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FRANKISH *LIMITANEI* IN LAZICA

Before being totally destroyed, Imperial security system actually had shown three gradual phases of development.

Huge number of the Italian colonists with the best technologies, swift and comfortable communications, the most prominent industrial output, Roman citizenship, municipal freedom – that was the Roman gift for the Western provinces in the 1st-2nd centuries A. D. Sincere intimacy with the metropolis had been founded as a direct result of complete satisfaction. It paved the way to the Romanization. As for the Greeks, the Romans reserved a quite life and economic stability. Still beyond the Roman Rhine, Danube and Pontus there were others favouring to this concept of Pan-European integration. The happy client kings used to be awarded with the Roman citizenship. And for the Julio-Claudians, these client kingdoms formed the first defense-line of the Imperial territories. A little behind, the whole perimeter had been dotted by solid legionary concentrations, proving the system to be impregnable. No cardinal changes took place in the Antonine era, except of annexation of the client kingdoms and breaking the big concentrations in favour of scattering the legions along the whole frontier. In the both cases, after defeating comparatively weak enemy at the border, the Romans usually attacked their territory. This system of security is called forward defense.

Greeks and the Romans were sending more and more hands towards industry, but not to manufacture the means of production. As a result, population was growing, but not amount of industrial goods *per capita*. Prices rushed high for the Italian produce, demanding damping for provincial food and raw materials, thus weakening the sympathies between the European subjects of the Roman Empire. Some even started to search for a relief beyond Rhine and Danube. Many things had happened that

completely changed the defensive strategy, namely: 1. economic crisis; 2. weakening of the integratory links; 3. socio-economic animation of 'Barbaricum'; 4. financial chaos and some professional regiments converted into *limitanei*. From now they are to stand the first strike and evacuate the whole frontier folk into citadels, thus wearing down the enemy. And there were large and mobile field armies deployed far behind that self-contained strongholds to cut down any invasion into the depth. This system shaped in the times of Diocletian is called defense-in-depth.

But before this new system was finally established, the Romans had been fighting those already easily passing the border wherever they could manage to concentrate large army-units. In the early days of Empire, Praetorians formed the only imperial reserve. And now Gallienus recruited special mobile reserve-regiments. Name for the defensive system is elastic defense.

Security-system had to be changed at least because of emergence of the Germanic seaborne attacks from the 3rd century everywhere at the seas that prolonged the line of the frontier.¹

Full-time units, legions, *alae* of cavalry, *cohortes* of infantry and mixed *cohortes equitatae* served the forward defense-system. Part-time border force of *limitanei* had appeared and auxiliary *alae* and cohorts had disappeared; and regular mobile reserve – *comitatenses* – substituted legions, fixed at the border. All they served new security system – defense-in-depth. The whole 3rd century saw these changes, finally shaped in the times of Constantine I. Septimius Severus was the first to form a certain kind of reserve. He stationed II *Parthica* in Albanum, increased Praetorian and Urban cohorts in number. And Gallienus created special cavalry units to serve as a reserve.²

In the 3rd century large federations of *Franki* and *Alemanni* began to threaten the Rhine-frontier. And the Goths had already reached Dniester by 238.³ Franks attacked Gaul, Alemanns – Italy. From the great deeds of Emperor M. Aurelius Probus (276-282) the most important is the deliverance of seventy Gaulic cities. He drove back Franks and Alemanns, four hundred thousand of them being killed. Probus passed the Rhine, and

¹ Luttwak Ed. N., *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire. From the First Century A. D. to the Third*, Baltimore 1981, 192-193; Dundua T., Silagadze N., *European Industrial Complexes of I Cycle of Capitalism and the Georgian Western Affiliations. Historical and Numismatic Tale*, Tbilisi 2005, 5-7; Dundua T., *North and South*, Tbilisi 2001, 8-15.

² Luttwak Ed. N., 1981, 173, 184.

