

# THE EXILE OF ROXOLANI KING P. AELIUS RASPARAGANUM AND HIS SON P. AELIUS PEREGRINUS IN ROMAN POLA

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Two sarcophagi of the Roxolani king, *Publius Aelius Rasparaganum*, and his son, *Publius Aelius Peregrinus*, from the time of Emperor Hadrian's reign and the campaigns against the Roxolani in 117/118 AD link the Roman colony of Julia Pola (*Colonia Iulia Pola*) in Istria on the Adriatic coast with the mouth of the Danube (Ister) River at the Black Sea.

The sarcophagi were discovered at different times: that of *Rasparaganum* in XVI century<sup>1</sup>, and that of *Peregrinus* in the XIX century<sup>2</sup>, both on the islet of Uljanik (*Scolio degli Olivi*) in the bay at Pula<sup>3</sup>, where even today, amidst a shipyard, the remains of a villa and possibly a temple are still visible. They spent their lives in exile with their families<sup>4</sup>, gazing upon Roman Pula with its forum temples and amphitheatre, today the sole remnants of the Roman past<sup>5</sup>.

The name of the Roxolani (*Roxolanus*) people was derived from the Alanic word *ruxsalan*, which, loosely translated, means "bright Alan". They were believed to have been a part of the Sarmatians (Gr.: *Sarmatai*, Lat.: *Sarmatae*) whose allies were the Aorsi, Alans, Roxolani, Siraces and Iazyges. The Sarmatians, and among them the Roxolani, were of Iranian origin. Between the seventh and fourth centuries BC, they were called the Sauromatae, although the question of whether these two peoples were one and the same is still being examined. Most scholars agree

<sup>1</sup> KANDLER, 1904, 216; TAMARO FORLATI, 1947, n. 153 – cit.: »Septem fragmenta partis anterioris magnae arcae e lapide calcario (altae m. 0.55, latae m. 2.05, crassae m. 0.13). Polae reperta (fortasse in insula q. d. degli Olivi, ut coniecit Weissäüpl)...»

<sup>2</sup> KANDLER, 1904, 217; TAMARO FORLATI, 1947, n. 154 – cit.: »Pars anterior magnae arcae ex lapide calcario in quattuor partes scissa (alta m. 0.55, lata m. 2.05, crassa m. 0.15) a dextero latere imminuita. Polae reperta in effossionibus quibusdam in parva insula q. d. degli Olivi in portu Polae (Carrara)...».

<sup>3</sup> WEISSHÄUPL, 1901, 203 – cit.: «...der Oliveninsel oder, wie sie auch heisst, S. Floriano, hier der Grabstein des Aelius Pelegrinus (CIL V 33) und wohl auch der seines Vaters, des thracischen Exkönigs Rasparaganus (CIL V 32 und Addit.).»

<sup>4</sup> BURTON-SCAMPICCHIO-COVAZ, 1875, 354 – cit.: «...As we steam past the Battery Island, we remark that the Scoglio (degli) Olivi (map delle olive or oliveninsel), alias S. Floriano, which anciently supported the mau-soleum of Rasparaganus, king of the Sarmatian Roxolani (A.D. 120) ...».

<sup>5</sup> KANDLER, 1876, pp. 61, 187; MARUŠIĆ, 1967, p. 25.

