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**CONSTANTINE, CONSTANS AND THE *COMES*
REI MILITARIS (306-350)**

Introduction

There are a lot of recent works and accurate historiography concerning the Late Roman Army¹; following the original trends of Nischer and Baynes, improved and cleared by Seston and van Berchem² at the middle of last century, came a number of scholars who tried to explain in a fresh and satisfactory manner the many changes after and during the Third Century Crisis and the traumatic Military Anarchy upcoming into the so called “New Empire” of Diocletian and Constantine³. Using new approaches, with the findings from archaeological data and making reinterpretations of the often scarce literary sources, it’s possible to add some light to a subject certainly as dark as intriguing.

¹ Concerning our time and place, we can sum up with the ultimate research of H. ELTON, *Warfare in Roman Europe, 325-450*. Oxford 1996; R. S. CROMWELL, *the Rise and Decline of the Late Roman Field Army*. Shippensburg 1998; M. J. NICASIE, *Twilight of Empire. The Roman Army from the reign of Diocletian until the battle of Adrianople*. Amsterdam 1998; P. SOUTHERN, *the Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*. London 2001; M. WHITBY, *Rome at War AD 293-696*. Oxford 2002; and P. ERDKAMP (ed.), *a companion to the Roman Army*. London 2011.

² Cf. E. NISCHER, “The Army Reforms of Diocletian and Constantine and their modifications up to the time of the Notitia Dignitatum”. *The Journal of Roman Studies* 23 (1923), pp. 1-55; N. H. BAYNES, “Three notes on the reforms of Diocletian and Constantine”. *The Journal of Roman Studies* 15 (1925), pp. 195-208. These works were followed and completed by W. SESTON, *Dioclétien et la Tétrarchie*. Paris 1946, and D. VAN BERCHEM, *L’Armée de Dioclétien et la Réforme Constantinienne*. Paris 1952.

³ We take here the name of the famous and superb masterwork by T. D. BARNES, *the New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*. London 1982. A new wave of recent publishing about the army started with G. WEBSTER, *the Roman Imperial Army*. London 1981, followed close by G. R. WATSON, *the Roman Soldier*. London 1982; K. DIXON & P. SOUTHERN, *the Roman Cavalry*. London 1992, and *the Late Roman Army*. London 1996, made a much more recent survey about the later periods and updated all information available from the archaeological recordings.

Rome met with a series of new organizational needs after her long struggle to death for survival. The defensive system changed completely, the unit sizes diminished, and the strategic net of outposts, watchtowers, forts and fortresses changed, from a virtual, only residence and headquarters device, to a stationary, all-out security zone where simple barracks and roads were turned into steady, blocking barriers holding key points and able to delay, slow, and even push back high intensity treats, not to mention the crushing of low scale marauding actions often present at frontier regions⁴.

As secondary but not less important aftermath of such turmoil at the tactical level, we also have the widespread use of *vexillationes*, or military detachments, instead of the slow and costly movements of entire units. The “new” legions, much reduced in size, the bigger amount of cavalry units throughout the army (not only in the field armies, but mainly at the *limites*), and the military ranks created for the organization, commanding and properly leading of the troops, completed then a quite different structure giving full nature to the Late Roman Army⁵.

Gallienus, first of all, had an escort attached to him, both as a quick response force and as trusted corps guard in the form of powerful cavalry units; those *comites* (literally “companions”), were later much developed by emperors Diocletian and Constantine along with the *duces*, or overall commanders of frontier troops. As a result, *vicarii*, *praeses* and provincial governors were stripped of army commands, turning full-time members of the civil service, and giving way to professional soldiers to hold every high rank tied to the armies⁶.

But we will focus here on another command or generalship, much less known, more recent too, but essential in the reorganization works and frontier adjustments settled at the end of Third Century and the beginning of the Fourth: *the comes rei militaris*. This time seems it wasn't an original idea from the masterminds of the period, coming from the young branch of Second Flavian dynasty, Flavius Julius Constans (333-350).

