

Universitatea „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași  
Facultatea de Istorie • Centrul de Studii Clasice și Creștine

Nr. 20-2/2025

# CLASSICA & CHRISTIANA



EDITURA UNIVERSITĂȚII „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” DIN IAȘI

***Classica et Christiana***

Revista Centrului de Studii Clasice și Creștine

Fondator: Nelu ZUGRAVU

**20/2, 2025**

***Classica et Christiana***

Periodico del Centro di Studi Classici e Cristiani

Fondatore: Nelu ZUGRAVU

**20/2, 2025**

**ISSN: 1842 – 3043**  
**e-ISSN: 2393 – 2961**

### **Comitetul științific / Comitato scientifico**

Moisés ANTIQUEIRA (Universidade Estadual do Oeste do Paraná)  
Sabine ARMANI (Université Paris 13-CRESC - PRES Paris Cité Sorbonne)  
Immacolata AULISA (Università di Bari Aldo Moro)  
Andrea BALBO (Università degli Studi di Torino)  
Antonella BRUZZONE (Università degli Studi di Sassari)  
Livia BUZOIANU (Muzeul Național de Istorie și Arheologie Constanța)  
Claudio César CALABRESE (Universidad Panamericana - Campus Aguascalientes)  
Dan DANA (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique/HiSoMA (UMR 5189), Lyon)  
Beatrice GIROTTI (Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna)  
Maria Pilar GONZÁLEZ-CONDE PUENTE (Universidad de Alicante)  
Attila JAKAB (Civitas Europica Centralis, Budapest)  
Fred W. JENKINS (University of Dayton)  
Domenico LASSANDRO (Università di Bari Aldo Moro)  
Carmela LAUDANI (Università della Calabria)  
Patrizia MASCOLI (Università di Bari Aldo Moro)  
Dominic MOREAU (Université de Lille)  
Sorin NEMETI (Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca)  
Evalda PACI (Centro di Studi di Albanologia, Tirana)  
Vladimir P. PETROVIĆ (Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade)  
Luigi PIACENTE (Università di Bari Aldo Moro)  
Sanja PILIPOVIĆ (Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)  
Mihai POPESCU (C.N.R.S. - ANHIMA, Paris)  
Julijana VISOČNIK (Archdiocesan Archives of Ljubljana)  
Heather WHITE (Classics Research Centre, London)

### **Comitetul de redacție / Comitato di redazione**

Claudia TĂRNĂUCEANU (Universitatea „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași)  
Nelu ZUGRAVU, director al Centrului de Studii Clasice și Creștine  
al Facultății de Istorie a Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași  
(*director responsabil / direttore responsabile*)

*Correspondența / Corrispondenza:*

Prof. univ. dr. Nelu ZUGRAVU  
Facultatea de Istorie, Centrul de Studii Clasice și Creștine  
Bd. Carol I, nr. 11, 700506 - Iași, România  
Tel. ++40 232 201634 / Fax ++40 232 201156  
e-mail: nelu@uaic.ro

Toate contribuțiile sunt supuse unei duble analize anonime (*double-blind peer review*), efectuate de specialiști români și străini.

All contributions are subject to a double anonymous analysis (*double blind peer review*), carried out by Romanian and foreign specialists.

La redazione sottopone preliminarmente tutti i contributi pervenuti a un procedimento di doppia lettura anonima (*double-blind peer review*) affidato a specialisti romeni e stranieri.

UNIVERSITATEA „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” din IAȘI  
FACULTATEA DE ISTORIE  
CENTRUL DE STUDII CLASICE ȘI CREȘTINE

## ***Classica et Christiana***

**20/2  
2025**

**Actele colocviului internațional *Receptarea Romei și a  
Imperiului Roman în cultura română contemporană*  
(Iași, 14-16 noiembrie 2024)**

**editate de**

**Nelu ZUGRAVU și Ionuț NISTOR**

Tehnoredactor: Nelu ZUGRAVU

**ISSN: 1842 – 3043**  
**e-ISSN: 2393 – 2961**

Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași  
700511 - Iași, tel./fax ++ 40 0232 314947

## SUMAR / INDICE / CONTENTS

### SIGLE ȘI ABREVIERI – SIGLE E ABBREVIAZIONI / 9

\*\*\*

### **Actele colocviului internațional *Receptarea Romei și a Imperiului Roman în cultura română contemporană***

**(Iași, 14-16 noiembrie 2024)**

Programul colocviului [The colloquium program] / 11

Florica BOHÎLȚEA-MIHUȚ, Vestigii romane pe mărcile poștale românești din perioada regimului comunist [Roman antiquities on Romanian postage stamps during the Communist regime] / 17

Roxana-Gabriela CURCĂ, Epigraphic Latin in Romanian studies in post-war period / 43

Dan DANA, Un alt latinism interbelic: urmașii francofoni ai Romei [Another interwar Latinism: French-speaking descendants of Rome] / 53

Gabriela E. DIMA, Roma antică în percepția lui Liviu Rebreanu [Ancient Rome as seen by Liviu Rebreanu] / 85

Theodor GEORGESCU, Imaginea Romei în cultura română prin ochii autorilor de limbă greacă veche [The image of Rome in Romanian culture through the eyes of ancient Greek writers] / 97

Marian I. HARIUC, „Și în România se lucrează în vederea sărbătoririi lui Ovidiu”. Bimilenarul nașterii lui Publius Ovidius Naso (1957-1958) [In Romania, Work is also being done in Preparation for the “Celebration of Ovid”: The Bimillenary of the Birth of Publius Ovidius Naso (1957-1958)] / 111

Emanuela ILIE, “Amo, amas, amat...” (1943) de V. Beneș: o distopie totalitară curajoasă, cu un roman și mulți (alți) barbari) [“Amo, amas, amat...” (1943) by V. Beneș: a courageous totalitarian dystopia, with a Roman and lots of (other) barbarians] / 131

Gheorghe IUTIȘ, Istoria Romei în manualele școlare din perioada 1920-1948 [The history of Rome in school textbooks from the period 1920-1948] / 149

Sorin NEMETI, Școala de arheologie de la Cluj și studiul religiei romane din Dacia [The archaeology School from Cluj and the study of Roman religion in Dacia] / 159

Ionuț NISTOR, Italian language and civilization at the University of Iași in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century / 171

Adriana PANAINTE, Provincia Moesia Inferior în istoriografia românească de la Vasile Pârvan la tratatul de *Istoria Românilor* (2001) [The province of Moesia Inferior in Romanian historiography from Vasile Pârvan to the *History of the Romanians* (2001)] / 181

Bogdan POPA, Despre trecutul unui cuvânt. „Daciada”, de la titlu de epopee la competiție sportivă [On the past of a word. “Daciada”, from epos title to sports competition] / 207

Nelu ZUGRAVU, Claudia TĂRNĂUCEANU, Ediții din autorii latini în perioada comunistă – exigențe profesionale, concesiile ideologice [The editions of Latin authors during the Communist period – professional requirements, ideological concessions] / 217

