

The subject of study within this project will be the East Roman military elites from the time of Theodosius II (408–450) until Anastasius I (491–518), which will be presented in a wide socio-political context. The topic, in spite of its importance for the study of late antiquity, has not yet been satisfactorily treated either in Polish literature or foreign. We recognize the need to undertake it for that reason. In the project, we intend to systematize, and first and foremost to supplement and deepen the knowledge of East Roman military elites, and the fruit of our research will be the writing of a monograph which will present them in a holistic manner.

The civilizational significance of the period under study cannot be overestimated. The 110 years which intervened between the start of the reign of Theodosius II and the death of Anastasius I were decidedly a critical moment in the history of Europe, during which the Western Roman Empire fell, marking out the generally accepted boundary of the ancient period. The eastern part of the Empire managed to escape that fate despite having to contend with internal tensions and barbarian forays. An answer to the question why it was so and what role in those events was played by the military elites will be an important element of the study.

We have decided to focus our research on the military elites mainly due to their exceptional importance to the functioning of the East Roman state. In the period which will be the subject of the study we find cases of generals, such as Aspar, who were powerful enough to install their own subordinates on the imperial throne, or Zeno, who donned the imperial purple himself, and Basiliscus, who decided to reach for it by force. It comes as no surprise that the researched epoch abounded in intrigue and bitter political strife in an internally-divergent military elite. Those tensions between the generals were skilfully manipulated by some of the emperors, such as Theodosius II, Leo I, or Anastasius, for the sake of improving their position and realizing their own aims.

Our study will not only have a political aspect, as we intend to concern ourselves with social questions as well. It is of particular interest for instance that the majority the generals were of a barbarian descent and had a different confession from the orthodoxy preponderant in the Empire. A paradox of the period in question is the fact that the security of a Christian empire rested in the hands of heretics and pagans. We undertake therefore to inquire into the literature of the period, especially of a religious type, in order to determine how the said situation influenced the latter group in the works of the authors of the late antiquity.

We are of the opinion that the results of the research conducted as part of the project will show themselves not only to be important to and inspire a further discussion among the scholars of the period, but will also attract the interest of a broader range of the readers of historical literature. It should be the case because our study touches on the popular military and social questions, and the events and persons presented by us, thus far unfamiliar to the Polish reader, can compete with more than a few fictional depictions by virtue of their qualities and singularity.