

Ioan Piso, *Dacia Porolissensis. Potaissa et vicinia (Inscriptiones de la Dacie romaine IV/1)*, Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, tome 64, Paris 2024, 409 p., 503 figures

The volume IV of the *Inscriptiones Daciae Romanae* was expected to be published for a long time. Now, thanks to the generous effort of Professor Ioan Piso, the first fascicle of this volume, containing the inscriptions of Potaissa, has appeared. The majority of the epigraphic texts were already published (in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, *Inscriptiones Latinae Daciae* – edited by Constantin C. Petolescu, or in various publications). In the last decades, an important role in collecting and publishing the inscriptions had Mihai Bărbulescu, who led a long time the excavations at Potaissa. Ioan Piso has done the impressive work of collecting, describing, transcribing, translating and commenting the epigraphic file of one of the most important camps and civil habitation in Roman Dacia.

After a *Proemium* in which the author presents the actual research stage, expressing his gratitude towards his predecessors, a necessary *Prolegomena historica* follows. It is known that Potaissa was, starting with Marcomannic wars, the camp of the *legio V Macedonica* and then the civil settlement developed into a *municipium* and then a *colonia*, but Professor Piso succeeds to realize a coherent connection between the history and the inscriptions and the way in which history is possible through epigraphic texts. The editor emphasizes following in this direction (Mihai Bărbulescu), that an auxiliary camp which preceded the legionary one was situated most likely on Dealul Zânelor and not on the position of the future legionary camp. The *vicus militaris* situated next to the auxiliary camp was identified east of Dealul Zânelor, until to Arieș river and to a hill leading to Sând valley. Of course, the coming of the Vth Macedonica legion changed essentially the history of the settlement. The legion was dislocated from Moesia Inferior in 168/170, in order to defend the province during the Marcomannic wars. The camp was identified and excavated on Cetate plateau. The *canabae legionis* were supposed to be situated nearby, of course *intra leugam*. The epigraphic texts sustained the statement of Ulpian (*Dig.* 50, 15, 1), proving that Septimius Severus granted the status of *municipium* and then of *colonia* to the civil settlement. Ioan Piso demonstrates once again that the *Patavissensium vicus* mentioned by Ulpian was the *vicus canabiarum* and the settlement followed the status of *municipium* and then of *colonia*, rightfully denying the concomitant existence of a *municipium* and of a *colonia*. Due to the reason that the legion was alongside him in the combat against his rivals, Septimius Severus granted very likely to the *canabae* the municipal status, with a quattuorviral constitution (as the author indubitably shows). Then, to „equalize” the status of *colonia Aurelia Apulense*, the same emperor granted to the city the status of *colonia*. Professor Piso realizes the connection between the texts and the finding spots, identifying on field some settlements or monuments (the first *vicus*, a sanctuary connected to the *canabae*, a temple of Liber Pater, a necropolis, other sanctuaries next to the legionary camp etc). The offensive of the Goths in 262 has ruined Dacia. At the level of the archaeological information, the *porta decumana* of the camp was partially blocked and thereafter destroyed. The last inscriptions were dated 255/256 and 260.

Coming now to the *corpus*, it contains 504 inscriptions, organized in the classical way. The texts of Potaissa (inscriptions on stone and then on metal, the *graffiti*, the amphorae and the *sigillata*, the lamps and the stamps on the *tegulae*). The stone inscriptions are also in the classical

order (votives, construction, honorary and funerary inscriptions). I will draw the attention towards the most important texts, both from historical point of view and epigraphic and historical polemics).

