
LEGIO VII CLAUDIA AT POTAISSA

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ABSTRACT:

The paper tackles with the inscription from Potaissa (ILD I 499) which have risen an entire discussion about the presence of the legion *VII Gemina* at Potaissa, in the context in which the stamps of this legion are known in large numbers from the fortress of Porolissum. Only P. Le Roux struck a discordant note, reading in line 2 the name of the legion *VII Claudia*. In the storage space of the Turda History Museum there is additional evidence of the presence of a vexillation of the *Legio VII Claudia* in the fortress of Potaissa. These are two *lydion* bricks with this legion's stamp (MIT inv. nos. 327, 884). The second *lydion* brick, fragmentary, comes from investigations in the fortress carried out by I. Țigăra in 1950-1952, in the same area where the altar ILD I 499 was discovered. Thanks to the epithets *pia constans* and the use of the term *commanipulares* we consider that the inscription from Potaissa ILD I 499 must be dated at the earliest at the time of Caracalla. A possible moment would be at the beginning of Caracalla's eastern *expeditio*, probably in the first half of 214 when he inspected the fortresses and forts on the Danube.

REZUMAT:

Articolul se ocupă de o inscripție de la Potaissa (ILD I 499) care a dat naștere unei întregi discuții privind prezența legiunii VII Gemina la Potaissa, în contextul în care ștampile ale acestei legiuni sunt cunoscute în număr mare în castrul de la Porolissum. Doar P. Le Roux a făcut notă discordantă, citind în rândul 2 numele legiunii VII Claudia. În depozitul Muzeului de Istorie Turda există dovezi suplimentare despre prezența unei vexilații a legiunii VII Claudia în castru de la Potaissa. Acestea sunt două cărămizi de tip *lydion* cu ștampila acestei legiuni (MIT nr. inv. 327, 884). A doua cărămidă *lydion*, fragmentară, provine din cercetările efectuate de I. Țigăra în 1950-1952 în zona unde a fost descoperită și inscripția ILD I 599. Grație epitetelor *pia constans* și a utilizării termenului *commanipulares* considerăm că inscripția ILD I 499 trebuie datată cel mai devreme în timpul lui Caracalla. Un moment de luat în considerare este cel al începutului expediției orientale a lui Caracalla, probabil în prima jumătate a anului 214, când a inspectat caestrele de la Dunăre.

KEY WORDS: *legio VII Claudia*, *vexillatio*, Potaissa, brick stamps, Caracalla

CUVINTE CHEIE: *legio VII Claudia*, *vexillatio*, Potaissa, ștampile tegulare, Caracalla

In his synthesis on the presence of legions or legionary vexillations in provincia Dacia, Ioan Piso notes that the legion *VII Claudia* from Viminacium (Moesia Superior) was involved in Trajan's Dacian Wars and that it is no longer attested in Dacia before the reign of Philip the Arab (with reference to the inscription IDR II 327 from Romula)¹.

He discusses the inscription from Potaissa ILD I 499² in the sub-chapter dedicated to the presence of the legion *VII Gemina* in Dacia, accepting the reading of the first publication (M. Bărbulescu, Z. Milea) and rejecting P. Le Roux's reading. In the same volume, Y. Le Bohec and Catherine Wolff accept the presence of the legion *VII Claudia* at Potaissa but confuse the evidence of the presence of this legion: not the inscription discovered in 1972 in the fortress of the legion on *Dealul Cetății*, but a series of "stamped roof tiles" of the legion *VII Claudia* from Potaissa, which are not found in P. Le Roux's cited work³.

¹ Piso 2000, 218.

² AE 1976, 574 = AE 1981, 722 = AE 1985, 719.

³ Le Bohec, Wolff 2000, 244 («Potaissa: les tuiles proviennent de la VII Claudia, et non de la VII Gemina»).

M. Bărbulescu and Z. Milea's reading, accepted by I. Piso and other authors, gives rise to a whole discussion about the presence of the legion *VII Gemina* at Potaissa⁴, in the context in which the stamps of this legion are known in large numbers from the fortress of Porolissum⁵, which is located relatively nearby.

To clear up this confusion, we consider it necessary to re-examine the altar from Potaissa in the light of new epigraphic finds from this archaeological site.

The monument is a limestone altar, measuring 54 x 25 x 19 cm, with moulded base and capital (**Pl. I.1**). The base is decorated with six dentils, and the capital with *acroteria*, a triangular pediment, and two vegetal ornaments (probably stylised pinecones). At the top it has a libation cavity, 18 cm in diameter and 2.5 cm deep. The altar was discovered in the *retentura sinistra*, in the barracks of a *cohors quingenaria* (in the portico of *contubernium* V, opposite room H)⁶. Turda Museum of History, inv. 3135. There are five small *hederae distinguentes* at dividing points on the first line, and in the last line two larger *hederae* flank the letter T (the last letter of the word *posuerunt*).

