

The Roman military diploma discovered at Atmageaua Tătărască – Sarsânlar (Zafirovo, Bulgaria)

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Abstract. *A tabella II of a Roman military diploma, copied after an imperial constitution issued in AD 54 (CIL XVI 3) is published once again in these pages. On the basis of archival information and new research on the table, kept by the National Museum of Romanian History in Bucharest, the article provides a reconstruction of the text and short histories of the mentioned military units.*

Rezumat. *O tabella II a unei diploma militare romane, copiată după o constituție imperială din anul 54 p. Chr. (CIL XVI 3) este republicată aici. Pe baza unor informații de arhivă și pe baza unei noi autopsii a tăbliței, păstrată în colecțiile Muzeului Național de Istorie a României, București, articolul oferă o reconstrucție a textului, precum și scurte istorii ale unităților militare menționate.*

Keywords: Roman Army, military diploma, ala, auxiliary unit, Thracians.

In the summer of 1929, the *tabella II* of a Roman military diploma (Figure 1) was discovered in Atmageaua Tătărască (today Zafirovo, Bulgaria). According to the information provided by its first editor, the diploma was discovered in a tumulus found at ca. 45 km southwest of Silistra (*Durostorum*), along the road linking the settlements of Sarsânlar and Atmageaua Tătărască, during excavations carried out by C. Zamfirescu, instructor at the local elementary school. The moment and circumstances of its discovery remain shrouded in mystery, since the first editor mentions that he only consulted a copy sent by a certain A. Florescu, a former pupil of his and secretary at the Silistra secondary school, and the one who, probably having the chance to witness the discoveries made by C. Zamfirescu, grasped the particular importance of the bronze tablet. When it was published, the tablet seemed to have disappeared “in the hazard of the antiquities trade”². Sometime after, the diploma was “rediscovered”, and became part of the collections of the National Museum of Antiquities (inventory no. V 6479). The circumstances of its entry into the MNA collections are not known, but in any case this occurred after 1930–1931, if not even after 1936, when it was recorded in CIL XVI, which again states that the diploma had disappeared. Nevertheless, even

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² LAMBRINO 1930; 1931.

though its first publisher mentions that he used a copy made by A. Florescu, in CIL XVI, H. Nesselhauf claims that he verified the text according to the photographs sent by S. Lambrino. In reality, the diploma was most probably discovered in the very area of the *tell* settlement investigated by Vladimir Dumitrescu in 1929 and 1931. Thus, Vl. Dumitrescu mentions that this diploma was discovered before the start of the archaeological campaign – most probably following the excavations carried out by C. Zamfirescu (not mentioned by Vl. Dumitrescu) –, while the investigations unearthed Roman coins and ceramics³. It would thus seem that a Roman occupation, likely brief, overlapped the prehistoric tell.

At it can be seen, the context of the discovery is unclear. The information according to which the diploma was discovered in a tumulus, without mentioning its character, is entirely suspect, since such documents were not generally deposited in graves – if by *tumulus* we were to understand it as such –, but were used by descendants to demonstrate the quality of Roman citizen of their ancestor. There are no known military diplomas discovered in funerary contexts, save for one: CIL XVI 10 is actually rather important, since it likewise concerns a veteran of Thracian origin, (*natione Bessus*) *Dules Datui f.*, from the 7th of March 70 AD. He served in the fleet and in the II Adiutrix legion. The diploma was discovered in 1930 near Breznik, Bulgaria, in the valley of the Struma, in a funerary tumulus⁴. Note should be made of the fact that definite information on the place and conditions of discovery are available for an extremely limited number of diplomas – compared to the rather large number known so far, more than 1200 –, the great majority, particularly those discovered in the last two decades, being the result of metal detecting.