The inscriptions nos 1 and 10 of the catalogue happen to be important in this respect. The first one is a dedication to Aesculapius and Hygia set by M. Publicianus Rhesus, *praefectus alae I Batavorum milliariae, agens vice praefecti legionis*. The first problem encountered by the editors if the text is linked to the emperor's name, which was erased. Mihai Bărbulescu has identified the emperor with Gallienus,¹ while Constantin C. Petolescu proposed the restitution *Regalianus* or *Ingenus*.² It is still visible on the stone that the first letter is an A, not a G or a R. The arguments of Professor Piso seems to me convincing: the name of Gallienus was never erased in Dacia, the epithete *Gallieniana* added to the unit is missing, the coins of Regalianus are missing in Dacia, and ingennus had a limited authority even in Pannonia. Thus, the restitution of the name *Aemilianus* is more probable, and Ioan Piso draws into attention a similar inscription found at Čačak (Dalmatia).³ The second problem related to this text (and implicitly to inscription no 10 of the catalogue) is the name of the *praefectus*. Mihai Bărbulescu has read *Rhenus*, connecting the name to the Batavian ethnicity of the unit. On the inscription no 1 the letter S, even if it is less visible, appears however clear to me, so I have to agree with Ioan Piso in reading the *praefectus*' name *Rhesus*. Besides, in the time of barracks emperors, a recruitment in a Dacian unit from the Rhine provinces seems less likely than an enlistment from the local population. A third issue that, in my opinion, the editor of this *corpus* argues convincingly, is the existence of a *praefectus* at a legion's command in 253 (when Aemilianus was emperor). In this period of trouble, each province was practically under the authority if a *procurator agens vice praesidis*. In fact, the subordination of the *legati legionis* to an equestrian *agens vice praesidis* was considered inappropriate and they were replaced by *praefecti legionis* (see also the inscription no 64). In this respect, it seems logical that, in our specific case, the *praefectus legionis* was replaced by an *agens vice praefecti*, i. e. M. Publicianus Rhesus, *praefectus* of *ala I Batavorum*. The second text (inscription no 10) is a dedication to Fortuna. The S of the name *Rhesus* is, in my opinion, still visible when looking at the photograph accompanying the text. In an article recently published, S. Nemeti, R. Varga, and D. Deac (2024) proposed other lectures concerning the emperor's name and the name of the *praefectus*. With all respect and sympathy due to the authors, I cannot agree with them and I will show why. They suggest that the emperor was Philippus Arabs, arguing that Aemilianus did not suffered *damnatio memoriae* and the only one at the middle pf the 3rd c. who took this blame was Philippus⁴. First of all, Aemilianus did suffer *damnatio memoriae*, as we can see in the inscriptions of Čačak⁵ or Cuicul.⁶ Secondly, on the vow to Aesculapius and Hygia the superior part of the letter A is still visible. On the second stone (the vow to Fortuna) the emperor's name is illisible on the photo provided by S. Nemeti, R. Varga and D. Deac.⁷ The second issue concerns the name of the *praefectus*. The cited authors read *Rhenus*. After comparing the photos from IDR IV/1 and the article of S. Nemeti and his collaborators,⁸ in the case of the vow to Aesculapius and Hygia, I can see an S at the end of line

¹ Bărbulescu 2012, 188-191.

² Petolescu 2013, 377-378

³ Dušanic 2003, 254-256.

⁴ Nemeti, Varga, Deac 2024, 434-435.

⁵ Dušanic 2003, 254-256. See also Varner 2004, 209.

⁶ AE 1911, 104. See also Varner 2004, 209; Hugenberg 2005, 1598.

⁷ Nemeti, Varga, Deac 2024, 437, fig. 6.

⁸ Nemeti, Varga, Deac 2024, 436, fig. 5.

4 (in both photos), a double VV at the begonnig of line 5 (more visible in the photo of IDR IV/1 and less in that of the article published in *Chiron*). In any case, the *S* appears clearly for my and the lecture *Rhes/u{u}s* is doubtless. In the second inscription, on both photos, only the letter *R* from the name of *praefectus* is visible. S. Nemeti, R. Varga and D. Deac underlined on their photo what that seems to be an *N*.⁹ It seems to me that it is a fragment where the stone is deteriorated and this deterioration has a form similar to an *N*. Another argument is that between the letter *R* (which is clear) and the supposed letter *N* there is no enough space to write to letters, specifically a *H* and an *E*. The third argument is, in my opinion, the lecture *Rhesus* on the first text, which is clear. It is true that Rhenus is more attractive, taking into account that he was prefect of the *ala I Batavorum*, but at the middle of the 3rd c., the ethnic recruitments (especially from a quite far region) are rare. Another controversy was linked to the supposed *gentilicium* of the prefect, *Publicianus*. M. Bărbulescu and more recently S. Nemeti, R. Varga and D. Deac considered that *Publicianus* is the *nomen*. The last authors think that the form is one that is popular in Celtic and Germanic provinces. However, the form of the *gentilicium* derived from a *cognomen* is popular in these provinces, but with the suffix *-ius* (for example, *Publicius*, *Secundius* etc.). In this respect, I believe that Ioan Piso's argumentation that the *gentilicium* is missing, being probably *Aurelius* (very often used in this time) is more plausible.

