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Limitanei in *Historia Augusta*. Can Remarks About a Frontier Army Be Used to Date *Historia Augusta*?

Limitanei w *Historia Augusta*. Czy wzmianki o armii przygranicznej można wykorzystać do datowania *Historia Augusta*?

ABSTRACT

The *Historia Augusta* is the most enigmatic source of the late antiquity. Its author often departs from the truth, even on most salient issues. He not only suggests that he had written his work earlier than he actually did, but also assumes 6 different nicknames to confirm his version of events. *Limitanei* (the soldiers of frontier districts) were mentioned in *Historia Augusta* four times. All these references, however, contain anachronistic terminology both for the times when, according to the author, they were to happen and the times of writing. In the article below I have analyzed these references. I believe that it allows us to better understand the author's mentality. One of these references is particularly important. For long time it was believed to be a testimony to the transformation of the Roman frontier army into a peasant militia. This interpretation seems to be rejected now-

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days. Today this interpretation describes the use of land by *limitanei* soldiers, which is confirmed in codex sources only in the middle of the 5th century, it may serve as a hint regarding the time when the notes may have been taken. Meanwhile, in the present times most of scholars today believe that the *Historia Augusta* was written in the late 4th or early 5th century. While based on this reference, it is impossible to date the creation of the *Historia Augusta* as a useful source when starting a discussion about dating this source again. It remains a clue that allows us to start a discussion about dating this source again.

Key words: Roman Army, *Limitanei*, Late Roman Empire, Roman historiography, *Historia Augusta*

It is a well-known fact that one of the most important changes in the Roman army in the 4th century was the introduction of the division into *comitatenses* and *limitanei*. This reform took place during the reign of Constantine the Great¹. In the emperor's constitution of 17 June

¹ Unfortunately, our knowledge of *limitanei* is far from satisfactory because of the sparsity of our sources. Ancient authors rarely described these units (H. Elton, *Sztuka wojenna w rzymskiej Europie 350–425*, Oświęcim 2013, p. 166). The discussion about the exact time when the Roman army split into *comitatenses* and *limitanei* is very dynamic. Unfortunately, our historiographic sources are very limited and, apart from Zosimus, do not describe the moment when it happened. Many researchers saw this as a change introduced by Diocletian (W. Treadgold, *Bizancjum i jego armia 284–1081*, Wodzisław 2013, p. 10; P. Southern, K.R. Dixon, *The Late Roman Army*, London–New York 1996, p. 15; D.S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay AD 180–395*, London–New York 2004, pp. 451–453). This is partly due to the possible testimony to the existence of *comitatenses* during the reign of Diocletian. In a papyrus from 295, a Martianus is mentioned, who served in *comites* (Oxyrhynchus, *Papyri*, vol. 1–82, eds. B.P. Grenfell et al., 1889–, 1.43). In addition, in the dedication to *augusti*, Constantine the Great, Licinius and Maximinus Daia, from 310 – Valerius Sambarras is mentioned, who was *praepositus equitibus Dalmatis Aquesianis comitatensibus* (*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, ed. H. Dessau, Berlin 1892–1916 [hereinafter: ILS] 3.5565 = ILS 664). Finally, from the tombstone of Valerius Thriumpius we learn that he was *lectus in sacro comitatu lanciarus*. He served in one of *lanciarus* units that were part of the *comitatus*. However, all the above testimonies are not unambiguous. Perhaps *comitatus* existed during the reign of Diocletian as a few elite units, that were not identical to the later field army (see: W. Seston, *Dioclétien et la tétrarchie*, Paris 1946, pp. 295–356; D. van Berchem, *L'Armée de Dioclétien et la Réforme Constantinienne*, Paris 1952, pp. 105–111; W. Seston, *Du Comitatus de Dioclétien aux Comitatus de Constantin*, in: *Scripta varia. Mélanges d'histoire romaine, de droit, d'épigraphie et d'histoire du christianisme*, ed. W. Seston, Rome 1980, pp. 483–495; P. Southern, *Historia armii rzymskiej 753 przed Chr.–476 po Chr.*, Oświęcim 2019, p. 620). There are more arguments for the division of the army into *comitatenses* and *limitanei* during the reign of Constantine the Great. Firstly, the reform of the army is attributed to Constantine the Great by Aurelius Victor. Unfortunately, he provides no details (Aurelius Victor, *Liber de cesaribus*, eds. F. Pichlmayer, R. Gründer, Leipzig 1970 (Bibliotheca Teubneriana); P. Dufraigne, Paris 1975 (Les Belles Lettres) [hereinafter: Aur. Vict., Caes.], 41.12). Zosimus is less laconic. He contrasts Diocletian with Constantine the Great. The former took care of Roman defense; everywhere in the border zone troops were stationed that could repel the enemy. Meanwhile, Constantine the Great dismantled this

325, the units of *ripenses*, *comitatenses* and *protectores* are mentioned². Most likely, the term *ripenses* should be understood as a frontier army, which was then called *limitanei*³. The term *limitanei* itself first appeared on 21 December 363⁴, although this did not mean that one term was immediately replaced with another. In several constitutions from the second half of the 4th and early 5th century, names such as *ripariensis* and *ripensis* are still used⁵. It soon turned out that the combat value of *limitanei* was relatively small, despite the fact that on paper they constituted 2/3 of the Roman army⁶. *Limitanei* and *riparienses* appear not only in legal texts,

security measure, withdrawing much of his troops from the borders and placing them in the cities instead. Zosimus describes this reform very negatively. It was supposed to demoralize Roman soldiers who would watch the games and indulge in debauchery. For Zosimus it is one of the points that started the ruin of the Roman State (Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, ed. L. Mendelssohn, Leipzig 1867 (Bibliotheca Tauberiana); F. Paschoud, Paris 1971–1989 (Les Belles Lettres) [hereinafter: Zos., Hist.], 2.34). Obviously, the assessment made by Zosimus is unfair and religiously motivated (E. Wipszycka, *Zosimos, Nowa Historia*, Warszawa 1993, p. 275). Nevertheless, the reform carried out by Constantine the Great did more harm than good in the future.

² *Codex Theodosianus*, eds. T. Mommsen, P. Meyer, Berolini 1905 [hereinafter: C. Th.], 7.20.4: 'Idem a. ad Maximum praefectum Urbi. Comitatus et ripenses milites atque protectores suum caput, patris ac matris et uxoris, si tamen eos superstites habeant, omnes excusent, si censibus inditi habeantur. Quod si aliquam ex his personis non habuerint vel nullam habuerint, tantum pro suo debent peculio excusare, quantum pro iisdem, si non deessent, excusare potuissent, ita tamen, ut non pactione cum alteris facta simulato dominio rem alienam excusent, sed vere proprias facultates'.