Archaeological research of the Roman era in the areas of the border provinces has focused on the military fortifications and on the civilian settlements from their vicinity. Most of the military diplomas were discovered in these contexts, indicating a relative tendency of the veterans to settle in the area of action of the military unit to which they previously belonged. Nevertheless, without knowing the place of discovery, the great majority of the diplomas discovered in the last decades that ended up in Western Europe through via the antiquities trade, originate from the Balkans, suggesting a tendency of the veterans of Thracian, Moesian and Dacian origin to return home⁵.

In theory, there is also the possibility that the document was buried much later, in other historical conditions, when its initial significance had been lost, as in the case of a fragment of a military diploma discovered in a Chernyakhov settlement⁶. The diploma was bestowed to a

³ DUMITRESCU 1934, 40.

⁴ CIL XVI 10; GEROV 1961, 110.

⁵ See foremost DANA 2013. Also consult ZAHARIADE 2009 and MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA & DUMITRACHE 2012. For the veterans of Dacian origin, see DANA & MATEI-POPESCU 2009.

⁶ IVANTCHIK, POGORELETS, SAVVOV 2007; DANA & MATEI-POPESCU 2009, 217, no. 35. Also see the two fragments of Roman military diplomas discovered in the Republic of Moldova, MATEI-POPESCU 2007.



Figure 1. The *tabella II* of the Roman military diploma from Atmageaua Tătărască/Zafirovo.

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to a former member of the Pretorian cohorts originating from Durostorum, but in unclear circumstances, probably in the context of the Gothic invasions from the second half of the 3rd century AD, the diploma ended up in the area of present-day Ukraine. The diploma became important in this new context probably on account of the high-quality bronze from which it was manufactured, or acted as a prestige good.

Returning to the diploma at hand, it was most probably discovered in a rural settlement, possibly a *villa rustica*, which has not been investigated so far. The *tumulus* appearance could have been given by the pile of rubble covered in time by a thick layer of earth. To my knowledge, no archaeological research or surveys, which could provide clues on the character of the Roman occupation, have been carried out during the last decades in the aforementioned area.

Once the National History Museum of Romania was founded in 1972 (as the National History Museum of the Socialist Republic of Romania), the diploma became part of its collections, where it is still kept nowadays (inv. no. 16679).

Rectangular bronze plate, broken only at the right corner, *tabella II* of a military diploma, dimensions: 15 × 12 cm; 0.3 cm in thickness; the sizes of the letters are not specified. The text on the outer side of the diploma is placed in a rather unusual manner. Generally, this place holds the name and seals of the seven witnesses. In our case, the left part of the diploma, where usually the *praenomina* and *nomina* of the witnesses appear, contains the first part of the text of the imperial constitution after that the diploma copied, running along the length of the table. The right part — the diploma is divided into two parts by the place where the seals of the witnesses were found — contains the *praenomina*, *nomina* and *cognomina* of the witnesses, as well as their functions. The text runs along the width of the table. This manner of placing the text is attested only in a wooden diptych discovered in 1909 in Philadelphia, Egypt, which likewise contains the text of a copy of a special imperial constitution issued for the veterans of Legio X Fretensis during Domitian reign⁷. On the exterior side, the text from the left part, rows 2–4, there are visible traces of the ink (*atramentum*) used for writing the text that was to be engraved (the omitted text is given in square brackets).

LAMBRINO 1930, 131-137; 1931, 251-267; AE 1930, 72; CIL XVI 3; VULPE 1968, 294, fig. 2; HOLDER 1980, 203; CGLBI 652 (only the list of witnesses); FREI-STOLBA 2001, 99, no. 3; 2007, 41, no. 3; IACOB *et alii* 2012, 44, no. 2 (photo); ISM IV 1.

Intus

CVM · VXORIBVS · QVAS · TVNC · HABVI
 SSENT · CVM · EST · CIVITAS · IIS
 AVT · SIQVI · CAELIBES · ESSENT
 CVM · IIS · QVAS · POSTEA · DVXISSENT

⁷ ILS 9059 = CIL XVI, suppl. 12.