that the Sauromatae were an older ethnic substratum of the Sarmatians<sup>6</sup>. They were nomadic peoples whose basic economic activity was livestock husbandry. The first recorded territory of the Roxolani during the second century BC encompassed the foothills around the Urals, the eastern Black Sea steppe and the plains around the Volga River. During the second century BC, the Roxolani, together with the Sarmatians, defeated the Scythians, who also lived on the Black Sea steppes<sup>7</sup>. Together with the Scythians, under the leadership of the Roxolani king, Tasius, and the Scythian military leader Palacus, they attacked the Pontic kingdom and the Greek colony in the Crimea. Diophantus, a general of Mithridates VI, successfully defended the kingdom and repelled the joint Roxolani-Scythian onslaught. During the first century BC, they moved farther west toward the Danube in the territory today known as the Bărăgan Plain (the eastern section of the larger Walachian Plain) in Romania. The Graeco-Roman historian Strabo described the Roxolani “as nomads who carried all their belongings on wagons”<sup>8</sup>. Given the presence of the Roxolani along the Danube’s lower course and around the mouth of the Ister and the Black Sea peninsula of Histria and the islets at the Danube Delta, today called Dobruja or Lesser Scythia, it was only a question of time when they would come into conflict with the Roman Empire on the other side of the border. One such conflict broke out in 68/69 AD, when the Roxolani cavalry crossed the boundary at the Danube with the intention of raiding the border zone. However, they were met by the Third Gallic legion (*legio III Gallica*) and defeated. Tacitus also wrote about this event<sup>9</sup>. He described how the Roman legion caught the almost 9,000-strong Roxolani cavalry, encumbered by the heavy baggage of their plunder, off their guard. He also described the heavy armour worn by distinguished Roxolani, made of many small iron plates, and he wrote about the principal Sarmatian and Roxolani cavalry weapon, the long pikes (*kontos* in Greek), which had to be wielded with both hands. Similarly, they bore heavy, long swords which also had to be held with two hands. A cavalry so equipped was in a precarious position given the prevailing weather at the time. The slippery ground and soft snow eliminated any advantage the Roxolani would have had as a heavily armed cavalry, and their heavy armour made them easy targets for the lightly-armoured Roman legionnaires in hand-to-hand combat. The Roxolani avenged this defeat in the year 92, when they joined forces with the Dacians to utterly annihilate the Roman Twenty-first ‘Predator’ legion (*legio XXI Rapax*). During the first Dacian War (101–102)<sup>10</sup>, which was conducted by Roman Emperor Trajan (98–117), the Roxolani allied with the Dacians, offering them support with their typical heavily armoured cavalry. However, since the Dacians, under King Decebalus, ultimately lost this war, the Roxolani withdrew to the other side of the Danube<sup>11</sup>. During later Roman campaigns against the Dacians (105–106), the Roxolani were considered neutral between the two sides. Since, by conquering Dacia<sup>12</sup>, the Roman Empire expanded to the very border of Roxolani territory, the threat of looting in the newly-formed Roman province became imminent. Trajan and his successor Hadrian (117–138) therefore reinforced the border along the Danube’s<sup>13</sup> lower course by constructing fortifications and bolstering the *limes*. During the following years, Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–180) also waged war against the Roxolani. In the latter half of the second century, the Goths, who began

<sup>6</sup> SULIMIRSKI, 1970, pp. 77 ecc.

<sup>7</sup> HARMATTA, 1950, pp. 51–52.

<sup>8</sup> STRABO, Bk. VII.

<sup>9</sup> TACITUS, Bk. I, 79.

<sup>10</sup> OPREANU 1998, pp. 69–70.

<sup>11</sup> MATIJAŠIĆ 2009, pp. 195, 208, 222–224, 234.

<sup>12</sup> PETOLESCU 1985, pp. 45–55; PETOLESCU 2002, pp. 21–37.

<sup>13</sup> OPREANU 1998, pp. 37–56.

their attacks on the Roman border all along the Danube, pushed them west, and they gradually relocated to the Pannonian plains in the territory of modern-day Hungary.

