

Stoneworkers' Hercules. A Comment on an Upper Moesian Inscription

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Abstract. *The paper aims to provide comments on the worship of Hercules as a protector of Roman stoneworkers, focusing on an inscription from Upper Moesia — a tabula from the Iron Gates gorge dedicated to Hercules by the lapidarii of the legions VII Claudia and IV Flavia.*

Rezumat. *Autoarea comentează adorarea lui Hercules în calitate de protector al lucrătorilor romani în piatră, concentrându-și analiza pe o inscripție din Moesia Superior – o tabula de la Porțile de Fier dedicată lui Hercules de către lapidarii legiunii a VII-a Claudia, și legiunii a IV-a Flavia.*

Keywords: Upper Moesia, Iron Gates, quarrying, Hercules, Roman legions, vexillations.

The following article aims to provide comments on the cultic aspects of an important yet overlooked epigraphic monument from Upper Moesia. It is a *tabula* dedicated to Hercules by the *lapidarii*² from two Upper Moesian legions, *IIII Fl(avia)* and *VII Cl(audia)*. The inscription (Figure 1) runs as follows:

*Herculi sacrum | lapidari(i) qui exieru|nt ancones
facien|dos legionis IIII Fl(aviae) | et legionis VII
Cl(audiae) | vot(um) so[lverunt]*

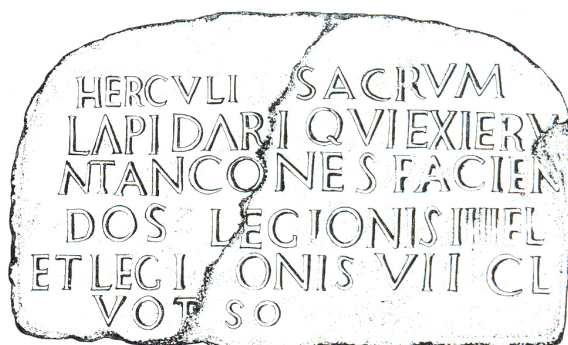


Figure 1. The inscription of the *lapidarii*.
Drawing (ap. PETROVIĆ 1986)

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² GABRIČEVIĆ 1972, 408–416 (AE 1973, 473); PETROVIĆ 1986, 48–49; fig. 12–13 (AE 1993; MIRKOVIĆ 2003; AE 2003, 1533).

It was discovered in 1971, at Hajdučka Vodenica, near the site of the more famous inscription, *Tabula Traiana* known from XVI century (*CIL* III 1699 = 8267 = *ILS* 5863 = *ILJug* 63). The inscription belongs to a group of monumental inscriptions (often referred to as *tabulae*) that shed important light on the large-scale Roman building projects in the region of the Danube gorge of the Iron Gates that begun immediately with the Roman conquest (Figure 2).³ In the sector of the Danube gorge, natural characteristics rendered both land and river communications extremely difficult. The massive steep cliffs are divided by the rapid and forceful river where the navigation was extremely difficult because of the dangerous cataracts.⁴

The Roman road-building projects in this region are epigraphically attested by the mentioned monumental inscriptions, which are the earliest epigraphic evidence in the Iron Gates gorge and in the province. The construction phase is attested by two *tabulae* from



Figure 2. The photograph of the remains of the Roman road cut through the cliffs of the Iron Gates gorge, showing also the holes for the consoles. The photo is a courtesy of its author, Mr. Tony Morrison who took it in 1966

³ After the opening of the hydroelectric power plant “Đerdap I/Portile de Fier I” in 1972, the water level was significantly raised and all inscriptions were submerged except for the *Tabula Traiana* that can still be seen as it was cut out and raised above the new water level. The specialists from the National Museum in Belgrade made squeezes of the inscriptions (cf. PETROVIĆ 1986, 46, note 24).

⁴ Cf. Strab. VII 3.13; XVII 1.2.

