

## Notes on the funerary epigraphy of soldiers from Roman Dacia

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**Abstract.** *The current paper constitutes an overview on the funerary epigraphy of soldiers from Roman Dacia. Without trying to be a complete and exhaustive analysis of all possible aspects, it aims at collecting all epitaphs regarding military personnel and offering a general image of the realities they present.*

**Rezumat.** *Studiul de față reprezintă o prezentare sintetică a epigrafiei funerare a militarilor din Dacia romană. Fără pretenția de a analiza în detaliu toate aspectele posibile, cercetarea a avut ca scop colectarea și centralizarea tuturor acestor monumente și prezentarea unei imagini generale a realităților despre care ele vorbesc.*

**Keywords:** epigraphic habit, age groups, identity, representation, self-representation.

The everyday life of the Roman soldier has been a quite popular theme of research during the last decades. This includes aspects of material culture, sociologically oriented analyses of the inter-human relations and ties, anthropological studies, etc. The main goal and stake of these undertakings is to reveal the Roman soldier besides and beyond the *Rangordnung* and to emphasize on the complex social role that the army played in all Roman provincial environments. The current study is more or less part of this trend, though our approach will be rather positivistic: thus, we will present a detailed overview on the military funerary inscriptions from province Dacia and stress upon the social and familial data which they bring forth.

Our database comprises 106 readable funerary monuments involving soldiers, either as deceased (seventy-six) or as commemorators (thirty). On these epitaphs, we will look for elements that speak of presentation and sometimes self-presentation, such as: name, family/social relations, indication of origin, age, stylistic details of the monument, etc. Focusing on soldiers, the first thing to note was the military troops attested on epitaphs; surprisingly enough, only a minority of monuments involve legionary soldiers (about 30%) and no more than 17% from the total of dedications were erected for commemorating soldiers from the legions. With few exceptions<sup>2</sup>, we are of course dealing with militaries from the two

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<sup>2</sup> The IV Flavia Felix from *Drobeta*, for example (Iulius Stratus - CIL III 14484; Caius Titius Ianuarius - AE 1959, 314).

main legions of Dacia: XIII Gemina, stationed at *Apulum*, and V Macedonica, stationed at *Potaissa*. Most of the funerary stones of legionary soldiers come from the two urban centres hosting the troops, but there are also some exceptions, such as Marcus Aurelius Antoninus<sup>3</sup>, *librarius* of the XIII Gemina, buried by his parents at *Ampelum* and Lucius Aelius Candidinus<sup>4</sup>, *tesserarius* of the same legion, who dedicates a monument for his deceased sons at *Romula*.

Another element, present on two thirds of the analysed epitaphs, regards the military ranks and positions of the deceased, as well as of the commemorators; these are differently (and probably subjectively) presented: some only mention being a *miles* or an *eques*, others give more precise data on their military position/rank. About a quarter of the deceased soldiers have the service years mentioned (detail which was better known, in many cases, than the actual exact age of the man) and 20% of them have peregrine juridical status. But, nonetheless, the most present element on epitaphs, socially as well as individually relevant, is the relationship between deceased and commemorator, or between multiple deceased/commemorators (Graph 1). For clarifying the statistics, we must first mention that we know this relationship in about 77% cases. For comparison, we will present some already existing statistics regarding the commemoration habits of soldiers and their families<sup>5</sup>. Thus, during the 1<sup>st</sup> century, 56% of the funerary *stela*e for soldiers were set up by comrades and/or inheritors (here we include brothers as well<sup>6</sup>, as they are most often denominated not only as relatives, but also as *heredes*), the ones set up by the family (wife and children) represented only 5.2%, and the ones set up by the soldiers for their wives and children did not exceed 1.7%. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the percentages are as follows: 16.8% of the funerary monuments for auxiliary soldiers were set up by their family, 36.5% by comrades/inheritors, and the soldiers set up for their families (wife and children) 4.4%. For the other chronological extreme (the 3<sup>rd</sup> century), the situation changes dramatically: 20.8% of the monuments were set up by wives or children, soldiers dedicated for family members 24.2% of the epitaphs, while the military pseudo-family (comrades/inheritors), set up only 16.5% of the total. Another study, conducted by S. E. Phang on the *auxilia* from the Danube provinces<sup>7</sup>, offers different statistical data compared to those obtained at the level of the whole Empire. Thus the percentage of soldiers commemorated by their wives increases in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century as compared to the 1<sup>st</sup>, from 16% to 39%, while that of epitaphs set up by the comrades decreases in the same period from 53% to 29%. One of the explanations for this increased commemoration of the family can be connected to the relative stability of the troops from the Danube region and to massive local recruitment.

