

AURELIAN'S ARMY ON THE DANUBE (THE SECTOR BETWEEN THE IRON GATES AND THE VIT RIVER)

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In the years that followed the military and administrative evacuation of most of Trajan's Dacia, the general picture of the troops deployment along the Danubian frontier remains in its greatest part unknown as a result of acute shortage of epigraphical and/or historical sources (Vetters 1951, 6-7; Macrea 1969, 464-469; Tudor 1978, 39-40; Zahariade, Phelps 1999, 321-322). Fortunately, both epigraphic and historical documents, even in an outrageous small number, are official, so that there is no doubt about their veracity (Tudor 1960, 335-361; Morfova 1970, 33-43; 1971, 25-33).

Beside the withdrawal of the imperial administrative structures (financial services, mining exploitation, state properties, customs services, transportation), the abandonment of north Danubian Dacia during Aurelian's reign technically envisaged a partial withdrawal of the military administration (troops, military bureaus) in the first place (Iliescu 1971, 425-442; 1972, 149-160; 1973, 5-28; Ruscu 1998, 235-254). The technical details of this large-scale operation, implying movements of former structures into the new installations, are hardly to be known in detail. The only units from Trajan's Dacia south of the river, whose names and headquarters are recorded in official documents, were the legions XIII Gemina and V Macedonica. They took position at Ratiaria and Oescus respectively, former 1st century legionary fortresses. This new tactical arrangement, which is part of the larger evacuation plan, is clearly indicated only by two official documents: Itinerarium Antonini 219-220, 5, the closest chronological document of the date of the abandonment of Dacia, finally revised by 293 and showing late 3rd century realities; Notitia Dignitatum XLII 34-38; 31-33; 39, whose Eastern sections were also submitted to important corrections by 394/5.

The way and circumstances in which the two legions were moved south of the Danube remain also obscure enough. The Aquilcia (CIL V 808; 8237=IDRE I 143; 144; Inscr. Italiae X/4, 349=IDRE I 146) Poctovio (AE 1936, 53-57), Dertona (CIL V 7366=IDRE I 138-140) and Ticinum (CIL V 6423=IDRE I 165) inscriptions dated within the interim period between Gallienus and Aurelian/Claudius reign's record detachments and military personnel from the XIII Gemina and V Macedonica garrisoned in or around these cities. The vexillations deployed in those places seem to have been numerically strong enough - at least from the command personnel viewpoint - (*praepositi centuriones, tesserarii, custodes armorum, actarii, codicarii, canaliclarii, beneficiarius[tribuni] laticlavi, signifer, imaginifer, optio spei*). On the other hand, the later date of some inscriptions raises the question whether they ever reunited with the bulk of the two Dacian legions in Apulum and Potaissa. In our opinion these vexillations never joined again their mother legions. In this instance the detachments could have remained independent army corps whose existence can be tracked down in the 4th century army lists.

The transfer from Dacia to the new headquarters of the remaining cores of the two legions could have had important implications on the size of their new accommodation areas. Archaeological investigations carried out at Oescus and Novae, established new enclosure areas dated by mid 3rd century (Zahariade 1997, 62; Zahariade, Phelps 1999, 322) bounded to the former structures. At Oescus a new 10 ha in surface stone wall (known as *Oescus II*) (Ivanov 1974, 59-65 fig. 2) was connected to the former 18 ha 1st century enclosure wall (*Oescus I*) which had served as headquarters for the V Macedonica before A.D. 106 and as defences for the colonia *Oescensium* in the 2nd - 3rd centuries. The smaller size of the legion 5th Macedonica at mid 3rd century required only 10 ha for accommodation outside the walls of colonia, therefore only 60 % of the initial size. At Novae a similar surface (Novae II) was fortified to the east (Ivanov 1974, 65-67, fig. 6; Dimitrova-Milčeva 1990, 867-868; Ivanov 1996, 163-165) with an

enclosure stonewall intended either to temporarily accommodate a legion (eventually XIII Gemina until the military installations from Ratiaria would have been totally rebuilt) or a large bulk of auxiliary regiments withdrawn from Dacia. Recent archaeological excavations at Ratiaria have established clear traces of enlargements of the initial fortified area by mid 3rd century (Atanasova-Georgieva 1986, 437-440; Dimitrova-Milčeva 1986, 864-866). The operations must have taken place, however, under Gallienus and there is clear evidence that a series of measures south of the Danube were taken by this emperor. From his Lower Danubian policy it comes out clear enough that he intended to at least partially abandon northern Dacia. In this case the new south Danubian installations aimed to accommodate as many as possible military forces from the abandoned parts of Dacia. The new military territories assigned to the two legions between the Porečka and Vit Rivers, evidently covered the whole segment of the Danube line. These desiderata were never accomplished by the Gallienic administration.