\*\*\*

## **STUDII – STUDI /**

Immacolata AULISA, Antichi itinerari di pellegrinaggio al Santuario di San Michele sul Gargano [Ancient pilgrimage routes to the Sanctuary of Saint Michael on the Gargano] / 257

Francesco BOTTI, L'immagine dei Visigoti nella *Cronaca* di Idazio [The description of the Visigoths in the *Chronicle* of Hydatius] / 291

Antonella BRUZZONE, Un capitolo di storia degli studi del Novecento sulla poesia bucolica greca e latina [A chapter of the history of twentieth-century studies on Greek and Latin bucolic poetry] / 309

- Maria Carolina CAMPONE, *Mare undique et undique caelum*: il *topos* del viaggio in mare nell'epistola 49 di Paolino di Nola [*Mare undique et undique caelum*: the *topos* of the sea voyage in Paulinus of Nola's Epistle 49] / 325
- Dalila D'ALFONSO, *Ut iugum continet sirpiculos*: a proposito di 'sirpi' e transumanza in Varro *rust.* 2,2,9 [*Ut iugum continet sirpiculos*: on 'sirpi' and transhumance in Varro *rust.* 2.2.9] / 347
- Beatrice GIROTTI, Pratiche di discredito dalla storiografia pagana del IV secolo d.C.: *muliebritas* vs. *virilitas* nelle rappresentazioni di potere [Practices of discredit in 4<sup>th</sup> century AD pagan historiography: *muliebritas* vs. *virilitas* in representations of power] / 365
- Alessandro LAGIOIA, "*O misera domus Herculea*": un contributo inedito alla fortuna umanistica del mito di Ercole [*O misera domus Herculea*": an unpublished contribution to the humanistic reception of the myth of Hercules] / 385
- Carmela LAUDANI, Del buon uso della lira: Ermes (Hom. 4) e Teutra (Sil. 11, 288-482) [The good use of the lyre: Hermes (Hom. 4) and Teuthras (Sil. 11, 288-482)] / 421
- Patrizia MASCOLI, Aldelmo di Malmesbury epistolografo [Aldhelm of Malmesbury, epistolographer] / 431
- Manuela MONGARDI, Nuove forme di rappresentazione delle *Augustae* nel III secolo d.C.: il caso dei miliari [New forms of representation of the *Augustae* in the third century AD: the case of milestones] / 443
- Roberto MONTEFINESE, Between sword and cross: the christianization of Roman military culture from persecution to symbolic transformation / 467
- Fabrizio PETORELLA, *Quia non, sicut videt homo, videt deus*. Cecità e guarigione nella *Vita di Severino* di Eugippio [*Quia non, sicut videt homo, videt deus*. Blindness and healing in Eugippius' *Life of Severinus*] / 489

Vladimir P. PETROVIĆ, A new votive Roman inscription from Rogatica dedicated to Liber Pater (East Dalmatia) / 509

Daniela SCARDIA, *Audacter facio*: il confronto tra santi nell'*Hom. 6 in Is. 1-2* di Origene [*Audacter facio*: The comparison between saints in Origen's *Homily 6 on Isaiah 1-2*] / 517

Enrico SIMONETTI, *Lacrimae sua verba sequuntur*: Pathos elegiaco e reticenza emotiva nell'*Eroide* di Ipermestra [*Lacrimae sua verba sequuntur*: Elegiac pathos and emotional reticence in the *Herois* of Hypermnestra] / 551

\*\*\*

**CRONICA – CRONACA** / 567

**PUBLICAȚII – PUBBLICAZIONI** / 571

## SIGLE ȘI ABREVIERI / SIGLE E ABBREVIAZIONI\*

<i>ActaMN</i>	<i>Acta Musei Napocensis</i> , Cluj-Napoca.
<i>AIIAI</i>	<i>Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie „A. D. Xenopol”</i> , Iași.
<i>AISC</i>	<i>Anuarul Institutului de Studii Clasice</i> , Cluj.
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Ausstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> , Berlin-New York.
<i>AȘUI.Istorie</i>	<i>Analele Științifice ale Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași</i> , S.N., Istorie.
<i>BSAS</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société archéologique de Sousse</i> , 1903-
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina</i> , Turnhout, 1953 sqq.
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> , Vienna-Leipzig, 1860 sqq.
<i>DACL</i>	<i>Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie</i>
<i>EDR</i>	<i>Epigraphic Database Rome</i> .
<i>GCS</i>	<i>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten (drei) Jahrhunderte</i> , Leipzig-Berlin.
<i>PCBE</i>	<i>Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire</i> , éd. par A. Mandouze et al., 4 voll., Paris-Rome 1982-2013.
<i>PIR</i>	<i>Prosopographia Imperii Romani. Saec. I.II.III</i> .
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> .
<i>RRMAM</i>	D. French, <i>Roman Roads and Milestones of Asia Minor</i> , Vol. III, British Institute at Ankara, 2012-2016.
<i>SAI</i>	<i>Studii și Articole de Istorie</i> , București.
<i>SC</i>	<i>Sources Chrésiennes</i> , Paris-Lyon.
<i>SCIVA</i>	<i>Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie</i> , București.
<i>TD</i>	<i>Thraco-Dacica</i> , București.
<i>ThLL</i>	<i>Thesaurus linguae Latinae</i> .

---

\* Cu excepția celor din *L'Année Philologique* și *L'Année Épigraphique* / Escluse quelle segnalate da *L'Année Philologique* e *L'Année Épigraphique*.



## BETWEEN SWORD AND CROSS: THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF ROMAN MILITARY CULTURE FROM PERSECUTION TO SYMBOLIC TRANSFORMATION

Roberto MONTEFINESE\*  
(Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia)

**Keywords:** *Christianization, roman army, military religion, identity transformation, miles Christi.*

**Abstract:** *This paper analyzes the impact of Christianity on Roman military culture during the later period of the Empire. The transition from traditional religion, centered on pagan cults and loyalty to the emperor, to Christian values led to a profound transformation of the Roman soldier's identity. Through an interdisciplinary approach, the study examines how religious beliefs influenced military life, from ritual practices to spiritual symbolism and new forms of allegiance. Literary, epigraphic, and archaeological sources are explored to understand this transitional process, in which the soldier becomes not only a historical figure but also a theological symbol. The result is a reinterpretation of the military role within a new religious and cultural order.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *creștinare, armata romană, religie militară, transformarea identității, miles Christi.*

**Rezumat:** *Între sabie și cruce: creștinarea culturii militare romane de la persecuție la transformarea simbolică. Lucrarea analizează impactul creștinismului asupra culturii militare romane în perioada târzie a Imperiului. Trecerea de la religia tradițională, centrată pe cultele păgâne și pe loialitatea față de împărat, la valorile creștine a generat o transformare profundă a identității soldatului roman. Printr-o abordare interdisciplinară, studiul urmărește modul în care credințele religioase au influențat viața militară, de la practicile rituale la simbolismul spiritual și noile forme de loialitate. Sunt examinate surse literare, epigrafice și arheologice, pentru a înțelege acest proces de tranziție, în care soldatul devine nu doar o figură istorică, ci și un simbol teologic. Rezultatul este o reinterpretare a rolului militarului în cadrul unei noi ordini religioase și culturale.*

---

\* rmontefinese@alu.ucam.edu

## 1. *Introduction*

The emergence of Christianity represents one of the most significant developments in Roman history, particularly in relation to the transformation of the military identity of Roman soldiers. As the fourth century AD progressed, the Christianization of the Roman Empire prompted a profound rethinking of the values and beliefs that had traditionally guided military life, values closely tied to pagan cults such as that of Mars and to the ideology of martial virtue<sup>1</sup>. Soldiers, who had long been regarded as warriors devoted to the gods of war, now faced a new reality in which their loyalty was challenged by a monotheistic God who demanded total and unconditional commitment.

