

BYZANTINA LODZIENSIA

XLVII

**The Shields of the Empire:
Eastern Roman Military Elites
during the Reigns of the
Emperors Theodosius II,
Marcian and Leo I**

Łukasz Pigoński



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seria wydawnicza Katedry Historii Bizancjum UŁ



założona przez

Profesora Waldemara Cerana

w

1997 r.

№ XLVII

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 WYDAWNICTWO
UNIwersytetu
ŁÓDZKIEGO

Łódź–Kraków 2023

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Published by Łódź University Press & Jagiellonian University Press

First edition, Łódź–Kraków 2023

W.10797.22.0.M

ISBN 978-83-8331-094-7 – paperback Łódź University Press

ISBN 978-83-233-5230-3 – paperback Jagiellonian University Press

ISBN 978-83-8331-095-4 – electronic version Łódź University Press

ISBN 978-83-233-7431-2 – electronic version Jagiellonian University Press

Łódź University Press
34A Matejki St., 90-237 Łódź
www.wydawnictwo.uni.lodz.pl
e-mail: ksiegarnia@uni.lodz.pl
phone: 42 635 55 77



Distribution outside Poland

Jagiellonian University Press
9/2 Michałowskiego St., 31-126 Kraków
phone: +48 (12) 631 01 97, +48 (12) 663 23 81, fax +48 (12) 663 23 83
cell phone: +48 506 006 674, e-mail: sprzedaz@wuj.pl, www.wuj.pl



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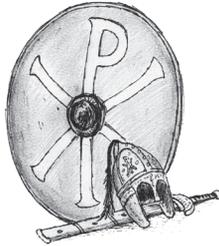
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Introduction



The military history of the Roman Empire in the fifth century is perceived to have some interesting peculiarities. Recent decades have seen much growth in the interest in late antiquity, and thanks to this development, the earlier misconception of the late Roman Empire as a declining state on a trajectory towards inevitable fall has largely been done away with. However, while the focus has been on rehabilitating late Roman culture, it has not quite been the case for the political and military aspects. After all, the ‘soft power’ of the Roman civilization contributed to the survival of its legacy, even after the dissolution of its political institutions in the West. If there have been attempts to defend the leadership under which the Empire crumbled, they generally focused on select, extraordinary individuals among whom one can name Stilicho, Majorianus or, the famous ‘last Roman’, Flavius Aetius. There are two notable points which all of these examples have in common. Firstly, they all faced adversity from a corrupt establishment or lesser, power-hungry opponents, who ultimately brought about their downfall. Secondly, they were all from the Western part of the Roman Empire.

It is interesting that the leadership in the East is so rarely lauded for the accomplishment of preserving its own part of the Empire. However, its survival cannot be simply attributed to external factors. While it may be true, albeit difficult to quantify, that the East had a superior economic base, it was also dealing with a society far more fractured by religious conflicts. The pressure from the

barbarians was no less of a challenge and sharing a border with a peer superpower of late antiquity, Sassanid Persia, stretched the limited defensive capabilities of the Eastern military. The fact that the Eastern Roman Empire managed to weather the storm of the tumultuous migration period has to be, at least to an extent, credited to those responsible for its protection: the emperors who decided on the foreign policy and the military commanders who took action when diplomacy failed.

The object of the present work is that second group, the military elite, however, with an emphasis on the variety of ways in which its representatives affected the functioning of the Eastern Roman state. This means that just as much of the focus has been placed on the relationships between the generals themselves on one hand and the generals and the emperors on the other. One of the observations which I made at the very early stages of the research was that many of the military leaders were not satisfied with simply being the executors of the Imperial will and rather wanted to be involved in the process of decision-making. The throne, however, was not always responsive to their wishes; having to consider many more factors, the emperors often disagreed with the priorities set by the military. This was not, however, because one side was motivated by selfish reasons or acting in otherwise underhanded ways, while the other was clearly in the right. The resulting political conflicts were complex and originated from the difference of perspectives. Analysis of how they played out will constitute a major portion of the following chapters.

