

TWO FRAGMENTARY INSCRIPTIONS FROM HALMYRIS

Mihail ZAHARIADE*
John KARAVAS*

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Rezumat: *Articolul prezintă două fragmente de inscripții descoperite în anul 2019 în cetatea de la Halmyris (Murighiol, jud. Tulcea). Fragmentul nr. 1 provine dintr-o inscripție funerară și datează din secolul al II-lea p.Chr. cel mai târziu de la începutul secolului III p.Chr. și pare să aparțină, conform grafiei, unui soldat din detașamentul de legiune staționat în castru. Fragmentul nr. 2 provine dintr-un monument votiv care se referă la o activitate de construcție în castru în secolul al IV-lea p.Chr. exprimată prin cuvintele cas[tra] ref(ecit).*

Abstract: *The article presents two fragments of inscriptions discovered in 2019 at Halmyris (Murighiol, jud. Tulcea). Fragment no. 1 is part of a funerary inscription and dates from the 2nd century AD or early 3rd century. It belonged to a soldier from the local legionary detachment garrisons in the fort. Fragment no. 2 is part of a votive monument referring to a construction activity in the fortification in the 4th century AD, as suggested by the words cas[tra] ref(ecit).*

The excavations carried out in 2019 at the Halmyris fort yielded two fragments of inscriptions found in the debris of a big building siding the northern part of the Tower 4 to which the fort wall to the west is bonded. Upon discovery, both fragments showed consistent traces of fire on all sides. The inscriptions were certainly used as building material in later repair activities in the building.

1. Fragmentary inscription on porous, friable, grey limestone of local provenance (**Fig. 1**); dimensions: length: 27 cm; width: 24 cm; thickness: 9 cm; hl: 5 cm. A flat, higher edge, 8 cm in width, sides the inscription to the right. The text bears three visible lines with the following clearly readable letters:

* Mihail ZAHARIADE: Institute of Archaeology "Vasile Pârvan", Bucharest; e-mail: zahariade@yahoo.com.

* John KARAVAS: International Center for Hellenic and Mediterranean Studies (DIKEMES), Athens, Greece; e-mail: jnkaravas@gmail.com.

l. 1: the lower part of S shortly after the break of the stone; it is followed by AVG; the next letter after G indicates a V which offers the reading: [...]S AVGV; the reading [...]S AVGV(usti) [...].

l. 2: AMIANVS: A+ M in ligature; the reading: AMIANVS.

l. 3: A group of letters must have fell into the break of the stone to the left. Under the group AM, on line 2, only the letters C and A are relatively easy to read. Between A and the following letter R there is room for at least one more letter. A curved intervention of the lapicid suggesting possibly an S is visible after A. Proposed reading CAŞ [(tra)].

The following readable group after CAŞ is RES which doubtlessly suggests RES (*tituit*) and there is enough space at least for two more letters after it. Although there are clear signs of chiselling intervention after RES nothing is clearly readable. For now, we prefer to restore REŞ [tituit].

With all the difficulties and ambiguities showed on l. 3 we dare to propose the reading CAŞ[t(ra)] REŞ[(tituit)]. It would be the most judicious interpretation and understanding of the meaning of the visible letters on the stone.

Suggested restitution of the entire text preserved:

1. [...]S AVGV(usti): s Augu(sti) [N(ostri)]
2. [...] AMIANVS: Am(m?)ianus [...]
3. [...] CAŞ[tra] RES [tituit]: cas(tra) res(tituit)

Commentary

The official large-scale imperial propaganda in Scythia is mirrored in sizable building inscriptions written on good quality stone and by experienced lapicids like those from Tropaeum, Capidava, Cius, Carcaliu and Halmyris¹. Apparently, by late 4th century the central imperial power allowed the local authorities to set inscriptions commemorating the erection or repair of important monuments in the name of the Imperial authorities. That could entail occasionally the use of less skilful local personnel.

Or, the inscription seems not to be the work of an imperial qualified stone worker. That explains why, on our fragment, some of the letters show clumsiness and slightly different sizes and indicates the use of the local stone instead of traditional marble lapicid brought from important south centres for such kind of monuments on which, however, the Emperor's name must have been required.

The name and position

The l. 2 reveals the name AMIANVS. The name with the spelling of a double M, i. e. AMMIANVS is most common and known thus from the 2nd throughout 6th century². In our knowledge, the particular form with only one M is unique.

¹ POPESCU 1976, 169 (Tropaeum); 22 (Capidava); 233 (Cius); 238 (Carcaliu); GLIH 1 (Halmyris). The Tropaeum, Capidava, Salsovia and Halmyris inscriptions are late 3rd – early 4th century in date while Cius and Carcaliu mid- 4th century.

² On the individuals bearing this name, all appear to be spelt AMMIANUS in the Imperial administration, see: PLRE I 52-53 (second half of the 3rd and 4th century); PLRE II 70 (first half of the 6th century). The name Ammianus was borne by notorious high ranking

That the lapicid did not know the correct spelling of the official remains a pure speculation. If AMIANVS at Halmyris was an individual in a high administrative or military position his name must have been correctly known in the local society or at the provincial scale, enough to be recorded in an honorary inscription. It might be that either the one M individual was his the real name, a fact that would have broken the impeccable series of the spelling of the name with double M throughout the centuries, or we must concede a lapicid mistake, otherwise hardly plausible in case of an Imperial honorary inscription.

