

# Roman Auxiliary Troops recruited from Gaul and Germany during the Principate

-abstract-

Keywords: *auxilia*, *primus pilus*, *centurio*, *decurio*, *praefectus*, *principales*, *alae*, *cohors*, Gaul, Germany, gauls, germans, tribes, provinces, Roman army, auxiliary troops.

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This paper approaches a theme studied in historiography, that of military history. It is an attempt to study the roman soldier recruited in two provinces Gaul and Germany. Coming from two different cultures we can speak of two different people meeting in a common place, the Roman army. The methodology is based mainly on the study of epigraphic inscriptions, antic writings and modern authors' studies on the Roman army. Based on military diplomas and other inscriptions I put together a timeline of when and where the auxiliary troops recruited in Gaul and Germany had stayed in various provinces of the Roman Empire. The study of some of the troops that don't appear on military diplomas was done based on epigraphic inscriptions. To

complement the information offered by military diplomas and other inscriptions I used ancient writings and modern studies on the Roman army.

This paper starts with studying the evolution of Roman auxiliary troops from their beginnings until the Principate. Starting from the time of the Republic, the Romans have used their allies and their defeated enemies to supplement their troops, especially with troops that had a specific fighting system. From the Carthage wars until the end of the Republic, the auxiliary troops, whether belonging to client kingdoms or recruited from defeated tribes, were part of the Roman army.

If until Marius's military reforms of 108 BC, the Senate supervised the recruitment of auxiliary troops one way or another, from allies or conquered peoples, after this reform the role of the leading general of the army starts to be more important in matters regarding these troops. During the Principate the auxiliary troops were spread throughout the Roman provinces where they were put under the command of the legion if they were stationed in a border province. This subordination was in fact an integration of the provinces' defense system, a system in which the legion and the auxiliaries formed a whole; an auxiliary troops not part of such a system was vulnerable from an attack from outside. The auxiliary troops stationed in inner provinces of the empire were tasked with helping administering and mostly maintaining public order in the province.

The internal organization plan of auxiliary units was largely the same as a legionary cohort but adapted to the logistical needs of the auxilia. Unlike the legions, auxiliary troops lacked artillery, engineers and topographers. The training and living conditions were the same as in the legions except for pay and longer years of service. Some of these auxiliary units were specialized in certain military actions suchs as scouting, military police, archery or stone throwing. All officers leading an auxiliary unit had to be Roman citizens.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to troops recruited from Gaul. Each troops recruited from Gaul is studied separately. The chapter is divided into two subchapters, the first one dedicated to cavalry troops, alae, the second to infantry troops, cohorts. From the three provinces conquered by Caesar, Aquitania, Gallia Lugdunensis and Gallia Belgica, 57 auxiliary troops were recruited between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Most troops were recruited from Gallia Lugdunensis, 24 alae and 15 cohorts. From Gallia Belgica were recruited 13 units of which 2 were alae and 11 cohorts. From Aquitania were recruited 5 cohorts from the *Biturigi* tribe. All troops recruited from Gallia

Lugdunensis carry the name Gallorum not the name of the tribes from which they were recruited. Most of these troops were mustered in the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD but some of the tribes in Gallia Lugdunensis had sent troops to the Roman army since Caesar's time. The lack of the tribe's name from the unit's indicative may be because of accentuated urban sprawl after the Roman conquest. The names that have been kept as part of the unit's designation were of cavalry units and remind either of the unit's first commander or of soldiers that have contributed to the troops history. It can be said that in cavalry units, personal example and fighting skills were cherished by the men so the troops gathered respect and acquired tradition and the unit's name became a totem for its soldiers. It is almost certain that these troops that carried the name of a brave soldier were elite units that had high standards for new recruits. Being a province with no border with the barbarian world and having commercial roads that tied the North Sea to the Mediterranean Gallia Lugdunensis experienced a faster urbanization. The level of development of celtic *oppidum* that in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD reached a level close to that of Roman cities helped this development. Many of the troops recruited here participated in the conquest of Britain and others were stationed on the Danube. Some of these cavalry troops were combined with thracians, bosphorani etc. Almost half of the *alae* recruited in this province were sent to the East of the empire, that meaning the Lower Danube and Asia Minor provinces. The rest of the units were stationed on the Rhine and in Britannia. Of the 12 *alae* sent to the east, 7 were stationed in Pannonia, Moesia and Dacia. Almost just as many were stationed on the Rhine border. This disposition shows the danger coming from the tribes on the Rhine or Danube borders. The fact that these tribes counted more on cavalry in wars and incursions into the Roman empire made it necessary that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD some gallic troops were combined with thracians and bosphorani and that an *alae* from Siria specialized in horseback archery. This transformation was made to counter the Parthian way of fighting. In the Danube provinces two *alae* were combined with pannoni and adapted to the sarmatian way of fighting. This adaptation meant the protection of the horse and rider with chain armor and for the rider to carry a spear and thus fight like medieval knights. The cohorts recruited in Gallia Lugdunensis seem to be dispersed equally. Some of them were stationed in North Africa and Hispania.