It is still to notice the inscription no 4, a vow of the centurion C. Caius Vitalis to Apollo Phoebus, who bears the ephete *Parthicus*. This can be related to the eastern expeditions of Septimius Severus, event which can contribute to the datation at the very end of the 3rd c. The text no 5 of the catalogue provides of vow of many veterans to a certain *Deus Fortis* (?) at the middle of the 3rd c. The list is important in order to see the origin of the former soldiers of the legion. Inscription no 19 provides the existence of a *conventus civium Romanorum*, very likely of the *canabae*, after the finding spot.

The dedicant at no 52, Cominius Celsus, belongs certainly to the *gens* Cominia, attested in many inscriptions at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa (IDR III/2, 19, 107-108, 371, 419, 484). The members of this *gens* were of Italic origin and represent the municipal elite of Sarmizegetusa; they were related to other *gens* of the local aristocracy, Varenia (IDR III/2, 108, 128-130, 322; III/3, 48; III/5, 596). Cominius Celsus could be related to the Cominii of Sarmizegetusa, too.

We should also mention the vows to Egyptian divinities (Apis – no 3, Tithoes, Re-Harmahis – no 25, Isis – nos 27-28, Serapis – no 28, together with Isis), which is not surprising, taking into account the popularity in Roman Dacia.¹⁰ The inscriptions vowed to Oriental and Semitic divinities (Aziz- Bonus Puer – no 6, Jupiter Balmacordus – no 69, Jupiter Dolichenus – nos 72-74, Jupiter Sabazius – no 77, Men the Invincible – no 92, Mithra – nos 96-103) are also present, proving the heterogenous religious and ethnic composition of the population at Potaissa.

The municipal status of Potaissa is attested through inscriptions nos 56 (an ancient *duumvir* of the *municipium Septimii Potaissensis*), 61 (an *ex-quattuorvir*), 71, 87 (*augustales*), 74 (un *duumvir*), 89 (dedicant with unknown status), 106 (a *flamen*), 113 (a *scriba*), 123 (*collegium fabrum*), 124 (a *decurio*). The mention of the *duumviri* was already explained by the author in the introductory chapter. Potaissa was administrated by *quattuorviri*, as in the *municipium Septimium Apulense*, and the term *duumviri* expressed a confusion of the population, who saw only their images as supreme magistrates in Potaissa (p. 18). The *colonia* is mentioned at no 131, 191, 496, possibly at

⁹ Nemeti, Varga, Deac 2024, 437, fig. 7.

¹⁰ Deac 2015, 2021; Bricault, Deac, Piso 2021.

no 132. I also notice the pertinent remarks on the dating of no 65 (the complete name of the *centurio*, the attribution of the epithets *pia constans*) under Commodus.

The inscription no 79 rises the question of the 7th legion surname's restitution. The lapicide is indeed inconstant, how Ioan Piso remarks. However, following the observations of Patrick Le Roux,¹¹ the lecture *VII C(laudiae)* seems more probable than *VII G(eminae)*.