In fact, we do not know who this personage was in Scythia and whether or not he must be associated with one of the four high rank dignitaries recorded in the Empire in the second half of the 3rd or 4th century.

Ammianus 3 was a more modest notable who held minor posts but had experience in administrative positions, among which the office of *praeses Euphratensis*³. However, if Amianus from Halmyris is not one of the four known Ammiani in the later Empire in the 3rd - 4th century, he would ostensibly be the fifth notable known bearing this name during this period.

The date

The roughly chiselled letters are regularly set in lines but show a sloppy writing from the hand of a less qualified lapicid from a local stone workshop. The lettering of the Halmyris fragment would indicate, in general, possibly the second half of the 4th century. If the word AVGV refers to a single Augustus, that could envisage the single reigns either of Valens or Theodosius.

The paucity of the text and the bad state of preservation of some letters offer poor historical data. Conjecturally we can count on three historical events to find out a date of the inscription.

In 366, Zosimos reports an intense naval activity at the mouth of the Danube at the beginning of the war with the Goths (367-369) and important changes in the high military command intended to revive the logistics of the army. The author relates that supplies were brought by sea in maritime ships that were unloaded at the mouth of the Danube on river boats from where they were delivered upstream Danube to each fort⁴. The position of Halmyris at the very mouth of the today Sfântu Gheorghe arm of the Danube could have played an essential role in the ongoing operations.

Another sequence to be considered is the period shortly after the end of the Valens' Gothic war (369/370) when the orator Themistos, eyewitness of the presence of the Emperor in Scythia, records an intense repair building and

civil and military dignitaries in the 3rd -6th centuries. Except the famous writer and officer, Ammianus Marcellinus, PLRE I identified one, or possibly two Ammiani in the second half of the 3rd century, three in the 4th century and one in early 6th century in active service in high positions. A possible late 2nd century C. Calpurnius Ammianus, *eques Romanus* is recorded in Rome (CIL V 4600=ILS 8092; SOLIN & SALONIES 2010-2017, p. 14, *Repertorium* 14) as the son of C. Calpurnius Philokyrius, *vir egregius*, and Septimia Ammias. In the second half of the 6th century the name seems to have disappeared from the list of the Roman onomastics; see PLRE.

³ PLRE I 54, *Ammianus 3* with bibliography.

⁴ ZOS. *Hist.* 4. 10.

rebuilding activity. The information is reflected in the epigraphic discoveries and archaeological excavations⁵.

Ostensibly, Halmyris was among the forts affected by the events that followed the disaster of the Roman army at Adrianople (August 9, 378). The operation seems well applicable to Halmyris fortress detectable on the level 8, datable in the second half of the 4th and early 5th century. Some important building and repair interventions were identified at the tower 13 of northern gate, coated by a massive masonry; the replacement of the Tetrarchic monumental North-West Gate with a solid curtain wall between towers 1 and 2 that blocked the in and out pedestrian and vehicles circulation; the building of the *Thermae I* behind the tower 1 and the new curtain wall; the repair of the praetorium⁶.

The character of the letters, the poor chiselling, the mention of a single Augustus, in contrast with the significant repair and reconstruction activity would suggest the date of the inscription either during Valens time, after 369, or from our perspective, rather Theodosius reign, after 379⁷.

2. Fragment of a funerary inscription; length: 18 cm; width: 18.5; thickness: 5 cm; hl: 5 cm.

The stone is a porous, friable, dark-yellowish limestone (**Fig. 2**). The text bears three visible fragmentary lines with the following clearly readable letters:

1. [VI]X AN[N...]; the reading: *[vi]xit an[nis]...*
2. [...]ME(n)SE[S...]; the reading: *me(n)se[s ...]*
3. [...]FIL[VS ...]; the reading: *fil(i)us*

I. 1. The upper halves of the I and X and the right side of the N are lost into the upper and right breaks of the piece.

I. 2. The left bar of the letter M, and most of the letter E on the right side, fall into the break of the stone.

I. 3. The lower parts of the letters F fall into the break of the stone; the next group is composite one showing a particular form of L ending in a loop at the base and an integrated ligature with I. The construction is obviously IL. The odd form of the L is rare but not inexistent. Such a form appears in some cases on stamps of different legions in the Empire.

Except the oddity on line 3, the writing is clear, elaborate, indicating the end of the 2nd or early 3rd century as date.

⁵ THEM. *Or.* 10; 14.

⁶ POPESCU1976, 233; SUCEVEANU & BARNEA 1993, p. 159-173; ZAHARIADE 2006, p. 61-119 *passim*.

⁷ VELKOV, 1961 p. 49-62; ZAHARIADE 2006, p. 27-28; SUCEVEANU, ZAHARIADE, TOPOLEANU & POENARU BORDEA 2003, p. 36-37; the Theodosian epoch of the inscription should be rather considered first from archaeological view point (see note 6) and secondly from the Emperor's visit in Scythia in 386, most likely to urgently recover the heavily affected province by the Gothic devastations.

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2