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THE ROMAN GARRISON OF LATOPOLIS¹

The ostraka of Roman Egypt, which for the most part have yielded vast quantities of receipts for taxes and transportation, of accounts, and of lists of names, have also over the past few decades provided several additions to our stock of information about the operations of the Roman army in Upper Egypt and Nubia, mainly in the form of letters. The most noteworthy groups of these texts have been the ostraka from Wadi Fawakhir² and those of Pselkis,³ but several smaller groups are of interest.⁴ The most recent addition to

¹ The ostraka on which this discussion is based are in Amsterdam; I want to thank P. J. Sijpesteijn for his constant cordiality in facilitating my study of ostraka in Amsterdam and Klaas Worp for his hospitality during the visit in June, 1975, when I was able to study the originals. I am also indebted to J. F. Gilliam for reading this paper and making several helpful suggestions.

² O. Guéraud, *BIFAO* 41 (1942) 141–196. There are 59 ostraka in all, of which 7 are in Latin; none is an official letter. The texts are reprinted as *SB* VI 9017 (where the ostraka are incorrectly said to be located in Turin; they are in the Cairo Museum). Most of the ostraka are very fragmentary. See Cl. Préaux, *Cd'E* 22 (1947) 152–154 for a summary of the significance of this archive.

³ *O.Bodl.* 2003–2060 etc.; see the discussion by Cl. Préaux, *Cd'E* 26 (1951) 121–155.

⁴ Ph.I. Price, *JJurPap* 9–10 (1955–1956) 159–167; the provenance of these is unknown (8 texts in all); J. Schwartz, *Cd'E* 31 (1956) 118–123 (2 ostraka from the area of the Wadi Hammamat, one mentioning the Cohors I Apamenorum); D. Meredith, *Cd'E* 31 (1956) 356–358, no. 1 (concerning Myos Hormos, and not directly military); H. C. Youtie, *TAPA* 81 (1950) 110–111 (now *Scriptiunculae* I [Amsterdam 1973] 224–226 with addenda, 232–233), cf. the important discussion of J. F. Gilliam, *TAPA* 83 (1952) 51–55 (a letter to a *curator praesidii*, no provenance); P. J. Sijpesteijn, *ZPE* 14 (1974) 236 (letter to a *duplicarius* listing Egyptian guards). J. F. Gilliam, *Cd'E* 28 (1953) 144–146, has demonstrated that the ostrakon from Mons Claudianus published by Cl. Préaux, *Cd'E* 26 (1951) 354–363, is not military, but it concerns the Roman exploitation of the Eastern desert of Egypt, like many of the military texts.

this group is a collection of fourteen ostraka purchased in Luxor in 1972 by P. J. Sijpesteijn and published by him with his customary promptitude.⁵ My aim here is to analyze the evidence with which Sijpesteijn has provided us in order to describe the outlines of the garrison which these ostraka concern, that of Latopolis; in doing so, I will also offer suggestions for the understanding and restoration of some of the individual texts.

The provenance of these ostraka was stated by the dealer to have been Esna or near that town; Sijpesteijn has already pointed out that some of the texts have a military connection and that "it is very well possible that these two ostraka (and some of the Greek ones) have come from the site of the camp of the detachment stationed at Esna" (from the garrison of Thebes, that is).⁶ The two texts in question are in Latin, while the other twelve are in Greek. Sijpesteijn dates the texts to the middle of the second century A.D. on the basis of palaeography.⁷

As Sijpesteijn remarks, there was no previous evidence of the military occupation of Latopolis, although Lesquier thought it likely (*a priori*) that it had a detachment from the garrison of Thebes. We can now, thanks to these ostraka, see the nature of this detachment (if it is not an independent unit). We may begin with number 13, the text of which is as follows:⁸

Domitio Respecto praef(ecto) suo
 Severus (centurio) salutem.
 Onnuphin Panamea e
 4 turma Proclidis misi excur-
 su VIII K(alendas) Ianuarias.
 Opto te, domine,
 multis annis felicem
 8 videre.

It is evident here that we are dealing with a unit in which both centuries and turmas were included, and of which the commanding officer was a *praefectus*. Only a *cohors equitata* of 500 men, in which six centuries of infantry and four turmas of cavalry were to be found

⁵ *TAAANTA* 5 (1973) 72-84.