AD 33–34 dedicated to the emperor Tiberius by the legions *IIII Scythica*⁵ and *V Macedonica* (CIL III 1698 = *ILJug* 57, Gospođin Vir, at the beginning of the “Upper Gorge” and CIL III 1698 = *ILJug* 60, Lepenska stena)⁶ and a *tabula* dedicated to the emperor Claudius, dated in AD 44, (CIL III 1698 = *ILJug* 56). A phase of the renovation of the roads as a part of Domitian’s preparations for the wars against the Dacians is attested in the years between AD 92 and AD 94 by two Domitianic *tabulae* (CIL III 13813d = *ILS* 9373 = *ILJug* 55, Gospođin Vir and CIL III 1698 = 13813c = *ILJug* 58). The inscription from Gospođin vir mentions the renovation of the *iter Scorfularum* that was ruined by its age as well as by an incursion of the Danube: *i[t]er Scor[fularum] vetu[s]tate [e]t | incursu Danuvi c[or]ruptum operibu[s] am[p]liatis [restituit?---]*.⁷ The largest campaign of building projects in the Iron Gates was carried out under the emperor Trajan, in the course of his preparations for the Dacian wars. The text of the *Tabula Traiana* explains in greater detail the works commemorated in the *tabula* of the *lapidarii* that probably dates from the same period: *montibus excisis anconibus sublatis viam refecit*. Except for the road construction, renovation and expansion, the works also involved great accomplishments such as the canal at Sip by which the most difficult stretch of the river was bypassed⁸ and Trajan’s bridge over the Danube, an architectural masterpiece of Apollodorus of Damascus.⁹

Previous editors were mainly concerned with the aspects important for the inscription’s context — namely the construction of the road, techniques, etc. while, as it appears, the cultic aspects of the inscription have not received equal attention although it is interesting.¹⁰ Taking into consideration all elements of the inscription, it would be reasonable to connect the vow of the *lapidarii* with the inscriptions dedicated to Hercules as a protector of stoneworkers,¹¹ frequently attested with the epithet *Saxanus*.¹² As a symbol of physical

⁵ On other building projects of *IIII Scythica* cf. HIRT 2010, 176–177.

⁶ Texts of both inscriptions run: *Ti. Caesare Aug(usti) f(ilio) | Augusto imperatore | pont(ifice) max(imo) tr(ibunica) pot(estate) XXXV | Leg(io) IIII Scyt(hica), Leg(io) V Maced(onica)*. Cf. MIRKOVIĆ 1968, 32–33.

⁷ MOCSY 1974, 45–47.

⁸ *Tabula* from Karataš (Diana) near Kladovo: PETROVIĆ 1970, 31 = *ILJug* 468 dated in AD 101: *Imp(erator) Caesar divi Nervae f(ilius) | Nerva Traianus Aug(ustus) Germ(anicus) | pont(ifex) max(imus) trib(unicia) pot(estate) V p(ater) p(atriciae) co(n)s(ul) IIII | ob periculum cataractarum | derivato flumine tutam Da|nuvi navigationem fecit*.

The traces of the Trajan’s canal were visible until the opening of the dam Đerdap 1. MOCSY 1974, 109–110.

⁹ Dio Cass. LXVIII 13, 1–6; Procop. *Aed.* IV 6. 13.

¹⁰ Surprisingly, the monograph dedicated to the cult of Hercules in Upper Moesia (GAVRILOVIĆ 2014) does not include this important monument in the catalogue and heavily overlooks its significance: there is only one vague reference to the inscription on page 59, containing furthermore some material errors in reading and interpretation. The inscription AE 1989, 631 dedicated to *Hercules Augustus* is also not included in the catalogue although it should be important for the discussion on the cult in the province (see text below).

¹¹ MATIJEVIĆ (2016) provides a detailed survey and examination of relevant bibliography, and convincingly demonstrates that the cult should be considered Roman, against some older opinions ascribing the cult of *Hercules Saxanus* to Germanic or Celtic cultural sphere and that it is not limited to military context.