The army reforms of Diocletian and Constantine

A new kind of legion filled the Roman first line as soon as the dust from anarchy was settled. Although we can assess now that classic, 6000 size legions didn't disappeared completely, at least until the end of Fourth Century, the trends pointed to a much smaller unit size. When it comes to the written sources, we can find units featuring 500, 1000 and 1500 men, but most of the changes are tied to the tactical level instead of lack of manpower; during the

⁴ A complete and brilliant essay about the great defensive reforms by Diocletian in S. WILLIAMS, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*. London 1985, pp. 91-102.

⁵ Cf. T. COELLO, *Unit Sizes in the Late Roman Field Army*. Oxford 1996, for a complete explanation of the reshaping of the army and such phenomenon. See also J. CASEY, *the Legions of the Later Roman Empire*. Cambridge 1991.

⁶ H. M. D. PARKER, “The Legions of Diocletian and Constantine”. *The Journal of Roman Studies* 43 (1933), pp. 175-188; H. G. PFLAUM, „Zu Reform des Kaisers Gallienus.“ *Historia* 25 (1976) pp. 109-117.

Tetrarchy, the Empire was still very able to raise and take the field with huge, first class armies. The new nature of the threats facing Rome asked for versatile, quick and multifunctional legions, filled with specialists and soldiers able to perform all duties, not only acting as heavy infantry as before. Probably as soon as Gallienus reign or even the Decius one (249-251), smaller detachments were sent, deployed elsewhere parting from the main unit, sometimes for good⁷.

Such specialists filled also the new Field Armies, attached both to *Augustii* and *Caesares* during the Tetrarchy; new *comitatenses* get reinforced with elite legions and crack troops, namely the *auxiliae palatinae*. It was even a true division settled on that, and sanctioned by law, not too different from the sport categories showing up the teams today⁸.

Increased numbers of horse contingents were set to fill the ranks of armies, thanks to the great organizational efforts the Roman Empire was still able to make. Plenty of cavalry regiments were posted all along the frontiers, at the Rhine, Danube and the East, watching the Desert. The *limitanei*, wrongly treated as peasant, halftime militia by some modern scholars, were actually provided with lands for survival and formed with a big amount of cavalry, essential to patrol the borders, control key points and fight back fast marauders with success⁹. During the peaceful times, their main duty was gathering information from the other side of the border, and surveillance.

Different categories of troops were showing now, with an aforementioned kind of quality division who worked actually until the very fall of the West: units marching and staying all the time with the emperors, centralized armies around cities or strategic points at the provinces, and finally the frontier, or semi-frontier troops, in close cooperation with the river patrol fleets, like the *pseudocomitatenses*. All worked in a sense.

Specialist troops, ethnic units, and soldiers trained in certain kind of weapons covered the new line of battle; raiders, outriders, scouts and poachers of Germanic stock were the norm, and other ethnic peoples provided the new armies with oriental style heavy cavalry (*cataphractii* and *clibanarii*) and mounted archers. The *mattuarii* were a clear proof of the new trends in the army; some legions or auxiliary troops took specific roles for concrete actions or certain phases of battle, leaving the general tasks or duties to the standard infantryman, still mostly a legionary.

Frontier and defense rearrangements

The fortunate but still polemic concept created by Luttwak, the “Defense in Depth”, was actually mastered by Diocletian (285-294); he was thoroughly

⁷ S. MACDOWALL & S. EMBLETON, *Late Roman Infantryman (236-565)*. London 1994.