⁶ Sijpesteijn (n. 5) 83.

⁷ The hands are much like those of the Florida ostraka (see n. 15 below), which I date to the mid-second century.

⁸ As published except that the printed text of line 2 has the misprint *Serverus*, and I have deleted the editor's period after *exkursu*.

normally, is possible.⁹ That the centurion has in this case given an order to a cavalryman need not excite wonder; in the situation of the Roman army in Upper Egypt, with relatively small detachments spread out over a large territory, it would be common for men to be under the orders of officers who were not strictly their hierarchical commanders from time to time.¹⁰

Other texts offer confirmation of this conclusion. The author of the fragmentary number 14 (in Latin) says that he has sent away a *mil(item)* to a *praesidium*. And in number 8, a fragmentary private letter in Greek, a centurion is mentioned. The cavalry side is represented by the Greek private letter number 12, in which a decurion is mentioned. And it appears likely that the *ἐπαρχος ἡμῶν* mentioned in number 10 is the *praefectus cohortis* (see below).¹¹ A member of the staff of the *praefectus cohortis* is, I think, the addressee of number 9. I argue below that this is Iulius Eupolemos, *beneficiarius*. A civilian official of high rank, the epistrategos, appears in the same text; his role I will consider below.

The author of number 9, however, identifies himself as *χ(ιλίαρχος)*, that is, *tribunus*. He cannot, therefore, be a part of the same unit as the officers and soldiers we have mentioned so far. He is, rather, an officer in a different unit, either the commander of a *cohors miliaria* or a subordinate to the *praefectus legionis*.¹² It seems to me much more likely that the former is the case, but there is no absolute basis for exclusion of the latter.¹³

9 A convenient recent summary of the ancient evidence, with references, is G. R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier* (London 1969) 25.

10 For the nature of the work of the army in the occupation of Upper Egypt, see the standard account of J. Lesquier, *L'armée romaine d'Égypte* (Cairo 1918) 377–458 and the remarks of Guéraud cited in n. 2.

11 An alternative explanation might be that the author, located (say) in Diospolis Magna, was referring to "our" prefect specifically to distinguish him from the commander of the cohort of which part or all was stationed at Latopolis; he might then be either a *praefectus legionis* or the *praefectus* of another auxiliary *cohors quingenaria*. For the unlikelihood that he is the prefect of Egypt, see below.

12 The editor takes the title to mean *tribunus militum*, but this is in the main a title in use in the Republican period, and it does not appear in the Roman army of Egypt.

13 He writes as if he were the logical person to inform Iulius Eupolemos of the arrival of the epistrategos, and he calls his correspondent *τιμωτάτος*; it appears to me less likely that a legionary officer would use such a term to a staff member of an auxiliary cohort than that the commander of one cohort would use it to a member of the staff of his colleague. Also, it is not clear that one would expect to find a *tribunus* of a legion in this place, time, and role. On the other hand, *cohortes miliariae* with tribunes appear to have been exceptional in Egypt; see Lesquier (n. 10) 143.

This *tribunus*, however, is probably to be seen as located somewhere other than Latopolis. The gist of his letter is that the epistrategos has reached the place where he (the writer) is already; he is writing so that Iulius Eupolemos will be aware of this and, one presumes, ready for the visit to his camp in the near future. One cannot always be certain with these ostraka that they were all found at the place in which the addressee was at the time they were written, but there does not seem to be any reason for thinking that this was not the case in this collection.

Some indications of the nature of the activities of the auxiliaries of the garrison of Latopolis are provided by the texts. The tendency to detach small groups of soldiers to man relatively isolated outposts, of which there is evidence in the Wadi Fawakhir ostraka, recurs here in the mention of a *curator* in number 8.¹⁴ It is likely that this is a *curator praesidii*, the soldier assigned to temporary command of a detachment; his rank need not have been high, and there is no evidence to indicate that *curator* here was anything but a temporary holder of a *cura*.¹⁵ One of these *praesidia* appears in number 14, where

14 *Praesidia* are mentioned in Guéraud's nos. 23 and 36; his introduction and the comments of Préaux (cited in n. 2) eloquently evoke the setting in which these people worked.

