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Supplementband 11



AD RIPAM FLUMINIS DANUVI

Papers of the 3rd International Conference
on the Roman Danubian Provinces
Vienna, 11th–14th November 2015

edited by
Fritz Mitthof – Chiara Cenati – Livio Zerbini

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V LADIMIR P. PETROVIĆ
V OJISLAV FILIPOVIĆ

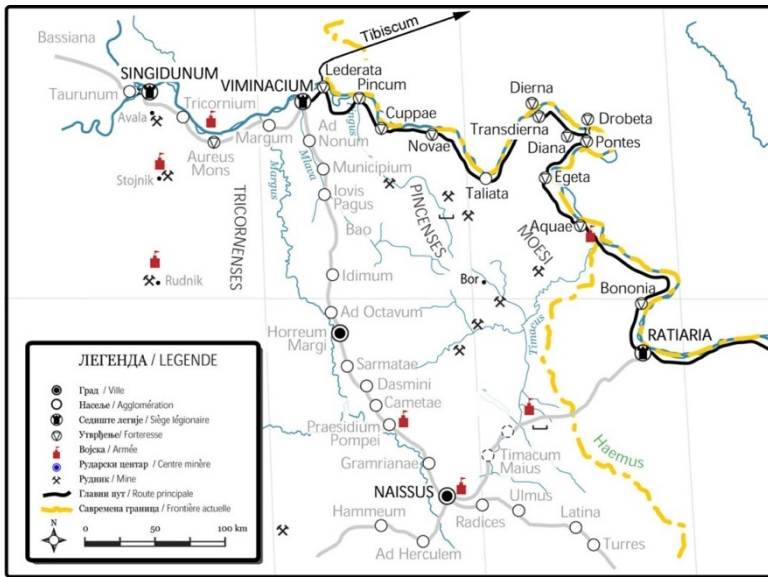
The *cohors I Cretum* between (Upper) Moesia and Dacia: *
New Epigraphic Testimonies
from *Timacum Maius* and *Lederata*¹

The bold hypothesis put forward at the very beginning of the excavation in Niševac by Svrlijig in the Timok River Valley (eastern Serbia) in 2008, that the site might be identified as the Roman settlement of *Timacum Maius*, the first station on the Roman itinerary road connecting *Naissus* (modern Niš, Serbia) and *Ratiaria* (modern Archar, Bulgaria), Central Balkans and Danube, was becoming more and more substantiated by the significant results of every excavation campaign (see map). Among the discoveries made so far it is worth mentioning the following: the building with a hypocaust and wall-embedded tubes (*tubuli*), a section of a main road running through the settlement, sewers, a portion of the very well preserved and early built baths (*thermae*), and plentiful and diverse small finds (pottery, including fine *terra sigillata*, coins, jewellery, weapons etc.). The interesting epigraphic monuments that derive from this area have been published and re-discussed in recently published scholarly works and monographs. It is indicative that we are investigating the sizeable Roman settlement which had been founded in the mid-first century and continued to be occupied without a break until the Hunnic invasion of 441, when it was ravaged and burnt down, as was the nearby city of Naissus. Yet, what remained unknown was which military unit had been garrisoned there, taking part in the construction of public and military structures.²

* This paper is the result of the scientific projects of the Belgrade based Institute for Balkan Studies of SASA (num. 177012) funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

¹ The archaeological investigation has been carried out by the Belgrade-based Institute for Balkan Studies and is funded by the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia, the Municipality of Svrlijig, and the Centre for Tourism, Culture and Sport of Svrlijig. Since 2013 it has been carried out jointly by the Institute for Balkan Studies and the Bordeaux-based Ausonius Institute as part of a Serbo-French research project.

² Petrović / Filipović 2008, 29–43; Petrović / Filipović 2009, 25–30; Petrović *et al.* 2012, 73–112; Petrović / Filipović 2013, 35–50; Petrović *et al.* 2014, 97–142.



Map of the Roman Roads and Settlements in Moesia Superior.

During the 2014 season we discovered nine bricks bearing the stamps of the *cohors I Cretum* embedded in the walls of the baths (*thermae*). The stamp inscriptions read: *coh(ors) I Cret(um)*. This auxiliary unit of the Roman army had been created in pre-Flavian times and had some five hundred soldiers, infantry, and cavalymen.³ The *cohors I Cretum* is epigraphically attested in the province of Moesia only from the Flavian period, but it might have been the part of Moesian army even earlier, as its veterans seem to have been discharged by Nero.⁴

Until the latest discoveries, the only known epigraphic evidence for the *cohors I Cretum* in the interior of Upper Moesia was an inscription from *Naissus*⁵ and the military diploma from modern Tetovo near *Scupi*.⁶ The inscription from *Naissus*, which is in Latin and informs us of a certain *Tiberius Claudius Valerius*, a veteran of the *cohors I Cretum* born in *Hierapytna* (modern Ierapetra) in Crete, dates to the second half of the 1st century but most probably is not earlier than Vespasian's age. The veteran lived in *Naissus* towards the end of the 1st century, apparently before his cohort was pulled into Trajan's Dacian campaign. The presence of a veteran in *Naissus* at that particular time is indirectly indicative of the city's significant growth because retired soldiers usually settled in one of the main centres of a province, not far from the place where they had served. *Naissus* certainly had a military camp and a civilian settlement at the time,

³ *Equites* and *pedites* are mentioned in the military diploma AE 2011, 1118 = AE 2012, 1256.