DVM·TAXAT·SINGVLI·SINGVLAS
A·D·XIII·K·IVLIAS
MASINIO·MARCELLO M/·ACILIO·AVIOLA COS
ALAE·GALLORVM ET·THRAECVM·ANTI
ANA CVI·PRAE·EST·M·MILONIVS·VERVS·
IVNIANVS
·EQVITI
ROMA·EST·AE·RESCENTI·F·SPIVRO
DESCRIPTVM·ET·RECOGNITVM·EXTA
BVLA·AHENEA·QVAE·FIXA·EST·IN·CAPI
TOLIO·IN·AEDEM·OPIS·IN·PRONA·EVO
LATERE·DEXTERIORE



extrinsecus

left, text running vertically

TI·CLAVDIVS·CAESAR·AVGVSTVS·GERMANIC
PONTIFEX·MAXIM·TRIBVNIC·POTEST X[IIII]
IMP·XX[VII P P] CENSOR COS[V]
EQVITIBVS·QVI·MILITANT·IN·ALIS·QVIN[QVE]
QVAE·APPELLANTVR·VETERANA·GALLORVM
ET·THRAECVM ET·GALL[O]RVM·ET·THRAECVM
[A]NTIANA·ET·GALLORVM·ET·THRAECVM



right, text running horizontally



SEX·MAGI·B
RVFI·NAVARCHI
C·CASSI·LONGI
NI·TRIBVNI·B
M·VALERI·FIR
MI·TRIBVNI
L·NVMERI·LVPI
TRIBVNI·B
M·TITINI·MACRI
CENTVRIONIS
SEX·APVLEI·MA
CRI·CENTVRIO
L·VALERI·VOL
SENI·M[I]SSI·CL
BESSI



The diploma, one of the oldest in the entire empire⁸, is a copy of an imperial constitution issued by emperor Claudius on the 18th of June 54 AD (*ante diem XIII kalendas Iulias, M. Asinio Marcello et M'. Acilio Aviola consulibus*)⁹ for the horsemen of five cavalry units (*alae*) from an unknown province. In all probability, as we will see below from the brief history of the units, it concerns a part of the auxiliary units that were stationed at that moment in the Syria province. The diploma was bestowed to a horseman (*equus*), *Romaesta Rescenti filius, Spiurus*, from the *ala Gallorum et Thracum Antiana*, which was under the command of prefect *M. Milonius Verus Iunianus*. The name of the horseman, as well as the place of discovery of the diploma, indicates unequivocally a Thracian origin¹⁰. The diploma was probably lost by one of his descendants, somewhere in the area of origin of the soldier, where he returned after being discharged.

As mentioned, the name of the soldier is of Thracian origin, being given in traditional manner, name and patronymic¹¹. For long it was held that *Spiurus* must have been a byname of the horseman. However, *Spiurus* most likely indicates the origin of the veteran (*origo*)¹². A settlement with this name, but rendered in a slightly changed form, is found in early Byzantine writings, in Procopius of Caesarea's works (*De Aed.* IV, 11, 20: Σπίβυρος)¹³. Nevertheless, it is not certain that this is the ancient name of the Roman settlement from Zafirovo, as it has been suggested¹⁴, since the diploma could have been lost in another place than the settlement of origin of the soldier.

Romaesta was enrolled around 25 years earlier, that is around 28–29 AD, when the periodical recruiting of Thracians into the Roman auxiliary units was resumed, after the crushing of the uprising of 26 AD. More likely, the recruitment took place immediately after that moment, being massive, since all the units mentioned in the imperial constitution are units originally composed of horsemen of Gallic origin to which important contingents of Thracians were added¹⁵. Thus, *Romaesta Rescenti f.* probably served for ca. 27–28 years before

⁸ For the start of imperial constitutions/decrees issuing, through which *civitas Romana* and *conubium* were granted, during the reign of Claudius, as part of his policy favouring the integration of the empire's inhabitants into the Roman system, see: BIRLEY 1986; HOLDER 1980, 49–50; BEUTLER 2007. The first, in chronological order, is a military diploma from the 11th of December 52 AD, CIL XVI 1, for a member of the fleet of Ravenna. The first known diploma for a member of the auxiliary units dates from the 13th of February 54 AD, CIL XVI 2. The moment when Claudius decided to issue imperial constitutions through which *civitas Romana* and *conubium* were granted to the soldiers of the auxiliary troops has been linked to the census of 47/48 AD (LEVICK 1990, 137; BEUTLER 2007, 12).

