

TILE-STAMPS OF *LEGIO IV FLAVIA FELIX* FROM BERSOBIS

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New archaeological excavations have been performed in the last years (1998 - 2000) in the headquarters building of the fort of *Legio IV Flavia Felix* from Bersobis (nowadays Berzovia, in Caras-Severin county) (Flutur 1999-2000)(Piso 1996, 154 sqq.) They brought to light many fragmentary *tegulae*, of which 80 pieces displaying the Legion stamp. I have identified three types of stamps (Pl. II 1-3):

1. Stamp in cartouche as *tabula ansata*; two horizontal lines border the letters; lines and letters in relief.

Size: 3x11.2 cm; letters: 1.7-1.8 cm.

2. Stamp in rectangular cartouche; lines and letters in relief.

Size: 3.4x11.4 cm; letters: 1.8 cm.

3. Stamp in rectangular cartouche; letters in relief.

Size: 2.5x9.8 cm; letters: 1.5-1.7 cm.

In comparing these stamps with those from Colonia Sarmizegetusa (Piso 1996, 154-156) belonging to the same legion, it is obvious that the two groups of dies are distinct. Therefore, a more critical approach to stamps has to be made, in accordance to their original location. Three stamps from the collection of the Museum of Banat in Timișoara have been published (IDR III 1, 113 a - c) as coming from Berzovia, although the inventories held no information on their origin. The stamp IDR III 1, 113 b belongs to the 3rd type from Sarmizegetusa (Piso 1996, 156 nr. 3), which has been identified only there(1). The military tileries from Sarmizegetusa and Bersobis have produced during a relatively short span large quantity of tiles. Soldiers of *Legio IV FF* have built the first public edifices from the capital city of the Roman Dacia (Piso, Diaconescu 1985-1986, 175; Etienne, Piso, Diaconescu 1990, 282) and the fort at Bersobis.

Most of the *signacula* were made of wood (Dressel XV 1, 3; Lugli 1957, 556; Steinby, RE 1495; Spietzelberger 1968, 109) and less of metal (iron or bronze) (Spietzelberger 1968, 109-110; Isac 1991, 58; Flutur 1999-2000). The metal ones usually leave a mark lacking the cartouche, with the letters deeply impressed. The cartouches and projected letters are specific to the imprints of the wooden *signacula*. As they were easier to be carved, the soldiers working in the brick factories made them on the spot. The possibility for a *signaculum* used in one *officina* to be re-used in another distant one is minimal and unsupported by any evidences. Alterable as they were, wooden *signacula* had to be often renewed. The hypothesis of the tile transports on great distance is even more unrealistic(2). Accordingly, the difference between the Berzovia tile-stamps and those from Sarmizegetusa is no surprise.

The contemporaneous spreading of *Legio IV FF* tiles in the vicinity of the two sites has been reduced, given the short presence of the Legion in Dacia. Nevertheless, some of the Roman tiles have been re-used, especially in modern times and they are to be found in the neighboring villages. In addition, Roman stamped bricks have always been prizes for amateur collectors and souvenirs' hunters. The bricks of the Fourth Legion FF are also known at Drobeta, Pojejena, and other places from Banat (Protase 1967, 48-61; Benea 1983, 153-156 Pl. IV-V). This fact does not really prove the presence of the Legion, a *vexillatio* or at least a team of its brick workers. For instance, the stamped tile fragment from Kovin (Pl. II 4), in custody of Museum in Cluj (Protase 1967, 56 fig.12; 57 nr. 11) was made in Bersobis. It belongs rather to type 1 than to type 2 (Pl. II 1-2), as the *ansae* are less legible than on some tiles of type 1. Very

probably, this fragment was brought here in modern times. More interesting is the tile-stamp from Aradu Nou (Pl. II 5), in custody of Museum in Arad (Protase 1967, 56 nr. 2; 57 fig. 2; Dörner 1971, 506 n. 19)(3). It represents a particular type of stamp, although initially I thought that it belongs to Bersobis type 3. The fragmentary tile has been found in 1962 as they a grave pit have been dug in the Catholic cemetery. The subsequent archaeological excavations in the area did not attest Roman layers (*Repertoriul arheologic al Mureşului Inferior: judeţul Arad* 1999, 37). As any other evidences are lacking(4), it is difficult to suppose the existence of an auxiliary fort at Aradu Nou (Gudea 1997, 23-24).