The Aurelianic abandonment of most part of Trajanic Dacia implied the transfer of the two legions south of the Danube - as the last structures to be withdrawn - in the headquarters envisaged already by Gallienus. Sequences of of the last quarter of the 3rd century organization are perceptible in both epigraphic finds and Notitia Dignitatum which preserved information from late 3rd century. The legion XIII Gemina received territories east and west of Ratiaria, while the legion V Macedonica had been assigned both areas to the west and even further east, till probably Augustae (Harlets) inclusively.

The rich building stamped material produced by the legionary workshops at Ratiaria and Oescus seems to have started immediately after the operation of troop withdrawal from northern Dacia had taken place. The bridge-heads massively imported this building material, necessary for the repair and reconstruction activities (IGL 279, 280-283, 285 at *Sucidava*: LVMCORSIII; CORS; | L | VMCIIII; IGL 420 at Băile Herculane: XIII; IGL 421 at *Ad Mediam*: LEGXIIIIG; IGL 416 at Dierna: XIII). At Ratiaria the most spread types of tile and brick stamps which circulated between A.D. 271-285, seem to have been LEGXIIIIGEM, LEGXIIIIG. These shortened forms of the unit name were inherited from the last years of its garrisoning in Trajan's Dacia.

The legionary workshops in Oescus produced also building material in sizable quantity. The LVM type of mark used in the 3rd century in Dacia, continued to be issued in Oescus in the years immediately after 275. On the other hand, the LEGVM type in circulation in the second half of the 1st and 2nd century A. D. in Dacia seems not to have been completely abandoned in Aurelianic period or even later as the mark LEGVM found in later archaeological context in Oescus shows (Frova 1950, 53).

There are also some epigraphic and literary evidences for the redeployment of auxiliary troops in the same area during Aurelian's reign.

The last records of auxiliary troops in northern Dacia dates during the Gallienus' reign. *Cohors III Delmatarum milliaria equitata Civium Romanorum pia fidelis* appears to have been stationed at Praetorium/Mehadia between 257-260 (IDR III/1 nr.77; Zahariade, Phelps 1999, 317). The splitting of the *numerus Palmyrenorum Porolissensium sagittariorum Civium Romanorum* from Porolissum (Gudea 1997,22-43) around 250-260 gave birth to two distinct regiments: *cohors I Palmyrenorum Porolissensium* garrisoned at Potaissa and possibly an *ala Palmyrenorum Porolissensium* sent to Boroşneu Mare (Gudea 1997, 64; Zahariade, Phelps 1999, 320), although this was recently strongly argued on the basis of the re-interpretation of inscriptions and tiles found here (Piso 1999,81-86). *Cohors I Sagittarium milliaria* left also important traces of its presence at Drobeta by mid 3rd century (Tudor 1978, 335; Davidescu 1980, 85). *Cohors I Aurelia Brittonum* mentioned at early 3rd century at Bumbeşti is recorded by the middle of the same century on a Tesseloniki altar as *Cohors I F M Bryttonum Malvensium* (CIL III 13704=ILS 9009; Tudor 1978, 233-234).

Based on solid ground one could raise grave doubts, however, about the very existence of many of the auxiliary regiments in Dacia on the eve of the Aurelianic withdrawal of the army. The dramatic events in the 60s of the 3rd c south of the Danube could have implied the

engagement of several Dacian alae and cohortes in south Danubian territories or on other fronts. Others, presumably occupied the bridge heads envisaged by the Gallienic administration to be kept as strategic points, like Drobeta or Sucidava, as well as the installations south of the Danube between Porecka and Vit rivers that must have been also previously rebuilt or repaired after a long period of non-operative use between 106-270/5.

The successive redeployment of auxiliary troops south of the Danube seems to be supported by a series of three altars dedicated to Iovi Optimo Maximo Cohortali found in the Iron Gates area.

Drobeta. IGL 402: Ara(m) / Iovi / co(ho)rtali p(ro) (centurionibus) o(mnium) o(rdinum) Lupus tribunus.

Rgotina. ISM III/2, 126: I(ovi) O(ptimo) I(ovi) M(aximo) / Cortali (sic !) Pat<e> / rno Aur(elius) Cat / andio posui (sic !) / ara (!) libi(es) (sic !) ex bo / to (sic !) felic(iter).