³ R. Grosse, *Armia rzymska. Od cesarza Galiena do początków bizantyjskiej organizacji temowej*, Oświęcim 2012, p. 50.

⁴ C. Th., 12.1.56: 'Idem a. Qui nati origine curiali militare munus adamaverunt, ubi X annorum stipendia confecta sunt, iussionum nostrarum auctoritate erunt curia immunes. Si vero intra decennium recens athuc erit ratio militiae limitanae, causa generis praeponderabit et originis: curiis enim adgregabuntur. Dat. XII kal. ian. Antiochiae Iuliano a. IIII et Sallustio cons's'.

⁵ C. Th., 8.4.14; 8.22.8; 8.13.7; 8.1.18; *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. 2, *Codex Iustinianus*, ed. P. Krueger, Berlin 1967 [hereinafter: CJ], 12.35.14. See: R. Grosse, *op. cit.*, p. 50. Although these terms are synonymous, there may have been slight differences between these types of units (H. Elton, *Sztuka*, p. 89).

⁶ On the causes of the weakness of Roman forces at the end of the 4th and 5th centuries, see: A. Ziółkowski, *Historia Rzymu*, Poznań 2004, pp. 559–568. Recently, attempts have been made to rehabilitate the combat value of *limitanei* forces (B. Isaac, *The Meaning of the Terms Limes and Limitanei*, 'The Journal of Roman Studies' 1988, 78, p. 145; Y. Le Bohec, *Limitanei et comitatenses Critique de la thèse attribuée à Theodor Mommsen*, 'Latomus' 2007, 66, pp. 659–672; P. Letki, *Kawaleria Dioklejana*, Oświęcim 2012, p. 60; A. Szopa, *Armia rzymska w IV wieku*, in: *Świat rzymski w IV wieku*, eds. P. Filipczak, R. Kosiński, Kraków 2015, pp. 397–398; P. Southern, *op. cit.*, p. 636). It is indicated that the main task of *limitanei* was to guard the forts; those units were not intended to start battles, they effectively prevented small forces from crossing borders (H. Elton, *Sztuka*, pp. 170–171). It does not seem very plausible. It was not without a reason that in 372 worse recruits were assigned to *limitanei*, meaning

but also in the works of ancient historians and orators. *Historia Augusta* contains four passages mentioning *limitanei/riparienses*. Three cases are constituted by the mentions of *limitanei* in the biographies of Pescennius Niger, Severus Alexander and Probus. *Riparienses* were mentioned in Aurelian's biography. The very appearance of these terms in *Historia Augusta* is one of the numerous anachronisms occurring in this work⁷. In my text, I would like to investigate the references to *limitanei* in order to answer whether anything can be said about the dating of the work on the basis of those fragments.

The first reference comes from the biography of Pescennius Niger. The author of *Historia Augusta* reports anecdotes regarding strict military discipline introduced by the aforementioned Pescennius Niger prior to his attempt to gain imperial power. We find, among other things, that when asked for wine by the *limitanei* soldiers, the commander ordered them to drink water from the Nile⁸. The author of *Historia Augusta* refers to this anecdote at the end of the usurper's biography. The grateful inhabitants of Thebes (Egyptian) were to offer Pescennius Niger a statue made of Theban marble (*ex Thebaico marmore*), i.e. basanite. In this way they wanted to thank him for being an ally of Thebes (*Thebaidos socius*) and the terror of the Egyptian soldiers⁹. This story echoes the *Historia Augusta* author's hostility towards Egypt (although he turns out to be an ally of the Thebans). However, this is not the first time we can observe an antipathy to Egypt in *Historia Augusta*¹⁰. It is worth emphasizing that in Late Antiquity negative

that those units were treated as inferior ones. While some *limitanei* units were moved into the ranks of *comitatenses*, creating the *pseudocomitatenses* forces, they nevertheless enjoyed less privileges than *comitatenses* (R. Grosse, *op. cit.*, p. 67). In addition, only a part of the *limitanei* forces was given such a promotion, by no means all of them. Only in the times of Justinian the sources described to us the effective use of *limitanei* units in conducting activities in areas distant from their place of stationing (Procopius, *Bella*, ed. J. Haury; rev. G. Wirth, Leipzig 1962–1964 (Bibliotheca Teubneriana), 2.16.17).

⁷ The author of *Historia Augusta* suggests that he was writing during the reign of the tetrarchs or Constantine the Great, but uses a term that is mentioned in legal sources 25 years after the death of the latter ruler. On the date of the creation of *Historia Augusta* see: R. Suski, *Jowisz, Jahwe, Jezus. Religie w Historia Augusta*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 1–12.

⁸ *Historia Augusta*, ed. E. Hohl, Leipzig 1971 (Bibliotheca Teubneriana), transl. with franc. A. Chastagnol, *Histoire Auguste. Les empereurs romains des II e et III e siècles*, Paris 1994 [hereinafter: *Hist. Aug.*], *Pesc. Nig.*, 7.7: 'hic erga milites tanta fuit censura, ut, cum apud Aegyptum ab eo *limitanei* vinum peterent, responderit 'Nilum habetis et vinum quaeritis?'; si quidem tanta illius fluminis dulcitus, ut accolae vina non quaerant'.

⁹ *Hist. Aug.*, *Pesc. Nig.*, 12.6.

¹⁰ The most famous passage from *Historia Augusta* showing aversion towards the inhabitants of Egypt is a letter attributed to Hadrian, allegedly cited by the author of *Historia Augusta* following Phlegon. In that letter, Egypt is referred to as reckless, volatile, prone to believing in rumours. Money is the only god for the Egyptians; they are presented as rebels,

stereotypes about Egypt co-occurred with a positive image of this land¹¹. In this case, however, the xenophobia of the author of *Historia Augusta* prevails. Quite often he spoke negatively about the inhabitants of the province (e.g. about Gaul).

