

ON THE DEPICTIONS OF ROMAN SOLDIERS ON FUNERARY MONUMENTS IN MOESIA INFERIOR

CRISTINA-GEORGETA ALEXANDRESCU*

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Abstract: One of the few examples of Roman gravestones bearing a depiction of the deceased as a soldier was known to have been found in Tomis and kept in the collection of the National Museum of Antiquities in Bucharest. Considered lost at one point in time, the monument was traced to the National Military Museum and it is presented here together with other two gravestones from Moesia Inferior, originating in Histria and Oescus.

Cuvinte-cheie: Moesia inferior, Tomis, armata romană, stelă funerară.

Rezumat: Unul dintre puținele exemple de stele funerare de epocă romană cu reprezentarea defunctului ca militar era cunoscută ca provenind de la Tomis și păstrată în colecția Muzeului Național de Antichități din București. Considerată pierdută la un moment dat, stela a fost reperată la Muzeul Militar Național și este prezentată aici alături de alte două stele funerare din Moesia inferior, de la Histria și de la Oescus.

More than fifty years ago D. Tudor, in the second volume of this very publication¹, presented a selection of unpublished inscriptions from Dacia and Dobruja, mentioned in the manuscripts of Gr. G. Tocilescu – the former director of the National Museum of Antiquities in Bucharest – and present at that date in the lapidarium of the Archaeological Institute in Bucharest founded in 1956 and including the former Museum as one of its departments. During recent research on ancient stone monuments², especially on those bearing depictions of soldiers, we were able to re-examine one particular gravestone found in ancient Constanța and published for the first time by D. Tudor (Fig. 1). The results of this re-examination are the subject of the present contribution.

¹ Tudor 1956. The manuscripts of Gr. G. Tocilescu are preserved in the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest.

² The monument was documented within the NCSRHE Project TE 113 (2010–2013) of PN II (2007–2013) Human Resources: www.arheomedia.ro/monumente/ID5122.

* “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology, Bucharest, e-mail: cgalexandrescu@gmail.com.

THE SOLDIER FROM TOMIS

For a long time this spectacular marble funerary stela from Tomis was considered lost³. Recently it was possible to study it in the permanent exhibition of the National Military Museum in Bucharest (Fig. 2). The stela is but partially preserved: only two thirds of the plate⁴ with the original right side remained, showing surface damage of the area below the register with the depiction wherein the inscription was carved. The upper part of the stela is also missing, rendering impossible the identification of its initial shape. It is also impossible to determine whether the inscription started on the upper border of the field with depiction or had only the two lines carved under this field⁵. From the preserved part of

³ Gr. G. Tocilescu's manuscript 5132, sheet 309 (see also note 1 above). The information (a handwritten note in a small size notebook) is very scarce, and probably belongs to Tocilescu himself. For provenance information is mentioned only “Constanța”.

The monument was registered in the collection of the National Museum of Antiquities in Bucharest under inv. No. L658: Tudor 1956, p. 585, no. 55, fig. 12. The monument was loaned to the newly organised National Military Museum but the formal registration of this action seems to have been lost. – ISM II, 213: *Ma]rcianus patri / [--- posu]it*; Alexandrescu-Vianu 1985, p. 77, no 182.

⁴ Dimensions: preserved height about 70 cm; preserved width 42 cm; thickness of the slab 8 cm (in the area bearing the inscription) and 11 cm (in the area of the field with depiction). The field with depiction is about 6.5 cm deep and the preserved height of the body of the represented soldier is 26 cm. The letters are about 4 cm high. On the right side of the slab still exists the hole for a clamp (3 cm wide and 2 cm high, ca. 1.5 cm deep).

⁵ Typologically the stela could have been a type of gravestone with a simple border and relief or a naiskos-type gravestone, as in Conrad 2004, p. 35–36. It belonged rather to the Greek gravestones ‘Typ A’ or ‘B’ than ‘Form VII’ after Conrad 2004 – see also in Conrad 2004, p. 54, footnote 454 the comment on this particular monument from Tomis.

the epigraph it is known that the gravestone was raised by [Ma]rcianus for his father. The slab seems to have been re-used and for that purpose re-shaped. This is also indicated by the remains of mortar present all over the surface of the relief.

The representation is the portrait of the deceased, depicted in high relief as a high-ranking officer, wearing a cuirass, with a *gladius* on his left side and *pugio* on his right hip. The manner of his depiction is rather unusual, being neither a bust, nor a full figure, but a half-body representation. The *centurio* M. Caelius, who fell in the battle against Varus in AD 9, is the best known half-body depiction on Roman funerary monuments. His cenotaph was found near Xanten in Germania Inferior and is preserved in the Bonn museum⁶.