15 For the curator, see the Skeat ostrakon published by Youtie and discussed by Gilliam (references in n. 4). Despite Gilliam's undoubtedly correct assertion that the text was longer at right than was restored, the short restoration appears in S. Daris, *Documenti per la storia dell' esercito romano in Egitto* (Milan 1964) no. 5 and is still apparently preferred by Youtie in the addenda in *Scriptiunculae I* (Amsterdam 1973) 233. Gilliam points out that the short restoration leaves Claudius Germanos with no title, that the curator has no name, and that the soldier needs more room for a cognomen. The collection of ostraka from the garrison opposite Edfu, in the library of Florida State University (to be published by me) gives us ample parallel information here, but it shows that there was no real consistency. It is virtually certain that Claudius Germanos had both names, and that Germanos is not (as Daris would have it) the name of the addressee, for officers do not have imperial nomina without cognomen; it is likely that he would have a title and that the name of the curator would appear, but there is one example where the name of the curator does not. The soldier certainly needs more room for his cognomen. I do not think we should follow Gilliam's suggestion (p. 53), "since he [Claudius Germanos] writes to a military officer in Greek and not Latin, it is very possible that he was himself a civilian." The Florida ostraka now provide numerous examples of indisputably official letters written on ostraka in Greek from one military person to another. It also seems more likely, given the frequent mention of *praefecti* in these clusters of ostraka, that we are not dealing with the *praefectus Aegypti* in the Skeat ostrakon but with a military commander, in this case probably the *praefectus legionis* (which Gilliam, p. 54, n. 17, admits as a possibility). Other *curatores* (probably of *praesidia*) appear in two of the ostraka published by Price (see n. 4), his nos. 3 and 4; he was ignorant of the Skeat ostrakon and Gilliam's discussion.

a soldier is sent to it. The complement of this system of *praesidia* was the practice of sending soldiers, singly or in small groups, on patrols of various sorts, as indicated by the sending of a soldier on an *excursus* in number 13.

It is likely enough that the territory controlled through this method was, as elsewhere,¹⁶ in part the desert area to the east of the valley, between the Nile and the Red Sea. There is no indication that Latopolis was the end-point of any major roads across the desert, nor does it appear in a listing of quarry sites known in this period,¹⁷ but it is not at all improbable that either mines or quarries were located in the adjacent desert. That they were not of major importance is suggested by the paucity of our evidence for Latopolis and the seeming smallness of its garrison.

We turn now to some remarks about the individual texts.

2: In line 1 the editor reads *Δὸς ἰς Απολ* traces, and he remarks in a note "There seems to be writing at the end of this line, but it is very faded. Perhaps it is possible to read *Ἀπόλλωνος πόλιν*, though one would expect *ἀπόδος*..." It is certainly possible that this line did give a place-name (an unpublished Amsterdam ostrakon has a notation *εἰς Ἀφιν* on an address tag), but despite ample surface space I can see no ink remaining to indicate which of many possible toponyms was intended, and the name may well have been abbreviated.

In lines 6–7, the writer says *καὶ γράψον μοι πῶς στέχει τὸ παιδίον σου*. The apparatus says, "r. *στέγει* (?)," and this is translated, "and write how your son stands it (?)." An attractive alternative (which Klaas Worp has also pointed out to me) is to understand *στέχει*, "write me how your son is doing." The idiom does not seem to be cited in the lexica (and the verb is in fact absent from the papyri, cited in the *Wörterbuch* only from poetic inscriptions), but it is similar to the French "Comment allez-vous?" and its analogues in other languages.

In lines 5–6 and 10, the name *Θαρσέας* is certainly to be seen not as a new name but as metathesis of *Θρασέας*.

3: The mention of a *κυνορία* in line 13 as a place where one Belles

16 See n. 14; the Florida ostraka also make a contribution to this subject.

17 It does not appear in K. Fitzler, *Steinbrüche und Bergwerke im ptolemäischen und römischen Aegypten* (Leipzig 1910). Fitzler does, however, (p. 106) note the existence of quarries in earlier times at Eileithyia (El-Kab), between Edfu and Esna; we know nothing of their exploitation in Roman times, but it is not improbable that they were in use. And it is perfectly likely that there were other sources of stone and metal of which we now know nothing.

is located, may point to almost any feasible borderland, whether between two nomes, between a nome and the desert, or between Egypt and Ethiopia.¹⁸ The use of *καί*, "even," before it indicates that this borderland is not a near or easy destination. In line 15, five letters have been omitted in the printed transcription: the line reads in fact [δ]τι ἀνάγκη ἐστίν. μή με ποιήσατε. At the start of line 16 the reading is perhaps].can.