The intersection of religion and military identity in the Roman Empire is a subject that has attracted considerable interest among historians and scholars of religion, especially in the context of the Christianization of Roman soldiers. In an era when the cult of Mars, the god of war, dominated the collective imagination, Roman legionaries strongly identified with the military tradition and the ideals of glory and honor associated with pagan worship. However, from the early fourth century onward, the gradual rise of Christianity began to reshape not only religious practices, but also the very notion of what it meant to be a soldier in the Empire.

This research aims to explore how this transition reshaped the identities of Roman soldiers, forcing them to come to terms with a God who rejected violence and thereby altering their motivations and emotional frameworks. The testimonies of Christian soldier-saints and martyrs, for instance, represent a crucial aspect of this transformation, as they reveal how Christian values began to replace older military traditions.

This study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the Christianization of Roman soldiers and the resulting evolution of their military

---

<sup>1</sup> For further study on religion in the Roman world see: M. Henig, *Roman Religion and Roman Culture in Britain*, in M. Todd (ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Britain*, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, 220-240; D. Frunkfurter, *Traditional Cult*, in D. S. Potter (ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Empire*, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, 543-564; J. Rüpke (ed.), *A Companion to Roman Religion*, Blackwell Publishing, 2007; M. Goodman, *Judaism in the Roman World*, Brill, 2007; J. Alvar, *Romanising Oriental Gods. Myth, Salvation and Ethics in the Cults of Cybele, Isis and Mithras*, Brill, 2008, 17-39; D. Frunkfurter, *Religious Practice and Piety*, in C. Riggs (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, Oxford University Press, 2012, 319-333.

identity, through a multidisciplinary approach that integrates historical, textual, and contextual analysis.

The transition from the worship of Mars, the god of war, to the acceptance of Christianity by Roman soldiers is a complex phenomenon that reflects the profound cultural and identity shifts that took place in the Roman Empire between the third and fourth centuries AD. Beginning in the late third century, the Empire's growing support for Christianity, alongside the concurrent decline of pagan practices, marked a significant turning point in the lives of military men, who had traditionally identified with a pantheon of deities that legitimized their experiences and motivations as warriors.

Analyzing the Christianization of soldiers is essential not only for understanding the religious dynamics of the period, but also for examining the tension between Christian faith and military tradition, as evidenced by historical events such as rebellions against the new religion. Numerous studies, including those by Irby-Massie and Whitby, have documented the interaction between military religious practices and the adoption of Christianity. The main sources for this research focus on inscriptions, votive altars, and funerary mosaics that attest to soldiers' devotion to deities such as Jupiter and Mithras. These archaeological findings offer a crucial window into shifting patterns of belief, highlighting the central role these mythological figures once played in shaping military identity. With the increasing influence of the Church and the administrative reforms enacted by emperors such as Constantine, we observe a slow but irreversible shift in paradigm, as the army began to adopt a new role as a supporter of the Christian faith.

## **2. *The imperial army: structure and transformation***

The transition from the worship of pagan cults, to the acceptance of Christianity by Roman soldiers is a complex phenomenon that reflects the profound cultural and identity transformations experienced by the Roman Empire between the third and fourth centuries AD<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> Important works on this period include: N. H. Baynes, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church*, London, 1929; R. MacMullen, *Constantine*, New York, 1969; G. Fowden, *The Last Days of Constantine: Oppositional Versions and their Influence*, *JRS*, 84, 1994, 146-170; G. Michael, *The Emperor Constantine*, Phoenix Giant, 1998; J. Morgan, *Constantine: Ruler of Christian Rome*, Rosen Pub. Group, 2003; H. A. Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine*, Taylor & Francis Inc, 2004; W.

Beginning in the late third century, the Empire's increasing support for the Christian religion, alongside the concurrent decline of pagan practices, marked a significant turning point in the lives of soldiers, men who had traditionally identified with a pantheon of deities that legitimized their military experiences and motivations.

Upon securing sole authority over the Roman world in 31 BC, Octavian faced the dual challenge of demobilizing civil war forces and ensuring the continued loyalty of the remaining troops. Aware that his rise to power had mirrored that of earlier Republican leaders, achieved through the personal loyalty of soldiers, he sought to prevent others from replicating this path. His military reforms were therefore designed to professionalize the Roman army, reduce its size, and redirect its allegiance to the emperor. These measures included the establishment of a permanent standing force, the regulation of service terms, and the creation of a military treasury (*aerarium militare*) to fund veteran rewards<sup>3</sup>. The demobilization of over 300,000 veterans was carefully managed through financial compensation and land grants, thereby minimizing unrest and consolidating support. Augustus also institutionalized auxiliary forces and naval units, while reorganizing elite troops such as the praetorian and urban cohorts. Over time, these reforms provided a durable military framework that endured into the third century AD, though they also introduced new political and economic tensions. The deployment of legions shifted in response to strategic needs, particularly in frontier regions, and the practice of assigning detachments (*vexillations*) became common. These developments contributed to the army's gradual integration into provincial urban life, reinforcing Roman authority throughout the empire<sup>4</sup>. A key component of the Roman military system was the auxiliary forces, which provided most of the army's cavalry and a substantial portion of its infantry, including specialized troops such as archers. Unlike the legions, auxiliaries were primarily recruited from *peregrini*, free provin-

---

Löhr, *Western Christianities*, in A. Casiday & F. W. Norris (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, 9-11; D. S. Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, Oxford University Press, 2012; E. James, *Constantine the Great: Warlord of Rome*, Pen & Sword Military, 2012; R. Cowan, *Roman Legionary, AD 284-337: The age of Diocletian and Constantine*, Osprey Publishing, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> L. Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army. From Republic to Empire*, Routledge, 1998, 128; P. F. Uriel, *El aerarium militare, ETF(Hist)*, 16, 2003, 197-214.

<sup>4</sup> N. Pollard, *The Roman Army*, in D. S. Potter (ed.), *op. cit.*, 206-210.

cial inhabitants without Roman citizenship, who typically received citizenship upon retirement. Over time, distinctions between legionaries and auxiliaries began to blur, especially after the *constitutio Antoniniana* in 212 AD granted citizenship to nearly all free inhabitants of the empire.