⁸ A. R. MENÉNDEZ ARGÜÍN, *Las legiones del siglo III d. C. en el campo de batalla*. Écija 2000; *Codex Theodosianus* VII 20, 4

⁹ Cf. B. ISAAC, “The meaning of the Terms Limes and Limitanei”. *Journal of Roman Studies* 78 (1988), pp. 125-147; G. CIAMPOLTRINI, “Castra, castelli, limitanei”. *Archeologia medievale*, 23 (1996), pp. 777-778.

studying the conditions, shape and needs of every border before putting to work a huge building and securing program intended to expand, improve or create security zones able to quench the river of invasions and intrusions in every sense¹⁰. New and bigger fortresses and forts were designed, reduced in garrisons, but powered with new defensive facilities. Bridgeheads, ramparts, roads and ditches turned into military positions firmly defended, being no more secondary objects filling the frontier landscapes. Huge frontier areas turned into military regions able to perform defense and offensive actions¹¹.

Limitanei were provided by Diocletian with first class troops: full strength legions to hold on the ground and balance out invaders, while most *comitatenses* were stationed nearby as second line troops, coming to destroy a fixed and engaged enemy tangled in the fortified net, full of obstacles¹².

After his efforts, Constantine understood the key role of frontier devices, and provided the same attention to defensive problems. He kept updated the Diocletianic system and improved it when possible or necessary, mostly at his beloved Rhine frontier and the Danube, where archaeological data are showing today great works. His nephew Julian and later Valentinian were restless workers too, and gave constant watching attention and care to the defenses; like Constantine and his son Crispus, they campaigned quite often in barbarian soil, thus clearing the adjacent zones of enemies.

*The other heirs of Constantine (337-361)*¹³

Constantine II (337-340), after the bloodshed following Constantine's death, was acknowledged Augustus on September 9, 337¹⁴. He was born about 316-317, proclaimed Caesar when still a baby jointly with emperor Licinius son¹⁵. Ruling Spain, Gaul and Britain, the original domains of his father, he was senior emperor because of age, and tried to impose his will on the other two, but lacking success. Constantine II wanted to legislate above Africa, against the will of the younger but tempered Constans; that point shows us the specific and peculiar way in which the Roman laws were proclaimed and set in the Late Empire. Some argue that Caesars were unable to legislate, some say they could; when it comes to seniority, the overall ruler, at least during Diocletian and Constantine reigns, were able to set laws all over the Empire, even to the other

¹⁰ Cf. E. M. LUTTWAK, *the Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*. Baltimore 1976, pp. 127-191.

¹¹ S. JOHNSON, *Late Roman fortifications*. London 1983, with a survey of all frontiers during our period.

¹² S. WILLIAMS, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-78.

¹³ We need to recall here the old but accurate work of C. GIGLI, *La dinastia dei secondi Flavii. Costantino II, Costante, Costanzo II*. Roma 1959.

¹⁴ M. DIMAIO & D. W. ARNOLD, "Per vim, per caedem, per bellum: a store of murder and ecclesiastical politics in the year 337 A. D.". *Byzantion* 62 (1992), pp. 158-211; X. LUCIEN BRUN, "Constance II et le massacre des princes". *Bulletin de l'Association G. Bude* (1973), pp. 385-602.

¹⁵ T. D. BARNES, *the New empire... op. cit.*, p. 7, 84-85;

Augustii (if any)¹⁶. Probably, having in mind such antecedents, Constantine II wanted to do the same, but Constans refused and open war broke in 340. Seems the West army planned to invade Italy and pin down Mediolanum, but some poorly executed movements probably put the task force loose and disorganized. With the legions stranded along the way, Constans fought back, coming with his main army from Trier, and he was able even to cut off the enemy and trap his brother himself in some kind of ambush. Constantine was killed in action, and western provinces accepted peacefully Constans as ruler¹⁷.

Seems Constantine II was married before 336, but wife's name and possible progeny are unknown. Probably he was badly advised during his short reign; his Praetorian Praefect, we need to note here, was the father of future bishop St. Ambrosius¹⁸. Even so, he lacked the qualities showed by her great father and other relatives, and seems both his political talent, intelligence and leadership skills were under the family level.