³ Luttwak Ed. N., 1981, 128, 146.

returned back with considerable tribute of corn, cattle, and horses. Sixteen thousand Germanic recruits were dispersed among the Roman units. Other captive or fugitive barbarians gained a new status, that of part-time peasant-soldiers (*limitanei*). Emperor transported a considerable body of Vandals into Cambridgeshire, great number of Franks and *Gepidae* were settled on the banks of the Danube and the Rhine, *Bastarnae* – in Thrace. Pontic (The Black Sea) coast was reserved for some more Franks.⁴ But which one exactly? This is to be discussed.

According to Ed. Gibbon, Franks settled at the sea-coast of Pontus had to check the Alani inroads. A fleet stationed in one of the harbors of the Euxine fell into their hands, and they resolved, through unknown seas, to explore their way from the mouth of Phasis (River Rioni in the West Georgia, Ancient Colchis/Lazica – T. D.) to that of the Rhine. They easily escaped through the Bosphorus and the Hellespont, and cruising along the Mediterranean, indulged their appetite for revenge and plunder by frequent descents on the shores of Asia, Greece and Africa. City of Syracuse was sacked by the Barbarians. Franks proceeded to the columns of Hercules, coasted round Spain and Gaul, and steering their course through the British channel, at length finished their voyage by landing in safety on the Batavian or Frisian shores.⁵

What is this whole story based on? Zosimus and one panegyric to Constantius Chlorus contributed to it.

Narrating about the events in the past, in the times of divine Probus, author of this panegyric mentions undeserved success of the small Frankish band, who, sailing from Pontus on the captured fleet, ravished Greece and Asia, damaged Africa, stormed Syracuse, and passing through the columns of the Hercules, reached the ocean ('*Recursabat quippe in animos illa sub diuo Probo paucorum ex Francis captiuorum incredibilis audacia et indigna felicitas, qui a Ponto usque correptis nauibus Graeciam Asiamque populati nec impune plerisque Libyae litoribus appulsi ipsas postremo naualibus quondam uictoriis nobiles ceperant Syracusas et immenso itinere peruerti oceanum, qua terras irrumpit, intrauerant atque ita euentu temeritatis ostenderant nihil esse clausum piraticae desperationi, quo nauigiis pateret accessus*').⁶

⁴ Gibbon Ed., *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1, London 1993, 362-368.

⁵ Gibbon Ed., 1993, 367-368.

⁶ *Panegyricus Constantio Dictus*, IV, XVIII, *Panegyriques Latins*, T. I (I-V), Texte Établi et Traduit par Édouard Galletier, Paris 1949, 96-97.

Zosimus tells us about the Franks having applied to the Emperor, and having a country given to them. A part of them afterwards revolted, and having collected a great number of ships, disturbed all Greece; from whence they proceeded into Sicily, to Syracuse, which they attacked, and killed many people there. At length they arrived in Africa, whence though they were repulsed by a body of men from Carthage, yet they returned home without any great loss.⁷

There is no mention of mouth of the river of Phasis as a spring-board for the expedition in the sources. Then, what was in Gibbon's mind? Perhaps, logics, excluding the possibilities.

Indeed, the Northern Black Sea coast is beyond the Roman rule. The Western shores, and the Balkans are already packed with the Barbarians. Southern littoral had been less used for *receptio*. While Lazica and Pontic *Limes* can not be argued. And something strange had happened to this *limes* in the 3rd century. Now threat comes not from the front, the Romans have Lazi client king dwelling there, but – from behind, because of the Goths living at the Northern shores.

We can only guess that the Franks were in Lazica as *limitanei*. But we really know nothing about how they were coordinating with the full-time units, their number before and after the revolt, what was the life like for those who stayed loyal.

Still, it seems quite reasonable that the bargain of *receptio*-system should had been distributed among all Roman provinces to keep the centre undisturbed from the Barbaric influx. In the 3rd century Empire is able to do this, not after.

⁷ Zosimus, *New History*, Book 1, London: Green and Chaplin 1814.