Auxiliary troops were organized into cohorts (infantry) and *alae* (cavalry), with unit sizes varying from about 500 to 1,000 soldiers. Some cohorts were *equitatae*, combining infantry with a cavalry detachment. These units often operated far from their place of origin, as indicated by military diplomas, official bronze documents that recorded the service and discharge of auxiliary veterans. While auxiliaries manned many frontier posts, legions were often stationed slightly inland as a reserve force, though recent finds challenge the idea of strictly separate deployment.

In addition to auxiliaries, client kings provided troops, especially in the East. These forces, sometimes called *numeri*, retained native weapons and command structures in their early stages. Examples include the Moors under Lusius Quietus and the *Palmyrenes* who served across the empire. Command of the imperial army was centralized under the emperor, with provincial governors often acting as military commanders. Legions were led by senatorial legates, while auxiliary units were typically under equestrian prefects. Within each legion, centurions played a crucial role in leadership and discipline, supported by junior officers (*principales*) and technical staff (*immunes*).

In battle, legionaries fought as heavily armored infantry, using standardized weapons like the gladius and pilum. Auxiliaries, initially equipped according to local traditions, gradually adopted Roman, style arms and armor, though distinctions remained in shield shapes and weapon types. Auxiliary cavalry wielded spears and spathae, and specialized forms like *cataphractarii* and light Moorish cavalry emerged by the second century AD.

Although literary accounts of actual battles are limited, sources such as Tacitus, Josephus, and Arrian illustrate Roman tactical principles: deploying auxiliaries on the flanks or front lines, using cavalry to protect the wings, and maintaining flexible reserves. These strategies highlight the adaptability of the Roman army and the essential role

auxiliaries played not just in warfare, but in the broader military, religious culture of the empire<sup>5</sup>.

By the time of Constantine, the Roman army had undergone significant structural and organizational changes compared to the earlier imperial period. Although many reforms are commonly attributed to Diocletian and the tetrarchic rulers, the evidence from the third and early fourth centuries is often limited or ambiguous, making it difficult to assign precise dates to every development. Key sources for the late Roman army, such as the *Notitia Dignitatum*, Vegetius' *Epitoma rei militaris*, and the historian Ammianus Marcellinus, were all written after Constantine's reign.

As external pressures increased during the third century AD, the army expanded in size, although the scale of this growth remains debated. While some ancient critics, like the Christian author Lactantius<sup>6</sup>, exaggerated these changes for rhetorical purposes, later legal and administrative documents confirm a larger and more complex military system. Conscription became more widespread in the fourth century, often replaced by payment or substitution. Despite later perceptions of widespread "barbarization", recruiting soldiers from beyond the empire's borders had long been standard practice, including entire ethnic units composed of Germans, Goths, and others.

Numerous new units were created during the tetrarchic period, and the traditional legion was often restructured. Some legions may have counted only 1,000 men, and auxiliary units could be even smaller. This reflects both administrative reform and practical military concerns. Infantry of the late Roman army still relied on armor, helmets, and shields, but used a broader variety of weapons, including thrusting spears and weighted darts like the *plumbatae*. The longer *spatha* sword became standard, and archery training was increasingly emphasized, with mixed units of archers and infantry becoming more common.

One major change was the growing prominence of cavalry. The *Notitia Dignitatum* lists a large number of cavalry units, many of them *vexillationes* rather than traditional *alae*. These troops enjoyed legal privileges similar to legionaries and reflected a shift toward greater

---

<sup>5</sup> N. Pollard, *The Roman Army*, in D. S. Potter (ed.), *op. cit.*, 211-216. For further study on the army in the late Roman period in Roman Britain, see P. Southern, *The Army in Late Roman Britain*, in M. Todd (ed.), *op. cit.*, 393-406.

<sup>6</sup> *Mort.* 7.2.

mobility to address threats across the empire. Specialized cavalry types such as horse archers (*equites sagittarii*), and heavily armored units like *clibanarii* and *cataphractarii*, played important roles, particularly on the eastern frontier. This evolution likely began under Gallienus in the late third century and continued through Constantine's reforms. The army was increasingly divided into two main categories: the *limitanei* (frontier troops), who were stationed along the empire's borders, and the *comitatenses* (field troops), who formed mobile forces capable of responding quickly to crises. The origins of this division are debated, but by Constantine's time it was already in effect. Later writers, such as the pagan historian Zosimus, criticized Constantine for weakening border defenses by concentrating troops inland, but this likely reflects a broader shift toward a layered defense strategy (*defense-in-depth*), aimed at delaying and containing enemy incursions. These changes were not only military but also economic and political. Smaller, more dispersed units may have been easier to supply in a system increasingly reliant on local provisions (*annona in kind*) rather than centralized cash payments. Soldiers still received stipends and donatives, but logistical constraints shaped where and how armies were stationed. Imperial workshops, noted in the *Notitia Dignitatum*<sup>7</sup>, provided equipment and clothing, and the reluctance to transport bulky goods like grain over long distances may have encouraged regional deployment patterns. In short, the army of the late Roman Empire was a more fragmented but flexible force, designed to respond to new strategic challenges while adapting to economic and political realities. These transformations also had significant implications for military identity, structure, and culture, including religious life, which continued to evolve throughout the fourth and fifth centuries<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> J. B. Bury, *The notitia dignitatum*, *JRS*, 10, 1920, 131-154; J. C. Mann, *The Notitia Dignitatum – dating and survival*, *Britannia*, 22, 1991, 215-219; M. Kulikowski, *The Notitia Dignitatum as a historical source*, *Historia*, 3, 2000, 358-377; M. Speidel, *Dressed for the occasion. Clothes and context in the Roman army*, Vol. 10, Oxbow Books, Oxford and Oakville, CT, 2012, 1-12; G. Esposito, *The Roman Army of the Middle Empire, AD 180-284: Weapons, Organization and Equipment*, Pen and Sword Military, 2025, 14-52.

<sup>8</sup> N. Pollard, *op. cit.*, 225-227.

### 3. *The religious cosmos of the Roman soldier*

Numerous studies, including those by Irby-Massie and Whitby<sup>9</sup>, have documented the interaction between military religious practices and the adoption of Christianity. With the increasing authority of the Church and the administrative reforms implemented by emperors such as Constantine, a gradual yet decisive paradigm shift becomes evident, as the army began to assume a new role as a supporter of the Christian faith. Constantine's pivotal role in promoting Christianity marked a turning point, catalyzing the transition from devotion to traditional pagan cults to allegiance to the Christian religion.

A foundational study by John Helgeland<sup>10</sup> has demonstrated that religion was not a peripheral aspect of the Roman army but a fundamental element embedded within its institutional structure and symbolic universe. Army religion was both official and personal, functioning on multiple levels to integrate soldiers into the religious and political order of the Roman state. Officially, it was expressed through state-sanctioned practices such as the imperial cult, the worship of deities like Jupiter Optimus Maximus and Mars, and the veneration of the legionary standards (*signa*), which were regarded as sacred objects. Central to this official dimension was the military calendar preserved in the *Feriale Duranum*, a third-century document that reveals a regular rhythm of sacrifices and festivals celebrated within the camp. Equally important was the *sacramentum militiae*<sup>11</sup>, the military oath, which bound the soldier to the emperor in a sacred covenant, reinforcing discipline and loyalty as divinely sanctioned obligations.