Constantius II (337-361), was let ruling Egypt, Asia and the East¹⁹. Patient and careful, he was ill-fated at external wars against the barbarians, but showed unique talent to deal with internal turmoil and usurpers, being resolute, cunning and even ruthless when it was needed²⁰. Made Caesar by his father when he was seven in 324, not counting a brief period in Gaul during childhood, most of his life was tied to the East Roman Empire; for some scholars, Constantius was the ultimate "Byzantine emperor", because he was already showing the characteristics that all his successors will feature afterwards in the bombastic, luxury Constantinople court: intrigue, favoritism, heavy involvement in religious affairs and increasingly autocratic ruling.

When the three brothers met at Vinimacium (338) they took profit of the riches, domains and territories held by their slaughtered relatives, and Constantius proved to be the less aggressive, being content with the East and even giving up the symbolic capital of their father to the hands of the younger Constans. He waited when the other two brothers went to war two years after,

¹⁶ Details at S. J.J. CORCORAN, *the Empire of the Tetrarchs: Imperial Pronouncements and Government, AD 284-324*. Oxford 1996.

¹⁷ B. BLECKMANN, "Der Bürgerkrieg zwischen Constantin II. und Constans (340 n. Chr.)". *Historia* 52(2) 2003, pp. 225-250.

¹⁸ M. P. SANCHO GÓMEZ, "Education and Leadership. Some Aspects about Culture in the Latin West (375-597)", in B. PEÑA ACUÑA (coord.), *Human Development*. Jaipur 2013, p. 48.

¹⁹ T. D. BARNES, *the New Empire... op. cit.*, pp. 45, 85-86.

²⁰ A.H.M. JONES, J.R. MARTINDALE & J. MORRIS, *the Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire. Vol I 260-395 AD*. Cambridge, 1975, s. v. *Fl. Iul. Constantius 8*. See also W. BLUM, "Die Jugend des Constantius II. bis zu seinen Regierungsantritt. Eine chronologische Untersuchung". *Classica et Medievalia* XXX (1969), pp. 389-402; R. ED-BROOKE, "The visit of Constantius II to Rome in 357 and its Effect on the Pagan Aristocracy". *American Journal of Philology* 97(1) 1976, pp. 40-61; J. W. LEEDOM, "Constantius II: Three revisions", *Byzantion* 48 (1978) pp. 132-145; C. VOGLER, *Constance II et l'administration imperiale*. Strasburg 1979; R. F. BOWEN, *the Emperor Constantius II (A. D. 317-361): a critical study*. Leeds 1982; M. M. MUDD, *Aspects of the internal government of the Later Roman Empire in the reign of Constantius II: A. D. 337-361*. Ann Arbor 1992; J. VANDERSPOEL, "Constantius and the Celts". *Hermes* 121 (4) 1993, pp. 504-507.

and he was giving way in religious matters too: despite of being an Arian, conceded some amnesties and forgiveness to the fierce and bitter Nicean creed supporters. Sober and consistent, he was thinking first in the Roman Empire, and didn't wanted to see the costly works and the toil of his predecessors ruined by religious strife and bigotry unrest²¹.

But his moment came lately. When the usurper Magnentius killed his brother Constans in 350, Constantius let Gallus (Flavius Julius Constantius) as Caesar at Antioch and organized a huge army concerning Danube and East legions to deal with the usurper. Although he made some perverse and unnecessary deals, like paying the Alamanni to invade north Gaul and tear down his own subjects and lands, he was able to lead the war right, proving his organization skills, and after the bloody showdown at Mursa (with 53.000-55.000 legionary troops casualties from both sides reported), stripped one by one all Magnentius provinces until the usurper was surrounded at Mons Seleucus, in Gaul, where he committed suicide. After a three year war, Constantius was finally sole ruler of the Roman Empire (353)²². The following Silvanus "uprising" and the family matters concerning his cousins Gallus and Julian are other subjects we won't treat here²³.

