

A summary of the doctoral thesis 'Military Elites and their Influence on the Eastern Roman Empire during the reigns of Theodosius II, Marcian, and Leo I' by mgr Łukasz Pigoński written under the supervision of prof. Mirosław J. Leszka on the Faculty of History and Philosophy on the University of Łódź.

The aim of the dissertation is to present the Eastern Roman military elite against the background of the events of the fifth century, and to show their influence on the functioning of the empire in the period in question. The main part of the thesis consists of three chapters, an extensive introduction and conclusion.

In the *Introduction* I define the term 'military elites' which appears through the work. This group consists mainly of military commanders serving in the rank of *magister militum*, the commander-in-chief of late Roman field armies. In this context, I present basic information about field armies in late antiquity. I define the command system in the Eastern Roman Empire during the period in question, and present assumptions about it that influenced the research process in the main part of the thesis. The introductory chapter concludes with a presentation of the sources used to write the dissertation, and a definition of the specific problems and challenges involved in their analysis, in the context of the presented topic.

In the first main chapter of the dissertation, *The Military Elite during the Reign of Theodosius II*, I present the process of the formation of the military elite during the reign of Theodosius II. I begin by outlining the background to this era that was the revolt of Gainas, before moving on to describe the times of domination at the court of the prefect Antemius. I show, how his fall and the rise to power of the emperor's sister, Pulcheria, correlated with the emergence of more information about the military elite. This is followed by a description of the course of the war with Persia and how it affected the rise of military commanders, and then, I describe the campaign in Italy led by Ardaburius the elder against the usurper John, in which Flavius Aspar, a fundamental figure in the context of the subject of this work, who also commanded the expedition against the Vandals in 431, first appears. I then present relations with the Huns in the 420s and 430s, in order to explain in this context the rise of Plinta's influence at the court. After presenting the early period of Theodosius' reign, marked by wars but generally successful for the empire, I move on to outline the events that made up the disastrous years 441 and 447. I describe the failed expedition against the Vandals in 441, and how the empire's enemies, the Persians in the east and the Huns in the north, took advantage of the absence of Roman troops. I pay particular attention to the Huns, who became the main threat to the eastern empire during this period, and whose invasion in 447 shook

the empire to its foundations. I present an interpretation of the above events, trying, apart from reconstructing the course of events on the basis of fragmentary sources, to show how these defeats affected the Eastern Roman military elite, their status and position. In the context of the peace negotiations with the Huns, I outline the formation of an opposition against Theodosius and his minister Chrysaphius, led by prominent military commanders such as Aspar and Flavius Zeno, and how dissatisfaction with the emperor's foreign policy was an important factor in the consolidation of the Eastern Roman military elite into a relatively coherent group with common political goals.

The sudden death of the emperor completely changed the political situation in Constantinople, allowing the military elite, and above all Aspar, to place a candidate close to themselves on the throne, who was Marcian, which I describe in the second chapter of *The Military Elite during the Reign of Marcian*. By making a thorough analysis of the available source materials I try to reconstruct the course of events that led to the assumption of the throne by Marcian, and I prove his close relations with particular commanders. In the following part of the chapter I outline the changes in foreign policy which the emperor implemented and which, I argue, were inspired by the military elites around him. First and foremost this concerned relations with the Huns, to whom Marcian stopped paying tribute and against whom he began to pursue an uncompromising policy. Because of the emperor's efforts to strengthen the defences of the northern frontier, and his personal involvement in the war effort, the Huns concentrated their raids in the west. Contrary to common findings, I demonstrate that Marcian sought to support the western empire in 452. I then outline how the emperor's policies influenced the resolution of the Hun problem. In the following part, I reconstruct the course of the other military operations that the Roman army conducted during the reign of Marcian: the battles against the Arabs, the Blemmyes and the Nobades, and the intervention in Lazica. On this basis I prove that the reign of Marcian was the key moment summarising the formation of the Eastern Roman military elite in the period under discussion, and the time of their greatest influence on the functioning of the state. In a sense, Marcian was an emperor of soldiers and an emperor for soldiers.

After seven years of Marcian's reign, Emperor Leo ascended to the Eastern Roman throne. His reign represents a unique episode, in relation to the growing conflict between the emperor and Aspar, which is the focus of the third chapter of *The Military Elite during the Reign of Leo I*. I begin by outlining the circumstances surrounding Leo's assumption of the throne and the role Aspar played in this. I also consider whether Aspar himself could, and whether he wanted to, take the throne at all, and take a position on Antemius as a potential candidate. In the following section, I outline the early period of Leo's reign, a time of Aspar's dominance in political life. I describe how Leo tried to pursue his political ambitions despite his weak position. I also outline Leo's response to the

unrest in Alexandria, and the conflict with the Ostrogoths and how this resulted in Leo's collaboration with Marcellinus, ruler of Dalmatia. I then analyse the events of 463, when a son was born to Leo. Although the child died quickly, this event caused Leo to think openly about pursuing his own dynastic ambitions. These, however, conflicted with Aspar's plans, and as long as the chief maintained his power, Leo was forced to seek a compromise. However, when Tarasikodissa-Zenon arrived in Constantinople in 466 with evidence of treachery by Aspar's son Ardaburius, this set in motion a series of events that escalated the conflict between emperor and chieftain. These are described later in the chapter: Leo's ignoring of Aspar's advice in the context of the conflict between the Ostrogoths and the Sciri, Aspar's insubordination in the battles against the Huns of Dengisich, and Leo's actions to intervene in the West and expedition against the Vandals. As I demonstrate, for Aspar, Leo's policies were a repetition of Theodosius' mistakes, which the leader objected to, but Leo skilfully exploited political alliances as well as installing people loyal to himself in military positions, undermining Aspar's position in the military elite. The expedition against the Vandals of 468 failed, however. Leo tried again two years later, but more importantly, his failures allowed Aspar to regain some of his former influence. I then describe Aspar's intrigue in connection with the Anagastes revolt and the attempted assassination of Zeno, and how protests in Constantinople against the recognition of Aspar's son, Patricius, as Leo's successor led the emperor to conclude that the only solution was to get rid of the powerful leader, which happened in 471. Unfortunately for the emperor, his victory was a Pyrrhic one, as it was too late for the emperor to save what he cared about, and to make matters worse, the Gothic leader Theodoric Strabo stepped forward on Aspar's behalf, with whom fighting occupied the rest of the ruler's reign.

In the *Conclusions*, I refer to the popular attempts in the literature to approach the topic analysed by me in ethnic, dynastic and religious contexts. I present a detailed critical analysis of the arguments in favour of each of them, based on the findings of the main part of the work. In the conclusion which follows, I show that although dynastic issues were among the most important for the topic under discussion, they should be accompanied by a conflict between rulers and representatives of the military elite over the direction of foreign policy which, although it appears repeatedly on the pages of the sources, has not been sufficiently taken into account as a factor determining the dynamics of political life in the Eastern Roman Empire during the reigns of Theodosius II, Marcian and Leo.

The whole work is completed with the *List of Abbreviations* and a *Bibliography* divided into primary sources, respecting of their various editions, and secondary literature.

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