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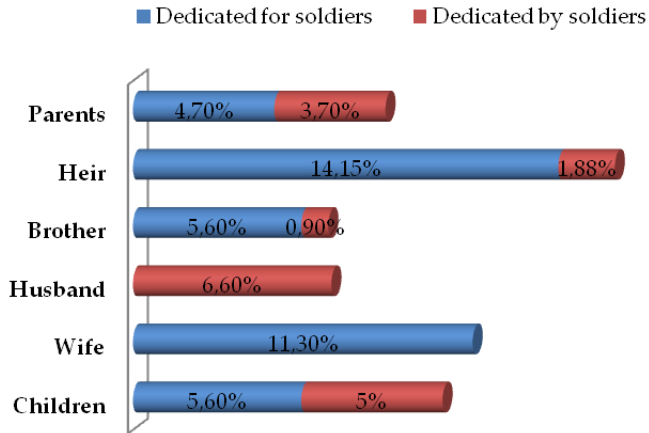
<sup>3</sup> IDR III/3, 344.

<sup>4</sup> CIL III 1592.

<sup>5</sup> VARGA 2014, 89-90.

<sup>6</sup> Equally, the term *frater* is used to designate a close comrade and friend, not necessarily a blood relative (see BIRLEY 2002).

<sup>7</sup> PHANG 2001, 153.



Graph 1. Main relationships attested between deceased and commemorator, or between multiple deceased/commemorators.

More or less expectedly, in our case, most of the relationships are between comrades and peers: heirs and/or militaries from the same unit (16% of all monuments). Underlining the ramification of certain relationships, we also have cases when the heir (explicitly stated as such) also identifies himself as brother<sup>8</sup> (Aurelius Maximus from *Arcobadara*<sup>9</sup>), freedman<sup>10</sup> (Caius Titius Epipodius from *Drobeta*) or even son (names illegible, from *Apulum*)<sup>11</sup>. The second numerically attested tie is the one between spouses. In the civilian environment, this is usually the best represented relationship group, along with the dedications for children. Thus, 11% from all epitaphs are dedicated by wives for their husbands, soldiers from legions or auxiliary troops. We stress upon the lax usage of the term *coniux* and *uxor*: *coniux* implies, within the boundaries of Roman law, the existence of a *conubium*, a marriage between two Roman citizens<sup>12</sup>. Thus, in the case of soldiers from the pre-Severan era, this type of marriage is out of question; true enough, we are most dealing with Roman citizens, but still their military status excluded the contracting of a Roman, full-rights marriage. Even so, in funerary epigraphy, a certain liberty in the employment of this term (along with *maritus*) is noticed, as it frequently appears on the epitaph of soldiers, peregrines or slaves. The detail is rather important for the shaping of an identity constructing image, as a liaison only accepted *de facto* by society metamorphosed, *post mortem*, into a fully endorsed marriage. Children dedicate and are dedicated for as well, but their proportion is of only 10%, with the epitaphs for and by present in almost equal numbers. Though not extremely explicit, we can also intuit the

<sup>8</sup> CIL III 803; CIL III 8048; CIL III 807.

<sup>9</sup> Or \**Arkobara*, a more plausible, probably Dacian, form of the name (DANA, NEMETI 2012)

<sup>10</sup> AE 1959, 314.