Only lines 2-4, where the name of a legion and the names of the dedicating centurions are written, present reading problems.

M. Bărbulescu and Z. Milea read in 1975: *L(egioni) V(quintae) M(acedonicae) P(iae?) C(onstanti?) / L(egioni) VII (septimae) G[EM(inae)? (eminae)? p(iae) f(elici)?] G(aius) Val(erius) Lu[c(anus)?] / G(aius) Tib(erius) C[eler?) / cen(turiones) co[m]/manucu/lis posu(erun)t*⁷.

It is interpreted as an altar dedicated to the legions *V Macedonica* and *VII Gemina* by two centurions. In fact, we must understand by this the protective spirits of these units, according to the Romans' religious categories⁸, and so the dedication would read like: (*Genio*) *L(egionis) V (quintae) M(acedonicae) p(iae) c(onstantis) (et) (Genio) L(egionis) VII (septimae) G(eminae)*. The focus for libations, the structure of the epigraphic text and the final dedicatory formula *posuerunt* indicate that we are dealing with a votive offering.

The initial reading is contested by I. I. Russu, who prefers the name of a third dedicant in line 2, *L(ucius) Ulp(ius) Cl[em(ens)?]* and the cognomen *Cr[es]/cens* in lines 3-4⁹, a solution that has not been pursued by anyone.

The reading that reconstructs the name of the legion *VII Gemina* is accepted by most authors who have mentioned this inscription (M. Bărbulescu, N. Gudea, I. Piso, É. Tóth, C. C. Petolescu, etc.)¹⁰. P. Le Roux struck a discordant note, reading in line 2 the name of the legion *VII Claudia*. He notes that there are two distinct ways of rendering the letter C, that those in lines 1 and 2 are represented rather as the letter G, unlike the other letters C from lines 3, 4 and 5, which resemble more the letter S, but notes that at the end of line 1, it can only be the initial of the epithet *C(onstans)*. After a review of the documentation about the legion from León, P. Le Roux concludes: "au terme de cet examen, nous donnons donc au texte de Turda son interprétation la plus simple et la plus logique à savoir que la légion mentionnée à côté de la Va Macedonica était la VIIa Claudia pia fidelis ordinairement cantonnée en Mésie Supérieure à Viminacium"¹¹.

In the storage space of the Turda History Museum there is additional evidence of the presence of a vexillation of the *Legio VII Claudia* in the fortress of Potaissa. These are two lydion bricks with this legion's stamp.

Lydion type brick, measuring 41 x 30 cm, preserved whole. It has an obliquely placed stamp with a rectangular die measuring 17 x 3 cm. The die includes a *tabula ansata* and contains the following inscription: LEG VII CL, which is reconstructed: *Leg(ionis) VII (septimae) Cl(audiae)*. MIT, inv. no. 327. According to the inventory record, the brick comes from the Téglás István collection and was acquired at the beginning of the formation of the Turda Museum collection (inventoried on September 20th, 1951)¹² (**Pl. I.2**).

⁴ Bărbulescu 2012, 175

⁵ Gudea 1976, 109-114; Opreanu 2015, 299-309.

⁶ Bărbulescu 1987, 170-171.

⁷ Bărbulescu, Milea 1975, 571-576; AE 1976, 574.

⁸ Domaszewski 1895, 96-100; Speidel, Dimitrova-Milčeva 2016, 1547-1548.

⁹ Russu 1977, 217-223.

¹⁰ Petolescu 2005, 179-181.

¹¹ Le Roux 1981, 203.

¹² The attempts of the Historical Monuments Commission, Transylvania section, created in 1921, to acquire the Téglás István collection as the basis for a future museum in Turda were unsuccessful. The collection was dispersed, but some pieces entered the collections of the Turda History Museum, which opened to the public in 1951 – Bărbulescu 1994, 21.

Lydion type brick, measuring 29 x 15 cm, fragmentary. It also has an obliquely placed stamp, within a rectangular die with a *tabula ansata*, of which only the right half is preserved over a length of 11 cm. Due to the shape of the letters, it seems to be of the same type as the previous stamp and thus the missing part would fit three letters. The preserved inscription is [LEG] VII CL, which is reconstructed as [*Leg(ionis)*] VII (*septimae*) Cl(*audiae*). MIT, inv. no. 884. According to the inventory record, it comes from the investigations carried out in the fortress and was inventoried along with other roof tiles and bricks on June 18th, 1953 (PI. I.3).