The aversion to soldiers and the emphasis on the need for discipline among them are stressed even stronger in this text. The author of *Historia Augusta* repeatedly attributes to Pescennius Niger austerity towards the army. No soldier under his command forced the inhabitants of the province to provide wood, oil or work¹². As a tribune, he did not allow accepting gifts¹³. As the Emperor, he ordered *auxiliares* soldiers to stone two tribunes when they had been convicted of cheating on the army rations¹⁴. Septimius Severus, chastening the governor of Gaul, Ragonius Celsus, indicated Pescennius Niger as an example of the perfect discipline in the army¹⁵. To the soldiers who were defeated by the Saracens, rebelling because they were given water, not wine, he told that their victors drink water, not wine¹⁶. He also forbade legionnaires to use silver items during war campaigns so that in the event of failure they would not fall into the hands of barbarians¹⁷. Moreover, he prohibited the soldiers from drinking wine during the expedition. They were to replace it with vinegar¹⁸. He ordered the beheading of ten soldiers, who ate a rooster stolen from a farmer. However, Pescennius Niger had to withdraw this sentence because he was threatened by a military revolt. In this situation, he only ordered the culprits to compensate for the damage caused, but he made them pay the victim the equivalent of the price for ten roosters¹⁹. Pescenius Niger also banned lighting fires during the campaign and eating freshly cooked food²⁰. On the other hand, those setting out to fight

liars, and unjust people. The fact described in this passage are completely ahistorical. See: R. Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta*, Oxford 1968, p. 61; M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 2, Jerusalem 1980, p. 638; F. Paschoud, *Histoire Auguste*, vol. 5.2, *Vies de Probus, Firmus, Saturnun, Proculus et Bonose, Carus, Numérien et Carin*, Paris 2001, pp. 245–246; A. Galimberti, *The Pseudo-Hadrianic Epistle in the Historia Augusta and Hadrian's Religious Policy*, in: *Hadrian and the Christians*, ed. M. Rizzi, Berlin–New York 2010, p. 112.

¹¹ D. den Hengst, *Egyptomania and Egyptophobia in Late Antiquity*, in: *Studies of Greek and Roman Literature, Classica Cracoviensia II*, ed. J. Styka, Kraków 1996, pp. 119–136.

¹² Hist. Aug., Pesc. Nig., 3.6.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 3.7.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 3.8.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 3.9–12.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 7.8.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 10.1–2.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 10.3.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 10.5–6.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 10.6.

had to deposit gold and silver coins, so that in the event of their death instead of becoming the enemy's spoils it would rather go to widows and orphans²¹. For the author of *Historia Augusta* austerity is a positive quality²². Therefore it should not be surprising, since he emphasised this feature in Pescennius Niger so strongly, that he held the would-be Emperor of Rome in high regard. Supposedly, Marcus Aurelius²³ and Commodus²⁴ had a positive opinion about him, and Septimius Severus would probably have forgiven Pescennius Niger's usurpation had the latter not been so adamant with regard to his values²⁵. The author of *Historia Augusta* considered Pescennius Niger useful for the State, if he had wanted to side with Septimius Severus²⁶. Moreover, according to the author of *Historia Augusta*, Pescennius Niger would have been a better ruler than his victor, he would have fixed what the latter could not or did not wish to fix²⁷. Of course, the use of the term *limitanei* in the passage from the biography of Pescennius Niger is rather coincidental. For the author of *Historia Augusta*, this name seemed the most natural when referred to the army. He was unaware that this term appeared only in the 4th century. Not much results from this fact. Certainly, the author of *Historia Augusta* lived at a time when the division of the army into *limitanei* and *comitenses* had already been in force for decades. It is, therefore, obvious he did not feel that this term was anachronistic when used in the context of the late 2nd century.

The term *riparienses* appears in Aurelian's biography. We find it in a letter about the rebellion of Felicissimus, which the Emperor sent to Ulpian Crinitus. He reported to his foster father that seven thousand rowers, *ripariensium*, *castrianorum*, and Dacians were killed while suppressing the rebellion²⁸. This letter seems bizarre. First of all, everything indicates that the senator

²¹ *Ibidem*, 10.7.

²² B. Mouchová, *Crudelitas Principis Optimi* in: *Bonner Historia-Augusta – Colloquium 1970*, ed. J. Straub, Bonn 1972, pp. 167–194; I. Moreno-Ferrero, *Severus Alexander's Severitas and the Composition of the Life*, in: *Historiae Augustae Colloquium Genevense, VII 1998*, ed. F. Paschoud, Bari 1999, pp. 191–216.

²³ *Hist. Aug.*, *Pesc. Nig.*, 4.1–3.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 4.4–5.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 4.7.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 6.10.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 12.3.

²⁸ *Hist. Aug.*, *Aurel.*, 38.3–4: 'Aurelianus Augustus Ulpio patri. quasi fatale quiddam mihi sit, ut omnia bella quaecumque gesserō, omnes motus ingravescant, ita etiam seditio intramurana bellum mihi gravissimum peperit. monetarii auctore Felicissimo, ultimo servorum, cui procurationem fisci mandaveram, rebelles spiritus extulerunt. hi compressi sunt septem milibus lembariorum et ripariensium et castrianorum et Daciscorum interemptis. unde apparet nullam mihi a dis immortalibus datam sine difficultate victoriam'.

and adoptive father of Aurelian Ulpius Crinitus is a fictional character²⁹. Secondly, while Felicissimus is an authentic figure, he was certainly not a slave. According to our sources, he served as a *rationibus*³⁰, which rules out his low social position³¹. It is also not obvious whether he led the rebellion of the mint workers or his death was a signal for rebellion³². While the most likely reason that provoked the rebellion was Aurelian's uncovering of coin counterfeiting by mint masters, it is not entirely clear what the number of the victims was³³. In the discussed letter Aurelian estimated the death toll at 7,000. This sum also appears in Aurelius Victor, but this number of people was to die on both sides of the conflict³⁴. Most likely, the author of *Historia Augusta* misinterpreted Aurelius Victor's message. The more so because he

²⁹ In the biography of Aurelian Ulpius Crinitus is mentioned several times. He was a descendant of Trajan (Hist. Aug., Aurel., 10.2). He was a brave man, and similar to Trajan (Hist. Aug., Aurel., 10.2). He held the office of Consul three times (Hist. Aug., Aurel., 10.2). In the Temple of Sol there was a painting of Ulpius Crinitus with Aurelian (Hist. Aug., Aurel., 10.2), Ulpius Crinitus supposedly achieved a lot of military victories, he restored the old borders, distributed the spoils to the soldiers, he generously gaveed Thrace oxen, horses, and slaves. He placed the spoils on the Palatine, gave Valerian 500 slaves, 2,000 cows, 1000 mares, 10,000 sheep and 15,000 goats to his private estate (Hist. Aug., Aurel., 10.2). Finally, Valerian was about to consider making Crinitus Emperor (Hist. Aug., Aurel., 10.2). Ulpius Crinitus was to adopt Aurelian (Hist. Aug., 10.3–15.2). The description of Aurelian's adoption by Ulpius Crinitus suspiciously resembles the passage in Ammianus Marcellinus, which describes the change in command made by Valens (see: D. den Hegst, *Ammianus, The Historia Augusta and Julian*, in: *Studies of Greek and Roman Civilization*, ed. J. Styka, Kraków 1998, pp. 101–107). Apart from *Historia Augusta*, no one mentions the senator. The name (nomen) of Aurelian clearly indicates that he was not adopted into the Ulpius family. There is no indication that Ulpius Crinitus served as a Consul. It would be unusual for a man to hold a private consulate three times in the 3rd century. Thus, everything appears to be indicating that this senator is a fictional character. See: T.D. Barnes, *Some Persons in the Historia Augusta*, 'Phoenix' 1972, 26, p. 155; D. Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, Darmstadt 1996, p. 235.