The cuirass of the soldier in Tomis follows the Roman cuirass of Hellenistic tradition⁷, developed in the late first century BC. Its origins can be traced back to a bell-shaped cavalry-style cuirass popularized in the late fourth century BC by Alexander the Great.

The best examples are to be seen on funerary monuments of famous generals such as T. Mikalos from Perinth (now in Istanbul⁸, dated to the late first century AD), on the funerary monument of the Iulii in St. Remy (35–25 BC)⁹ or on several later sarcophagi and gravestones of soldiers¹⁰.

The cuirass itself is made of two main sections, the front plate and the dorsal plate, usually joined together by a hinge along the right side of the torso and fastened on the left side. In addition, shoulder straps, permanently attached to the dorsal plate, help to secure together the front and back plates of the cuirass.

Beneath the cuirass the man wears two garments: a short-sleeved linen tunic covering the legs down to the knees; a protective vest-like jacket made of quilted wool or leather material. A single row of long leather straps falls over the upper legs from the lower edge of the vest, and short leather straps trim the armholes.

The *cingulum*, a military belt, is wrapped twice around the waist and tied at the front in an elaborate Hercules knot, to protect the bearer from evil.

Owing to the chosen portrait manner of the gravestone from Tomis (Fig. 3) are to be seen the single row of short leather straps which hang over the single row of long leather straps attached to the lower edge of the underlying vest.

⁶ Schalles, Willer 2009 (with literature).

⁷ Gergel 1994; Diaconescu 2012.

⁸ Kramer 1994.

⁹ See Miks 2007, p. 34–37 and pl. 296–299.

¹⁰ Vermeule 1959–1960, F3A. See the discussion in Miks 2007, p. 35–37.

As depicted on the slab from Tomis, the gesture of holding the grip of the sword with the left hand is well attested by the statues of emperors as *imperator* and of triumphant generals, of heros or of the god Mars¹¹. Usually the general is holding the *parazonium* or the *gladius* upside down, with the fingers across the hilt so as to prevent the sword from falling out of the scabbard.

Wearing the sword on a *balteus* on the left side is equally a Hellenistic tradition but also a Roman practice for officers¹².

The *gladius* and the *pugio* from the Tomis relief are also of great interest. The drawing published by Tudor (Fig. 1) gives the wrong impression that the end of the dagger's handle was shaped like antennae. In Fig. 4 it is recognisable that the terminal of the handle was an almost flat-topped piece with two rivets, ornaments similar to the ones observed on daggers found within the Roman provinces, and dated to the first century AD¹³.

The sword shows a round pommel and a relatively broad handle, while the scabbard has a pointed lower end and its chape and frame are also rendered¹⁴. The baldric on which the sword hangs is to be assumed, at least on the right shoulder, over the shoulder strap (Fig. 5), where the surface of the relief is too damaged. However the proportions of the sword (Figs 2 and 5), probably due to the intended perspective of the relief, are not quite accurate (the long handle, the wide handguard). For the dagger, the strip of the *cingulum* is not represented (Fig. 4), but its existence can be assumed from the position of the *pugio* on the right side of the depicted¹⁵.

D. Tudor correctly assumed that the deceased was a veteran and dated the monument to the second century AD¹⁶. However, the iconographic details indicate an earlier date, probably within the second half of the first century AD.

DEPICTIONS OF ROMAN SOLDIERS ON EARLY ROMAN FUNERARY MONUMENTS IN THE PROVINCE OF MOESIA INFERIOR

As one of the militarised provinces of the Roman Empire it is surprising that depictions of soldiers on funerary monuments found in Moesia

¹¹ See Fischer 2012, p. 35–37, fig. 16; Vermeule 1959–1960.

¹² See the discussion in Miks 2007, p. 33–34.

¹³ See Fischer 2012, p. 193–195.

¹⁴ Miks 2007; Fischer 2012, p. 181.

¹⁵ A detailed representation of the way of wearing the weapons with this cuirass is to be seen on the Claudian-Neronian gravestone of M. Favonius Facilis in Colchester: Huskinson 1994, pl. 19; Miks 2007, pl. 308/C–D.

¹⁶ Tudor 1956, p. 585, no 55.