⁹ DEGRASSI 1952, 15; KIENAST 2011, 90–91.

¹⁰ ZAHARIADE 2009, 83, 119–120.

¹¹ MÓCSY 1986, 439.

¹² See foremost SPEIDEL 1986, 470; DANA 2013, 252.

¹³ DETSCHEW 1976, 478. For a complete discussion, see OLTEANU 2007, 86–87.

¹⁴ OLTEANU 2007, 86, fig. 6.

¹⁵ ZAHARIADE 2009, 64.

being discharged¹⁶. The commander of the troop, *M. Milonius Verus Iunianus*, a Roman knight in his third equestrian militia (*praefectus alae*), is not known from other sources. His origins are western, most probably Italian¹⁷.

The document is authenticated by the seals of the seven witnesses (*signatores*; their number had not been yet fixed in that period, with even nine witnesses being attested in this early period, between 52 and 73/74¹⁸), the names of which are placed horizontally on the outer side of the diploma.

Still unsolved is the issue of the mentioning of letter *B* next to the first two and fourth witnesses. Traditionally, it was understood as the abbreviation for *beneficiarius*, only that these were attested in relation to high-ranking officers, and never alongside a *navarchus*, the equivalent of the legionary *centurio*¹⁹. Nevertheless, *beneficarii* are also attested in the fleet, but it is quite clear that they are detached to the general staff of the prefect of the fleet, in the directly attested case, the praetorian fleet from Ravenna²⁰. Most probably, just as in the case of the last witness, where the space allowed a full rendering, we are dealing with the abbreviation of the ethnonym *Bessus*²¹ (actually a generic name for soldiers of Thracian origin²²). Accordingly, the complete list of witnesses is as follows: *Sex. Magius B(essus) Rufus, navarchus*; *C. Cassius Longinus, tribunus, B(essus)*; *M. Valerius Firmus, tribunus*; *L. Numerius Lupus, tribunus, B(essus)*; *M. Titinius Macer, centurio*; *Sex. Apuleius Macer, centurio*; *L. Valerius Volsenus, missi(cius) cl(assis), Bessus*. Save for one, the witnesses are not encountered on other military diplomas. The exception is, however, only apparent, since a *C. Cassius Longinus* appears as a witness on another military diploma from the 26th of February 70 AD, mentioning that he was a *veteranus*²³. If we were to consider him, in our case, a *tribunus* and not a *beneficiarius tribuni*, then the identity between the two could not be established, even if from the chronological point of view this is possible.

Even though the text of the imperial constitution mentions five cavalry units (*in alis quinque*), the diploma mentions only three: the *ala Gallorum et Thracum Antiana* — the unit in which the horseman who received the diploma served —, *ala veterana Gallorum et Thracum*²⁴,

¹⁶ HOLDER (1980, 272, no. 341) holds that he was recruited around 29 AD.

¹⁷ DEVIJVER 1976–2001, vol. I–IV, M 54; also see vol. VI, p. 14; ALFÖLDY 1986, 420–421. DEMOUGIN 1992, 486, no. 31.

¹⁸ CIL XVI 5 and 9; FREI-STOLBA 2001, 89; 2007, 15–53.

¹⁹ von DOMASZEWSKI 1967, 106.

²⁰ RMD IV 203: *beneficari(i) qui militant in classe Ravennate sub Sex. Lucilio Basso*, from the 26th of February 70 AD, awarded to *Dernauius*, son of *Derdipilus, Dacus*.