Constans as military commander

Constans I, born in 323, was proclaimed Caesar by his father when he was 10²⁴. The younger son of Constantine was betrothed to a daughter of Praetorian Prefect Ablabius before 337, but due to the falling on disgrace of the latter, marriage never took effect. We don't know thereafter about Constans getting married or having offspring ever²⁵.

²¹ W. PORTMANN, "Die politische Krise zwischen der Kaisern Constantius II. und Constans". *Historia* 48(3) 1999, pp. 301-329.

²² M. P. SANCHO GÓMEZ, *Guerra y Política en el Imperio Romano de Occidente (337-361)*. Colonia, 2011, pp. 97-126. Mursa is the nowadays city of Osijek, Croatia.

²³ But it's possible to consult the problem in R. C. BLOCKLEY, "Constantius Gallus and Julian as Caesars of Constantius II". *Latomus* XXXI (1972), pp. 433-468; P. A. BARCELO, "Caesar Gallus und Constantius II: ein gescheitertes experiment?". *Acta Classica* 42 (1999), pp. 23-34. For the Silvanus affair, J. CESKA, "Le dessous social de l'usurpation de Silvanus". *Sbornik Praci Filosofické Fak. Brneské X E6* (1961), pp. 169-178 G. FERNÁNDEZ, "La rebelión de Silvano en el año 355 de la Era Cristiana y la política eclesiástica de Constancio II", en *Anejos de Gerión* II (1989), pp. 257-265. Ed. Universidad Complutense. Madrid; D. C. NUTT, "Silvanus and the emperor Constantius II". *Antichthon* VII (1973). pp. 80-89; J. F. DRINKWATER, "Silvanus, Ursicinus and Ammianus: Fact or fiction?". *Studies in Latin literature and Roman history* 7 (1994), pp. 568-576.

²⁴ T. D. BARNES, *the New Empire... op. cit.*, pp. 8, 86-87.

²⁵ About Constans, A.H.M. JONES, J.R. MARTINDALE & J. MORRIS, *the Prosopography... s. v. Constans* 3; E. GARRIDO GONZÁLEZ, "Observaciones sobre un emperador cristiano: Fl. Jul. Constante". *Lucentum* 3 (1984), pp. 261-278; A. H. M. JONES, *The Later...op. cit.*, pp. 1064-1068; E. M. GARRIDO GONZÁLEZ, "Aspectos internos del reinado de Constante I". *Erytheia* 7.1 (1986), pp. 27-47; M. DIMAIO, "Smoke in the Wind: Zonaras' use of Philostorgius in his Account of the late Neo-Flavian Emperors". *Byzantion* 58 (1988), pp. 230-255.

After 337, being a mere teenager, we can find him ruling Italy, Illyricum and Africa. Opposite to other young princes in Roman history, he acted with resolution and nerve from the very beginning. Able minded ruler, never get discouraged because of his initial precarious position, trapped in between the domains of elder Constantine II and Constantius II. Outmaneuvering both brothers, he gained provinces and capitals, first at Vinimacium (338), when he was able to get almost all the lot from their disgraced cousin Dalmatius, and after in 340, when brilliantly trampling Constantine's clumsy invasion attempt. His prowess in war was confirmed shortly after, because of the recorded successful campaigns along his frontiers, with even a victorious expedition to Britain (343), that probably settled the affairs there for another twenty years²⁶.

It's important to note here that Constans probably kept the bigger part of his father's main army, the most trustful one, and addicted to Constantine's memory. Until the end, we need to note, Constantine I never lose the faith in his Western troops, British, Gallic and Germanic. His younger son kept the trust in Germanic auxiliaries, too, and was glad to promote specialist and develop elite legions. Top infantry units probably emerged as embryonic project during his reign, and he was an innovator as well. Close and careful study of his European frontiers gave him the idea to form and develop the new military rank best known as the "count for military things".

