

## “THE BARBARIZATION” OF THE ROMAN ARMY

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### **Abstract:**

Development of the Roman army presents to alike sight of the Roman History. Generally, army and administration of the Roman shared same fortune, and entity of Roman supremacy bounded to success of army. Especially, the army underlined the Roman system throughout Imperial period. In this time, Augustus established classical the Roman Army that seen as superior war machine starting from first century (AD) till third century. However, end of third century onwards the Roman army shows different character. Number of non-Roman soldiers and cavalry gradually increased in the compound of the Roman army. Generally, this process is called “barbarization” of the Roman army and it has been associated with disintegration of West Roman Empire. But also, it becomes one of the basic features of the Late Roman army or the Early Byzantine army.

**Keywords:** The Roman Army, Barbarization, the Late Roman Period.

In the Ancient Roman military service was obligatory for every healthy citizen and people of region in the Roman territory. Generally, while Roman *legions* were made up of Latin and Italian citizens, *auxiliary* units, which were subsidiary force units, was selected from people who depend on empire. People and community who was considered as “barbaric” by Roman authorities was excluded from recruitment. Therefore, military service was considered as a privilege being Roman citizen.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, recruiting from allied tribe or people under guardianship of Roman who called “barbaric” in the campaigns outside of Italy had become common practice in the throughout Late Republic era. For example, Julius Caesar recruited from Gaul soldier and Germanic cavalry in the Gallic expeditions. In the civil war period, the trio of

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<sup>1</sup> Bury, J. B. (1923). *History of the Roman Empire I*. Pp. 38.  
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Pompey, Brutus and Cassius established military contingents that made up from native population of Anatolian, Syrian and Egyptian against Julius Caesar.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in the Battle of Actium (B.C. 31) between Augustus and Marcus Antonius, Augustus' contingents was made up from Gaul and Spain soldiers, while Antonius picked up soldier from east provinces.<sup>3</sup> After civil war the citizenship concept in the military service prevailed, however, from end of first century (A.D) onwards recruitment from Italy gradually was diminished. *Legions* were made up of provinces which were considered citizen of Roman or it was given citizenship.<sup>4</sup> Especially, the colonies of retired soldiers which were placed the border of Danube by Augustus provided for need of soldier by giving citizenship until the Septimus Severus period (193-211). In the Emperor Caracalla period (212-217), gradually increased need of soldier caused it was given to citizenship all of provinces of empire and soldiers were recruited from like Illyria, Isaura, Galatia, Thrace where was seen as "uncivilized".<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, in the Marcomanni Wars, which were conducted by Marcus Aurelius (96-180), Sarmad, Germen and Goth tribes moved to border of Danube and Rhine River and these tribes were placed border of empire with ways of diplomatically.<sup>6</sup> In states of warfare of the third century, Emperors and their rivalries picked up soldiers from these tribes which stayed in the borders of empire and these soldiers were given commands of Roman commanders as mercenary.<sup>7</sup>

At the end of the third century, pressure of the nomadic tribes in the border of empire led to these groups combining with defense policy of empire in exchange for military service. In the *Tetrarchy* period, while Frankish tribes were donated land which called *terrae laeticae* in exchange for military service and these groups as *laeti* soldier were placed Trier, Langres and Amiens provinces in Gaul, Arabic tribes, as allied of empire, under the their own commander undertook defense east borders of empire.<sup>8</sup> In the fourth century, placing the groups of nomadic tribes became systematic. Emperor

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<sup>2</sup> Keppie, L. (2005). *The Making of the Roman Army From Republic to Empire*. Routledge. Pp. 130.

<sup>3</sup> Southern, P. (2006) *The Roman Army A social and Institutional History*. ABC-CLIO, Inc. Pp. 99.

<sup>4</sup> Camphell, B. (1994). *The Roman Army, 31 BC-AD 337 A Sourcebook*. Routledge. Pp. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Whithy, M. (2007). *Army and Society in the Late Roman: A Context for Decline? A Companion to the Roman Army*. (ed. Paul Erdkamp). Blackwell Publishing. P. 515-532. Pp.520; Blockmans, W. and Hoppenbrouwers, P. (2014). *Introduction to Medieval Europe, 300-1500*. Routledge. Pp. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Cameron, A. (2001). *Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity AD 395-600*. Routledge. Pp. 36.