One cannot, however, approach the impact of the military elite on the political landscape of the Empire without the broader context of its duty: the protection of the state and its citizens from external threats. Unfortunately, the wars which the Eastern Roman Empire fought during the discussed period rarely get the attention they deserve. Because of this unsatisfactory state of affairs, I have seen the need to re-analyse and synthesize the events which form the background to the main problems outlined in the present work. For this reason, the following proposes a new outlook on the underappreciated military conduct of the Eastern Roman army in the years 408–471.

This book is the result of my long-lasting interest in the history of the Mediterranean in the fifth century, the migration period, and the struggle of the Roman Empire to survive this difficult epoch. My previous research was concerned with the diplomatic and military responses of the Eastern Roman Empire under the rule of emperors Marcian and Leo I to the crisis in the West and the two main barbarian threats, the Vandals and the Huns¹. The present work, which

¹ Ł. Pięgoński, *Polityka zachodnia cesarzy Marcjana (450–457) i Leona I (457–474)*, Łódź 2019.

is based on the Ph.D. thesis entitled *Military Elites and their Influence on the Eastern Roman Empire during the Reigns of Theodosius II, Marcian, and Leo I* which I defended in 2021 at the University of Łódź, expands and elaborates on the ideas developed throughout my earlier academic career.

In the following pages I intend to collate and re-evaluate existing sources and interpretations related to the topic of the military elites in the fifth-century Eastern Roman Empire. Even though there is no shortage of contributions, they often present conflicting views, while certain problems remain untouched. I shall try, to the best of my ability, to fill the gaps where possible and provide a coherent historical narrative. It is, however, important to note that my views often stand in contrast to those which predominate in the scholarship. The present work is thus less of a synthesis of up-to-date findings and more of an interpretative proposition, a novel look at the problems it tackles. I have paid special attention to basing my arguments on as strong research as possible and always to present a detailed overview of established theses whenever I disagree with them, so that the reader may judge my views himself. Nevertheless, I am aware of the contentious nature of such an approach, and if the presented ideas do not gain recognition in the scholarly world, I do at least hope that they will serve as a subject for discussion which is interesting and worthy of consideration.

The book consists of four main chapters. The first one serves as an introduction to the problems outlined in the present work, providing a cursory overview of the primary sources, the structure of the late antique military and its command, the prerogatives of the generals, and the ways in which they secured power and influence. The following three chapters, dedicated to the reigns of the respective emperors, recount political and military events, focusing on the areas of activity of the members of the military elites. The book also includes two appendices which contain additional arguments elaborating on some of the views expressed in the main text which did not fit well in the structure of the narrative.

I would like to extend sincere thanks to those who have reviewed the present work: professors Rafał Kosiński and Marek Wilczyński for their valuable and constructive critical remarks which certainly helped iron out many mistakes and gave me directions on how to improve it.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Mirosław J. Leszka, the supervisor of the thesis whose guidance was invaluable in helping me

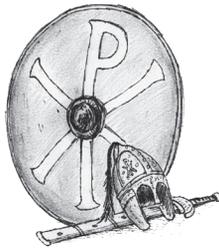
navigate through the intricacies of the topic of the fifth-century military elites. His patience and unfaltering support were essential in my enduring through the highs and lows of writing a doctoral thesis.

I would like to thank Professor Teresa Wolińska who guided me in the earliest stages of my academic research. In addition, I would like to express gratitude to all of the members of the Department of Byzantine Studies and the 'Cera-neum' Center of the University of Łódź, Professor Kokoszko, Professor Bralewski, Professor Marinow, Professor Brzozowska, Dr. Filipczak, Dr. Kompa, Dr. Wolski, and the others whom I had the honour to meet over the years.

I would also like to extend sincere thanks to Professor Hans Boemelburg and the University of Giessen for their hospitality and the opportunity to gather many scholarly resources which were instrumental in the writing of the present work.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family on whom I always knew I could count. Without you and your support this work would never have come to be.

This book was written as part of a research project financed by the National Research Centre (Poland). Decision number DEC-2018/31/B/HS3/03038 (*Wschodniorzymskie elity wojskowe od Teodozjusza II do Anastazjusza I (408–518). Studium społeczno-polityczne*).