<sup>9</sup> G. Irby-Massie, *Military Religion in Roman Britain*, Brill, Leiden, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> J. Helgeland, *Christians and the Roman Army A.D. 173-337*, *ChHist*, 43/2, 1974, 149-163 (<https://doi.org/10.2307/3163949>); idem, *Roman army religion*, in *ANRW*, II/16.2, 1978, 1470-1505.

<sup>11</sup> A. Holbrook, *Loyalty and the sacramentum in the Roman Republican army*, Doctoral dissertation, 2003; D. G. Van Slyke, *Sacramentum in ancient non-Christian authors*, *Antiphon: A Journal for Liturgical Renewal*, 9/2, 2005, 167-206; M. Hebblewhite, *Sacramentum militiae: empty words in an age of chaos*, in J. Armstrong (ed.), *Circum Mare: Themes in Ancient Warfare*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2016, 120-142; M. Wuk, *Religionibus firmis iuramenta constricta? Ammianus and the sacramentum militiae*, in M. Hanaghan, D. Woods (eds.), *Ammianus Marcellinus from Soldier to Author*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2022, 1-31; B. Kolbeck, *The early Christians and war: Tertullian's witness*, in I. Polinskaya, A. James, I. Papadogiannakis (eds.), *Religion and War from Antiquity to Early Modernity*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2024, 242.

Helgeland emphasizes that Roman soldiers inhabited what he terms an “archaic religious reality”, in which religion, politics, and warfare were not distinct domains but interwoven expressions of a unified worldview. Military camps themselves functioned as microcosmos of Roman religious order, equipped with altars, temples, and places for ritual observance. Unofficial and localized cult practices also flourished, reflecting the ethnic and regional diversity of the imperial army; these included the worship of local deities, Eastern mystery cults such as Mithraism, and ancestral rites. The religious life of the army thus provided not only spiritual cohesion but also psychological reinforcement amid the stresses of campaign and garrison life.

Understanding this complex religious framework is essential for tracing the army’s eventual transformation under Christian emperors. As Helgeland notes, the military’s capacity to internalize and ritualize new ideologies would later facilitate its gradual incorporation into the Christian religious order of the late empire. The shift from polytheistic worship to Christian devotion did not erase the army’s religious character, but reoriented it within a new theological paradigm, preserving many of the structural and symbolic functions that had long underpinned Roman military religion.

The religious life of the Roman army was a complex system, made up of two main components. The first was the official, regulated religion of the military. This included the cult of the emperor and the worship of the state gods, practices that were standardized across the empire and obligatory for all military units<sup>12</sup>. The second component involved the personal religious practices of individual soldiers. These included worship of native deities from their regions of origin, gods from previous stations, and most notably, local gods near the current garrison<sup>13</sup>. These personal devotions were often motivated by a desire

---

<sup>12</sup> I. P. Haynes, *The romanisation of religion in the auxilia of the Roman imperial army from Augustus to Septimus Severus*, *Britannia*, 24, 1993, 141-157.

<sup>13</sup> Essential works on the study of religion in the Roman world are as follows: S. J. Case, *Religion and war in the Greco-Roman world*, *The American Journal of Theology*, 19/2, 1915, 179-199; R. L. Gordon, *The real and the imaginary: production and religion in the Graeco-Roman world*, *Art history*, 2/1, 1979, 5-34; D. Watts, *Religion in late Roman Britain: forces of change*, Routledge. Taylor & Francis, London and New York, 1998; N. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews and Christians*, Routledge, 2002; M. Henig, *Religion in Roman Britain*, Taylor & Francis, London 2003; R. S. Kraemer (ed.), *Women’s Religions in the Greco-Roman World. A Sourcebook*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2004; V. M. Warrior, *Ro-*

for protection. Generally speaking, group dedications are typical of the official religion and reflect collective actions by military units, while individual dedications usually represent private beliefs. However, since this distinction relies mostly on epigraphic formulas and sometimes archaeological context, it can be difficult to apply consistently. Therefore, when studying inscriptions, one must carefully consider whether the religious act reflects personal faith, unit tradition, or broader institutional practice.

Because of their constant mobility, soldiers played a major role in spreading both material culture and religious practices. The army was a key driver of cultural exchange across the empire. Alongside this transmission, there were also processes of integration: soldiers often adopted local deities when stationed in new regions. This overlap between the cults of the military and those of local civilian populations was especially common because, from the early second century onward, troops were increasingly recruited from the regions where they served. While Roman units often retained a diverse ethnic makeup, occasional recruitment from distant provinces remained possible. This local recruitment contributed to a high level of cultural and religious compatibility between soldiers and civilians. Thus, studying the religious situation in local and regional contexts provides valuable insight. No major differences in religious practices appear between different branches of the army, whether legions, auxiliaries, or naval units.

Both official and personal forms of religious expression created many points of contact between soldiers and the civilian population. The emperor cult, in particular, was not limited to the military but was relevant to the entire empire. However, some cults were specific to the military. These included the veneration of protective spirits (*genii*), military tutelary gods, and the so-called flag cult, which was closely tied to the emperor cult.

The standardized nature of the army's official religion is illustrated by a papyrus from Dura Europos in Mesopotamia. Known as the *Feriale Duranum*<sup>14</sup>, this document preserves the festival calendar of

---

man religion, Cambridge University Press, 2006; A. Hunt, *Reviving Roman religion. Sacred Trees in the Roman World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016; N. P. DesRosiers & L. C. Vuong (eds.), *Religious competition in the Greco-Roman world*, SBL Press, Atlanta, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> H. A. Sanders, *Feriale Duranum* (Fink, Hoey, Snyder), *Classical Weekly*, 34, 1940, 271-272; J. F. Gilliam, *La Feriale Militare Romana*, *HThR*, 47/3, 1954,

the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* for the months of January to September, dating to around 225–227 AD under Emperor Severus Alexander. It outlines the specific dates and rituals – including offerings of wine, incense (*supplicatio*), and blood sacrifices (*immolatio*), that the unit and its commander were expected to perform. For instance, it records that on June 9, during the *Vestalia*, a *supplicatio* was to be offered to Vesta Mater.

This calendar reveals three main types of festivals: celebrations of state gods (e.g., Mars, Vesta, or the *dies natalis* of Rome), military-specific festivals (e.g., *rosaliae signorum* or the *honesta missio*), and events linked to the emperor, such as his birthday or accession to power. The calendar places great emphasis on the emperor cult, with 27 of its 41 entries related to it. In this way, the official religion of the army helped shape a sense of loyalty and shared identity between soldiers and the emperor. Rituals such as festivals and parades also served to reinforce discipline, which was seen as a source of Roman military success. The emperor, viewed as the guardian of discipline, was even associated with the cult of *Disciplina*, a goddess attested in Britain and North Africa and linked to the imperial family.