Thus, the record of the presence of the legion VII Claudia at Potaissa is completed with two stamps on bricks, one of which comes from investigations in the fortress of the legion V Macedonica. We do not know where the entire preserved *lydion* brick in the Téglás collection comes from, but it is very likely from Turda or its surroundings, like most of the pieces in the collection. We do know, however, from the inventory data, that the second *lydion* brick, fragmentary, comes from investigations in the fortress carried out by I. Țigăra. The tegular material, being inventoried in 1953, can only come from the preventive investigations carried out in 1950-1952 during the construction of two water reservoirs in the *latus praetorii sinistrum*. On this occasion, traces of a building were discovered, later identified by M. Bărbulescu as the *horrea* complex¹³. In reality, the water reservoirs affected a larger area of the *latus praetorii sinistrum* and the tegular material inventoried in 1953 may have come either from the *horrea* or from a complex of *centuriae* laid out *per strigas* between the *principia* and the *horrea*. The area where the fragmentary *lydion* brick with the stamp of the legion VII Claudia was discovered is in the immediate vicinity of the findspot of the altar dedicated to the genii of the units of Legio V Macedonica and Legio VII Claudia, namely a complex of *centuriae* from the *retentura sinistra* oriented *per scamna*, located to the west of the *horrea* and the barracks of the *latus praetorii sinistrum*. Here, during the 1971-1972 excavations for the construction of two more water reservoirs, some of the *contubernia* belonging to this complex of *centuriae* were partially uncovered. Based on diagonal and perpendicular survey sections of the buildings, a plan of six *centuriae* in the shape of an L with 10 rooms and the centurions' apartment was obtained. The altar was discovered in the portico of the barracks numbered V, opposite room H, the first one after the centurion's apartment numbered I. The plan of six *centuriae* with 10 *contubernia* each would correspond to a *cohors quingenaria* (480 soldiers)¹⁴.

The two stamps from Potaissa belong to the same type, namely the IV Benea type, with a rectangular die, without legion epithets. Doina Benea knew stamps of this type from Drobeta, Pojejena, Gornea and Vîrșeț, which she dates broadly to the 2nd-3rd centuries AD¹⁵. I. Piso proposes a more precise dating: the stamps with the epithet P(ia) F(idelis) are dated after AD 42 AD to the end of Trajan's reign, and those without epithets from Hadrian's reign to the middle of the 3rd century¹⁶. In the corpus of tegular stamps from the Museum of Banat in Timișoara, I. Piso, A. Ardeț and C. Timoc identify several LEG VII CL type stamps which they group into types XII-XL. The variant also found at Potaissa belongs to the XXXVI Piso, Ardeț, Timoc type and is found on 24 stamps from this collection, 23 of which come from the fortress of Pojejena and one from the island of Sapaja¹⁷. Due to the right-hand loop resembling the letter C, this variant was read by D. Tudor¹⁸, followed by others, as *leg(io) VII (septima) Cl(audia) C(uppis)*, a reading which can no longer be accepted. Most of these stamps were found in the Pojejena fortress (at the western gate, but also at the northern gate and near the *horreum*) and the authors propose Hadrian's era as a *terminus post quem* and a dating mostly in the second half of the 2nd century AD¹⁹. According to L. Jevtović, this variant dates from Phase II of the Viminacium fortress, *i.e.*, from the 2nd century²⁰. To explain the presence of the tegular material pertaining to the legion VII Claudia north of the Danube in the 2nd century AD, Doina Benea suggests the movement of some vexillations to Drobeta, Gornea or Pojejena who participated in construction and refortification works²¹. To I. Piso, A. Ardeț and C. Timoc, it would be more likely that they were transporting building material from Viminacium²².

¹³ Bărbulescu 1987, 95.

¹⁴ Bărbulescu 1987, 170-171.

¹⁵ Benea 1983, 39, pl. I/17-35, pl. II/8-14.

¹⁶ Piso, Ardeț, Timoc 2019, 33-34.

¹⁷ Piso, Ardeț, Timoc 2019, 55-61.

¹⁸ Tudor 1958, 373-379; Benea 1983, 98.

¹⁹ Piso, Ardeț, Timoc 2019, 35.

²⁰ Quoted by Piso, Ardeț and Timoc 2019, 35, n.113.

²¹ Benea 1983, 74.

²² Piso, Ardeț and Timoc 2019, 35.