³⁰ Aur. Vict., Caes., 35.6; Eutropius, *Breviarium ab urbe condita*, ed. H. Droysen, Hannover 1879; C. Santini, Stuttgart 1979 (Bibliotheca Teubneriana) [hereinafter: Eutrop.], 9.14.

³¹ On a *rationibus* see: F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World (31 B.C.–A.D. 337)*, London 1977, pp. 105–106.

³² Aurelius Victor describes Felicissimus as the leader of the rebellion (Aur. Vict., Caes., 35.6), while Eutropius suggests that during the rebellion a *rationibus* was already dead (Eutrop., 9.14).

³³ R. Turcan, *Le délit des monétaires rebellés contre Aurélien*, 'Latomus' 1869, 28, p. 957; R.T. Saunders, *A Biography of the Emperor Aurelian A.D. 270–275*, Ann Arbor 1992, p. 191; V. Cubelli, *Aureliano Imperatore. La rivolta dei monetieri e la cosiddetta riforma monetaria* Firenze 1992, pp. 40–46; A. Watson, *Aurelian and the Third Century*, London–New York 1999, p. 53; R. Suski, *Konsolidacja Cesarstwa Rzymskiego za panowania Aureliana 270–275*, Kraków 2008, pp. 332–336.

³⁴ Aur. Vict., Caes., 35.6.

certainly used his *De Caesaribus*³⁵ and it was probably this work that was his source here. Of course, the author of *Historia Augusta* developed the above source and, thanks to his own fantasy, enriched it with new details. Many elements of this letter are just weird, so one can definitely see his fantasy in it³⁶. He was short of real knowledge about the Emperor, so he duplicated facts, invented them to appear more informed than he really was.

In this imaginary letter, the list of Aurelian's opponents who supported Felicissimus is particularly astonishing. Funnily enough, the mint employees were not among them. There are, however, four terms, each of which is anachronistic in Aurelian's time. The first one is *Castriani*. This name only occurs in *Historia Augusta*³⁷. They must be equated with *Castriciani*, who are known from legal sources and are mentioned in the imperial constitution of 19 March 400³⁸. The *Castriciani* are most likely identical to the *Castellani*, mentioned in the subsequent imperial constitution of 423³⁹. The very appearance of these terms in *Historia Augusta* was the basis for the dating of this work by E. Birley after 400 AD⁴⁰. However, the matter is far from obvious. The terms may have been known earlier, the first use of the term in a legal text did not have to establish them. In any case, the *castellani* belonged to the *limitanei*⁴¹. Also the word *Daciscus* is likely not to have been an allusion to the inhabitants of Dacia, but to units known from *Notitia*. Thanks to this document, we know about the existence of *Milites Dacisci* led by *Dux Moesiae Secundae*⁴², and *Duxa Daciae Ripensis*⁴³, as well

³⁵ A. Chastagnol, *L'utilisation des 'Caesares' d'Aurélius Victor dans l'Histoire Auguste*, in: *Bonner Historia-Augusta - Colloquium 1966/1967*, ed. J. Straub, Bonn 1968, pp. 53–65.

³⁶ F. Paschoud, *Histoire Auguste*. vol. 5.1, *Vies d'Aurélien et Tacite*, Paris 1996, pp. 182–183.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

³⁸ C. Th., 7.1.18: 'Ide aa. Stilichoni magistro militum. Contra publicam utilitatem nolimus a numeris ad alios numeros milites nostros transferri. Sciant igitur comites vel duces, quibus regendae militiae cura commissa est, non solum de comitatensibus ac palatinis numeris ad alios numeros militem transferri non licere, sed ne de ipsis quidem pseudocomitatensibus legionibus seu de ripariensibus castricianis ceterisque cuiquam eorum transferendi militem copiam adtributam, quia honoris augmentum non ambitione, sed labore ad unumquemque convenit devenire. Quod si qui contra fecerint, per singulos milites singulas auri libras a se noverint exigendas. Dat. XIII kal. april. Mediolano Stilichone et Aureliano cons's'. See: O. Seeck, *Castellani*. 2, in: *Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, I A, col. 1753–1754; F. Paschoud, *Histoire Auguste*, vol. 5.1, p. 183.

³⁹ C. Th., 7.15.2.

⁴⁰ E. Birley, *True and False: Order of Battle in the HA*, in: *Bonner Historia-Augusta - Colloquium 1977/1978*, ed. J. Straub, Bonn 1980, p. 37.

⁴¹ H. Elton, *Sztuka*, p. 89.

⁴² *Notitia Dignitatum, Pars Secunda. In partibus Orientis*, in: *Notitia dignitatum. Accedunt notitia urbis Constantinopolitanae et laterculi provinciarum*, ed. O. Seeck, Frankfurt am Main 1962 [hereinafter: Or.], 42.24.

⁴³ E. Birley, *True*, p. 36.

as *Auxillium primorum Daciscorum* and *Auxillium secundorum Daciscorum*⁴⁴. The term *ripariensis* was not only equivalent to *limitanei*, but also meant special units along the river boundaries. The presence of such units is also mentioned in *Notitia*⁴⁵. In fact, out of those two terms only one seems to pose a problem. That is *Lembarii* which does not appear anywhere else except *Historia Augusta*⁴⁶. In *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* the word *lemba* or *lembus* is used eight times and denotes small boats used by pirates⁴⁷. Interestingly, this is also the name of the boats that were part of the Rhine flotilla of Valentinian I. The Emperor sailed on them to the other side of the river and made peace with Macrianus, the King of the Alemanni⁴⁸. Clearly, all Felicissimus' allies mentioned in the fictitious letter of Aurelian to Ulpius Crinitus have no connection with the potential participants of the minters' revolt in Rome. The author of *Historia Augusta*, inventing the correspondence between the emperor and Crinitus, did not care to name the real rebels. On the other hand, the list includes terms denoting *limitanei* military units that were used in the second half of the 4th or in the 5th century. It is not obvious why he chose these particular words. He could have come up with *castellani/castriani* due to the fact that the fighting took place in the city, while the introduction of *lembarii* and *ripariensis* to a false document could be related to the Tiber. In any case, we are obviously dealing with an anachronism⁴⁹.