Inferior are rare, especially for the first and second centuries AD¹⁷. The rich epigraphic evidence of the Roman army as well as depictions on funerary monuments dated to the third century AD offer additional and vital information on this most valuable component of the provincial society.¹⁸ The ‘memory strategies’, *i.e.* the selection of what, when and where was represented and mentioned on the Roman funerary monuments in the provinces seem to have been quite different from those in Rome, with their own particularities from region to region.¹⁹

Besides funerary monuments, other products of the provincial art are limited to architectonic decoration (however partially imported), to votive reliefs and to the reliefs of the Tropaeum Traiani. It is rather an individuality of this area that the soldiers and former soldiers preferred other subjects or even non-figurative decoration.

It is of interest to point out the difference between depictions of soldiers and depictions of items of military connotation, such as a frieze with weapons²⁰. The latter were chosen by the Romans for the decoration of funerary monuments also as sign of *virtus*.

The depiction of the deceased as a rider, in the tradition of the Thracian Rider or of the Danubian Riders, plays a secondary role in our discussion and has been repeatedly discussed by scholars. There are reliefs with preserved inscription attesting the military activity of the depicted. However, the heroization pose might have been chosen by non-military persons, too. As far as the published evidence allows, little interest in this region for realistic rendering of details like weapons, saddle, etc., is to be observed.

Q. Philippicus, standard-bearer of the legio XI Claudia

The best known owing to details shown on the relief, like the standard of the legion, is the stela of the signifer Q. Philippicus, found on the Romanian

¹⁷ Conrad 2004, p. 87–88. – V. Yotov presented in 2012 a paper on the *Military insignia on Roman monuments from Moesia Inferior (1st–3rd c. AD)* to the International Colloquium *The Romans at the Black Sea during the time of Augustus, Tulcea, 5–9 June 2012*. Despite the title he considered only the finds from the southern part of the province, in the territory of today’s Bulgaria, meaning four gravestones and one graffito on a brick.

¹⁸ Conrad 2004, p. 87–88. – On the Roman army during the Principate in Moesia Inferior see the syntheses Aricescu 1977, p. 24–106; Matei-Popescu 2010.

¹⁹ Hope 2003, p. 113. See also Bianchi 1985; Ciongradi 2007; Onițiu 2013.

²⁰ Conrad 2004, p. 88.

border of the Danube and preserved in Bucharest and Craiova²¹, but initially raised in Oescus. Analyzing the shape of the gravestone and the iconographic details used by the artist, M. Alexandrescu-Vianu was able to point out the different influences illustrated by this monument as well as its dating, at the end of the reign of emperor Claudius. In her opinion the gravestone stands as a single example, prior to the beginnings of the mass-production of funerary stelae in Oescus²².

The soldier from Histria

A fragment of a funerary stela of a soldier (depicted standing) was found at Histria in a secondary position, embedded in the Late Roman wall²³. The fragment was positioned in the middle of the initial monument, dated to the second century AD. The lower half of the field with depiction and the upper lines of the inscription are still preserved, as well as the right lateral border of the stela, decorated with accurately carved vine leaves while the separation between the field of depiction and the one of the inscription was decorated with vine stalk with leaves and clusters of grapes. The feet were represented in detail, wearing *caligae*. The legs of the deceased allowed his identification as a soldier. He was standing, leaning on his left foot, with the right leg slightly flexed backwards.

CONCLUSION

Funerary monuments of soldiers in Moesia Inferior differ from the ones in Dacia. On the one hand, there is a chronological difference, triggering different iconographical patterns and *habitus*, as well as differing trends in regard to the funerary monuments in the province. On the other hand, the existing traditions and influences play a significant role. In spite of the short existence of Dacia as a Roman province there is a wide range of shapes and types of funerary monuments bearing depictions of soldiers, from funerary stelae to statues and complex funerary constructions²⁴.

²¹ Alexandrescu-Vianu 1977; Alexandrescu 2010, cat. G12 (with literature).

²² Alexandrescu-Vianu 1977, p. 68.

²³ Preserved in the museum in Histria, inv. S228; Alexandrescu-Vianu 2000, cat. no 222 (with literature), pl. 87a; ISM I, 288: *D(is) M(anibus) et memori/ae pietati[---]*. – The stela is made of local Sarmatian limestone with Nubecularii, as determined by the geological analysis of A. Baltres (Geological Institute of Romania).

²⁴ Ciongradi 2007; Diaconescu 2012.

Moesia Inferior and especially the region on the shores of the Black Sea are marked by the Hellenistic tradition and also by the iconographic schemata in use either locally or by certain military units²⁵.

