**The Late Roman Army**

P Southern and K R Dixon

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Review by Jane Webster

This welcome summary of textual and archaeological information on the late Roman army examines the period from Septimus Severus to the end of the Western Empire. Historically, the volume thus works forwards from the Severan military reforms through to the more far-reaching measures undertaken by Constantine, charting the gradual separation of the field and frontier armies. It also takes a useful (if very brief) look at the demise of the army in the fifth century.

Much of the ground covered in this book with regard to military equipment has been recently trodden by Bishop and Coulston's (1993) *Roman Military Equipment* (also published by Batsford). But even so, published within Batsford's *Archaeology of the Roman Empire* series, and a companion volume to Southern and Dixon's *Roman Cavalry*, this book is comprehensively (and often beautifully) illustrated, and will be of value to those exploring military aspects of the late Roman period.

I do have two, interrelated, reservations about this volume. The first concerns the way in which the book separates, rather than attempts to synthesise, its 'historical' and 'archaeological' source material. This tendency is best illustrated by the chapter headings: *Crisis and Transition, Barbarians and Bureaucrats, Recruitment, Conditions of Service, The Morale of the Late Roman Army* and *The End of the Army* are heavily reliant on documentary sources; *Equipment, Fortifications, and Siege Warfare* are equally heavily dependent on excavated evidence (and almost all of the excellent illustrations in the book are confined to these three chapters). While, of course, there is some measure of inevitability in all of this, it is unfortunate, I think, that text and archaeology are rarely used proactively in this book. This is particularly in evidence in the chapter on *Conditions of Service*, where the growing body of archaeological evidence articulating the daily lives of soldiers and their families at forts is barely mentioned. Thus in addition to the excellent discussion of the equipment of Roman soldiers (Chapter 6), it would have been preferable to include some discussion of the less overtly militaristic aspects of material culture - from diet to pottery to iconography and epigraphy - which also formed part of soldiers' daily lives.

The mention of families brings me to my second reservation: that what is lost in this divide between textual sources and 'archaeology' in this volume is a social history of the Roman Army at precisely the point at which documented military reforms make such an enquiry particularly interesting. For example, in the third century soldiers were officially permitted to marry and have their families with them on service. Yet the ways in which this aspect of military and civilian (indigenous) interaction contributed to the shaping of provincial society is ignored. Indeed, 'marriage and the family' is reduced to a single paragraph here. Equally, the relationship between forts and *vici* is wholly overlooked. Similarly, the late Roman Army is characterised by the use of *Foederati*, yet the ethnic tensions and re-negotiations which would have accompanied this dependence on recruits from beyond the frontier is not discussed: the Roman Army firmly remains the *Roman* Army.
I should finally note that I do object to the continued use of the term 'barbarian' in studies of the late Roman period (a topic which has lately also exercised other readers of the E-mail ROMARCH list!). This is not wearisome political correctness on my part: I would suggest that it is precisely because Southern and Dixon still problematise the history of the Late Roman Army in terms of Barbarians and Bureaucrats (the title of Chapter 3) and the 'Barbarization of the Army' (p46) that what is missing from this book is a study of ethnic interaction between the 'Roman' army (in all its own ethnic diversity) and the indigenous peoples of the provinces.

There is much in this book to be lauded, and it will be a useful tool for students and teachers of Roman military history and archaeology. But I would also suggest that the end result of the assumption that

'Although the numbers of barbarians in the army may have seemed excessive, the cultural and moral superiority of the Romans ensured their subjection' (p50)

is a missed opportunity to explore some critical social issues surrounding the late Roman Army, not least the issue of 'Roman-ness' itself.

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