The third reference to *limitanei* in *Historia Augusta* comes from the biography of Probus. The author of *Historia Augusta*, narrating the emperor's successes, among other things mentions his victories over Germanic tribes. Well, Probus took the spoils and sixty cities occupied in Gaul⁵⁰ from Germanic people, he ordered to murder 40,000 of them and to drive the rest across the Neckar River⁵¹. Probus then moved the war front to the other side of the Rhine⁵². Ultimately, nine Germanic chiefs came to Probus and humbled themselves before the Emperor⁵³. This act resulted in Probus taking 16,000 Germanic soldiers into the Roman service. However,

⁴⁴ Or., 40.21.

⁴⁵ F. Paschoud, *Histoire Auguste*. vol. 5.1, p. 183.

⁴⁶ E. Birley, *True*, p. 36.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum*, ed. V. Gardthausen, Stuttgart 1967 (Bibliotheca Tauberiana); J.C. Rolfe, London 1935–1940 (Loeb); J. Fontaine, Paris 1968–1999 (Les Belles Lettres) [hereinafter: Amm.], 30.3.5.

⁴⁹ B. Isaac, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

⁵⁰ Hist. Aug., Probus, 13.6.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 13.7.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 13.8.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 14.2–4.

they were scattered throughout all the provinces. Fifty or sixty of them were assigned to the military units (including *limitanei*), so that it was not visible that the Romans were assisted by auxiliary barbarian troops⁵⁴. This narrative was to be confirmed by a letter that Probus reportedly sent to the Senate. It basically repeats all the 'facts' that appeared earlier: the killing of 40,000 enemies, liberating seventy cities from the Germanic invaders, surrendering of 16,000 opponents or getting plenty of loot⁵⁵. Of course, this in no way proves the authenticity of *Historia Augusta* stories. In his work the author repeatedly fabricates 'documents' of orations or letters, in which he repeats the 'facts' he described earlier. This does not mean that all of Probus' actions mentioned in the passages are untrue. Alemanni were indeed driven from Gaul by Probus⁵⁶. Only the proportions of the ruler's success, the number of captured cities or killed enemies are significantly increased⁵⁷. The exaggeration of the emperor's deeds does not only result from the desire to color the biography. The author of *Historia Augusta* builds the image of Probus as an ideal emperor, a fortunate leader. This is evident already after the presentation of the Emperor's deeds before assuming power⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 14.7: 'accepit praeterea sedecim milia tironum, quos omnes per diversas provincias sparsit, ita ut numeris vel limitaneis militibus quinquagenos et sexagenos intersereret, dicens sentiendum esse non videndum cum auxiliariis barbaris Romanus iuvatur'.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 15.1–7: 'Compositis igitur rebus in Gallia tales ad senatum litteras dedit: Ago dis immortalibus gratias, patres conscripti, quia vestra in me iudicia comprobantur. subacta est omnis qua tenditur late Germania, novem reges gentium diversarum ad meos pedes, immo ad vestros, supplices stratique iacuerunt. omnes iam barbari vobis arant, vobis iam serunt et contra interiores gentes militant. supplicationes igitur vestro more decernite. nam et quadrigenta milia hostium caesa sunt, et sedecim milia armatorum nobis oblata, et septuaginta urbes nobilissimae a captivitate hostium vindicatae, et omnes penitus Galliae liberatae. coronas, quas mihi obtulerunt omnes Galliae civitates aureas, vestrae, patres conscripti clementiae dedicavi. eas Iovi Optimo Maximo ceterisque dis deabusque immortalibus vestris manibus consecrate. praeda omnis recepta est, capta etiam alia, et quidem maior quam fuerat ante direpta. arantur Gallicana rura barbaris bubus et iuga Germanica captiva praebent nostris colla cultoribus, pascuntur ad nostrorum alimoniam gentium pecora diversarum, equinum pecus nostro iam fecundatur equitatu, frumento barbarico plena sunt horrea. quid plura? illis sola relinquimus sola, nos eorum omnia possidemus. volueramus, patres conscripti, Germaniae novum praesidem facere, sed hoc ad pleniora vota distulimus. quod quidem credimus conferre, cum divina providentia nostros uberius secundarit exercitus'.

⁵⁶ F. Paschoud, *Histoire Auguste*, vol. 5.2, p. 107.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 108–109.

⁵⁸ M. Baranowski, *Przedcesarskie gesta Probusa, czyli kariera idealnego pryncypsa w Historia Augusta*, 'U Schyłku starożytności. Studia Źródłoznawcze' 2014, pp. 85–99; idem, *Opowieść o koniu, który ani piękny, ani duży, ale wytrzymały był* (HA., Prob., 8), 'Historia i Świat' 2014, 3, pp. 9–17.

In a passage from Probus's biography, *limitanei* are mentioned in the context of the barbarization of the Roman army. Of course, we know cases of barbarians settled within Roman borders during the reign of Probus. For example, the Bastarnae were moved to Thrace⁵⁹. The acclimatization in the Frankish empire was less successful. Eventually, they left their seat in Pontus, plundered Greece, and perpetrated the massacre in Syracuse. Although they were driven from Carthage, they managed to escape and return to their homeland⁶⁰. In the passage from Probus' biography in *Historia Augusta*, where *limitanei* are mentioned, there are probably more references to the realities of the 4th and 5th century than of the 3rd century⁶¹. In this text, we do not see any negative feelings about the participation of barbarians in the Roman army. Part of the Roman elite was reluctant to barbarize the Roman army⁶². In this respect, the author of *Historia Augusta* does not complain like Synesius⁶³, and his assessment of the murder of Germanic soldiers is not as positive as is the one by Ammianus Marcellinus⁶⁴ or Zosimus⁶⁵. Although it must be remembered at this point

⁵⁹ Zos., Hist., 1.71.1; Hist. Aug., Prob., 18.1.