<sup>11</sup> IDR III/5, 598.

<sup>12</sup> ULPIANUS 5.4.

phenomenon of military families, detected not only at the level of the same generation (brothers)<sup>13</sup>, but also at a trans-generational level<sup>14</sup>. Other groups of dedicators include sole dedications, as is the case of a maternal grandson<sup>15</sup> dedicating a common monument for his father and grandfather.

Expectedly, the feminine dedications, besides expressions of matrimonial relations, are scarce, though not completely lacking: two of his daughters dedicate for Aurelius Cl(unius)<sup>16</sup>, a woman about which we don't know details dedicates for Aelius Borafas Zabdiboli<sup>17</sup>, a sister for Areatinus (?)<sup>18</sup>, Aurelius De... dedicates for his mother<sup>19</sup>, etc.

Graph 2 shows the network of all characters attested on military funerary stones. The militaries are represented with red and the civilians with blue. One can see the familial/social clusters clearly on this graphic representation.

Dealing with funerary monuments, the recorded ages constitute an important and relevant factor. Approximately 65% of the soldiers' ages and 75% of their relations are conserved; in absolute figures, this means a total of about 100 records. The number is actually quite high, as the total of known ages from province Dacia is of about 500<sup>20</sup>. The medium age of death is of 32.48 years, with the minimum for the ages of soldiers of 20 years<sup>21</sup> and the eldest of 60<sup>22</sup>. The life hope at birth, calculated for Dacia, is of 33.027 years. Regarding the tendency to round the age of death—identifiable through an unnaturally high number of ages divisible to 5 and 10—we can identify it in more than half the cases. The habit can be connected with a “looser” mourning (as exact ages are usually recorded for young wives and children, whose death is usually harsh), as well as regarded as a consequence of not knowing exactly when the deceased was born.

The onomastics reflects well the realities of the general Dacian military onomastics. Thus, most of the names are Roman, with certain exceptions: Thracian names (Mucatra Brasi, Mucapor Mucatralis)<sup>23</sup>, Semitic names (Aelius Guras Iidei, Aelius Habibis)<sup>24</sup>, etc. The *nomina*, where there is the case, are dominated by the imperial Aurelius, followed by Aelius. In most of the cases, the same imperial names are born by both deceased and commemorator, as it is normal in the case of family relations.

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<sup>13</sup> IDR III/1, 167.

<sup>14</sup> CIL III 837.

<sup>15</sup> CIL 03 908.

<sup>16</sup> CIL III 1603.

<sup>17</sup> IDR III/1, 152.

<sup>18</sup> CIL III 13766.

<sup>19</sup> CIL III 802.

<sup>20</sup> See MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2004, 27-41 for an overview on Dacia's age structures.