The only tribes that keep their name in the units indicative are those from Gallia Belgica. Most units are recruited from the *Lingones* tribe, followed by the *Treviri*. Maybe the *Batavian* revolt delayed a similar romanisation as in Gallia

Lugdunensis. In general, the troops were recruited from the fiercest tribes in the province, in a similar way to the Germanic tribes. There are tribes that participated in the *Batavian* revolt and were defeated and maybe this participation in the Roman army was a condition of peace. Peoples defeated by Rome did not receive a favorable juridic status so their economic development was slower and had to find other means for survival. One of the ways to ensure a day to day living for their families and even advance in society was to join the army. The more the province is in the middle of the empire, the recruitment numbers in the auxilia drop; this can be a sign of romanisation or the locals have a comfortable living so they don't have to enlist. Aquitania is a special case compared to the other two gallic provinces. Being a province that bordered the Roman since the Republic, the roman way of life was adopted earlier. There were no rebellions and the province was protected from barbarian incursions. Being a province protected from incursions and plundering and urbanization settled intertribal conflicts maybe the people were not so eager to fight. Troops were recruited from the largest tribe, *Biturgi*, maybe as a guarantee of their loyalty to Rome and in time sending recruits to the Roman army may have turned into a tradition.

Chapter four presents the Roman auxiliary troops of Germanic origin recruited in the Roman army. Troops were recruited from Germanic tribes living in the provinces of Gallica Belgica, Germania Inferior and Germania Superior. The chapter is divided in three, one for each type of unit, cavalry – *alae*, infantry – *cohortes* and ethnic units – *numeri*. From the German tribes were recruited 31 regular auxiliary units and 6 unregular units. Cavalry units that survived the 68 AD rebellion are very few; we have information about five of them. One was sent to Britannia, the other four were sent to the Lower Danube provinces. Maybe the fear of another rebellion kept the Roman from mustering other cavalry units and determined them to send the rest where they were needed mostly. Besides these *alae*, there was the *equites singulares Augusti*, the cavalry from the Emperor's guard that was formed from Germans at the beginning; even after the *Batavian* revolt their number in the guard was significant. Roman emperors preferred to have Germans in their personal guard because they put honor above the palace intrigues and maybe even above rewards. Of 27 *cohortes* recruited from German tribes, 16 were stationed or have passed through Britannia. Many of these troops participated in the conquest of Britannia and stayed on the island. The *cohortes* sent to Europe were stationed on the Danube. They took part in the Dacian wars, some staying as provincial garrisons. Most German origin units were

recruited from the Batavians. It is possible that this large number of troops sent to the Roman army is an obligation imposed after their defeat in 70 AD. A large number of the troops recruited from their allies such as *Tungri*, *Nervii* are registered as auxiliaries in the Roman army. There were also 5 units of *numeri*, recruited from the tribes on the German border. In general, they were stationed on the border and were moved to other provinces only in times of war.

Chapter five is a case study about their evolution in an occupied province, Dacia. Being the last conquered and the first abandoned, Dacia experienced two crucial moments in the Roman army in this period. First is the moment when the army is at its best, when the empire is waging conquest wars. The second is its decline, military rebellions and loose discipline. This chapter also addresses the impact that these troops had on the romanisation of the province, the socio-economic evolution that they determined through their stay in Dacia. This evolution is closely related to the evolution of the Empire and we can extrapolate it to their evolution throughout the entire empire in these 3 centuries. The paper has at the end a catalogue of epigraphic inscriptions in chronological order, where possible, for each auxiliary troop recruited from Gaul and Germania.

The Roman auxiliary troops recruited in the two provinces were very well integrated in the Roman fighting system. Firstly because of command and training done by Roman officers. Command was given in Latin, the fighting way was the one of a legion with some particularities for specific units. They were used in combat based on their fighting abilities.

It is possible that the total number of Roman troops recruited from Gallic and Germanic tribes may have been higher but unfortunately only these units made it to historic sources. This research tried to follow the evolution of Roman auxiliary troops recruited from Gaul and Germania throughout three centuries. Starting from their hierarchical organization to identifying and tracing the evolution of units recruited in the two provinces, the research has tried to unearth a segment from the life of the Roman army.

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