The Civilian Legacy of the Roman Army

History of Warfare

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The Civilian Legacy of the Roman Army

Military Models in the Post Roman World

Edited by

Luca Loschiavo

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Preface

The importance of the army in Roman political and social history is a well-known and widely studied topic. The role of the army as a vehicle of 'Romanisation' for the people who lived in the provinces of the empire or in the wide belt of the *limes* is equally well known. By contrast, not so well known is the impact that the organizational models employed by the army (hierarchies, administration, payroll, food acquisition, storage and distribution, logistics, justice, tax collection and so on) had on the rising Barbarian and Romano-Barbarian societies, which progressively replaced the great construction of the Western Empire during the centuries (4th–7th) that saw the passage from Late Antiquity to Early Middle Ages.

Increasingly open to the recruitment of non-Roman 'manpower', for centuries, the Imperial army was also the meeting place of different cultures (today we would use the expression 'melting pot'). However, the coexistence of people of different ethnic origin was only one problem for Roman generals. Continuously forced to adapt to different situations and environments, the Roman army had to develop the capacity of finding multiple and innovative solutions that allowed it to maintain the control of the *Urbs* over very large territories with diminished troops, so that real force would be used as little as possible.

Sometimes Roman officers imposed on the occupied territories models taken from Latin tradition (the use of a common language and writing, ownership structures, the separation between administration and religion, etc.). In other cases, they realized that it would be more useful and effective to adapt solutions already spread among local populations (simplified negotiating practices, symbolic formalism to strengthen juridical obligations, reliance on divine judgment, gift economy, military and paramilitary clientele, etc.).

Quite often the groups of barbarians that penetrated the borders dealt with these very models, and they eventually adopted them at the moment of settling within the Empire, replacing their ancestral models of leadership with the more elastic Roman techniques of governance. One can believe that the army constituted an important social and organizational reference model for the barbarian populations, especially as it was distinct, at least in part, from the complex and aristocratic sphere of *civilitas*. In any case, the great flexibility and adaptability of the solutions used by the Roman army allowed the 'new *domini*' not only to maintain power for a long time and spread throughout medieval Europe, but also to leave a lasting cultural imprint. It is precisely the resilience of such solutions at a time when the empire fades away and the military dimension of power assumes less aristocratic forms than those of the late-antique *civilitas*, and becomes predominant in the new realms, that represents the principal reason for this type of investigation today.

Starting from this point of view – analyzing the defining moment when Antiquity came to end and a new age begun, whose influence in some ways is still visible today – some scholars, from a variety of different disciplines and countries, gathered for the first time in Cagliari in October 2012. Their perspective ranged from political, social and economic history to law and anthropology. The purpose of that first meeting was to reconstruct the *status quaestionis* in different areas: the results are now collected in the volume *Civitas, Iura, Arma. Organizzazioni militari, istituzioni giuridiche e strutture sociali all'origine dell'Europa* (*secc. III–VIII*), Fabio Botta and Luca Loschiavo eds. (Lecce 2015).

This research group – enriched with new specialists (esp. scholars of Roman and medieval history, Germanic philologists and linguists, and historians of religion and iconography) – continued to work on the subject and to share their knowledge. They all pay close attention to cultural and specifically lexical aspects. One of the main purposes of the research group is to avoid the generation of confusion and misunderstanding through use of the same terms – which are recurrent through various centuries and yet assume different meanings in different contexts – among scholars from different disciplines, hindering (as in fact happened in the past) a truly fruitful dialogue.

This volume collects and presents the results of that research. It certainly does not claim to be the definitive word on the subject. However, it is intended to give an account of the richness of the problem and the usefulness of a multidisciplinary study conducted in this way. The very core of many contributions remains the legal issues with the greatest social impact: marriage (Castagnino), personal status and integration processes (Poly, Marotta), hereditary successions (Ruggiero), dispute resolution (Kerneis), taxes and military obligation (Wood, Osaba), land distribution and creation of new settlements (Trisciuoglio and Porena), legal pluralism (Loschiavo), maintenance of order and punishments (Esders), collective criminal responsibility (Botta). Much importance – as just mentioned – is also given to the linguistic developments starting from military terminology and the linguistic solutions adopted within the army (Haubrichs, Falluomini). Also taken into account is the complex historiographical topic of 'ethnogenesis' and the formation-transformation of the core-traditions of the barbarian people before and after contact with the Roman world (Borri), the meaning of military ideology for the newcomers (especially the Lombards: Gasparri) and the resilience and re-adaptation of Roman military power-symbols (Verardi). The concluding chapter (Pohl) offers an account of the current historiographical debate and provides new insights for the prosecution of research.

The principal aim of this book is to indicate to the scholarly community how interesting and fruitful this path could be in order to learn more about the origins of the civilisation that began after the fall of the Roman world. It is

therefore hoped that this research can continue and that other scholars would like to join our research group and provide their specific contribution.

•••

Many people and institutions deserve to be mentioned for their help in the realisation of this volume. Jean-Michel Carrié, Gisella Bassanelli Sommariva, Fausto Goria and Arnaldo Marcone participated at different times in the research group, giving punctual advice and substantial support of various kinds. Elvira Migliario and Saverio Lomartire with their papers (unfortunately not published here) enriched the 2019 Roman conference. Guido Rossi was invaluable in the last editorial phase. The Departments of Law and Humanities of the Roma Tre University provided financial and logistical support.

Personally, I would especially like to thank all the authors of the chapters collected here for their commitment and patience during the various stages of the project. To their knowledge and dedication, we owe all the good and interesting things this book has to offer to reader.

Rome, December 2023

Maps

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