¹² From Lat. *saxanus*, *saxum*. In Gaul and Germania the epithet is often spelled *Sax(s)anus*.

strength and endurance, Hercules was exceedingly popular with quarryman, stoneworkers, miners especially among the members of the Roman army that was commonly employed for quarry work and similar tasks such as those in the Iron Gates gorge. His place in Roman miners' pantheon has been well recognised by the scholars.¹³

There are very indicative epigraphic analogies from Italy,¹⁴ Gallia¹⁵ and Germania, Noricum,¹⁶ Dalmatia, Lower Moesia, Dacia, etc., that can be useful for the interpretation of the Iron Gates *tabula*. Great number of dedications *Hercules Saxanus* was set up by Roman soldiers at the quarry in the valley of the Brohl, a tributary of the Rhine (Lower Germania).¹⁷ The setting and the atmosphere are to some extent comparable to the Upper Moesian case, as well: soldiers commemorated their hard work on quarrying stone by setting altars for the *Hercules Saxanus*, "Hercules of the Rocks". In Flavian epoch, the Rhine limes received new fortifications after Batavian revolt and the vexillations from legions, auxiliary units and fleet¹⁸ were dispatched there on the quarrying missions.¹⁹ The temporary character of these quarrying missions is well illustrated by the inscription *CIL* XIII 8036 that indicates that in the times of Trajan, the vexillations extracted stone in the Brohl quarries for the building of *colonia Ulpia* at Xanten. At the quarry of Karistos (Euboea, Ahaia), a centurion of the legion *XV Apoll(inaris)*, *T. Sergius Longus* dedicated inscription *CIL* III 12286 to Hercules.²⁰ The same person is attested as a *centurio* of the *legio XXII Primigenia* stationed at *Mogontiacum*. A.M. Hirt reasonably presumes that he was "dispatched to the Karystean quarries based on his expertise in quarrying organization".²¹

Suggestive epigraphic and iconographic evidence from the quarries of the island of Brač (*Brattia*, *Brac(h)ia*) shed light on the function of Hercules as a patron of the quarrying and stonemasonry. At the entrance in the Roman quarry at Rasohe, there is a relief of Hercules carved on the rockface.²² From another Roman quarry on the same island the altar set up for *Hercules Augustus* (*CIL* III 3092, Stražišće, Brač): *H(erculi) A(ugusto) s(acrum) | [S?]al<v>ius*

¹³ DUŠANIĆ 1999, 133; cf. MATIJEVIĆ 2016, 56 and note 127.

¹⁴ *CIL* XIV 3543 (Tibur); *CIL* V 5013 = *ILS* 3457 (Tridentum, Regio X): *Herculi Saxan(o) | Lubiamus Endrubi | Quintalli | v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) [m(erito)]*.

¹⁵ *CIL* XIII 3475, 4623–4625 (Belgica).

¹⁶ As *Saxanus*: *ILLPRON* 375 *Saxano Aug(usto) | sac(rum) Messor | C(ai) H(erenni) Ruf(ini) s(ervus) | ex vis{s}u po(suit)*; *ILLPRON* 376; *CIL* III 5093 = *ILLPRON* 206: *S(ilvano?) Saxano | Aug(usto) sac(rum) | Adiutor | et Secundinus*; *ILLPRON* 1892.

¹⁷ Brohl: *CIL* XIII 7697–7714, 7715–7719, *AE* 1923, 33, *AE* 1926, 21 = K. MATIJEVIĆ, *Römische und frühchristliche Zeugnisse im Norden Obergermaniens. Epigraphische Studien zu unterer Mosel und östlicher Eifel* (Rahden (Westf.) 2010 (non vidi).

¹⁸ The flotilla was used for transporting quarried stone.

¹⁹ HIRT 2010, 175.

²⁰ *T(itus) Sergius Longus ((centurio)) leg(ionis) XV | Apoll(inaris) Herculi sacrum*. HIRT 2010, 170–171; RUSSEL, 2014, 44.

²¹ Cf. HIRT 2010, 170–171.

²² CAMBI 2013.

Obul|tronius | De[x]ter).²³ Third important evidence from Brač is provided by another epigraphic monument *CIL* III 10107 = *ILS* 3458 discovered the quarry of Plate, Škrip. It is a well-known inscription that was set up by a soldier appointed to imperial quarries on a mission of obtaining of capitals and columns for the ongoing erection of imperial baths in *Sirmium* — the *thermae Liciniana*:²⁴ *Herculi Aug(usto) | sac(rum) Val(erius) Vale|rianus mil(es) | cum insist|erem ad cap|itella colu|mnarum ad t(h)e|rmas Licin(i)an(a)s q(u)as(!) (f)iunt S|irmi v(otum) l(ibens) s(olvit)*.