4: The mixture of names here, as in many other texts in this group, is characteristic of the groups of ostraka concerning the army: Saturnilus, Serapodoros, and Ammon.¹⁹

7: This letter, from a son to his father, is damaged on both sides and at the bottom, but it concerns in the main the purchase and sending of various supplies. Of the readings and restorations, only a couple of points need to be noted. In line 5, one could restore ναύ[λου] just as well as the editor's ναύ[του]. In line 3 the editor divides τὰ ἡμάτια, and this may well be correct, but one could also read τὰ η μάτια, since the *mation* is well-known as a unit of measure in these texts.²⁰

9: This letter, of which some is lost at the left, was published as follows:

]νιος χ(ιλίαρχος) Ἰουλίῳ Εὐπολέμῳ
		N]ικιάρίῳ τῷ τιμιωτάτῳ
		χαίρει]ν. Γείνωσκε τὸν κράτι-
4	στον	στρ]ᾱτηγὸν παραγινο-
	μενο	κ]αὶ εἰ δίδοντα ἡ-
	μῖν]τῇ β̄. Ἐπεὶ τῷ ε-
]δης

18 In papyri a border between the territories of two villages is commonly meant, as in BGU III 831.9 and P.Oxy. VI 918 v 17 (also in col. vii, according to a note). But see OGIS 168.18 and 206.1ff. for the borderland of Egypt and Ethiopia. In O.Bodl. 1827.4 the *κυνορία* Κοπεύτου is mentioned; this is perhaps the boundary of that nome with another one, but one could also envisage a boundary at the edge of the cultivated land.

19 The editor's note to line 7 ("the verb *αἰτίζεω* is new") is to be suppressed, as this well-known epic verb is cited in LSJ from several authors. In line 4 the restoration seems to me hazardous (the *alpha* is doubtful) and in line 6 I read δα. ἀνά ("at the rate of"). Pi as the uncertain letter is rather dubious. The text at the end of line 8 is doubtful; I cannot read more than αυτο.. In line 10, the *mu* of *πέμψις* is present but shortened by *Verschleifung*. *πέμπω* in line 11 is uncertain.

20 *Matia* appear in Fawakhir ostraka nos. 1 (perhaps wheat), 2 (salt), 12 (onions), 20 (half-mation of grain?), and 21 (mustard). A mention is also found in one of the Florida ostraka.

The editor considered it likely that two persons were addressed, since his restoration of line 4 made the space available too large for τῷ καὶ only in line 2. The reason for the supplement given for line 4 was “κράτιστος is not an epitheton used for στρατηγός,” leading to the conclusion that someone else, perhaps the prefect, must have been mentioned in the intervening space. But this hypothesis is unnecessary, for the official with whose title the adjective κράτιστος most commonly appears, other than the prefect, is the epistrategos (see *Wörterbuch* III, pp. 192–193, where more than 35 attestations for the second century alone are listed). The restoration of this official’s title here is inescapable.²¹ The consequence of this restoration is the establishment of a loss of 10 letters in line 4, where 14 letters of text survive. In the preceding line, with 17 letters preserved, one can then be sure that only [χαίρει]ν is to be restored, 6 letters. For lines 1 and 2, then, the loss should be about 4 and 5 letters respectively. In line 1 we are lacking the beginning of a nomen; Antonius and Herennius come to mind as possibilities, but there are certainly others. In line 2, [τῷ καὶ Ν]ικηῶν is only a bit too long, but it is dubious on other grounds, notably the oddity of the name (for which the editor cites no example) and the rarity of such alias names in military documents. We should, rather, think of a title here, with the Latin termination *-iciarius*. The only possibility in the staff of an auxiliary cohort such as I have demonstrated is attested at Latopolis is the beneficiarius. This is suitable both on grounds of length (exactly the five letters required) and sense, for as a staff assistant of the commander (or perhaps even the commander himself of a small detachment) he would be a logical person to be notified of the movements of the epistrategos.²²