This explanation of the export of stamped building material cannot be considered for the fortress of Potaissa, located in Dacia Porolissensis. The presence of the inscription with the name of the legion *VII Claudia* and the two bricks stamped with the legion's acronym in the fortress speak of the presence of a vexillation of the legion from Viminacium. The issue is when this presence should more precisely be dated.

P. Le Roux attributes the presence of the legion *VII Claudia* at Potaissa to the concentration of troops on the Danubian front during the Marcomannic Wars (presenting the inscription attesting the presence of vexillations from the legions of Moesia Inferior, *V Macedonica* and *I Italica* in Dacia in 170/171 AD as an analogy)²³.

The epithets *P(ia) C(onstans)* born by the legion *V Macedonica* on the common inscription from the *retentura sinistra* go against such early dating. Various loyalty or imperial epithets of the legion *V Macedonica* appear in inscriptions and on stamps and dating the loyalty ones is more difficult. An older opinion emitted by E. Ritterling states that the legion received the epithets *pia fidelis* and *pia constans* at the time of Commodus after the internal disturbances mentioned in literary sources (SHA, v. Comm. 13.5)²⁴, an assertion frequently repeated without further arguments²⁵. As we have tried to show by analysing the dated inscriptions of the legion *V Macedonica* and the tegular stamps from the fortress of Potaissa, the *pia* epithet appears earliest in AD 195-197, the *pia fidelis* epithets in an inscription from AD 198-211 and the *pia constans* epithets only in an inscription dated after Geta's death, namely between 211-217 AD. Another inscription with relative dating where the epithet *constans* appears is the one dedicated by Optatus, *praefectus legionis*, probably around the middle of the 3rd century AD. Although the data is scarce, it is fairly certain that the epithets *pia* and *pia fidelis* do not appear before the reign of Septimius Severus and his sons. The *pia constans* epithets must be subsequent, as confirmed by the dated inscriptions as well, after 211 until after the middle of the 3rd century AD²⁶.

Another relative dating element of this inscription is the formula *co[m]/manucu/lis*, a formula for *cum commanuculis suis*. The correct expression would have been *commanipularis*, derived from *manipulus* with the preposition *cum*. There are several attested occurrences in various corrupted forms of this expression meaning "together with the colleagues from the manipulus", mostly from Rome. The phonetic variations of the variant from Potaissa (transformation of the vowel *i* into *u* and of the consonant *p* into *c*) are characteristic of the military jargon and especially of the south-eastern provinces of the Empire as shown by the evolution of the Romance languages of the area (Lat. *geniculum*, *genuculum* – Rom. *genunchi*, Lat. *manipulus*, *manuculus* – Rom. *mănunchi*)²⁷.

The *commanuculis* variant attested at Potaissa is only known in three inscriptions from Rome, two of which are dated at the time of Caracalla²⁸.

Thus, we consider that the inscription from Potaissa ILD I 499 must be dated at the earliest at the time of Caracalla and thus, the presence of the *VII Claudia* legion detachment at Potaissa should be dated after this *terminus post quem*.

A possible moment would be at the beginning of Caracalla's eastern expedition. In 213/214, he wintered in Pannonia Inferior, probably at Sirmium, and in the first half of 214 he inspected the fortresses and forts on the Danube (Herod. 4.8.1)²⁹. This visit to Moesia Superior is attested by a series of inscriptions erected at and around Viminacium³⁰. Problems on the frontiers of Dacia demanded the attention of the emperor who, abandoning his itinerary, visited Dacia (SHA, v. Ant. 5.4; Dio 77.16.7)³¹.

²³ Le Roux 1981, 201-203 (CIL III 14433 = ILS 9118 = ISM IV 26).

²⁴ RE XII.2, 1925, c. 1371, 1580, s.v. legio [E. Ritterling].

²⁵ Grec 2000, 138-139; Piso, Marcu 2016, 16.

²⁶ Nemeti 2017, 147-149; Nemeti 2019, 141-144; Petolescu 2020, 74, still considers that the epithet is granted by Commodus, but notes that it is only attested in an inscription dated at the time of Caracalla.

²⁷ Beu-Dachin 2011, 80-81, 83.

²⁸ CIL VI 2056 (M. Aurelius Antoninus, trib. pot. VIII), 3079 (coh. VI vig. Antoniniana), 2787 (undatable).

²⁹ Halfmann 1986, 223.

³⁰ Benea 1983, 64.

³¹ Halfmann 1986, 223.

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Pl. I. 1. The altar from contubernium V (Photo P. Chiorean). 2-3. The hydion type bricks from Turda Museum (Photo P. Chiorean).