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The discovery of two sarcophagi on the islet in Pula's bay belonging to high-ranking Roxolani individuals, who were deemed Sarmatians in the broader sense, demonstrated the essence of their captivity and exile in Pula based on readings of the inscriptions thereon. The inscription on the first sarcophagus reads:

*P(ublio) Aelio Rasparag[a]no  
regi Roxo[la]noru[m]  
[u(xor)] v(iva)  
[f(ecit)]*

*Inscript. Italiae, X/I, 153  
C.I.L., V, 32*

The other reads:

*P(ublius) Aelius Peregrinus re[gis]  
Sarmatarum Rasparagani  
f(ilius) v(ivus) f(ecit) sibi et Attiae Q(uinti) f(iliae)  
Procillae lib(ertis) l(iber)  
tabusq(ue) posterisq(ue) eorum*

*Inscript. Italiae, X/I, 154  
C.I.L., V, 33*

Rasparaganum, the king of the Sarmatian tribe living on the other side of the Danube in today's Bessarabia, was defeated at the end of 117 or 118 AD in warfare against Hadrian<sup>14</sup>, forced to surrender and conclude a peace, and was then sequestered in life-time relegation on the islet of Uljanik in the Bay of Pula, as denoted by the inscriptions on the sarcophagi<sup>15</sup>. On this islet not far from the Roman city of Pula, Rasparaganum lived and died together with his entire family, his wife and son with his own wife, and their freed slaves. War was often combined with Roman diplomacy. The inscriptions point to several other interesting facts: after his capture, Rasparaganum was treated like a Roman citizen – he was accorded citizenship by imperial decree at the moment he came under Roman authority – while the members of his family acquired Roman citizenship in the same manner. Rasparaganum was thus tried as a Roman citizen. His Roman citizenship was also reflected in his imperial gentilicium (*Aelius*), while his son's cognomen (*Peregrinus*) permanently preserved the memory of their peregrine origin<sup>16</sup>. It may therefore be concluded that Emperor Hadrian had considerable respect for the reputation of this king of a barbarian people (*rex amicus*), according the same treatment to this vanquished opponent as was accorded to the members of the highest Roman class: *relegatio* was a sentence

<sup>14</sup> SHA, *Hadr.* 6, 8; 5, 2; TACITUS, Bk. I, 72.

<sup>15</sup> MURATTORI 1742, p. 2099; DONATI 1765, p. 152; ORELLI 1828, p. 833; MAIONICCA 1879, pp. 36–62; DESSAU 1892, p. 852;

<sup>16</sup> KANDLER 1904, p. 217.

reserved for the highest Roman classes, and it was only introduced to jurisprudence in the latter half of the first century BC. Legal texts indicate the consequences and conditions which relegation entailed, and which consequently also applied to King Rasparaganum. The right to pronouncement of relegation was exercised by a princeps, praetorian prefect or provincial consul<sup>17</sup>. A relegated individual retained Roman citizenship<sup>18</sup>, and by force of the verdict acquired domicile in this place of exile<sup>19</sup>. Usually an island was chosen as the place of captivity<sup>20</sup>. This location was chosen by the princeps or praetorian prefect, and the convicted individual was given a military escort to this site<sup>21</sup>. Regardless of the duration of exile, the exiled individual had the right to retain his property and to be accompanied by the members of his family (*obsides*)<sup>22</sup>. Finally, the *relegatus*, in this case King Rasparaganum, could not be allowed to die in Rome or at any other place in which a princeps resided<sup>23</sup>.

Besides shedding light on the reason why King Rasparaganum and his son with their families were exiled on an island in Pula's bay, where they died as well, some other details may be discerned after close scrutiny<sup>24</sup>. King Rasparaganum and his son Publius were adopted by Emperor Hadrian, which is signified by their name *Aelius*. They were supposed to become completely loyal to the emperor in this manner, without the danger of them breaking free of control and launching an uprising. Remembrance of his status was retained by the son, *Publius Aelius*, who added the cognomen *Peregrinus*, while his affiliation with the Roxolani was denoted by the phrase *Rasparagani filius*, where *Roksolanum* is concealed and submerged into the broader term *Sarmatarum*. This is also evidence that the family's second generation had already begun to be gradually romanized<sup>25</sup>, while maintaining some modest memory of their origin. The wife of the king's son *Peregrinus* was named *Attia Procilla*, who came from the ranks of the Pula colonists, after whom some estates were named with vestiges left in local toponyms<sup>26</sup>. Proof that the king's son had no children is the absence of the possibility of their interment in the sarcophagus, as this right was granted to all of their freed women (*libertae*) and men (*liberti*).