Another example of the religious-military connection is the worship of the *Campestres*<sup>15</sup>, protective mother-goddesses often venerated near military training grounds. Although their origins lie in Celtic-Germanic traditions, their cult was absorbed into the broader Roman military context. The emperor's elite cavalry unit, the *Equites Singulares Augusti*, worshipped them alongside a group of twenty diverse deities, forming a shared “regimental tradition”. These foreign deities could be reinterpreted, incorporated into Roman religious practice, and even brought to Rome itself, illustrating the army's role in cultural and religious transfer. The same unit helped spread the cults of Celtic and Germanic goddesses like Epona and the *Matres Suleviae*.

---

183-196; F. L. Gómez, *El culto a los emperadores en el ejército romano: el caso del Feriale Duranum*, *Arys. Antigüedad: Religiones y Sociedades*, 12, 2014, 213-237; G. Iovine, (ed.), *Latin Military Papyri of Dura-Europos (P.Dura 55-145): A New Edition of the Texts, with Introduction and Notes*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2023.

<sup>15</sup> G. L. Irby-Massie, *The Roman army and the cult of the Campestres*, *ZPE*, 1996, 293-300; E. Birley, *An Inscription from Cramond, and the Matres Campestres*, *Glasgow Archaeological Journal*, 4/1, 1976, 108-110; P. F. Dorsey, *The cult of Silvanus. A Study in Roman Folk Religion*, Brill, Leiden-New York-Köln, 1992.

The roots of the official military calendar go back to the Julio-Claudian period. Inscriptions from military provinces confirm that the festival dates found in the *Feriale Duranum* were followed throughout the empire. For example, Rome's birthday on April 21 was celebrated both in High Rochester and in Novae. A dedication from Niederbieber on September 23, 246 AD aligns with Augustus' birthday, as recorded in the *Feriale*. The calendar, maintained by the central government, was binding for all units regardless of local or ethnic religious traditions. As part of the army's role as the *exercitus populi Romani*, the observance of Roman festivals helped disseminate ideas and practices rooted in Roman identity. Though it was not explicitly designed to promote Romanization, the calendar nonetheless supported the development of a shared imperial identity. At the same time, the religious traditions of individual soldiers or regiments, especially those based on original recruitment areas, were maintained and even encouraged, especially to boost morale.

Numerous details from daily military life reflect the strong bond between the army and the emperor. Soldiers took a sacred oath of loyalty to the emperor in front of the regimental standards, and this oath had to be formally revoked upon discharge. The emperor also conferred the standards upon the regiments, and his name was often included in the titles of units. His image appeared on military equipment, flags, and even had its own standard carried by an *imaginifer*. Soldiers encountered the emperor's image regularly on coins, either through pay or as special donatives. These donatives often marked imperial festivals, such as birthdays or jubilees, and were received with ceremonial respect. For the soldiers, this money symbolized a direct gift from the emperor, reinforcing the sacred nature of their bond with him<sup>16</sup>. This close integration between military and religious life was not limited to internal regimental practices but extended outward, fostering interaction between soldiers and the local population. The imperial cult, in particular, acted as a shared framework that connected the military with provincial communities. Joint participation in imperial rituals is well attested – for instance, during the *nuncupatio votorum* on January 3 and on the emperor's *dies imperii*, as well as his birthday.

---

<sup>16</sup> O. Stoll, *The Religions of the Armies*, in P. Erdkamp (Ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Army*, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, 452-455.

One distinctive aspect of military religious life was the central symbolic role of the *signa*, or military standards<sup>17</sup>. These ensigns held deep ritual and emotional significance for soldiers. Present at all key ceremonies, from oath-taking to sacrifices and parades, they embodied regimental identity and honor. The standards often bore inscriptions naming the unit and commemorating decorations awarded by the emperor. The *vexilla*, which functioned much like modern military flags, displayed the unit's name and served as tangible representations of collective military pride and tradition<sup>18</sup>.

Beyond shared public rituals, the religious experience of Roman soldiers was shaped by a broad exposure to diverse cults throughout the empire. When off duty, military personnel enjoyed considerable freedom in the choice of their private religious practices, provided these did not interfere with military obligations or public order. Deployment in distant provinces often introduced them to unfamiliar deities and sacred traditions, fostering new forms of spiritual allegiance. The local gods of the regions in which they served were frequently adopted by soldiers, not only as protectors but also as symbolic links to their temporary homes and the surrounding civilian communities.

Over time, this process contributed to the formation of distinct "religious profiles" for different army units and garrisons. Each military site developed its own religious character, shaped by regional influences and the dynamics of interaction with local populations. In some areas, entire legions became devoted to local cults. For instance, the soldiers of *Legio I Minervia* at Bonn were fervent worshippers of the *Matronae Aufaniae*<sup>19</sup>, a group of maternal deities associated with the Lower Rhine. Such devotion contrasts with neighboring units in Upper Germany, where no comparable cult activity is recorded, suggesting that religious behavior was shaped as much by local context as by military culture.

This openness to local cults was not limited to rank-and-file soldiers. High-ranking Roman officials, too, participated in regional reli-

---

<sup>17</sup> J. F. Shean, *Soldiering for God. Christianity and the Roman Army*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2010, 44.

<sup>18</sup> O. Stoll, *The Religions of the Armies*, in P. Erdkamp (ed.), *op. cit.*, 457-461.

<sup>19</sup> H. Lehner, *Das Heiligtum der Matronae Aufaniae bei Nettersheim*, BJ, 119, 1910, 301-321; R. Simek, *Matronae*, in J. P. Schjødt, J. Lindow and A. Amdrén (eds.), *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures*, 3, Brepols, Turnhout, 2020, 1481-1491.

gious customs, both in official capacity and private devotion. From the prefect of Egypt offering ritual gifts to the Nile, to a praetorian prefect dedicating an altar to a Germanic goddess in Cologne, the engagement with local religion permeated all levels of military and administrative life.

Archaeological and epigraphic evidence from across the empire confirms the widespread adoption of local deities as tutelary figures by military units. Soldiers stationed briefly in cities like Gerasa, Hatra, or Carrawburgh often left dedications to indigenous gods shortly after arrival, seeking protection in unfamiliar environments. These deities were sometimes even integrated into the official identity of the unit, as shown by inscriptions naming them as patrons or guardians of the cohort.

In Egypt, where documentary evidence is especially rich, soldiers frequently invoked local gods in letters and graffiti, requesting their protection for themselves, their families, and their comrades. These brief devotional phrases, found in ostraca and temple walls, offer vivid testimony to the personal religiosity of military men stationed far from home.

Taken together, these practices illustrate the remarkable adaptability of Roman military religion. While the army maintained a shared framework of official cults, particularly the emperor cult and traditional Roman rituals, it simultaneously allowed space for diverse, localized forms of belief. This dual religious identity reflects both the structured nature of Roman imperial rule and the fluid, integrative character of life within the provinces<sup>20</sup>.