As for line 5, Sijpesteijn is certainly right that we must restore a participial ending, and as we now see that this is to be singular, we find

21 J. D. Thomas tells me that he had already reached the same conclusion.

22 For the beneficiarius see A. von Domaszewski, *Die Rangordnung des römischen Heeres*² (Köln-Graz 1967) 59 (with additions by B. Dobson), and the extremely useful remarks of L. Robert, *Hellenica* 10 (1955) 174–175 on the appearances of beneficiarii in Greek texts (with many references). Lesquier (n. 10) 410, n. 11, cites a beneficiarius of the Cohors II Thracum in Egypt. The beneficiarius is sufficiently elevated in the hierarchy that τιμώτατος (which appears in a Florida ostrakon addressed to a curator who is probably not of high station) would not seem out of place. An alternative to the situation described here would be the supposition that at the time of the writing of this ostrakon the *cohors quingenaria* attested by 10 and 13 had been replaced by part of a *cohors miliaria*, and that --nius was writing to his own subordinate, who might have been responsible for coordination of activities at Latopolis.

that of a probable loss of 12 letters we have restored 6. I suspect that the remaining letters were taken up by an adverb meaning "here," perhaps ἐνθάδε. After ἡ|[μῶν] in the next line there would have been about 11 letters; they were probably the words telling what it was that the epistrategos gave to "us," but we cannot tell what that was.²³ There is no way of restoring line 7, but the ending suggests [ἴν' ἐ]ῖδ' ἦς, with some form of γράφω preceding it. The text as a whole, thus restored, reads:

[...]νιος χ(ιλίαρχος) Ἰουλίῳ Εὐπολέμῳ
 [βενεφ]ικιᾶρίῳ τῷ τιμιωτάτῳ
 [χαίρει]ν· γείνωσκε τὸν κράτι-
 4 [στον ἐπιστρ]άτηγον παραγινό-
 [μενον κ]αὶ εὖ διδόντα ἡ-
 [μῶν ± 11] τῇ β. ἐπεὶ τῷ ξ-
 [± 12 ἴν' ἐ]ῖδ' ἦς.

"--nius, tribunus, to Iulius Eupolemos, beneficiarius, the most honored, greeting. Know that the most mighty epistrategos arrived here and well gave us . . . on the 2nd . . . I have written to you (?) so that you may be informed . . ."

10: Since this text is complete at the top (as the editor states), a great deal must be lost at the left. Two points of interest arise here: what is the δίπλωμα mentioned in line 2, and what is the significance of the Ision mentioned in line 3? The latter seems to be typical of the naming of minor settlements in the desert after a sanctuary; an Isideion appears in one of the Florida ostraka, while an Aphis appears both in the Florida ostraka and in the Amsterdam collection. The diploma is probably a document of the type referred to by the prefect Cn. Vergilius Capito in his edict (OGIS 665.21–25): διὸ κελεύω τοὺς διοδεύοντας διὰ τῶν νομῶν στρατιώτας καὶ ἱππεῖς καὶ στάτορας καὶ ἑκατοντάρχας καὶ χειλιάρχους καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἅπαντας μηδὲν λαμβάνειν μηδὲ ἀνγαρεύειν, εἰ μὴ τινες ἐμὰ διπλώματα ἔχουσιν. It is clear that the diplomas in question were to be given by the prefect of Egypt. That

²³ One could speculate that what the epistrategos was giving to the troops was *commeatum*, furlough; this would require the assumption that he was acting for the prefect in a military matter, which is somewhat dubious. Restoration of τὸ κομμεᾶτον would fill the lacuna exactly.