This inscription also serves as evidence that King Rasparaganum and his son *Peregrinus* had no further heirs and that their royal line was extinguished in exile in Pula. Today we may only wistfully contemplate their sad fate. The citizenship they had acquired did not preclude luxury and entertainment, and they lived in opulence in a villa on an island not far from a Roman colony that had two theatres and an arena (amphitheatre). On this island, only 100–150 meters from the mainland shore, they certainly yearned for their steppes, horses, armour and weapons, customs and traditions which had been the everyday reality of their people for centuries. Deprived of the right to vote, they were prevented from any engaging in any political activity or contacts with their ancient homeland. The sea and fish instead of the expanses of the steppes and horses were a severe punishment for them, and in this case as well the Romans applied a refined

<sup>17</sup> Dig. 48, 22, 14

<sup>18</sup> Dig. 48, 22, 7; 48, 22, 14.

<sup>19</sup> PAUL., *Sent.* 1, 1 A.

<sup>20</sup> Dig. 48, 22, 4–7.

<sup>21</sup> Dig. 48, 22, 7; 48, 22, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Dig. 48, 22, 1; 48, 22, 4; 48, 22, 7; 48, 22, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Dig. 48, 22, 18.

<sup>24</sup> MOMMSEN 1877, p. 1016 – cit: «Nomina regias apparet venire ab Hadriano, quem cum rege Roxolanorum qui de imminutis stipendiis quereretur cognito negotio pacem composuisse scribit Spartianus (c.6). Ceterum hunc Rasparaganum Polae degentem cum suis probabiliter habemus pro captivo vel exule; etiam notandum ipsum regem dici, filium non regem, sed regis filium».

<sup>25</sup> OPREANU 2011, p. 128.

<sup>26</sup> KANDLER 1904, pp. 217–218.

and sophisticated form of pacification and Romanization, leaving the impression of royal splendour and affluence accompanied by a quiet dying off.

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And what happened to the Roxolani and Sarmatians after their king, Rasparaganum, was exiled on an island near Pula together with his family?

There are records that the Roxolani attacked the province of Pannonia in 260. However, soon thereafter parts of the Roxolani together with their military units were incorporated into the Roman armed forces. At that time, the territory of the Pannonian Basin adjacent to the Roman border was occupied by the Sarmatian tribe called the Iazyges. Since the Roxolani and Iazyges were related and on good terms, they began to live and work together. The Roman writer Ammianus noted in his texts that during this period, in the third century<sup>27</sup>, the Sarmatians lived in this territory; it is relevant that even earlier the Iazyges were simply called Sarmatians, so that the Roxolani also assumed this common unified appellation, in order to be distinguished from the Alans who also lived in a neighbouring region. It is also symptomatic that the archaeological finds of the Iazyges during this period were intermingled with the newer ones of the Roxolani, who in turn, due to contacts with eastern Germanic peoples such as the Goths, had some traces of German influence on their culture and customs. The emergence of a newer, more robust Sarmatian culture with Germanic elements became visible. It was also apparent that most Roxolani were not permanently settled in Roman territory but rather in the friendly territory of the similar Iazyges along the Roman border. The final written record of the Roxolani was provided by the Gothic scribe Jordanes, who, when discussing the settlement of the Goths along the Danube, mentioned the Sarmatians, Iazyges and Roxolani. They were also mentioned in battles against the Huns who, arriving from the east in a surge of conquest, initiated new migrations of peoples throughout Europe during the fourth century. The Roxolani disappeared from the written sources after the fourth century, even though certain other names for similar Sarmatian tribes such as Limigantes and Ardaragantes appear in the written sources after this time. It is therefore not inconceivable that some altered name for the Roxolani may be confirmed in the future. The Roxolani never came to Istria. The only people to do so of all the peoples mentioned above were the Goths, who were defeated in the Gothic War and forced to leave Istria, surrenderin