---

<sup>20</sup> O. Stoll, *The Religions of the Armies*, in P. Erdkamp (ed.), *op. cit.*, 464-468.

#### 4. *Christianization and identity transformation*

Our analysis begins with the attestations from primary historical, Eusebius<sup>21</sup> and Tertullian<sup>22</sup>, sources regarding soldiers who opted for Christian faith during the persecutions.

<sup>21</sup> Eus., *HE* VIII 4, 1-4: “For we might tell of many who showed admirable zeal for the religion of the God of the universe, not only from the beginning of the general persecution, but long before that time, while yet peace prevailed. For though he who had received power was seemingly aroused now as from a deep sleep, yet from the time after Decius and Valerian, he had been plotting secretly and without notice against the churches. He did not wage war against all of us at once, but made trial at first only of those in the army. For he supposed that the others could be taken easily if he should first attack and subdue these. Thereupon many of the soldiers were seen most cheerfully embracing private life, so that they might not deny their piety toward the Creator of the universe. For when the commander, whoever he was, began to persecute the soldiers, separating into tribes and purging those who were enrolled in the army, giving them the choice either by obeying to receive the honor which belonged to them, or on the other hand to be deprived of it if they disobeyed the command, a great many soldiers of Christ’s kingdom, without hesitation, instantly preferred the confession of him to the seeming glory and prosperity which they were enjoying. And one and another of them occasionally received in exchange, for their pious constancy, not only the loss of position, but death. But as yet the instigator of this plot proceeded with moderation, and ventured so far as blood only in some instances; for the multitude of believers, as it is likely, made him afraid, and deterred him from waging war at once against all. But when he made the attack more boldly, it is impossible to relate how many and what sort of martyrs of God could be seen, among the inhabitants of all the cities and countries.” (cf. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250108.htm>) (Accessed 21-07-2025).

<sup>22</sup> Tert. *De Cor.*, 1: “Very lately it happened thus: while the bounty of our most excellent emperors was dispensed in the camp, the soldiers, laurel-crowned, were approaching. One of them, more a soldier of God, more steadfast than the rest of his brethren, who had imagined that they could serve two masters, his head alone uncovered, the useless crown in his hand — already even by that peculiarity known to every one as a Christian — was nobly conspicuous. Accordingly, all began to mark him out, jeering him at a distance, gnashing on him near at hand. The murmur is wafted to the tribune, when the person had just left the ranks. The tribune at once puts the question to him, “Why are you so different in your attire?” He declared that he had no liberty to wear the crown with the rest. Being urgently asked for his reasons, he answered, I am a Christian. O soldier! Boasting yourself in God. Then the case was considered and voted on; the matter was remitted to a higher tribunal; the offender was conducted to the prefects. At once he put away the heavy cloak, his disburdening commenced; he loosed from his foot the military shoe, beginning to stand upon holy ground; he gave up the sword, which was not necessary either for the protection of our Lord; from his hand likewise dropped the laurel crown; and now, purple-clad with the hope of his own blood, shod with the preparation of the gospel, girt

These two sources, represent the earliest extant testimonies concerning the conversion of Roman soldiers to Christianity. They reveal profound theological and ideological tensions between military service and Christian identity in the late second and early third centuries. Tertullian, writing in a North African context around 210 AD, records the case of a soldier who refused to wear the laurel crown during a public ceremony, likely associated with imperial or pagan ritual. For Tertullian, this act of refusal becomes a paradigmatic assertion of Christian distinctiveness, a gesture of nonconformity to Roman religious expectations. His apologetic tone suggests a community already grappling with the practical implications of serving two masters: the emperor and Christ. A century later, ecclesiastical historiography preserves the memory of soldiers who, in the context of imperial ceremonies or military service, openly declared their Christian allegiance and suffered persecution as a result. The early *Passiones* of Christian martyrs document several such cases between 292 and 295 AD, including the martyrdom of a *vexillifer* named Fabius in 292, a centurion in Mauretania in 293, and the soldier Maximilian in Numidia in 295<sup>23</sup>. These cases, all situated in North Africa, suggest that the problem of military conversion was neither theoretical nor rare, but a concrete and recurring issue within the Roman army. For these men, becoming Christian meant redefining not only personal belief, but also professional identity and public loyalty.

These narratives, whether apologetic, hagiographical, or historiographical, consistently frame conversion as an act of rupture: a deliberate rejection of the traditional interconnection between military duty, civic cult, and imperial authority. The figure of the Christian soldier in these early sources thus appears as a liminal figure, caught between the expectations of Roman discipline and the demands of a

---

with the sharper word of God, completely equipped in the apostles' armour, and crowned more worthily with the white crown of martyrdom, he awaits in prison the largess of Christ. Thereafter adverse judgments began to be passed upon his conduct — whether on the part of Christians I do not know, for those of the heathen are not different — as if he were headstrong and rash, and too eager to die, because, in being taken to task about a mere matter of dress, he brought trouble on the bearers of the Name, — he, forsooth, alone brave among so many soldier-brethren, he alone a Christian.” (cf. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0304.htm>) (Accessed 26-05-2025).

<sup>23</sup> Eusebio di Cesarea, *Storia Ecclesiastica*/2, Città Nuova, Roma, 2001, 151-152.

transcendent moral order. Their stories illuminate the complex reconfiguration of identity faced by Christian converts in military service, and lay the foundation for the symbolic reimagining of the soldier in later Christian thought.

Other important evidence is provided by epigraphic sources<sup>24</sup>, including sepulchral inscriptions, which attest to Christian participation in military service. Leclercq has assembled a scholarly collection of Christian military inscriptions. His representative corpus includes fifty-four sepulchral inscriptions honoring Christian soldiers, spanning the early third to the late fifth century<sup>25</sup>. Inscriptions featuring formulaic expressions and distinctively Christian symbolic elements typically emerge around 180 AD. The chronologically earliest inscription in Leclercq's corpus (no. 29) commemorates a soldier of Septimius Severus's Second Parthian Legion. Dating to 201 AD, this inscription not only represents one of the earliest Christian epigraphic testimonies of any kind, but also demonstrates Christian military service from the earliest period of Christian archaeological documentation<sup>26</sup>.

Additional support for the presence of Christianity within the Roman military comes from a notable archaeological discovery at Dura-Europos<sup>27</sup>, a Roman frontier city. Excavations there uncovered the remains of a Christian worship space located within a military compound, dated to the Severan period. This rare architectural evidence, suggests that Christian practices had begun to find a foothold even within military garrisons. While this case likely reflects the particular circumstances and disposition of the local command rather than broader imperial policy, it nonetheless points to the growing visibility and potential toleration of Christian worship among soldiers during the third century. The chronology aligns with the wider diffusion of Christianity in this period and complements the epigraphic and literary evidence for Christian military presence.

---

<sup>24</sup> E. Le Blant, *Inscriptions chrétienne de la Gaule antérieure au VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Tome 1, *Provinces Gallicanes*, Paris, 1856, 81-87.