The "comes rei militaris"

It seems that the *comes rei militaris* was a recent innovation, created by Constans I, who paradoxically chose for this new post his future executioner²⁷. Everything shows that the rank was deserted during the reign of Julian in the West, although J. Rodríguez González²⁸ presents a tribune of Julian, Libinus, with the rank of *comes rei militaris* in 361. However, Constantius II himself took note of his brother's innovation, and created a *comes rei militaris* for the Illyricum around 349. Attached to a certain district or area, designated to a certain task, *comes rei militaris* worked along with the *duces* of the *limites*.

These *comites* held military appointments, often higher than *dux*, but under the overall command of the *Magister peditum* and *Magister equitum*, and later of the *magister utriusque militiae* or overall commanders; the new *comites* were the superiors of a series of military posts, each commanded by a *praepositus limitis* (border commander), and/or unit commanders, such as tribunes of cohorts, *alae* (auxiliary equivalent), *numeri*, and in the Eastern Empire, even full legions.

²⁶ It was not until 360 when Julian needed to send a small force under Lupicinus to Britain, for meeting the menace of the picts from the north; cf. JULIAN, *To the senate and people of Athens* 281a-b. Cf. P. L. MALOSE, "Qu'est donc allé faire Constant Ier en Bretagne pendant l'hiver 343?" *Historia* 48(3) 1999, pp. 465-476.

²⁷ Cf. R. S. CROMWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 13; P. SOUTHERN & K. DIXON, *op. cit.*, p. 59

²⁸ J. RODRÍGUEZ GONZÁLEZ, *Diccionario de las batallas de la Historia de Roma (753 a. C. - 476 d. C.)*. Madrid 2005, p. 566.

We can find the *comes rei militaris* commanding detachments of the field army in the provinces. Such *comites* were many times leading a group of *comitatenses*, from Army Corps size to mere regiments or detachments assigned to a particular area or task. They commanded always army groups of *comitatensis* rank, never the units under the *duces*.

Spain, Illyricum, Britain, Mauretania and Africa saw in action the *comes rei militaris* to some extent. Both *magistrii*, as supreme generals, had under their command both the *comites* and *duces*. This military charge carried with it a bureaucratic office of its own, similar as the civil one, but rather simplified²⁹.

The *Notitia Dignitatum* mentions six such positions, with the rank *vir spectabilis*, in the Western Empire (*Comes Italiae*, *Comes Africae*, *Comes Tingitaniae*, *Comes Tractus Argentoratensis*, *Comes Britanniarum* and *Litoris Saxonici per Britanniam*), and two in the Eastern Empire³⁰: *Comes Isauriae* and *Comes (limitis) Aegypti*. As the number of *comites* grew, the rank was devalued, which led to the introduction of the notion of classes of *comites*; first, second and third *ordines*.

It was a new type of general, commanding a body of *comitatenses* charged with protecting and defend a smaller area in size to those that could be assigned to a *magister militum*. It was a necessary innovation, because Constantius as we told copied the idea from his brother, to establish a *comes rei militaris* on the Danube. The title points out to a count holding eventually military command but with very diffuse prerogatives, whose importance could vary, from a regional command of small importance or being almost equivalent to a *magister militum*. The later was the situation with Magnus Magnentius.

Magnentius (350-353)

As many others before and after him, Magnentius (ca. 303-353) was an able and skillful Roman general of Barbarian stock, a *laeti* himself, from a family of prisoners of war turned to settlers³¹. He was climbing from his humble origins along the ranks of the Roman Army and proved to be valuable and courageous leader in combat. We should note here that the very emperor put his eyes

²⁹ A. H. M. JONES, *the Later Roman Empire 284-602. A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey*. Oxford 1973, pp. 105, 124, 174, 526, 528, 597, 610.

³⁰ Cf. A. H. M. JONES, *The Later... op. cit.*, p. 609. Around 395 Theodosius I confirmed such rank in the Eastern army. Certainly a *comes rei militaris* tied to the defense of Egypt remained until Arab conquest.