²¹ Werner Eck, personal communication. But see: MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA & DUMITRACHE 2012, 3. See in this sense an inscription from Oescus, where *B* is used as an abbreviation for *Bessus*, AE 1957, 299 = ILB 64 = CONRAD 2004, 244, no. 444, *Mucatra(lis) Site f. natio(ne) B(essus)*.

²² See conclusively DANA 2013, 245–246.

²³ RMD IV 203. This has already been noted by FREI-STOLBA (2001, 99).

²⁴ ZAHARIADE 2009, 122–123.

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and the *ala Gallorum et Thracum (constantium)*²⁵. All were originally units formed by horsemen of Gallic origin, later supplemented by Thracians recruited en masse after the uprising of 26 AD was quenched²⁶. Most probably, as it can be drawn from the brief history of each unit, they were stationed at that moment in the province of Syria.

*Ala Gallorum et Thracum Antiana*²⁷

This unit was recruited in Gaul, most probably in 16 AD, when P. Vitellius and C. Antius carried out a *census*²⁸. The name could originate from the latter. Even if this solution has been rejected, it is nevertheless obvious that it was recruited from Gallia Lugdunensis in a very early period, perhaps even during the rule of Augustus, and was named after one of its first commanders, a certain Antius. When the Thracian revolt of 26 AD was crushed, an event in which it took part, the unit received a new batch of recruits of Thracian origin, and was subsequently transferred to the province of Syria. Here, besides the diploma at hand, in which the name of the province is not present, it is attested directly in 88 AD²⁹ and in the years immediately after³⁰. Later, during Hadrian's Jewish War, the unit was transferred to that province, where it stayed for a period, appearing on the imperial constitutions issued for the auxiliary units from the province of Syria-Palestina — first attested in 139 AD³¹, and also attested in an inscription found at *Scythopolis* (Beth-Shean)³².

The horseman discharged in 54 AD was recruited, as already noted, around 28–29 AD. Another important batch of Thracian recruits (between 1000 and 2000) is attested in the aforementioned diplomas from 88 and 91 AD, including in this unit. They were recruited en masse in 62–66 AD, most probably on the backdrop of the expedition to Armenia and the Parthian war of that period, in which Gn. Domitius Corbulo distinguished himself³³. In point of fact, recruitment from the Balkan peninsula for this unit from Syria was frequent during the 1st century AD, as revealed by the epitaph of a veteran hailing from the eastern part of the province Macedonia, from Oinoussa, from the territory of the city of *Sirrha* (Serrès), discharged from this unit sometimes in the second half of the 1st century AD³⁴.

²⁵ HOLDER 1980, 39; ZAHARIADE 2009, 121–122.

²⁶ HOLDER 1980, 22, 112.

²⁷ SPAUL 1994, 27–28, no. 3; ZAHARIADE 2007, 1498–1499, no. I; 2009, 119–121, no. 1.

²⁸ Tacitus, *Ann.*, II, 6; LAST & STEIN 1990, 226.

²⁹ RMD I 3; RMD V 329, 330, 331.

³⁰ 12th of May 91 AD. ECK & PANGERL 2006, 205–219, no. 1–2, which also cites the other copies of the same constitution, RMD I 5, RMD IV 214 = RGZM 6; WEISS 2006, 255–257, no. 3, also see p. 259 with the complete list of known copies of this imperial constitution.

³¹ CIL XVI 87.

³² LAST & STEIN 1990, 224–228. AE 1990, 1013.

³³ WEISS 2006, 257–261.

³⁴ AE 1991, 1427: C. Sertorius C. f. / sive Cetrizis / Besidelti f., eques / missicius alae / Antianae h. s. e. For a discussion on the name of this soldier, see conclusively DANA 2013, 263–264.