Sources:

PAUL.	Paulus, <i>Sententiae</i>
SHA	<i>Scriptores Historiae Augustae</i>
STRABO	Strabo, <i>Geographiká</i> , book VII.
TACITUS	P. Cornelius Tacitus, <i>Historiae</i> , book I.

Abbreviation:

AEM	<i>Archäologische-epigrafische Mittheilungen aus Österreich. Ungarn</i> , Wien
AMSI	<i>Atti e Memorie Della Società istriana di Archeologia e Storia Patria</i> , Parenzo – Venezia – Trieste
AT	<i>Archeografo triestino</i> , Trieste
BAR	British Archaeological Reports, Oxford

<sup>27</sup> AMMIANUS, Bk. VIII, 31.

C.I.L.	<i>Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum auxilio et auctoritate Academiae Litterarum regiae Borussicae editum</i> , Berlin
Dig.	<i>Digesta, Corpus iuris civilis</i> , Berlin
I.I.	<i>Inscriptiones Italiae</i> , Roma
JÖAI	<i>Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts</i> , Wien

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## EXILAREA REGELUI ROXOLAN P.AELIUS RASPARAGANUM ȘI A FIUL SĂU P.AELIUS PEREGRINUS ÎN POLA ROMANĂ.

(Abstract)

There are records that the Roxolani attacked the province of Pannonia in 260 B.C.. However, soon thereafter parts of the Roxolani together with their military units were incorporated into the Roman

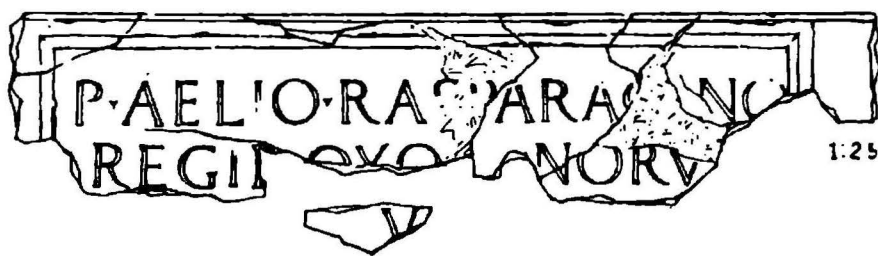
armed forces. At that time, the territory of the Pannonian Basin adjacent to the Roman border was occupied by the Sarmatian tribe called the Iazyges. Since the Roxolani and Iazyges were related and on good terms, they began to live and work together.

The Roman writer Ammianus noted in his texts that during this period, in the third century, the Sarmatians lived in this territory; it is relevant that even earlier the Iazyges were simply called Sarmatians, so that the Roxolani also assumed this common unified appellation, in order to be distinguished from the Alans who also lived in a neighbouring region. It is also symptomatic that the archaeological finds of the Iazyges during this period were intermingled with the newer ones of the Roxolani, who in turn, due to contacts with eastern Germanic









*P(ublio) Aelio Rasparag[a]no, regi Roxo[la]noru[m],  
[u(xor)] v(iva) [f(ecit)]*

Fig. 3. Inscription (I.I. X71,153)



*P(ublius) Aelius Peregrinus, regis Sarmatarum Rasparagani filius, vivus fecit sibi et Aeliae Quintili filiae Procillae, libertis Liber tabisque posterisque eorum*

Fig. 4. Inscription (I.I. X71,154)



Fig. 5. Olive Island – Uljanik, remains of Roman ruins (photo: K.Džin)





Fig. 6. Pula, the view, Olive Island – Uljanik in the middle (photo: R.Kosinožić)