The bricks' circulation in Dacia seems to be very limited(5). Every important settlement (town, fort) had its own brick production, which supplied a certain area around. Certainly, bricks were also made in *pagi* or *villae rusticae*. Still, the possibility of bricks' long-range transport can not be excluded; more difficult on land, it was easier on watercourses. Probably, the spreading on the Danube Valley of the military bricks from Moesia Superior is due not only to the troops movement, but also to the transport of this building material on the Danube.

NOTES

1. In addition, confusions continue in the latest publications of the stamps: Gudea 1997, 29 nr. 12 (the drawings Z 2-4 represent stamps known only at Sarmizegetusa), p. 36, nr. 18 a (the drawings Z 3-4 represent stamps unknown at Sarmizegetusa, but they are alike those from Bersobis, cf. *infra*, Pl. II 1-2).
2. The distance between Sarmizegetusa and Berzovia is about 105 km on the Roman road: Diaconescu 1997, 14.
3. Dörner 1971, 506. The drawing published in *Lapidarul Muzeului Banatului* 1974, 87, a (also in IDR III 1, 242 fig. 187; Gudea 1997, 23, nr. 2 Z 1) is wrong, in fact it represents another stamp.
4. The bricks with *Legio XIII Gemina* stamps in custody of the Museum in Arad were brought here from Alba Iulia (*Apulum*) as a result of an exchange between museums in 1978 - thanks for information to Dr. P. Hügel, Museum Arad. These stamps have been published as coming from Aradu Nou (Gudea 1997, 23 nr.2 Z 2-4).
5. The bricks of Rome have been found in structures within a radius of 50 km, also further away along the Tiber, on the Mediterranean coast and in the isles from vicinity: Steinby, RE, Suppl.XV col. 1493.

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LEGNIFF

1

LEGNI·FF

2

LEGNIFF

3

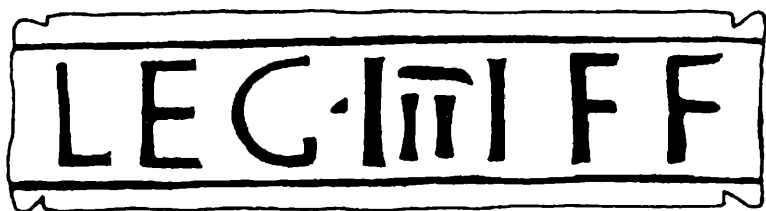
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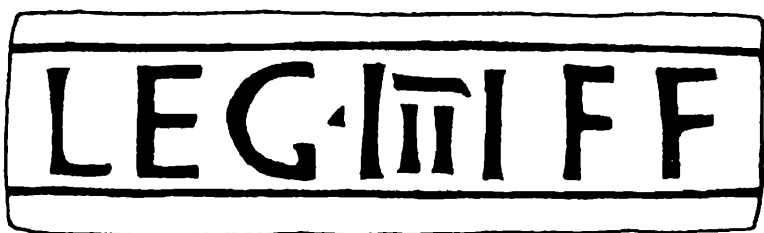
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Pl. I. Sarmizegetusa tile-stamps (after Piso 1996, 184).



1



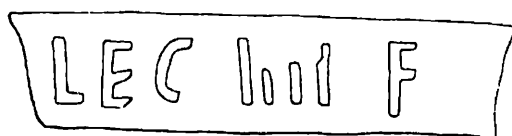
2



3



4



5

Pl. II. 1-3. Bersobis tile-stamps (from the legionary principia); 4. Kovin tile-stamp (after Protase 1967, 56 fig. 12). 5. Aradu Nou tile-stamp (after Protase 1967, 49 fig. 2).