⁶⁰ Zos., Hist., 1.71.2; *XII Panegyrici Latini*, ed. E. Galletier, *Panegyriques latins*, Paris 1949–1955, 4.18.3; see: F. Paschoud, *Zosime: Histoire Nouvelle*, vol. 1, Paris 2003, pp. 186–188. The story of the robberies committed by the barbarians settled within Roman borders is also included in *Historia Augusta*. Except that the author of *Historia Augusta* describes the Gepids, Greuthungi (i.e. Goths) and Vandals, and not the Franks, F. Paschoud, *Histoire Auguste*, vol. 5.2, pp. 128–131.

⁶¹ The Roman army was barbarized in the late Roman Empire. Unfortunately, we must draw on the impressions of Roman observers, so it is difficult to determine any numbers. According to Zosimus, Theodosius I allowed the general recruitment of barbarians from across the Danube (Zos., Hist., 4, 30, 31). As a result of Gratian's favourin the Alans the Roman army was to abandon the emperor, which led to his fall (Epit. 47, 6). Some modern researchers try to argue with the well-established opinion about the general barbarization of the army in the 5th century. For instance, H. Elton, who pointed out that among Roman commanders in the second half of the Fourth and in the 5th centuries individuals with Roman names predominate (H. Elton, *Sztuka*, pp. 123–129). According to him, the fashion among soldiers was more barbarized than the ethnic structure of the army itself (*ibidem*, p. 128). First of all, however, it is difficult to determine the ethnic composition of the rank and file soldiers, as there are no relevant data. Secondly, one needs to bear in mind the differences between *comitatenses* and *limitanei*. While the latter were dominated by the Romans, in the *scholae palatinae* and *comitatenses* there were more barbarians (A. Ziółkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 566). Thirdly, it was extremely difficult to distinguish the Romans from the barbarians, as the latter adopted Roman surnames (A. Szopa, *op. cit.*, p. 419).

⁶² W.N. Bayless, *Anti-Germanism in the Age of Stylicho*, 'Byzantine Studies' 1976, 32, pp. 70–76.

⁶³ Synesius, *De Regno*, in: *Synesios de Cyrène*, vol. 5, *Opusculus II*, eds. J. Lamoureux, N. Aujoulat, Paris 2008, 1089B–1093B.

⁶⁴ Amm., 31.6.8.

⁶⁵ Zos., Hist., 4.26.9.

that the Synesius' criticism could have been part of the political dispute in Constantinople between the supporters of Aurelianus and those of Eutropius⁶⁶. Many authors from the late 4th century and early 5th century spoke positively about the presence of barbarians in the Roman army⁶⁷. The massacres of the Germanic people in the Roman army took place as a result of fear after the defeat at the Battle of Adrianople or during Gainas rebellion⁶⁸. The author of *Historia Augusta* feels an aversion to the existence of compact barbarian units, which make the Roman army look not like a Roman one. In the 4th century, however, it became so common⁶⁹ that it is not surprising that the Roman conservative was reluctant to such changes.

The last mention of *limitanei* in *Historia Augusta*, in the biography of Severus Alexander, is definitely most interesting one. The emperor was to give the *limitanei* loot, land, animals, and slaves on the condition that their heirs would serve in the army. The ruler decided that people who defend their own estates are more motivated to fight than those who do not⁷⁰. Although this text is interesting, it is certainly also a product of the author's fantasy. Severus Alexander's biography is one of the least reliable in the entire collection⁷¹. The young Emperor is presented as an unattainable model for rulers, the ideal Emperor⁷². Therefore, it is impossible to take seriously the information about the lands granted to *limitanei* by Severus Alexander⁷³. All the more so because the division

⁶⁶ P.J. Heather, *The Anti-Scythian Tirade of Synesius' De Regno*, 'Phoenix' 1988, 42, pp. 152–172; H. Elton, *Sztuka*, pp. 121–122.

⁶⁷ Themistius, *Orationes*, ed. L. von Spengel, Leipzig 1866 (Bibliotheca Teubneriana), VI 211; Libanius, *Orationes*, ed. R. Foester, Leipzig 1903–1927 (Bibliotheca Teubneriana), LIX 127; Claudianus, *Panegyricus dictus Honorio Augusto quartum consuli*, ed. J.B. Hall, Stuttgart 1985, pp. 484–487; Claudianus, in: *Eutropium*, ed. J.B. Hall, Stuttgart 1985, I 382–383; idem, *Panegyricus dictus Honorio Augusto sextum consuli*, ed. J.B. Hall, Stuttgart 1985, pp. 218–220.

⁶⁸ H. Elton, *Sztuka*, p. 122.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

⁷⁰ Hist. Aug., Alex. Sev., 58.4–5: 'sola quae de hostibus capta sunt, limitaneis ducibus et militibus donavit, ita ut eorum essent, si heredes eorum militarent, nec umquam ad privatos pertinerent, dicens attentius eos militaturos, si etiam sua rura defenderent. addidit sane his et animalia et servos, ut possent colere quod acceperant, ne per inopiam hominum vel per senectutem possidentium desererentur rura vicina barbariae, quod turpissimum ille ducebat'.

⁷¹ A. Chastagnol, *Histoire Auguste. Les Empereurs Romains des II e et III siècles*, Paris 1994, p. XLI.

⁷² J. Linderski, *Heliogabalus, Alexander Severus and the ius confarreationis. A Note on the Historia Augusta*, in: J. Linderski, *Roman Questions. Selected Papers*, Stuttgart 1995, p. 215.

⁷³ A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, vol. 2, Oxford 1964, pp. 649–650; R. Syme, *op. cit.*, p. 46. Before the creation of the *Historia Augusta* during the reign of the tetrarchs or Constantine the Great was questioned at the end of the 19th century, scholars believed that

into *limitanei* and *comitatenses* is definitely later than the reign of Severus Alexander.

At this point, let us note that the reform allegedly carried out by Severus Alexander described in this passage is not obvious. The emperor was to distribute land to *limitanei* soldiers, and their heirs were to serve in the army. This land was not to fall into the hands of civilians. However, the text does not explain whether the inheritance of the profession was meant to apply to all sons of soldiers. Nor does it indicate whether the heirs would serve in the same unit as their fathers. We do not even know if the heirs would have to farm the land on which their fathers worked. This passage does not allow us to say whether the sons of the recipients were to remain *limitanei*, or whether they could have served in other units (*comitatenses*). Finally, there is no information whether all *limitanei* were to receive this land. The author of *Historia Augusta* wrote about *limitanei* in general, which does not have to mean that, according to him, they were all gifted by the Emperor. At this point, one should ask how it compares to the realities of the late Roman Empire.

