

“Immigration Policies” in the Age of Theodosius

One of the most significant transformations of the Roman world in Late Antiquity was the integration of barbarian peoples into the social, cultural, religious, and political background of the Roman Empire (Mathisen-Shanzer 2011). The concept of barbarian as uncivilized savage who settled outside the empire and threatened the borders of the Empire was a cultural construct. The Romans perceived the cultural differences with the barbarians and this perception, along with a sentiment of fear, influenced the political and military relations between Romans and barbarians. Since the Marcomannic Wars, Rome contained the barbarian threat through force and diplomacy.

However in fourth century the Romans realized that very often the poor barbarians who entered the empire clandestinely were only people pushed by hunger, misery and violence of enemies, people who did not speak Latin or Greek but who could put to work and who gladly accepted being put into agriculture labor (Barbero 2007). The consequence of this new perception of the barbarian was that the empire started to receive groups of barbarian and to settle them in the empire. Thus in the fourth century the barbarians invasion were considered more as waves of peaceful submissive wretched who, with their labor force, could contributed to the economic wealth of the empire (Demougeout 1981). The integration of the barbarians as soldiers or rural laborers contributed to create more stable conditions within the Empire.

The battle of Adrianopole in 378, which was a *wendepunkt* in the history of the Roman Empire and a blow that Rome never forgot, changed all this. The barbarians knew that they could be victorious and the Romans had fear again. Theodosius begun to put in practice a politics of compromise: he drew barbarians into the empire, gave them citizenship, land and army command (Heather 1991 and Errington 1996). This created a violent debate between those who

were favorable to open the Empire to all the people, including the barbarians, and those who claimed that was risky and perilous to accept many immigrants within the Empire at the same time and enlist them in many governmental sectors (Chauvot 1998).

In this paper I would like to investigate this debate about the “immigration policies” towards the barbarians, mostly the Goths, in the aftermath of Adrianople focusing on the speeches (14, 15, 16, 34) of Themistius, who supported and inspired Theodosius policy of compromise and promoted the concept of Philantropia (Daly 1972 and Daly 1975), and the speeches of Synesius, especially *De Regno* (Heather 1988), who fiercely opposed to this policy (Simonetti 1980).

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