C H A P T E R
I

The Military in the Fifth Century



When one studies the political and military history of the fifth-century Eastern Roman Empire, one thing becomes apparent: the presence and influence of those holding the highest ranks in the army can be widely observed in the sources. The immense impact that the powerful generals had on the various affairs and the ways in which they interacted with the state, society, and each other is thus the starting point for this work.

Who Constitutes ‘Military Elites’?

For the lack of a better alternative, I decided to classify the people mentioned above as ‘military elites’. Those who could be defined under that term usually served the Empire in the highest rank of *magister militum*, the master of arms. However, the choice of a vague term ‘elite’ over selecting a specific military office was my conscious decision. First of all, it was done to indicate that the aim of the present work is not to put forward an administrative survey or prosopography of all known persons holding certain rank. Due to the nature of the sources,

such approach would create a woefully incomplete and inconsistent image of the group. It is important to note that it is more common that we do not know who served in the rank of *magister militum* than we do. Even when the sources speak of military commanders, it is largely only the interpretation of the scholars attributing various offices to vague passing mentions in ancient texts. Legal documents, which are the only truly reliable sources for determining the exact ranks at exact points in time, are few and far in-between.

In addition to the uncertainty mentioned above, there were instances when military officers of lower ranks played just as important role in the events shaping the political landscape of the fifth century. Thus the extraordinary impact that the military elites had on the events, which are the subject of analysis in the following work, is not necessarily resulting from their serving in specific military offices. Naturally, it was a factor, but as there were many prominent *magistri militum* of great power and influence, some barely appear in the sources while others are completely unknown. In addition, some commanders of lower ranks had a much greater impact on the fate of the Empire than their place in the military hierarchy would indicate.

Furthermore, it is a safe assumption that every known powerful member of the military elite was not just an important individual. He had numerous clients and supporters, a network of associates, and various connections in the army. The sources at our disposal only rarely allow for such a unique glimpse into the people who were in the background, but arguably constituted a foundation of their superiors' power. Sadly, oftentimes that background is unreachable through the data at our disposal, however, it would be, in my opinion, misrepresenting the complexity of the group that constituted the military elite, if the title of the present work mentioned only one particular rank of commanders. This holds true, even if the reality of the situation is that its focus had to be placed on select *magistri militum*, both due to their disproportionate impact on the analysed events, and the selective nature of the sources.

This study is, thus, dedicated to the military elites, both as a group and individual persons that constituted it, and how they affected the Eastern Roman Empire under the rule of the three emperors, Theodosius II, Marcian, and Leo. I decided to select those specific reigns, because the period they cover almost exactly coincide with the emergence of the new military elite, its rise to power and prominence, which was eventually successfully challenged by the emperor what resulted in the fall of the established elite, and the birth of a new one. While the genesis of those events can be traced back to the reign of Arcadius, and the story of the new elites that emerged under Leo continues throughout the reigns of Zeno and Anastasius, I decided to narrow the scope of the present work to the events of the years 408–474. Such approach allowed for an

in-depth analysis of that important period which does not always feature prominently in the literature that generally tends to concentrate on the events in the Western part of the Empire instead.

An Overview of the Sources

Unfortunately, research on the topic in question is limited by the availability of the sources. Even when establishing basic facts about Eastern Roman generals, the researcher needs to realize that there are only singular documental sources for the military elite in the period between 408 and 474 in the Eastern Roman Empire. The most important one is *Notitia Dignitatum*¹, a list of offices of the Roman Empire; it is indispensable for any research into the military and administration in late antiquity. This document contains detailed lists of high military offices, including all the posts of *magistri militum* alongside the units under their command. However, there are multiple problems with it, most of which have already been discussed in previous parts of the chapter. In addition to *Notitia*, there are collections of laws, the codes of Theodosius and Justinian, which contain legislation pertaining to military matters, sometimes addressed to field commanders. That being said, compilations of laws provide only fragmentary information, only in regard to specific circumstances in which these laws were issued. They are far from representative as far as the development of the military elite and its influence on the Eastern Roman Empire is concerned. Documentary sources in this case are invaluable, but woefully insufficient for nearly any topic concerning the main part of the narrative. Thus, for the most part, they serve as credible but complementary sources.