Rgotina. IMS III/2, 127: I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) / Cortali (sic !) Aur(elius) Iusit / nianus (sic !) pro se et / suos (sic !) vot(um) lib(ens) pos(uit).

All three inscriptions seem to have been set in the same period, the end of the 3rd century. They show identical palaeographical character, similar wording and artistic style, and were dedicated to the same supreme deity Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Cohortalis, a military deity, protector of the *cohortes*. The tribune Lupus in the name of all the centurions of one or more unnamed regiments set the Drobeta altar. The military occupation in Drobeta continued, therefore, during and after the army withdrawal from Dacia. The other two altars were set also by commanders of other non specified cohorts, Aurelius Catandius and Aurelius Iustinianus. The first dedicated the altar to Iovi Optimo Maximo Cohortali Paterno, which can be seen as a protective father of the respective regiment. Iustinianus on his and his comrades' behalf set the second altar in the same unit.

Even if the occupation of the Drobeta fort, under the new circumstances, continued as a strategic point throughout the Aurelian's reign and therefore during the evacuation of Dacia, the altar would certainly indicate some changes in its garrison which can not be entirely perceived in the light of this unique evidence. On the other hand, the Rgotina pair of altars show clear enough the presence of at least one cohort at Rgotina, or in the area in the same period.

Altars dedicated to Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus at Brza Palanka date from the second half of the 3rd century (ILJug 465-467; Petrovic 1984,161) when the deity had largely spread in the military milieu. These monuments must be closely related to another important find from Brza Palanka: a bronze pointed plaque with the inscription: *Aur(elius) C(aius) cen(turio)c<o>hor(tis) I Cretum* (Vucković-Todorović 1964, 177 nr. 2). The editor dated the piece at mid 3rd century in direct connection to the new army of Dacia Ripensis (Petrović 1984, 162). The cohort ceased to be part of the army of Dacia Superior since mid 2nd century when it was recorded in an Upper Moesian military diploma of A.D. 160 (CIL XVI 139). It is likely that the cohort was moved to Egeta (Brza Palanka) either on the occasion of important reorganizations of the territory south of the Danube when Dacia Ripensis was set as a province and the river line re-established as a frontier or earlier, during Gallienus' reign (Zahariade, Phelps 1999, 321-322).

A direct indication of the presence of an auxiliary regiment from Trajan's Dacia in the newly established Dacia Ripensis is a recent find of high importance from this viewpoint at Augustae-Harlets (Mašov 1983, 97-98 nr.7). Recent excavations within the fort yielded a stamped tile with the letters DARPAST (A+R) in ligature, was found. M. Mašov, the editor and the author of the excavations read it as DA (cia) R (IP(ensis) (ala) AST(urum) a lecture that seems highly probable while the piece is datable during or immediately after Aurelian's reign.

The presence of some auxiliary Aurelianic regiments on the Danube frontier is also deduced from a passage in the section for Dacia Ripensis in Notitia Dignitatum. At the end of the list, which shows the legions' deployment along the river, two cohorts are recorded: *cohortes secunda Redux* at Siosta (unidentified)(NDO. XLII 40) and *cohortes Nova* at Siostica (also an unidentified place, but as it seems not very far from Siosta)(NDO. XLII 41). The place where the two auxiliary regiments are recorded susceptibly coincides with the *laterculi minores* from the Oriental provinces, which are

clearly of Tetrarchic origin. They preserved quite a few pre Diocletianic tactical arrangements. The adjective *Redux* which acquires here connotation of an epithet means the "returned one" the "one that was brought back" meaning a regiment which was brought back maybe in the same place or area where it had been stationed in the 1st c. A.D. before having been moved in the newly conquered territories north of the Danube. By the end of the 3rd c. it could have abandoned the old ethnical name and taken over the new one, just to stress the way in which it was brought back (*redux*).

Cohors Nova seems likely to have been set through a more recent reunion out of the remains of older northern Dacian cohorts. The record of *tribuni* in command to each cohort shows clearly that they were *miliariae* when they were transferred south of the Danube. The reconstruction of the picture of the Aurelian army in Dacia Ripensis remains still a desideratum. This is only a beginning. The epigraphic and archaeological evidence is still very scanty and submitted to interpretation. Studies dedicated to particular small area or sites east of Ratiaria along the Dacian segment of the river frontier appears to be a must for the future investigations.

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