Perhaps the author of *Historia Augusta* attributed to the Emperor the introduction of laws that, in fact, came to be used almost in his contemporary times⁷⁴. The requirement that the sons of soldiers become soldiers is well attested in the normative sources⁷⁵. It is mentioned for the first time in the law of Constantine the Great of 313 AD⁷⁶. Unfortunately, no ancient historian has directly mentioned this reform⁷⁷. The only exception is the

Roman *limitanei* already at beginning of the 3rd century were land farmers with military functions (Th. Mommsen, *Das Römische Militärwesen seit Diocletian*, 'Hermes' 1899, 24, p. 200). For obvious reasons, Severus Alexander could not introduce the *limitanei* reform, since the division of the army into frontier units and *comitatenses* was introduced several decades after his death.

⁷⁴ C. Bertrand-Dagenbach, *Histoire Auguste*, vol. 3.2, *Vie d'Alexandre Sévère*, Paris 2014, pp. 167–168. In other cases as well the author of *Historia Augusta* attributed to Severus Alexander dealing with problems that became the subject of legislation decades later. For example, according to him, the emperor ordered the death of tribunes who, in return for various privileges, took *annona* from their soldiers (Hist. Aug., Alex. Sev., 15.5). Indeed, there was such a practice of *stellatura*, which was initially punished (CJ, I 27.2.9), but in 406 it was legalized (C. Th. 7.4.28 = CJ, XII 37.12).

⁷⁵ See: R. Grosse, *op. cit.*, pp. 147–148; H. Elton, *Sztuka*, p. 112.

⁷⁶ C. Th., 7.22.1: 'Imp. constantinus a. ad octavianum. veteranorum liberos aptos militiae, quorum quidam ut desides recusant militarium munerum functionem, quidam adeo ignavi sunt, ut cum dispendio corporis militiae velint necessitatem evadere, iubemus, si ad militiam inutiles resectis digitis iudicentur, curialibus sine aliqua ambiguitate muneribus atque obsequiis adgregari. dat. xiiii kal. mart. sirmio, accepta vii id. april. regio constantino a. v et licinio c. conss'.

⁷⁷ H. Elton cites authors who mentioned a case in which that officer's son became an officer as well (H. Elton, *Sztuka*, p. 112), but this does not indicate whether woulson was

Sulpicius Severus' *Life of St Martin*⁷⁸. Hence, not everything is clear. We do not know with absolute certainty if all the sons of the legionnaires had to join the army⁷⁹. In any case, it is obvious that the sons of soldiers became soldiers, and if it were not for the codex sources, this reform might have not been noticed, or one might have raised doubts about its existence.

Limitanei soldiers working the land is a much bigger problem. Initially in the 4th century there is no evidence of drastic differences between *comitatenses* and *limitanei*⁸⁰. Some researchers believed that in the 5th century *limitanei* had transformed into a peasant militia⁸¹. Today the view of this issue is different. It is doubtful that the *limitanei* soldiers inherited land and affiliation to particular units⁸². First of all, it is because ancient authors, apart from the author of *Historia Augusta*, do not mention this reform. It is a well-known fact that *Historia Augusta* rightly has a bad reputation as a vague and fictitious work⁸³. This does not mean, however, that *limitanei* soldiers could not farm the land. Fortunately, we know several laws that show similar practices among *limitanei* soldiers⁸⁴. The first law establishing the transfer of land in exchange for military service is dated to 29 April 409. It is directed to the *comes* of Africa and concerns the lands that in the past were handed over to the barbarians in exchange for keeping the fortifications in good condition and defending the borders. These lands were reserved for barbarians and veterans⁸⁵. The soldiers who farmed the lands mentioned in this law were not *limitanei*, but the local tribal militia that served under Roman command⁸⁶. For the first time, on 7 March 423, the law addressed to the Prefect of the East specified that the territories

compelled to choose a career as a soldier. If we did not acquainted with the laws concerning mainly the sons of soldiers who refrain from military service, we would only have the *Life of St Martin*, whose truthfulness cred hagiographic text for ot very obvious.

⁷⁸ Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini*, ed. J. Fontaine, Paris 1967–1969 (Sources chrétiennes), 2.5.

⁷⁹ H. Elton, *Sztuka*, p. 112.

⁸⁰ A.H.M. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 649.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 650–651.

⁸² B. Isaac, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

⁸³ H. Elton, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, Batsford 1996, p. 68.

⁸⁴ B. Isaac, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

⁸⁵ C. Th., 7.15.1: 'Imp. Honorius et Theodosius aa. Gaudentio vicario Africae. Terrarum spatia, quae gentilibus propter curam munitionemque limitis atque fossati antiquorum humana fuerant provisione concessa, quoniam comperimus aliquos retinere, si eorum cupiditate vel desiderio retinentur, circa curam fossati tuitionemque limitis studio vel labore noverint serviendum ut illi, quos huic operi antiquitas deputarat. Alioquin sciant haec spatia vel ad gentiles, si potuerint inveniri, vel certe ad veteranos esse non inmerito transferenda, ut hac provisione servata fossati limitisque nulla in parte timoris esse possit suspicio. Dat. III kal. mai. Ravenna Honorio VIII et Theodosio III aa. cons's'.

⁸⁶ A.H.M. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 653; R. Syme, *op. cit.*, p. 47; B. Isaac, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

belonging to the castles would be ceded to strangers only if they started service in the *limitanei*. Otherwise, their property would be confiscated and they would be executed⁸⁷. In this case, the law was not limited to a specific province or situation (as in 409)⁸⁸. The lands belonging to the forts were given to the veterans who then left them and passed to other inhabitants. The latter must be in *limitanei* to maintain possession of land⁸⁹. More interesting is the law that was issued several years later, in 443, when the inhabitants of *agri limitanei* were exempted from taxes⁹⁰. Based on this law one can come to a conclusion that *limitanei* soldiers were allowed to work as farmers. Of course, the text does not mention either their land or status⁹¹. However, that was not what the Law was about. It is, therefore, impossible to recreate the specific legal situation of the land farmed by *limitanei* soldiers. We do not know how many of the soldiers serving as *limitanei* farmed on this land. Perhaps it was the privilege of only a small part of them. In any case, in the forties of the 5th century *limitanei* soldiers used the land, and in the twenties of the 5th century, the land belonging to the castellans was taken over from soldiers by civilians. So as far as this time is concerned, we have cases of similar land management by *limitanei* as those described in the life of Severus Alexander. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that since the author of *Historia Augusta* fictitiously indicated emperor Severus Alexander as the ruler who permitted *limitanei* to work the land, this practice was so trivial and deep-rooted that no one would be surprised by such an anachronism.