Most of the information regarding the military elites has to be discerned from various narrative sources. Since the interests of ancient authors usually concerned political and military events and the period in question was a turbulent one, the members of the military elite are often recorded in the pages of histories and chronicles.

Probably the most important one for this period is the *History* of Priscus of Panium², an Eastern Roman historian and diplomat. This classicizing work concentrated mainly on the foreign policy of the Eastern Roman Empire. Its

¹ M. Kuliowski, *Notitia Dignitatum as a Historical Source*, *Hi* 49, 2000, p. 358–377; A. Szopa, *Notitia Dignitatum – „najbardziej rzymski z dokumentów”?*, *ReG* 8, 2015, p. 183–191.

² In the sources there are three different versions of the title and it is impossible to say what it was in reality. Thus, from now on I will continue to refer to it by this title for consistency's sake. Cf. R.C. Blockley, *Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire*, t. I, Liverpool 1981, p. 49.

author was a state official involved in politics and diplomacy of the time, thus he likely had a very good understanding of the events the present work concerns³. Unfortunately, Priscus' *History* did not survive in full, but only in fragments collected in *Excerpta de legationibus* of Constantine Porphyrogenetos and some references by other historians who used it. Thankfully, almost all authors who later wrote about the events of the fifth century utilized his work in some capacity.

One of those was the famous Procopius of Caesarea, the author of the *History of the Wars*⁴. Even though it concentrates on the conflicts fought by the emperor Justinian, the extensive digressions and references provide quite detailed information on the earlier periods, especially on the campaigns against the Vandals. Be that as it may, the historian did likely modify the original account by Priscus to suit the needs of his narrative⁵. Priscus' *History* was also used by Antiochene authors: John Malalas and John of Antioch. The former was the author of *Chronographia* which describes the events from the creation of the world to ca. 563–574⁶. It was a po-

³ On Priscus and his work, cf. *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 906 (s.v. *Priscus 1*); R.C. Blockley, *Fragmentary...*, p. 49–70; R.C. Blockley, *The Development of Greek Historiography. Priscus, Malchus and Candidus*, [in:] *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity. Fourth to Sixth Century A.D.*, ed. G. Marasco, Boston 2003, p. 289–312; D. Rohrbacher, *Historians of Late Antiquity*, London 2002, p. 82–92; B. Baldwin, *Priscus of Panium*, B 50, 1980, p. 18–61. There are also several important works, focusing on specific problems: B. Croke, *The Context and Date of Priscus Fragment 6*, CP 78, 1983, p. 297–308; D. Brodka, *Priskos und der Feldzug des Basiliskos gegen Geiserich (468)*, [in:] *Griechische Profanhistoriker des fünften nachristlichen Jahrhunderts*, ed. T. Stickler, B. Bleckmann, Stuttgart 2014, p. 103–120; D. Brodka, *Priskos von Panion und Kaiser Marcian. Eine Quellenuntersuchung zu Procop. 3,4,1–11, Evagr. HE 2,1, Theoph. AM 5943 und Nic. Kall. HE 15,1*, Mil 9, 2012, p. 145–162.

⁴ A. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, London 1996; A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity*, Philadelphia 2004; D. Brodka, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie in der spätantiken Historiographie. Studien zu Prokopios von Kaisareia, Agathias von Myrina und Theophylaktos Simokattes*, Frankfurt am Main 2004, p. 14–151; For a more thorough and recent (2003–2014) bibliography on this essential Byzantine historian alongside with a commentary, cf. G. Greatrex, *Perceptions of Procopius in Recent Scholarship*, HOJ 8, 2014, p. 76–121.

⁵ A. Cameron, *Procopius...*, p. 211.

