnel	Not necessarily	Not necessarily

### Conclusion

Armies are more than battles, discipline, weapons, and wounds. They are made up of men who must work together as required both in and out of battle for the duration of their service. In many armies, discipline contributed to keeping men in good order in stressful circumstances and increased unit efficiency and lethality. Discipline was a key element in the success of fourth-century Macedonian armies and later Roman legions. No matter how good their discipline, however, conditions of service could reach a point where soldiers were prepared to 'act out' against authority, individually or collectively, in a variety of ways. All of these acts were (and are) forms of military unrest.

Just as there is more to warfare than combat, army life is more than discipline. Unrest was (and remains) a normal element in all militaries. Some armies were more inclined to outbreaks of unrest than others, but it has long been a normal quality of military activity. Historians now appreciate that in order to understand military history we must study the men who made up the military. Doing so permits a better understanding of not only the army, but also the society of which it was a part and the way these interacted at many levels. Focusing on unrest is part of examining the soldiers' society.

A fundamental problem in trying to examine and discuss military unrest has been the lack of a broadly accepted language with which to discuss unrest by soldiers. Elizabeth Carney recognized its importance for understanding Macedonian army leadership, but lacked the tools with which to explore the topic fully. In this article I have provided a vocabulary for discussing military unrest. Grounded in modern military-sociology and historical studies of armies and societies it is consistent with modern concepts of unrest and yet works well for describing an element of ancient military activity.

A consideration of military unrest will not diminish the history of any army. Rather, a careful study of the manner in which these events occurred and how militaries responded

to them reveals why some armies were more stable and successful institutions than others. Waldemar Heckel has, in his treatments of the unrest at the Hyphasis, highlighted the importance of understanding such incidents and the men who were behind them. No military historical treatment of Philip II or Alexander III or both can be complete without a consideration of military unrest.

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