*Ala veterana Gallorum et Thracum(veterana Gallica)*³⁵

This unit too was recruited in a very early period from the province of Gallia Lugdunensis. At some point in time, most probably after the suppression of the Thracian uprising of 26 AD, its effectives were filled up with recruits of Thracian stock. While the *ala Gallorum et Thracum Antiana* and the *ala Gallorum et Thracum constatium* will preserve in the title also the mention *Thracum*, this unit appears in the province of Syria, starting from 88 AD, only with the appellative of *ala veterana Gallica*. Most probably, after the discharging of the Thracian recruits, the unit did not receive new such contingents, and gradually regained its initial name. The idea of an eventual splitting of this unit³⁶, into the *ala veterana Gallica* (Syria) and the *ala I Thracum veterana sagittariorum* (Pannonia, Pannonia superior and Pannonia inferior)³⁷, should be fully dismissed, since it is clear that they are distinct units, recruited at different moments.

During the rule of Hadrian, the unit was transferred to Egypt, where it is attested until the end of the 3rd century.

*Ala Gallorum et Thracum constatium*³⁸

Most probably, this unit too was recruited in a very early period, having a similar history with that of the *ala Gallorum et Thracum Antiana*. As such, it received an important contingent of Thracian recruits after the suppression of the revolt of 26 AD, being subsequently mentioned until the age of Hadrian in the province of Syria. It then took part in Hadrian's Jewish War, staying in the province of Syria-Palestina, where it is attested until the end of the 2nd century AD.

Finally, on the basis of the considerations above, we can reconstruct the text of the diploma as follows:

Ti. Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanic(us), pontifex maxim(us), tribunici(ia) potest(ate) X[IIII], imp(erator) XX[VII], p(ater) p(atriciae)], censor, co(n)s(ul) [V]

equitibus, qui militant in alis quin[que], quae appellantur (1) veterana Gallorum et Thraecum et (2) Gall[o]rum et Thraecum [A]ntiana et (3) Gallorum et Thraecum [et (4) --- et (5) --- et sunt in Syria sub C. Ummidio Quadrato³⁹, qui quina et vicena stipendia aut plura meruerant (?)⁴⁰, quorum nomina subscripta sunt, ipsis liberis posterisque eorum civitatem dedit et conubium] cum uxoribus, quas tunc

³⁵ SPAUL 1994, 126–129, no. 41; ZAHARIADE 2007, 1501, no. IV; 2009, 122–123, no. 4.

³⁶ ZAHARIADE 2007, 1498, 1506–1507, no. IX; ZAHARIADE 2009, 129–130, no. 9.

³⁷ LŐRINCZ 2001, 24–25, no. 26.

³⁸ HOLDER 1980, 39. SPAUL 1994, 96, no. 30. ZAHARIADE 2007, 1500–1510, no. III; 2009, 121–122, no. 3.

³⁹ Attested as governor of the province of Syria in 51–60 AD (THOMASSON 1984, col. 306–307, no. 25; 2009, 126, no. 33:025).

⁴⁰ An *exempli gratia* reconstruction after CIL XVI 4.

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habuissent, cum est civitas iis data, aut, siqui caelibes essent, cum iis, quas postea duxissent dumtaxat singuli singulas.

A(nte) d(iem) XIII k(alendas) Iulias M. Asinio Marcello, M'. Acilio Aviola co(n)s(ulibus).

Alae Gallorum et Thraecum Antiana(e), cui praeest M. Milonius Verus Iunianus, equiti Romaestae Rescenti f., Spiuro.

Descriptum et recognitum ex tabula ahenea, quae fixa est in Capitolio in aede{m} Opis in prona{ev}o latere dexteriore.

Sex. Magi B(essi) Rufi, navarchi; C. Cassi(i) Longini, tribuni, B(essi); M. Valeri(i) Firmi, tribuni; L. Numeri(i) Lupi, tribuni, B(essi); M. Titini(i) Macri, centurionis; Sex. Apulei(i) Macri, centurio(nis); L. Valeri(i) Volseni, missi(cii) cl(assis), Bessi.

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