The stela from Tomis is one of the most spectacular and best-preserved examples in the Lower Danube area. The officer died most probably after his *missio*, while having the family around him – as the dedicator was his son²⁶. The gravestone of Q. Philipicus was erected according to his will by his colleagues, friends and heirs. He died while on active service and therefore found his grave in foreign soil, far away from his home, Edessa (in Macedonia)²⁷. As for the soldier from the Histria gravestone, the information is too scarce to make any assumptions. Even its dating is rather problematic.

The few examples of funerary monuments of Roman soldiers from the first and second centuries AD confirm the observations made in other provinces with richer evidence and published specialized studies. The diversity of the social landscape of the area of Moesia Inferior, as well as the craftsmen's skills and the economic wealth of the provincials, are attested by the monuments presented.

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²⁵ Alexandrescu-Vianu 1985; Conrad 2004 (with the bibliography).

²⁶ There are several epigraphic records of soldiers and veterans in Tomis, some of them from the legions in the province, like *V Macedonica*, *XI Claudia* and *I Italica*, and the shape of some funerary monuments is following the Greek pattern: Aricescu 1977, p. 34–35, also fig. 2.

²⁷ Alexandrescu 2010, cat. G12; Matei-Popescu 2010, p. 37, note 145.

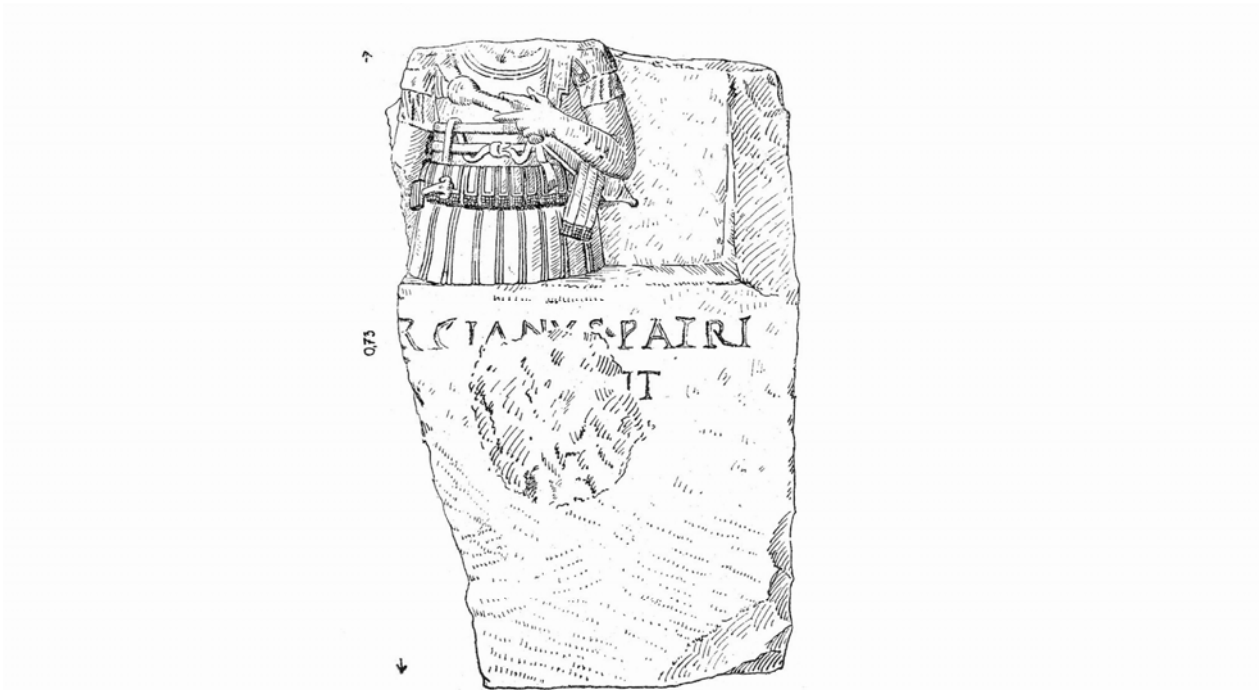


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Fig. 1. Gravestone from Tomis (after Tudor 1956, fig. 12).

Fig. 2-3. Gravestone from Tomis (C.-G. Alexandrescu © ArheoMedia).



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Fig. 4-5. Gravestone from Tomis (C.-G. Alexandrescu © ArheoMedia).