<sup>25</sup> H. Leclercq, *Militarisme*, in *DACL*, 11/1, Paris, 1932, 1108-1182.

<sup>26</sup> J. F. Shean, *op. cit.*, 183-184.

<sup>27</sup> D. K. Pettegrew, *The Christian building at Dura-Europos: Rethinking the archaeology of the world's oldest house church*, *AJA*, 128/3, 2024, 341-379; C. L. Angelo, J. Silver, *Debating the domus ecclesiae at Dura-Europos: the Christian building in context*, *JRA*, 37/1, 2024, 264-303.

The transformation of the Roman soldier from a devotee of pagan cults to a Christian martyr represents only one dimension of the profound religious revolution that marked the late imperial period. Equally significant, though operating on a different plane, is the emergence of the soldier as a powerful symbolic figure within the New Testament itself. This symbolic appropriation of military imagery by early Christian writers reveals a sophisticated theological strategy: the transformation of the very archetype of Roman imperial power into a metaphor for Christian discipleship and spiritual warfare.

The New Testament's use of military symbolism is neither accidental nor peripheral, but represents a deliberate recontextualization of familiar Roman military culture within a Christian theological framework. This symbolic transformation occurs precisely at the moment when actual Roman soldiers were beginning to face the contradictions between their professional duties and their new faith, as documented in the martyrdom accounts discussed above. The literary and theological development of military metaphors in Christian scripture thus parallels and complements the historical process of military conversion, creating a complex dialectical relationship between symbol and reality.

The most comprehensive and theologically sophisticated use of military symbolism appears in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, specifically in the famous passage on spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-17). This text represents the fullest development of the *miles Christi* concept, transforming the Roman soldier's equipment into a complete theological system. Paul's detailed enumeration of the Christian's spiritual armor, the belt of truth (*zona veritatis*), the breastplate of righteousness (*lorica iustitiae*), the sandals of the gospel of peace (*calceamenta evangelii pacis*), the shield of faith (*scutum fidei*), the helmet of salvation (*galea salutis*), and the sword of the Spirit (*gladius Spiritus*), creates a systematic correspondence between military equipment and Christian virtues.

This metaphorical transformation is particularly significant because it appropriates the most recognizable symbols of Roman military power and redefines them within an entirely different moral and spiritual context<sup>28</sup>. The Roman soldier's armor, which represented im-

---

<sup>28</sup> R. A. Wild, *The warrior and the prisoner: some reflections on Ephesians 6: 10-20*, *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 46/2, 1984, 284-298; J. K. McVay, "Our Struggle": *Ecclesia Militans in Ephesians 6: 10-20*, *Andrews University Seminary Studies (AUSS)*, 43/1, 2005, 6; F. S. Thielman, *Ephesians*, in G. K. Beale & D. A.

perial dominance and the capacity for violence, becomes instead the Christian's protection against spiritual evil and the means of advancing the gospel of peace. The gladius, the short sword that symbolized Roman military efficiency, is transformed into the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God", redirecting the concept of warfare from physical to spiritual combat.

The systematic development of military metaphors in the New Testament reflects a sophisticated theological strategy that operates on multiple levels. First, it demonstrates the early Christian community's ability to appropriate and transform the dominant cultural symbols of their time, redirecting them toward transcendent purposes. The Roman soldier, who represented the coercive power of the state and the glory of conquest, becomes instead the model of spiritual discipline, moral courage, and service to a higher kingdom.

Second, this symbolic transformation reveals the tension between Christian identity and imperial culture that would later manifest in the actual conversion and martyrdom of Roman soldiers. The New Testament's idealization of military virtues, discipline, courage, loyalty, endurance, provided a framework for understanding how Christian commitment might resemble military service while being directed toward fundamentally different ends. The symbolic figure of the soldier in the New Testament represents the culmination of a profound process of cultural and religious transformation that began with the conversion of individual Roman soldiers and extended to the systematic reappropriation of military imagery within Christian theology. This transformation reveals the early Christian community's remarkable capacity to engage with and transform the dominant cultural symbols of their time, creating new forms of religious identity that drew upon familiar military concepts while directing them toward transcendent purposes. The development of military metaphors in the New Testament thus represents not merely a literary or theological phenomenon, but a crucial stage in the broader process of Christianization that would eventually transform the Roman Empire itself.

---

Carson (eds.), *Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament*, Baker Academic, 2007, 813-833; N.-O. Benea, *Divine Virtues and Spiritual Conflict: An Exegetical, Patristic, and Contemporary Analysis of Ephesians 6: 14-18*, *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai. Theologia Orthodoxa*, 69/2, 2024, 95-114.

## 5. Conclusion

The Christianization of the Roman military marks one of the most complex and symbolically charged episodes in the broader transformation of Late Antiquity. Far from being a simple process of religious substitution, the adoption of Christianity by Roman soldiers unfolded through gradual adjustments, cultural reinterpretations, and ideological tensions that reshaped the very meaning of military service. This study has attempted to show that the intersection between martial identity and Christian faith was not only historically consequential but theologically and symbolically transformative. At stake was not merely the replacement of one set of rites with another, but the redefinition of what it meant to be a soldier in an empire that was itself undergoing a profound religious metamorphosis. The figure of the Christian soldier emerges in this context as a liminal and often paradoxical character. Bound by oath to the emperor yet drawn to a faith that placed ultimate allegiance elsewhere, Christian soldiers had to navigate the contradictions between violence and piety, imperial discipline and spiritual autonomy. Their experiences, whether expressed in acts of martyrdom, inscriptions, or silent devotion, reveal a gradual internalization of Christian values that did not necessarily erase older forms of loyalty, but reoriented them toward a new eschatological horizon. The conversion of the Roman soldier was therefore not merely an act of belief, but a symbolic gesture that redefined notions of virtue, obedience, and identity within the imperial system.

It is particularly striking that Christianity did not reject military language or imagery; rather, it appropriated and transformed it. The New Testament's use of martial metaphors, culminating in the image of the *miles Christi*, offers a powerful example of how the early Christian imagination did not shy away from Roman cultural forms, but resignified them to articulate a radically different kind of warfare. In this way, the Christian soldier became both a theological metaphor and a historical reality, a figure at once emblematic of personal conviction and of imperial transformation.

Ultimately, the Christianization of the Roman military was neither imposed from above nor achieved by resistance alone; it was the product of a dynamic interplay between institutional reforms, local practices, individual conscience, and evolving theological visions. It was a process that unfolded unevenly across time and space, marked by

---

tensions as well as accommodations. And yet, by the late fourth century, the transformation was largely complete: the army that once marched under the sign of Jupiter now fought under the sign of the cross.



Universitatea „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași  
Facultatea de Istorie • Centrul de Studii Clasice și Creștine

Bd. Carol I, Nr. 11, 700506, Iași, România  
Tel.: 040/0232/201634, Fax: 040/0232/201156



ISSN: 1842-3043  
e-ISSN: 2393-2961

EDITURA UNIVERSITĂȚII „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” DIN IAȘI