⁴ AE 1977, 722; AE 2011, 1118 = AE 2012, 1256; Matei-Popescu 2013, 223–224.

⁵ IMS IV 34 = AE 1964, 262.

⁶ AE 2011, 1118 = AE 2012, 1256.

but the considerable number of inscriptions on the bricks of the *cohors I Cretum* recovered from the baths at *Timacum Maius* gives grounds to assume that the cohort, or at least a part of it, was stationed there, not far from *Naissus* and in its territory from the middle of the 1st century. If it was, a 1st century military fort may be expected to be located in the area of the site of *Timacum Maius*.



Fig. 1. Photo of the brick with the stamped inscription of the *cohors I Cretum*, from the baths of *Timacum Maius*.

The *cohors I Cretum*, was transferred first to Upper Moesia and then took part in Trajan's Second Dacian War, according to the epigraphic evidence from Dacia: *Apulum*, *Sucidava*, *Banatska Palanka*, and *Drobeta*⁷ and military diplomas.⁸

It seems appropriate here to add to the list of epigraphic testimonies of the *cohors I Cretum*, the one brick stamped with the inscription from the fortress of *Ram (Lederata)* in modern-day Serbia, on the Upper Moesian limes, that has not yet been published.⁹ The stamped inscription mentions the *cohors I Cretum* and it reads: *coh(ors) I Cr(etum)*. The brick is unfortunately damaged and its right part is missing. The letters of the inscription within a *tabula ansata* are beautifully carved and its palaeographical elements do not oppose to the early dating of the inscription in the eve of Trajan's Dacian campaign.

⁷ *Apulum*: CIL III 1163; *Sucidava*: AE 1975, 726, 2; *Banatska Palanka*: AE 1912, 78; *Drobeta*: CIL III 1703, 2; Marcu 2004, 13–14.

⁸ From AD 110: CIL XVI 163 and 114 AD: RMD IV 226.

⁹ The brick with the stamped inscription from *Lederata* belongs to the legacy of Prof. Dr. Aleksandar Jovanović from the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. We are very grateful for the permission to publish it which was given to us by his successor Prof. Dr. Miroslav Vujović.



Fig. 2. Photo of the brick with the stamped inscription of the *cohors I Cretum*, from Lederata.

Lederata is situated at a suitable crossing point over the Danube, and it is assumed that Trajan, maybe led by *exemplum Alexandri*, started his conquest of Dacia using the very appropriate communication line: *Lederata* (Ram) – Banatska Palanka (*Zeugma*?).¹⁰ It is worth adding that one brick with the stamped inscription of the *cohors I Cretum* also originates from Banatska Palanka, just across the Danube in Dacia.¹¹ In this area it was very easy to cross the Danube, not only because of the proximity of the left Dacian bank of the river, but also because of the existence of one natural fact, the river island of Sapaja, that obviously facilitated the movement of the army to the other river side. This natural island does not exist anymore, as it was flooded in modern times by the construction of the hydro-electrical power plant Iron Gate I. Maybe the well-known representations of the pontoon bridge from Trajan's column in Rome originates from this point, that immediately later became a part of the itinerary road that connected *Viminacium* (Kostolac – Drmno) and *Tibiscum* (Jupa), as it is noticed in *Tabula Peutingeriana*: *Viminacio X Lederata XII Apofl(uvio) XII Arcidava XII Centum Putea XII Bersovia XII Ahihis III Caput Bubali X Tivisco*.

However, it is evident that *cohors I Cretum*, previously located in the area of *Naisus* and *Timacum Maius*, was transferred along the Upper Moesian limes, maybe to *Lederata* in the eve of Trajan's military campaign and was part of the Roman army that conquered and maintained the order in Dacia. It was transferred back to Upper Moesia under Hadrian and in the 2nd and 3rd centuries was stationed in *Egeta* (modern Brza Palanka) on the Danube¹² and was assigned to guard the strategic intersection of two Roman roads: the famous Trajan's limes road which connected the forts along the Iron

¹⁰ Jovanović 2007, 89–90.

¹¹ AE 1912, 78.

¹² AE 1966, 336 = AE 1968, 453.

Gates section of the Empire's border on the south bank of the Danube and the road which ran further inland and, circumventing the large river bend and the Iron Gates, led from *Taliata* (modern Gornji Milanovac) and across the ore-rich south slopes of Mt Miroč with the stations *Gerulata* and *Unum*, to Egeta.¹³

By way of conclusion, it must be emphasised that the inscriptions of the *cohors I Cretum* from *Timacum Maius*, testify to its earliest known position in Upper Moesia as well as the character, chronology, and history of this Roman settlement in the territory of *Naissus*. The Roman unit, or at least a detachment of it, could have been stationed at *Timacum Maius* to secure the important intersection of the Roman roads running from *Naissus* and *Pautalia* in the west of Thrace.¹⁴ As we have seen, it would subsequently be on a similar assignment at *Egeta* on the Danube. It seems correct to assume that the *cohors I Cretum* was engaged in building major military and civilian structures and facilities, including the discovered baths in *Timacum Maius*. Its participation in Trajan's army that conquered Dacia may have been more offensive, but its confirmed presence at the strategic points such as *Lederata*, on the major communication line between Upper Moesia and Dacia, lead to the conclusion that no matter the circumstances, its role always remained about the same: maintaining the order in the most important strategic locations.

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¹³ Petrović 2015, 274–278.

¹⁴ Petrović / Grbić 2014, 96.

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