<sup>7</sup> Southern, P. (2004). *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*. Routledge. Pp. 269.

<sup>8</sup> Southern, 2006, Pp. 259; Zuckerman, C. (2014). Ordu. *Bizans Dünyası Doğu Roma İmparatorluğu 330-641*. (Morrison, C. Ed.). (Aslı Bilge, çev.). Ayrıntı Yayınları. Pp. 183.

Constantine I stationed Vandals to province of Pannonia and these groups recruited under their own commanders in the units of *auxiliary*. After the Battle of Hadrianapolis (378), Theodosius I placed Goths as *feodorati* the Balkans in return of military service and he paid them annual payment or provision that known *annona feoderatice*<sup>9</sup>. These placements were done by agreement of *feodus* and it became mercenary contract in a short time.<sup>10</sup> In the same way, Germanic and Sarmad tribes was recruited to Roman Army under their own commander and such tribal settlements were widely used due to need for soldier of empire.<sup>11</sup>

In the late fourth century, foreign mercenary troops became very important in the Roman Army. Especially, increasing strategic importance of cavalry led to even more recruitment of tribal troops who were mainly fight on horseback. In fact, foreign mercenary troops provided service to all units within the Roman Army and discrimination or difference in between Roman and non-Roman gradually was lost.<sup>12</sup> Also, Roman citizens in Italy interested in civil administration and they did not want to be soldier. Therefore, mercenary troops were able to achieve higher posts or dignity in the Roman Army.<sup>13</sup> On the other side, although mercenary troops further more important played role than Roman soldiers in the Late Roman Army, still the number of units which made up mercenary troops are unknown.

Most historians have called this development as a “*barbarization*” of the Roman Army and they have thought of a sort of decadence in the Roman Army and Roman Empire. Usually, as a reason of this has been shown that mercenary troops fought for money and booty unlike Roman soldiers who fought for country and emperor.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, it is also accepted that mercenary troops who became *feodorati* in the west of

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<sup>9</sup> Southern, 2006, pp. 259.

<sup>10</sup> Blockmans, W. and Hoppenbrouwers, 2014, pp, 23.

<sup>11</sup> Bury, 1923, pp.39; Ermatinger, J. W. (2004). *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Greenwood Press. Pp.. 44-46.

<sup>12</sup> Cameron, 2001, spp. 51; Blockmans and Hoppenbrouwers, 2014, pp. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Though in the tradition of Roman, military and civil administration combined with each other, in the period of Tetrarchy, military administration and civil administration was separated each other and government imposed obligation to only choose one for Romans. Generally, Roman citizens did not want to stay far away home and they inclined to choose civil administration. See. Halsall, G. (2007). *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*. Cambridge University Press. Pp. 108.

<sup>14</sup> Whithy, 2007, pp. 522.

the empire were loyal to their own commanders instead of the Roman emperor and authorities.<sup>15</sup>

In summary, the increase of ethnic soldiers in the Roman Army naturally brought along non-Roman equipment and habits or practices and before long, these were adopted by Roman soldiers.<sup>16</sup> This development becomes one of the main features of the Late Roman and Early Byzantine military force and it has significant political, social and economic reflections on the history of the Roman Empire.

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<sup>15</sup> Liebeshuetz, W. (2007). Warlords and Landlords. *A Companion to the Roman Army*. (ed. Paul Erdkamp). Blackwell Publishing. Pp. 483.

<sup>16</sup> Throughout Late Antique era, in the Roman Army various indigenous and ethnic traditions were adopted and sight of the Roman Army substantially changed. For example, soldiers used to *spatha*, kind of Celt cavalry sword instead of *gladio* that was traditional Romans infantry sword. Likewise, instead of Roman shield *scutum*, they used to elliptic shield which belonged to indigenous people, Roman soldiers wore pants instead of skirt and they adopted war tactics that belong to Huns, Persian and Scythian. Also, Roman soldiers screamed to against enemy like Germanic warriors in war. Halsall, 2007, pp. 103-104.

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