I think that the information provided by inscription no 114 could be completed. Hermadio vows a shrine for Silvanus. The name is quite rare in Dacia. It appears three times and it belongs very likely to the same person. The first two times are those from Tibiscum (where Hermadio vows a shrine for the *conductor pascui et salinarum* P. Aelius Marius, as an *actor* of M. Turranius Dius)(IDR III/1, 145) and Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, where Hermadio consecrates a shrine to Mithra (IDR III/2, 283). Let us focus on the Potaissa inscription. Potaissa is next to the rock salt exploitation of Turda, the largest in Dacia. Silvanus was popular among miners, as other divinities of soil products (not only metals and stone, but also grains, wood, grass and wine).¹² In my opinion, Hermadio's presence in Potaissa was related to salt exploitation, which confirms his relationship to P. Aelius Marius. The same connection can be emphasized by the vow to Terra Mater accomplished by the *magistri* Satrianus and Decumus (no 120). S. Dušanić rightly states that Terra Mater assumed the role "of a goddess of the underworld, a mistress of the diggers".¹³ The association of Terra Mater with Dea Roma of provinces' personifications shows symbolically that the mines belong to the *fiscus* and the relation with the Roman state was unbreakable.¹⁴ It is true, as we can see below, that most of dedications are coming from the zone of metals' exploitation, but their mention in salt mining areas signifies, in my opinion, the cult was there in connection with mining activities. In Dacia, some dedications to Terra mater are related to salt exploitation. A first dedication to Terra Mater is set up by Atticus, *actor* of P. Aelius Marius, at Domnești (ILD 804).¹⁵ We have already discussed this text,¹⁶ taking into account that a *centurio regionarius* is attested in this place.¹⁷ It is important that the cult of Terra Mater is connected with mining activities for two reasons: the place where the shrine was erected is next to a salt spring and the text is consecrated by a clerk in salt administration. I have shown that in fact he acted on field, in order to survey better the salt exploitation. A second text comes from Ocna Mureș (Salinae): the dedication is towards Diana and Terra Mater (IDR III/4, 67). Moreover, the *beneficarii legati legionis* and *consularis* (nos 21, 67, 73, 126, 215), except their strategic duties, ensured also the security of salt exploitation in Potaissa.

The texts nos 144 and 145 provides a list of centurions honoring Iulia Domna and Caracalla. Their number (only 40) suggests that a part of the legion was detached, together with some vexillations of *legio XIII Gemina*, in the Parthic war of Caracalla. The ancient citizens and the people originating from Italy and western provinces prevailed in number.

The evidence of funerary texts provides important information about the population of Potaissa, especially the civilians. The data concern the soldiers' and civilians' families, their possible origin, and demographic information (age at death, size of families etc.). A little comment at no 179. The inscription is dating probably, taking into account the *nomen* Aelius,

¹¹ Le Roux 1981, 199-203.

¹² Dušanić 1999, 1301-31.

¹³ Dušanić 1999, 132.

¹⁴ Dušanić 1999, 133.

¹⁵ ILD 804. See also Dana, Zăgreanu 2013, 31.

¹⁶ Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2022, 74.

¹⁷ Piso, Cupcea 2014, 115-123.

the 2nd c. However, the name of the mother, Aelia Deccia, was very likely a peregrine, but at the moment of the epitaph's erection, she was not any more. We also remark the family of Palmyreans at no 180 (the father was a veteran of *numerus Palmyrenorum Porolissensium*). The ethnic composition is completed by Illyrians (nos 183, 190, 192, 198, 219, 238), Celts (nos 185, 213, 216, 239), Thracians (nos 186, 192, 201, 244), Greeks coming from Moesia Superior (no 197) or other Greeks (nos 219-220). At no 190, the Illyrian origin of a soldier active in a Batavian cohort represent an extra-argument for the enlistment of non-Batavian population in their ethnic units in the 3rd c.

Among the inscriptions on metal, it is worth noting the *pondera* of bronze, filled with lead and inscribed with silver letters (nos 276-280) (4 on 5 being controlled by the *optio* Valerius Sabinus).