⁶ Elisabeth Jeffreys (*Malalas' Sources*, [in:] *Studies in John Malalas*, ed. E. Jeffreys, B. Croke, R. Scott, Sydney 1990, p. 1–91) suggests that Malalas could have used Priscus' work, even if indirectly. On Malalas and his work, cf. *Studies in John Malalas*, ed. E. Jeffreys, B. Croke, R. Scott, Sydney 1990; B. Croke, *Introduction*, [in:] *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, ed. E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys, R. Scott, Sydney 1986, p. XXI–XLI; M. Meier, C. Drohisn, S. Priwitzer, *Einleitung*, [in:] *Johannes Malalas, Weltchronik*, ed. J. Thurn, M. Meier, Stuttgart 2009, p. 1–37; E. Jeffreys, *The Beginning of Byzantine Chronography: John Malalas*, [in:] *Greek and Roman Historiography...*, p. 497–527; M. Kokoszko, *Descriptions of personal appearance in John Malalas' Chronicle*, Łódź 1998, p. 6–11.

pular work concentrating primarily on the history of his native town, sometimes confused about more distant events, however, it can still provide valuable and often unique information. The work of John of Antioch unfortunately survived only in fragments, but because of his extensive usage of Priscus' work it is being used to reconstruct the latter parts of the *History*⁷.

Priscus was also likely used by Theophanes the Confessor in his *Chronographia*⁸ when describing the events of the fifth century. He was a monk living at the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries, who continued the work of his friend, George Synkellos, of writing a history from the creation of the world⁹. Due to his having been so distant from the events he described, his account is prone to misunderstandings and inaccuracies; however, he seems to have related the narrative of his sources relatively directly and with little conscious alterations of his own.

Another historian that needs to be mentioned is Jordanes, the sixth-century Gothic monk and author of *Getica* and *Romana*¹⁰. The former source is especially valuable as it focuses on the history of the Gothic peoples. Thus, it provides many unique information, however, its veracity may at times be questionable due to a pro-Gothic bias. It is also likely that Jordanes used Priscus as a source.

Unfortunately, another source that certainly would have been very helpful in researching this topic, the *History* of Candidus¹¹, has not been used as extensively as that of Priscus. Only a short synopsis written by Photius remains; despite its brevity, it is still invaluable for understanding the reign of Leo.

Some information regarding the later periods of Leo's reign can be found in the partially surviving *Byzantine History* of Malchus of Philadelphia; however, this historian focused primarily on periods beyond the scope of the present work¹².

⁷ R.C. Blockley, *Fragmentary...*, p. 114.

⁸ A. Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (650–850)*, Athens 1998, p. 205–234.

⁹ Cf. A. Kompa, *In search of Syncellus' and Theophanes' own words: the authorship of the Chronographia revisited*, TM 19, 2015, p. 73–92.

¹⁰ W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550–800). Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon*, New Jersey 1988, p. 20–111; B. Croke, *Latin Historiography and the Barbarian Kingdoms*, [in:] *Greek and Roman Historiography...*, p. 367–375; R. Kasperski, *Teodoryk Wielki i Kasjodor. Studia nad tworzeniem „tradycji dynastycznej Amalów”*, Kraków 2013.

¹¹ H. Brandt, *Zur historiographischen konzeption des Isaurers Candidus*, [in:] *Griechische Profanhistoriker des fünften nachchristlichen Jahrhundert*, ed. T. Sticker, B. Bleckmann, Stuttgart 2014, p. 162–167; M. Meier, *Candidus: um die Geschichte der Isauriers*, [in:] *Griechische Profanhistoriker...*, p. 171–193; R.C. Blockley, *The development...*, p. 312–314.

¹² R.C. Blockley, *Fragmentary...*, p. 71–74; H.U. Wiemer, *Malchos von Philadelphia. Die Vandalen und das Ende des Kaisertums im Westen*, [in:] *Griechische Profanhistoriker...*, p. 121–126.