³¹ Cf. JULIAN III 34c. A.H.M. JONES, J. R. MARTINDALE & J. MORRIS, *the Prosopography... s. v. Fl. Magnus Magnentius*. P. SOUTHERN & K. DIXON, *op. cit.*, pp. 48 and 50; J. F. DRINKWATER, "The revolt and ethnic origin of the usurper Magnentius (350-353) and the rebellion of Vetriciano (350)". *Chiron* 30 (2000), pp. 131-159; I. DIDU, "Magno Magnenzio. Problema cronologici ed ampiezza della sua usurpazione. I dati epigrafici". *Storia Critica* 14 (1) 1977, pp. 11-56; J. SASEL, "The struggle between Magnentius and Constantius II for Italy and Illyricum". *Ziva Antika* XX (1969), pp. 205-216; K. SHELTON, "Usurpers' Coins: The Case of Magnentius". *Byzantinische Forschungen* 8 (1981-83), pp. 211-235; V. NERI, "Il miliario di S. Maria in Acquedotto alla luce dei più resenti studi magnenziani". *Studi Romagnoli* XX (1969), pp. 369-374.

on him, and that's saying a lot. Magnentius inaugurated then the flamboyant figure of the *comes rei militaris*, probably with an independent command, and receiving high standard units. The two units Magnentius commanded could be the *Heculani Seniores* and *Ioviani Seniores*, mentioned in the *Notitia Dignitatum* (Occ. V and VII 3-4) as palatine legions stationed in Italy. Both accompanied Julian on his great expedition to Persia in 363 (Ammianus Marcellinus XXV 6 2-3; Zosimus III 32, 2), where they had to deal with Sassanid war elephants, and later served Valentinian effectively in the West (364-375); we can also find them as an integral part of the naval expedition sent against Gildo to Africa in 398, coming to an end with the deposition and death of the latter (cf. Claudian, *The Gildo War* 418-423). Both units received their honorary degrees from the Tetrarchy *Augustii* Diocletian and Maximian, sometime after the sovereigns adopted their famous nicknames in 287³². They are said to be numbered 6000 strong each³³.

With massive support in the cadres and the low ranks, it was too easy for Magnentius to conceal the military cabal plotting against the regime and Constans I's life. Proclaimed emperor at Autun (Augustodunum) while the emperor was outside with a hunting party, he quickly managed to send his so called specialists, and Constans was hunted himself, while trying desperately to reach Spain. He was sacked from his sanctuary at a small church in the Pyrenees town of Helena, and duly executed by Magnentius' pursuing posse. Gaiso, the leader committing such deed, was rewarded defiantly with the consulate at the Rebel West for 351³⁴.

Aftermath: the comes rei militaris until the end of the fourth century and beyond

After the fall of the West, the *comes* rank was used amongst the Barbarian Kingdoms, because Germanic warlords, rulers and kings, were often altering only slightly the Roman apparatus for administration. Ranks and offices tended to keep stationary all along the Fifth Century, because barbarians were unable to replace the highly advanced Roman administrative machine. In a sense, while the local aristocracies tended to stay operative, ranks kept working; where barbarization lead to a harsh discontinuity (like Britain and some Rhine and Danube lands), the military organization will change as well, sometimes dramatically.

The Ostrogothic *comes rei militaris* is raised as a much more important figure than even during the proper Roman time. They were the true overall commanders representing the king, in a society where the king meant everything, especially during Theodoric the Great reign (493-526). We are said that

³² Cf. AURELIUS VICTOR cf. 39, 18; VEGETIUS I 17; J. BARLOW & P. BRENNAN, "Tribuna Scholarum Palatarum c. AD 353-364: Ammianus Marcellinus and the *Notitia Dignitatum*". *The Classical Quarterly* 51(1) 2001, pp. 237-254.

³³ Cf. ZOSIMUS, II 42, 2; ZONARAS XIII 6. A. FERRILL, *La caída del Imperio Romano. La Explicación Militar*. Madrid 1989. p. 41.