It is interesting to notice that many dedications to Hercules in the mining context have a collective character. The Brohltal inscriptions mention vexillations, *vexillarii*, *commilitones vexilli*, et sim. (cf. *CIL* XIII 3475, 4623–4265, *AE* 1920, 118; *AE* 2004, 954). In the case of civilian dedicators, those are often associations of stoneworkers, united by the profession and, often, by shared ethnic and geographic origin.²⁵ For example, the inscription from Abbaye de Saint-Pons in the province of Alpes Maritimae, *CIL* V 7869 = *ILS* 3459 = *ILAM* 156: *Herculi | lapidari(i) | Alman^rτῆ|censes p(osuerunt)*. The dedication is made by a group of *lapidarii*, who came there to work on a building project.²⁶ They are also attested in an inscription from the vicinity of Arles (*Gallia Narbonensis*).²⁷ An altar from *Nicopolis ad Istrum* in Lower Moesia was set up for Heracles by a guild of Nikomedian sculptors / stonemasons (*IGBulg* II 674): ἀγαθῆι τύχη[ι] | θεῷ Ἡρακλεῖ | Μάξιμος [...]σίου κὲ Νει[κων]⁵ Θεοδώρο[υ ὑ]πε[ρ] | τῆς συνόδου Νει[κομηδέων λιθο]ξόων τὸν βωμὸν | χαρι[σ]τήριον.²⁸ A collegium of *Hercliani* is recorded at the Dacian mining centre *Ampelum*.²⁹ In Upper Moesia, the cult is attested in mining context, by the inscription *IMS* I 103 that has official character, testifying of the erection of the temple of Jupiter and Hercules in the mining district of Mt. Kosmaj.³⁰ A possible instance may be the inscription *AE* 1989, 631, found in the south-western periphery of Belgrade, near Železnik (“town of iron”), where quarries and iron mines operated from antiquity until modern times.³¹ It is an altar dedicated to *Hercules Augustus* for the salvation of the emperor, by a *collegium* from a *vicus Bube* — a toponym known from another long-lost epigraphic text

²³ CAMBI (2013) offers a different reading of the line 4: *deter(minavit)* instead of *De[x]ter*.

²⁴ MIRKOVIĆ 1971, 37, note 219a.

²⁵ Cf. GRBIĆ 2014 with bibliography.

²⁶ MORABITO 2010, 262–263, n. 156; WIERSCHOWSKI 2001, 120–121, and n. 94.

²⁷ *CIL* XII 732: *D(is) M(anibus) || Sex(ti) Iul(i) Valen[tini] lapida|ri(i) Almani|censes(?) ex fu|nere eius et |Pomp(eiae) Gra|tinae co(n)iugi | inconpara|bili (!) posuer(unt)*

²⁸ See a very exhaustive article of WARD PERKINS about the marble trade from Nicomedia.

²⁹ *IDR* III /3, 319. Cf. DUŠANIĆ 1999, 133.

³⁰ *Iovi et Herculi | templum fecit | Vecilia Tyranni Aug(usti) | lib(erti) proc(uratoris) locus datus | ab Appaeo Hermete et Fabi(i)s | tribus*.

³¹ Cf. above, note 10.

(IMS I 32) that reinforces the case for the mining context.³² Maybe not by accident, a *lapidarius* from Ratiaria is called *Herculanus*.³³

To conclude briefly. The *lapidarii* that were employed in the Danube gorge were most probably organized in a *vexillation* drafted from the Upper Moesian legions *III Fl(avia)* and *VII Cl(audia)* and employed in the Iron Gates section of the *limes* on a temporary mission. As we learn from the Iron Gates inscriptions, the special tasks entailed cutting rocks, lifting and setting the consoles (*exierunt ancones*) to expand the road in the narrowest sections of the gorge, where the Roman road was cut through the cliffs. This was most probably the organizational model for capital building projects in earlier construction phases in the region as well. As regards the character of the vow to Hercules, it is doubtlessly connected with their difficult professional assignment in the gorge.

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³² DUŠANIĆ 2004, 22–23, especially note 69.

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