Even though they appear unrelated to the events at hand, Western chronicles also provide some important information, especially pertaining to Eastern military involvement in the West. Out of those the primary ones are the works of a Spanish bishop, Hydatius¹³, and a secretary to the Pope, Prosper of Aquitaine¹⁴. Those accounts are supplemented by panegyrics of the poet Sidonius¹⁵, especially important is the one on the emperor Anthemius, who was, before his accession in Rome, an Eastern Roman general. Around the same time Marcellinus Comes wrote his *Chronicle*¹⁶. It is another important account, especially since its author used otherwise unknown Byzantine chronicles which did not survive to our times.

One more important group of sources are the various Christian texts, Church histories, and hagiographies, all of which focus mostly on religious developments, however, against the background of socio-political history. Thus, they still provide valuable information regarding the military elite, and not only in the areas of the generals' relationships with the Church and their religious convictions. For example, the primary source for Theodosius' first war against Persia is the *Church History* of Socrates Scholasticus¹⁷; however, his narrative ends in 439. Contemporary to Socrates' work was the *Church History* of Sozomen¹⁸, which reaches until about 425. Another, much later *Church History* that bears mentioning was written by Evagrius Scholasticus, which comprises of six books,

¹³ On Hydatius and his work, cf. C. Cardelle de Hartman, *Philologische Studien zur Chronik des Hydatius von Chaves*, Stuttgart 1994; R.W. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and Consularia Constantinopolitana*, Oxford 1993, p. 3–68; H. Börm, *Hydatius von Aquae Flaviae und die Einheit des Römischen Reiches im 5. Jahrhundert*, [in:] *Griechische Profanhistoriker...*, p. 195–214; G. Zecchini, *Latin Historiography: Jerome, Orosius and the Western Chroniclers*, [in:] *Greek and Roman Historiography...*, p. 342–344; A. Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication in Late Antique West 411–533*, Cambridge 2003, p. 36–83.

¹⁴ J.M. Kotter, M. Becker, *Einleitung*, [in:] Prosper Tiro, *Chronik. Laterculus Regnum Vandalorum et Alanorum*, ed. J.M. Kotter, M. Becker, Paderborn 2016, p. 3–60; *PLRE*, vol. II, p. 926–927, (s.v. Prosper Tiro); G. Zecchini, *Latin...*, p. 338–340.

¹⁵ J. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome AD 407–485*, Oxford 1994; D. Alvarez Jimenez, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fourth Punic War*, [in:] *New Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, ed. D.H. de la Fuente, Cambridge 2011, p. 158–172; J. Styka, *Sydoniusz Apollinaris i kultura literacka w Galii V wieku*, Kraków 2008; A. Horvath, *The Education of Sidonius Apollinaris in the Light of his Citations*, ACUSD 36, 2000, p. 151–162.

¹⁶ B. Croke, *Count Marcellinus and his Chronicle*, New York 2001; M.J. Leszka, Sz. Wierzbinski, *Komes Marcellin vir clarissimus. Historyk i jego dzieło*, Łódź 2022, p. 11–101.

¹⁷ Th. Urbainczyk, *Socrates of Constantinople. Historian of Church and State*, Ann Arbor 1997; G. Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories. Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret and Evagrius*, Paris 1986, p. 167–189.

¹⁸ G. Chesnut, *The First...*, p. 192–200.

covering the period from 431 to 593¹⁹. What makes this work valuable is the fact that its author was among those dependent on Priscus.

In addition to these works, one should mention a very important and informative hagiographical text, the *Life of St. Daniel the Stylite*²⁰. Even though it is an overtly religious source, due to the involvement of the saint in political matters as an advisor to the emperor Leo and the interests of the author, it records many political events, especially those relating to the conflict between Leo and Aspar and the rise of Tarasikodissa-Zeno.

This list does not exhaust all the sources that have been used in the present work. Some singular remarks regarding issues of interest to the present work can also be found in *Chronicon Paschale*, *Church Histories* of Philostorgius and Theodoret, the works of John Zonaras, *De Magistratibus* of John the Lydian, the *History* of Zosimus, and the Armenian histories of Yeghishe, Moses of Khoren, and Ghazar of Parp'i. The letters of Theodoret of Cyrrhus, primarily those addressed to generals, are also helpful in painting the whole picture.