³⁴ R. S. BAGNALL, A. CAMERON, S. R. SCHWARTZ, K. A. WORP, *Consuls of the Later Roman Empire*. Atlanta 1987, pp. 234-241.

mercenaries and skillful warriors were coming to his domains from as far as the Scandinavian lands, and the *comes rei militaris* were the one to lead, rally and drill such units. They were *comites* and the dukes of higher rank, at the same time. It should be recalled here that despite being farmers, field workers, peasants and shepherds breeding horse cattle, Ostrogoth man was mainly a mounted warrior, and was considered this way by law and at every point of his life. Provincials of Roman stock in Italy were farther than ever from military service, but every German settler, every Goth, was expected to fight when required. That fact can give us an idea of the paramount place in society these *comites* really had. The Ostrogoths had a distinctive *comes rei militaris* who was chief of military expeditions or border provinces needing of strong armed presence³⁵.

In Merovingian Gaul, however, the figure of Count faded completely along the Fifth Century and is replaced by the Duke³⁶. The complex processes that lead to the disappearing of the last remains of the Roman legions and Imperial forces have been studied to some detail, but a clear frame of the overall process is lacking and the very nature of such phenomena is still covered in darkness³⁷. We can assess that retinues, war bands, and the very strategic theater of Gaul lead to a completely different military organization, with the appearance of the marches, a centralization process and specific economical and social characteristics that hampered the formation of strong comital figures.

In Visigothic Spain, the *comites* were provincial governors³⁸. Although we know Hispanic and Roman families performing duties at the local level, the army was mainly manned and covered by the Goths, both at the low ranks and at leadership titles. It was expected, mostly after the king Wamba reforms that such counts should drill, lead and organize the armed forces, troops and militiamen at their domains, keeping them up to date to parade the troops and survey the weapons and equipment. The measures were forced upon both noblemen and clergy, counting that by the time (Seventh Century) even a bishop could be proclaimed count and bestowed with government, justice, administrative or military functions and prerogatives by the king.

Conclusion

While it was manned and cared, Roman frontiers made remarkably well its defensive duties. While building and campaigning emperors kept the system at full strength and punished the raiding parties with expeditions to Barbarian soil, frontier lands could maintain and feed the legions, holding a planned Roman way of life around urban centers featuring commerce and intensive herding, agriculture and field working. When government began to treat reluctantly such vital questions, all system began to crumble. Abandoned and stripped of man-

³⁵ H. WOLFRAM, *History of the Goths*. Los Angeles - London 1988, p. 213.

³⁶ B. S. BACHRACH, *Merovingian Military Organization 481-751*. Minneapolis 1972.

³⁷ J. M. O'FLYNN, *Generalissimos of the Western Roman Empire*. Alberta 1983, and especially P. MACGEORGE, *Late Roman Warlords*. Oxford 2002.

³⁸ Cf. R. COLLINS, *Visigothic Spain: 409-711*. Oxford 2004.

power, the defensive net sunk. Retreating both imperial court and Praetorian Prefect from Trier around 394 was the fatal blow marking the abandon of Gaul and the beginning of the end for the Roman Empire in the West.

Мигел П. Санчо Гомез
КОНСТАНТИН, КОНСТАНС И COMES REI MILITARIS (306-350)

Криза III века и војна анархија донеле су нове промене на целокупној територији Римског Царства, углавном због нове улоге хришћанства, другачије државне идеологије и политике Константина I. Међутим, поменуте промене одразиле су се и на функционисање војске, иако је углавном функционисала по Диоклецијановим моделима. За време Константина I изграђене су бројне куле, војни путеви, мостови са утврђењима нарочито дуж лимеса реке Роне. Константинову стратегију наследио је његов млађи син Констанс I, нарочито у војним подухватима против варвара у Британији и Галији. Констанс I је, уз поштовање очеве идеологије, оформио нови војни ранг, а посебно је допринео јачању граница на Западу: *comes rei militaris*.