The brick stamps represent an important category of inscriptions, taking into account that we are talking about a legion. The *signacula* were made from wood, and they were quickly replaced. The most ancient type is that of LEG V MAC (no 345 of the catalogue), similar to stamps found at Oescus and Troesmis. Ioan Piso admits he has published all he has found, with the mention that an exhaustive catalogue of the stamps is difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, the catalogue contains 147 brick stamps. The first one bears the text *Ex(ercitus) D(aciae) P(orolissensis)*, the other have the name of the *Legio V Macedonica* in various forms: LEG V Mac, LEG V M (nos 348-353, with a possible epithet – *A(notniniana)* at no 352), LE V M, L(e)G Q M. LEG V, LEGIO V, LEGIO M, L V M, L M V, (Legionis) V M, L V M *f(idelis)*, L V M *p(iae)*, *P(iae)* L V M P F, , L V M ANT, L V M A, L V M P F S(*everianae*), L V M P F M(*aximianae*), L V M G(*ordianae*). The *legio XIII Gemina* is also mentioned at Potaissa on brick stamps, in the period before the arriving of the *legio V Macedonica* at Potaissa (nos 483–488). Other stamp (no 490) attests *cohors I Hispanorum*, probably camped at Potaissa before the *legio V Macedonica*, being transferred at Orheiul Bistriței thereafter. The *cohors I Flavia Ulpia Hispanorum* is mentioned on a milestone at Aiton (next to Potaissa), building in 108 the road *a Potaissa Napocae*.

The *Indices* and the *Abbreviationes* close this beautiful volume. Professor Piso provides us a new important corpus of the *Inscriptiones Daciae romanae*, which will remain another milestone in the epigraphy of Roman Dacia. At the end, I would like to underline his deep respect for history and for his profession, citing some phrases of his presentation of the brick stamps: „Cette section contient 147 estampilles. On se demandera peut-être pourquoi je n'ai pas économisé mon temps et le papier en me limitant strictement à quelques types comme LEG V MAC, LEG V M, L V M, en positif et en négatif. La raison en est que la fabrication de chaque *signaculum* représente une activité humaine individuelle, à laquelle une bonne compréhension de l'histoire demande de rendre hommage”. Such respect for the human past belongs only to great spirits.

Lucrețiu Mihailescu-Bîrliba

„Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, Faculty of History
blucuretiu@yahoo.com

References

- Bărbulescu, M. 2012. *Inscripțiile din castrul legionar de la Potaissa (The Inscriptions of the Legionary Fortress at Potaissa)*. Bucharest.
- Bricault, L., Deac, D., Piso, I. 2021. Les cultes isiaques à Sarmizegetusa. In: Ș. Cristea, C. Timoc, E. De Sena (eds.), *Africa, Egypt and the Danubian Provinces of the Roman Empire. Population, Military and Religious Interactions (2nd-3rd centuries AD)*, 45-63. Oxford.

Dana, D., Zăgreanu, R. 2013. Deux dédicaces latines inédites de Porolissum, *Tyche. Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte, papyrologie und Epigraphik* 28: 27-35.

Deac, D. 2015. Ancient Egyptian Artifacts from Romania. Their Research and Future Perspectives. In: M. Tomorad (ed.), *A History of Research into Ancient Egyptian Culture Conducted in Southeast Europe*, 117-120.

Dušanić, S. 1999. The Miners' Cults in Illyricum, *Pallas*: 129-139.

Dušanic, S. 2003. Asinius Maximus in AD 253, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 144: 254-260.

Hugenberg, R. 2005. Strassen und Meilensteine in den römischen Provinzen Africa Proconsularis, Numidia und Mauretania, Zürich. DOI: 10.36204/edcsj-024-202207.

Le Roux, P. 1981. Inscriptions militaires et déplacements de troupes dans l'Empire romain, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 43: 195-206.

Mihailescu-Bîrliba, L. 2022. Religious aspects of salt mining in Roman Dacia. In: I. Piso, P. Forisek (eds.), *Defending the polis- defending the Empire. The ancient Greek and Roman military strategy and inscriptions*, 73-88. Budapest.

Nemeti, S., Varga, R., Deac, D. 2024. A vignette from Dacia under Philippus Arabs. Revisiting the altars of Marcus Publicianus Rhenus, *Chiron* 54: 434-435.

Petolescu, C. C. 2013. Cronica epigrafică a României (XXXII, 2012), *SCIVA* 64, 3-4: 371-388.

Piso, I. Cupcea, G. 2014. Ein centurio regionarius der legio X Fretensis in Dakien, *Tyche. Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte, papyrologie und Epigraphik* 29: 115-123.

Varner, E. R. 2004. *Mutilation and Transformation. Damnatio memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture*. Leiden-Boston.



© 2024 by the authors; licensee Editura Universității Al. I. Cuza din Iași. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons by Attribution (CC-BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).