being the case, one may well ask if either $\delta \epsilon\pi\alpha\rho\chi\omicron\varsigma \eta\mu\omega\upsilon\upsilon$ in line 1 or $\delta \epsilon\pi\alpha\rho[\chi\omicron\varsigma]$ in lines 4–5 refers to the prefect of Egypt rather than the commander of a military unit. The large loss at left prevents certainty on this point, but it seems to me that two points argue against the prefect of line 1's being the governor of Egypt: (1) the use of $\eta\mu\omega\upsilon\upsilon$, which would seem to distinguish him from other prefects (perhaps the prefect of lines 4–5) as being specifically pertinent to the writer, and (2) the absence of an honorific epithet such as $\kappa\rho\acute{\alpha}\tau\iota\varsigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$, which appears in 9 with reference to the epistrategos, showing that the relatively informal character of this correspondence did not make such terms otiose. Against (1) may be argued, however, that the "our" is a purely conventional term, perhaps even a rendition of the Latin *noster* as in "praefectus noster." The emphasis on coming and going in the letter points to the diploma as a document authorizing travel of the sort described by Capito, and it may well be that the prefect of Egypt was mentioned in some of the lost portion of the text.

12: This private letter is very fragmentary, but one phrase is of particular interest:²⁴ $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\kappa\alpha\lambda\omega \varsigma\epsilon, \acute{\alpha}\delta\epsilon\lambda\phi\epsilon, \epsilon\kappa\rho\alpha\tau\eta\varsigma [-]/\epsilon\omega\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\alpha\gamma\eta\varsigma$. There is probably little more (if anything) than some form of $\epsilon\iota\upsilon\alpha\iota$ lost to the right. The addressee is asked to be self-controlled or disciplined, to hold fast, perhaps, until the $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\alpha\gamma\eta$. The sense of $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\alpha\gamma\eta$ required seems to be "relief" or "change of personnel," an occasion on which the person addressed will be able to leave his isolated station. The meaning of "shift" of workers appears in papyri of the fourth century and later; this is the earliest example known by nearly two centuries.²⁵ The feelings which the addressee is being asked to contain come surely from the great length of time which a soldier might spend on a tour of duty in the *praesidia*, isolated from his friends and family, with little of interest to do.²⁶

24 Text as published except that the *sigma* of $\epsilon\kappa\rho\alpha\tau\eta\varsigma$ seems to me partly present (bracketed by the editor). The editor prints $\acute{\alpha}\delta\epsilon\lambda\phi\acute{\epsilon}$ and $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\alpha\gamma\eta\varsigma$.

25 *P. New York* 25.6ff. is the earliest; other occurrences are much later (Lewis cites *ad loc.* the remarks of Bell, *Archiv* 5 [1913] 189–191 and Wilcken, *ibid.* 450–451). $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\alpha\gamma\eta$ in the sense of a day's shift or complement also occurs in an unpublished Amsterdam ostrakon of the second century.

26 An eloquent picture of the hardships of such service is given by *P. Mich.* III 203, a letter of Trajanic date from Saturnilus, who is serving in the army in Nubia, to his mother. He has been in Pselkis for three months now, but if he does not get *commeatum* soon—within two months—he will be away $\epsilon\iota\varsigma \tau\acute{\alpha} \pi\rho\alpha\iota\kappa\iota\delta\iota\alpha$ for 18 months before he returns to Pselkis again. He refers to his wife, Gemella, and three children, one newly born, who are

13: The *eques* from the turma of Proclis who has been sent on an *excursus* is called Onnuphin Panamea. The editor remarks "probably Panameos is meant. The Roman habit of referring to a person by his praenomen and nomen caused the mistake." It was, on the contrary, the use of nomen and cognomen that lies behind this phenomenon of nomenclature, where as time goes on the line between the name plus patronymic pattern of Greek and Egyptian habit and the nomen plus cognomen typical of the Roman soldiers is blurred to a point of invisibility (*P.Hamb.* I 39 shows the end result clearly).

14: The unit identification of the soldier named in line 2 is lost at the left in line 3; the editor remarks, "at the beginning of this line: e turma + a proper name?" This is not likely, as a member of a turma would be called an *eques*, not a *miles* (the equivalents in Greek are ἵππεύς and στρατιώτης). One expects instead the sign for *centuria* (Ϛ).

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with him in Pselkis. See Cl. Préaux for a description of the military importance and the nature of service around Pselkis, in *Cd'E* 26 (1951) 121–155. Pselkis, modern Dakkeh, is 107 km. south of Aswan, at the entrance to a wadi in which gold mines are located. Saturnilus looks ahead to a year and a half spent in the desert in small detachments guarding these mines and the routes leading to them—hardly an attractive situation.

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