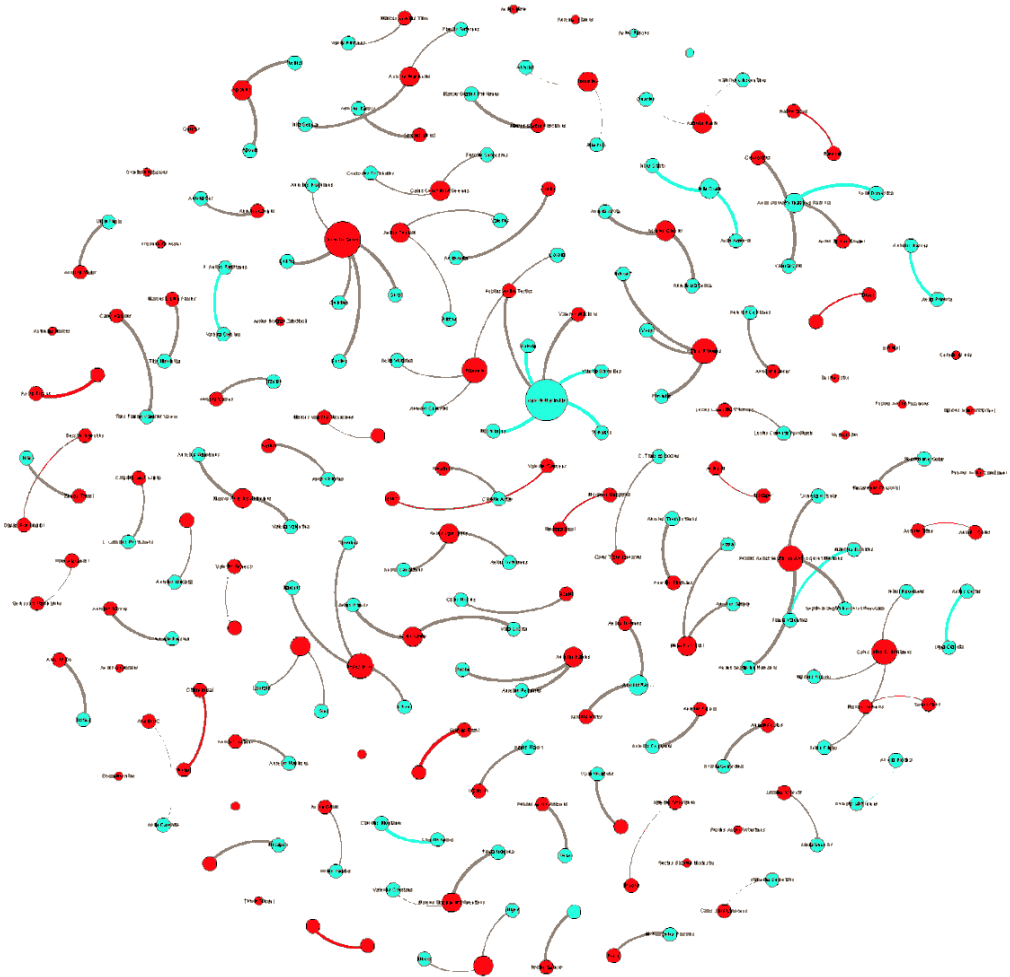
<sup>21</sup> IDR III/5, 558.

<sup>22</sup> IDR III/4, 188.

<sup>23</sup> IDR III/5, 559.

<sup>24</sup> IDR III/1, 154.

Linguistically, Latin predominates almost absolutely. A notable exception is the monument form *Tibiscum*<sup>25</sup>, erected by a Palmyrean *pontifex* and which writes the name of the deceased in both Latin and Palmyrean. The absence of Greek mirrors a social group with no cultural meanders. The same feature is underlined by the typicalness of the individualizing details on the deceased and the small number of exceptions. Regarding the balance deceased—commemorator, which reflects the balance religious—social, we record far more details on the deceased, thus inclining towards respectful commemoration more than social promotion.



Graph 2. The network resulted from the military funerary monuments.

<sup>25</sup> IDR III/1, 154.

Artistically, the monuments are simple and of low value. Very few have figurative representations (the banquet scene)<sup>26</sup> or other notable decorations<sup>27</sup>. The predominant materials are limestone and grit stone, with few exceptions manufactured of marble<sup>28</sup> and andesite<sup>29</sup>.

The funerary monuments of the soldiers from Dacia bring forth data about an important segment of the province's population. Expectedly enough, it reveals a more austere and artistically/linguistically poor environment, compared to the general, civilian, realities. As well, the social and familial relations are rather stern and without excessive ramifications, being almost exclusively limited to comrades/heirs and first-degree relatives. The patronage relationships, rather present in the civilian funerary epigraphy from Dacia, are extremely scarce. In the future, for a complete image, research should go towards collecting and analysing the votive inscriptions as well, and towards comparison with the realities of other provinces.

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<sup>26</sup> CIL III 847a=7651; CIL III 13766.

<sup>27</sup> ILD 511; AE 2007, 1191; CIL III 12542.

<sup>28</sup> IDR III/2, 437; IDR III/2, 366.

<sup>29</sup> IDR III/1, 160; IDR III/1, 154.