The above overview is meant not only to present the *corpus* of the sources that has been used as a basis of this dissertation, but also to illustrate a major problem facing the research into the subject matter. There is not one source that could provide a comprehensive support for the narrative; instead, there is a variety of texts, often surviving only in fragments, written from different perspectives, focusing on different things, and conceived in different time periods and places. It would appear that this could allow for extensive cross-referencing and facilitate views from different angles, but, unfortunately, that is rarely the case. Many events are only reported in single sources and the narratives tend to overlap only when the most famous events are described. Considering that the focus of the present work is a very specific aspect of late antique history, there is rarely a satisfactory amount of information at our disposal.

In addition, it needs to be realized that none of the sources specialize in the topic of the military of the fifth century²¹. The only author who was a member

¹⁹ P. Allen, *Evagrius Scholasticus the Church Historian*, Leuven 1981, p. 1–20; O. Jurcz, *Historia literatury bizantyńskiej*, Wrocław 1984, p. 46; M. Whitby, *Introduction*, [in:] *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, ed. M. Whitby, Liverpool 2000, p. XIII–XLIII; K. Ginter, *Wizerunek władców bizantyńskich w Historii Kościelnej Ewagriusza Scholastyka*, Łódź 2018, p. 19–79.

²⁰ R. Kosiński, *Holiness and Power. Constantinopolitan Holy Men and Authority in the 5th Century*, Berlin 2016, p. 119–129.

²¹ There is one source in that period which vaguely fits such a description, a dissertation on military matters written by Vegetius. It is a very important source on the late Roman army, armaments, training regime, etc.; however, the author was not a military professional, so his analysis is not without faults. Unfortunately, it is of very limited use for this dissertation on account of having been written in

of the military (and even then only in a loose sense) was Procopius, who wrote from the perspective of almost a century after the events he is described. Priscus, due to his involvement in the structures of the state and diplomatic experience probably had a good idea of the chain of command, but the military is not the focus of his work. The other authors were only further detached from military knowledge and usually also more distant chronologically.

This causes numerous problems when trying to establish the information base for the subject. For example, most of the sources do not use technical terms. The most common term denoting a military commander is στρατηγός (*strategos*)²². Many modern scholars seem to assume that whenever it is used, it specifically signifies the *magister militum*; however, it is most likely a misinterpretation. To give an analogy, when a modern news outlet, or even a scholar, uses the word 'general', unless it is of utmost importance to his narrative, he would not specify whether he means 'brigadier general', 'lieutenant general', 'general major', 'general', or the 'general of the army'²³. Thus, unless the author of the source in question was being very specific, which would be a rare occurrence, or unless the source is a legal text displaying a clear application of technical terms, the usual assumption should be that the sources are vague when referring to military ranks.

This is one of the primary reasons why this dissertation does not aim to offer a prosopography of *magistri militum*, but instead focuses on presenting the military elites and their influence, as well as their impact on the politics of the time, against the background of the events of the fifth century during the reigns of Theodosius II, Marcian, and Leo.

The Roman Army

Naturally, the primary and most obvious reason for the importance of the members of the military elite was their role in serving as the commanders of the army. Roman Army of the late antiquity barely resembled the iconic legions

the West, being filled with anachronisms, and taking little interest in the topic of the chain of command. For more information on Vegetius and his work, cf. N.P. Milner, *Introduction*, [in:] *Vegetius: Epitome of Military Science*, ed. N.P. Milner, Liverpool 1996, p. XIII–XLIII; F.L. Müller, *Einleitung*, [in:] *Publii Flavii Vegetii Renati, Epitoma rei militaris*, ed. F.L. Müller, Stuttgart 1997, p. 11–26.

²² Which simply means 'commander'. The other commonly used term was στρατηλάτης (*stratelates*) which appears in Zosimus (II, 33) when he is referring to the establishing of the office of *magister militum*. Cf. A.E.R. Bök, *The Roman Magistri in the Civil and Military Service of the Empire*, CP 26, 1915, p. 119–120.

²³ As per the officer ranks in the United States Army.