In codex sources, however, we observe land management by *limitanei* only in the middle of the 5th century. There are several possible explanations

⁸⁷ C. Th., 7.15.2: 'Idem aa. Asclepiodoto praefecto praetorio et consuli ordinario. Quicumque castellorum loca quocumque titulo possident, cedant ac deserant, quia ab his tantum fas est possideri castellorum territoria, quibus adscripta sunt et de quibus iudicavit antiquitas. Quod si ulterius vel privatae condicionis quispiam in his locis vel non castellanus miles fuerit detentator inventus, capitali sententia cum bonorum publicatione plectatur. Dat. non. mart. Constantinopoli Asclepiodoto et Mariniano cons's'.

⁸⁸ B. Isaac, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁰ CJ, 11.60(59).3: 'Imperatores Theodosius, Valentinianus. Agros limitaneos universos cum paludibus omnique iure, quos ex prisca dispositione limitanei milites ab omni munere vacuos ipsi curare pro suo compendio atque arare consueverunt, et si in praesenti coluntur, ab his firmiter ac sine ullo concussionis gravamine detineri, et si ab aliis possidentur, cuiuslibet spatii temporis praescriptione cessante ab universis detentatoribus vindicatos isdem militibus sine ullo prorsus, sicut antiquitus statutum est, collationis onere volumus adsignari: in his etiam contra eos, qui praeceptionibus nostris obviam venire temptaverint, proscriptionis poena valitura. * theodos. et valentin. aa. nomo mag. off. 443 d.Prid.Id.Sept. Constantinopoli maximo ii et paterio cons's'.

⁹¹ B. Isaac, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

for this fact. Perhaps the author of *Historia Augusta* described the reality of his time. In that case he would have to write not in the end of the 4th century but later, in the 5th century⁹². This is not the only possibility. Perhaps the author of *Historia Augusta* could have shown the reader how to reform the army in order for it to become effective again⁹³. Perhaps the use of land by *limitanei* soldiers preceded legal solutions⁹⁴. The mention of the *limitanei* in the biography of Severus Alexander cannot be unequivocal evidence of a later dating of *Historia Augusta* than it is usually accepted (at the end of the 4th century). Nevertheless, it is a premise that combined with other similar ones (such as the belief that emperors made hecatombs of lions, which shows *Historia Augusta* author's poor knowledge about sacrifices, quoting the false documents that were supposed to be in a library maybe operating still in the 6th century, stating that Severus Alexander attended temples every seven days, which resembles the reception of Christian customs by crypto-pagans in the 6th century) may suggest that the *Historia Augusta* was written later than most scholars believe.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this text, all references to the *limitanei* in *Historia Augusta* are anachronistic for the times they allegedly describe. The author of *Historia Augusta* weaves the terminology from his times in the narratives about the 2nd and 3rd century. He uses it both in the descriptions of the reigns of the rulers and in the documents he invented. It is present both in biographies that are completely unbelievable and in those a little more credible⁹⁵. This presents danger related to this work. A researcher can never be sure that the fact described by the author of *Historia Augusta* in the biographies of emperors ruling in the 3rd century (as well as usurpers and emperors in the 2nd century) actually shows the changes that took place in the Roman state or is just a fantasy of it. Unfortunately, still many researchers who do not deal with *Historia Augusta* forget about this trivial truth. Moreover, in the times when its author was active the term *limitanei* was so deep-rooted that it was used without much thought. It plays no role in most of discussed mentions. The meaning of the anecdote about

⁹² The vast majority of researchers believe that *Historia Augusta* was written at the end of the 4th or at the outset of the 5th century (F. Paschoud, *Histoire Auguste*, vol. 5.1, XIII).

⁹³ A.H.M. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 650.

⁹⁴ R. Syme, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁹⁵ F. Paschoud, *Histoire Auguste*, vol. 4.3, *Vies des trente tyrans et de Claude*, Paris 2011, p. LIII; F. Paschoud, *Histoire Auguste*, vol. 5.2, p. 301; A.R. Birley, *Rewriting Second- and Third-Century History, in Late Antique Rome the Historia Augusta*, 'Classica' 2006, 19, p. 19. F. Paschoud estimated that in Aurelian's biography there is almost 27% of reliable information, while in Probus' biography – 17%. There can be considerable doubts as to the criteria of F. Paschoud's calculation, but the first text is probably actually more credible than the second.

Pescennius Niger, the description of Aurelian's opponents, the location of the barbarians in Probus' army would not have changed at all if it had not been used in them. The most disturbing passage is from the biography of Severus Alexander. It may suggest that the work was created later than it is commonly assumed today. In any case, it confirms the practice of *limitanei* soldiers working the land, known from legal sources. It cannot be taken as evidence of the transformation of the *limitanei* into a peasant militia, but it shows a practice that we know from legal sources. Unfortunately, as in the case of the order to inherit the soldier's profession, late ancient historians dedicated surprisingly little space to the changes in the social status of the Roman army.

(translated by LINGUA LAB)

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STRESZCZENIE

Historia Augusta jest najbardziej enigmatycznym źródłem, które powstało w późnym antyku. Jego autor ukrył czas, w którym go stworzył, oraz użył 6 różnych pseudonimów. Sugeruje w swoich biografiiach, że pisał za panowania tetrarchów lub Konstantyna Wielkiego, a w rzeczywistości nastąpiło to dużo później. W *Historia Augusta* zostały wymienione cztery razy jednostki *limitanei*. Oczywiście wszystkie te wzmianki używają terminologii anachronicznej dla czasów, w których miały zostać napisane, czy miały się rozgrywać. W poniższym artykule poddałem analizie owe wzmianki dotyczące wojsk przygranicznych w *Historia Augusta*. Pozwalają one nam lepiej poznać mentalność owego autora. Szczególnie jedna z tych wzmianek była istotna. Długo uważano, że jest ona świadectwem przekształcenia rzymskiej armii nadgranicznej w chłopską milicję. Dziś zarzucono tego typu przekonanie. Niemniej opisuje ona użytkowanie ziemi przez żołnierzy *limitanei*, co poświadczone jest w źródłach kodeksowych dopiero w połowie V w. Tymczasem większość badaczy uważa dziś, że *Historia Augusta* powstała w końcu IV lub na początku V w. O ile na podstawie tej wzmianki nie sposób jednoznacznie datować powstanie *Historia Augusta* na połowę V w., to jednak pozostaje ona wskazówką, która pozwala na nowo rozpocząć dyskusję o datowaniu powstania tego źródła.

Słowa kluczowe: rzymska armia, limitanei, późne cesarstwo rzymskie, rzymska historiografia, *Historia Augusta*

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