Tribvnvs Angvsticlavivs

The position of **Tribvnvs Militvm Angvsticlavivs** (lit. “military tribune of the narrow stripe”) was one of the pillars of legionary command during the imperial period. He was an officer of the equestrian order (ordo equester), belonging to the main staff of the legion, subordinate to the Legatvs Legionis (**Legatvs Legionis**) and cooperating with the **Tribvnvs Laticlavivs** (a representative of the patrician families serving an internship) and with the camp prefect (**Praefectvs Castrorvm**).

In practice, the **Tribvnvs Angvsticlavivs** was a professional officer whose experience and knowledge of military life were of key importance for the functioning of the legion.

Authority in the Roman army was based on the so-called **“Imperium” (from Lat. “imperare” 'to command; to rule')**, which by definition was the highest and sovereign scope of military, civil and religious power of higher officials in ancient Rome, formally granted by the people (in the Republic) or by the Emperor (in the Principate).

It included:

- military command (imperium militiae)
- supreme criminal jurisdiction, including the right to issue death sentences
- the right to issue orders binding all citizens
- the right of coercion (coercitio maior)

Every person holding imperium could decide over life and death and impose the highest penalties.

Officers below the Legatvs, such as the Tribvnvs or the **camp prefect**, did not possess authority at the level of “Imperium”, because they performed functions at the level of a military official, not at the level of a magistrate. Every action of theirs was subdelegated by the **Legatvs** to whom they were subordinate.

Instead of imperium, they held the so-called **Potestas.**

The Potestas of the Tribvnvs included:

- command over detached units (cohorts, vexillatio)
- administrative and disciplinary supervision
- the right to issue orders to soldiers on behalf of the **Legatvs**
- limited coercitio minor (e.g. disciplinary penalties), since the highest penalties (such as the death penalty) lay in the decision of the person holding “Imperium”

MAIN DUTIES:

Tribvnvs Angvsticlavivs performed administrative and disciplinary functions, which included:

1. supervising fortifications and guards (cvstodiae),
2. issuing night passwords (signa nocturna),
3. control of drill and punishments (disciplina militaris),
4. preparing reports (tabvlae divrnae),
5. enforcing sentences

The main tasks of the Tribvnvs included:

- supervision over training and soldiers' discipline
- order in the camp and, in cooperation with **Praefectvs Castrorvm**, the necessary logistics
- direct command over part of the legion during tactical operations
- **keeping records** and lists of the legion's strength (tabvlae legionis),
- **control of pay disbursements (stipendium)** and bonuses (praemia militiae),
- **accounting for supplies and armament**,
- **coordination of communication** within the legion – receiving and transmitting the orders of the Legatvs,
- **issuing and receiving night passwords (signa nocturna)** – a communication system which, according to Polybius (VI.34), consisted in passing a tablet with an order from manipulus to manipulus,
- **keeping daily reports (relationes diurnae)** and reports on health, readiness and discipline,
- **participation in the council of war (consilivm militare)** together with the **Legatvs**, **Praefectvs Castrorvm** and senior **Centvriones** (primipilares).

TACTICAL DUTIES:

In military operations, the **Tribvni Angvsticlavii** served as **sector commanders** or **cohort coordinators,** and were an essential link in the command structure. They did not command independently like the **Legati**, but their decisions often determined the tactical effectiveness of the entire legion.

Their tasks included:

- supervision over maintaining the Legion's order and formation (e.g. acies triplex or acies duplex),
- command over a cohort or a group of cohorts,
- responding to local threats and the orders of the Legatvs,
- maintaining morale and discipline during combat,
- controlling the rotation of soldiers and reserves,
- signalling manoeuvres through signa and tvbae.

Each Tribvnvs, as a middle-ranking officer, had under his command:

- at least one cohort
- 2 cohorts in the legion's formation on the battlefield (~1000 men), or one cohortes milliariae, e.g. the first cohort of the Legion
- an auxiliary cohort (avxilia), including mixed mounted and infantry units (cohors eqvitata)
- or a detached unit of several cohorts assigned to various tasks which, because of their scale (often much smaller than a Legion), did not require appointing a **Legatvs** to command them.

DUTIES IN THE CAMP (CASTRVM):

In the camp (castrum), which formed the heart of legionary life, the tribunes had their quarters near the praetorium – the commander's tent. The main role of an officer in a Roman camp was to supervise assigned work. Soldiers under the supervision of **Centvriones** competed with one another between their units in a race to carry out orders. Soldiers tried to please their immediate superiors, the **Centvriones** tried to please their Tribvni, and the Tribvni tried to please the **Legati**.

Within the Castrvm, the Tribvnvs also dealt with:

- assigning guards and patrols (stationarii, vigiliae),
- conducting recruitment into the army
- inspecting fortifications and gates (porta praetoria, porta decumana etc),
- supervising storehouses (horrea, armamentaria),
- and organising daily briefings (contiones).
- **inspection and control of cohorts** – daily at dawn (prima vigilia),
- **supervision over combat training and drill** (disciplina militaris),
- **participation in councils of war** (consilium),
- **assessment of reports from Centvriones** and verification of pay, equipment and supply lists,
- **maintenance of morale** and organisation of the reading of orders (edicta).

The Tribvnvs performed a public function – he recruited soldiers for the army, conducted recruitment into the army from among citizens and non-citizens, supervised the process of incorporating them into army corps and the formation of new units. On behalf of the **Legatvs**, he presided over inspections of the units (recognitio) and verified their state of readiness.

As guardian of order and discipline, the Tribvnvs, when a newly formed unit (Legion or Auxilia) first established camp or before the beginning of a campaign, received an oath from each participant.

In order to maintain quality and motivation, the army had to be provided with proper food, care and training. All these aspects had to be coordinated by the Tribvni, because the success of military expeditions depended on the efficiency of the legionaries. The soldier not only faced the enemy and the potential wounds he might suffer in combat, but also had to cope with disease, difficult weather conditions, crises and the collapse of morale.

The Tribvnvs was also responsible for **the proper placement of guards** (stationes) and **the security of the camp at night**. In cooperation with **Centvrio** and **Optio**, they established the camp defence plan and the rules for the functioning of the guards, and all these arrangements were put into practice through the **Tesserarivs**.

Discipline and judicial authority

The Tribvnvs was the representative of the **Legatvs** in matters of discipline: he had the right to convene military courts and issue sentences for cowardice, insubordination, drunkenness or desertion.

In this sense, Tribvnvs Militvm was both an officer and a military judge, which shows how closely the legal and military aspects of service were then connected.

Punishments, however, did not concern only soldiers, but also included junior officers: **Centvriones**, **Optiones** and those subordinate to them, as persons responsible for the functioning and discipline of the unit. All imposed penalties were based on “potestas” of the Tribvnvs, who administered them by authorisation of the **Legatvs** or the **Praefectvs**.

The gravest offences included desertion, loss of standards or signs, or the flight of an entire unit from the battlefield, regardless of circumstances and the enemy's advantage, if there was no commander's permission to withdraw. Often the only proper punishment for this was death and disgrace through oblivion. This approach meant that the steadfastness of legionaries depended not only on discipline, their iron will and desire to win, but also on fear of their own commanders and the severe punishments associated with such offences. Soldiers feared their commanders more than the enemy on the other side of the battlefield.

Apart from punishments, however, there were also obligations to reward deeds worthy of praise, ranging from public verbal commendations and the recognition of comrades to material or monetary rewards.

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