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SUMAR – SOMMAIRE – CONTENTS – INHALT

STUDIES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND EPIGRAPHICAL NOTES

REVIEWS

INTERPREX DACORUM – COMMENTARIOLI AD RIU 590

András Szabó[1]

Abstract: *Since its discovery in 1943, the sarcophagus of M. Ulpius Romanus and its inscription was subject to various scholarly investigations regarding its artistic and epigraphic value. The most uncanny element of the inscription is the mentioning of a Dacian interpreter („interprex [sic!] Dacorum") – why did the legio I Adiutrix, stationed in Brigetio need a man of such expertise? The various datings for the sarcophagus, based on various observations spawned different interpretations for the presence of the interprex. In our contribution, we aim to point out hitherto overlooked coherencies regarding the dating and interpretation of the inscription and the sarcophagus.*

Keywords: *Dacians, interprex Dacorum, Pannonia, Brigetio, sarcophagus*

The sarcophagus of Marcus Ulpius Romanus is one of the most widely discussed epigraphic monument of Roman Brigetio (Komárom-Szőny/H). Its uniqueness lies in the fact, that it is one of the few inscriptions mentioning an *interpres* (or in this case *interprex*), but furthermore it mentions an *interprex Dacorum*, which incited many debates among scholars in order to determine why the *legio I Adiutrix*, stationed in Brigetio needed a Dacian interpreter in the late 2nd–3rd c. AD.

The sarcophagus itself has been unearthed in 1943 by L. Barkóczi, who also published the inscription[2] and connected it to a Free Dacian invasion in the early 3rd century AD[3]. G. Alföldy followed his thread and related some more epigraphic material from the Danube Bend area to the possible Free Dacian incursion[4]. Zs. Visy[5] and Zs. Mráv[6] interpreted the presence of the *interprex Dacorum* in relation with the *Cotini* – whom K. Godłowski and K. Pieta indentified as the Púchov-culture[7] –, an originally Celtic people, who became Dacianized in the wake of the Dacian supremacy over the Carpathian Basin in the 1st c. BC[8]. Zs. Mráv, however, argued that the *interprex* does not necessarily indicate any military effort by or against the Dacians, but the interpreter could have been used in the hinterland, in connection with the settlement of the *Cotini* in Pannonia inferior[9] after the Northern Wars of Marcus Aurelius (166–180)[10]. More

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[2] BARKÓCZI 1945, 178–189.

[3] BARKÓCZI 1945, 180–182.

[4] ALFÖLDY 1961, 29.

[5] VISY 1993, 9–10.

[6] MRÁV/OTTOMÁNYI 2005, 203.

[7] GODŁOWSKI 1977, 111; PIETA 1982, 208; 212–217.

[8] VISY 1993, 10–11.

[9] MRÁV/OTTOMÁNYI 2005, 203.

[10] KOVÁCS 2005, 202.

recently D. Deac gave further explanation to the presence of the *interprex Dacorum* in Brigetio and tried to give an absolute dating to the inscription[11].

The name of M. Ulpius Celerinus, the *interprex Dacorum* is known from another monument[12] – an altar dedicated to Iuppiter Optimus Maximus, which can be dated to the (sole) reign of Caracalla (212–217), because the *legio I Adiutrix* bears the imperial epithet *Antoniniana*[13]. The name of the legion does not contain the epithet on the sarcophagus' inscription, hence D. Deac considered the altar later than the sarcophagus[14]. However, there are some (precisely datable) examples, where inscriptions mentioning a unit are omitting its earlier attested imperial epithet from its name[15]. This phenomenon occurs quite commonly in the case of private epigraphic monuments, like sepulchral or religious inscriptions, just like in the case of M. Ulpius Celerinus. Furthermore, if an emperor died, his cognominal epithet was also dropped from the units' names[16], even if he was deified, whereas the sarcophagus can be years later than the reign of Caracalla. Therefore we cannot attribute any chronological significance to the ommission of the imperial epithet in the case of the sarcophagus, and its dating cannot be defined more precisely than the first half of the 3rd century AD.

Regarding the relative chronology, the sarcophagus is likely to be later than the altar, since it only mentions M. Ulpius Celerinus as a *salariarius legionis I Adiutricis*, but not yet as an *interprex Dacorum*[17]. Here we must also note, that the inscription of the sarcophagus is secondary[18] and its decoration, the so-called Norico-Pannonian volute is attested earliest in the second half of the 2nd c. AD[19], but it only became widespread on sarcophagi in the Severan period[20]. Based on these erroneous chronological observations, Deac pointed out that the *interprex* was used in peacful negotiations[21] with the Free Dacians during the reign of Septimius Severus (193–211). However, since the dating of the inscription is problematic and not possible more precisely, we have to re-examine the question of why a Dacian interpreter was required in the 3rd c. AD in the vicinity of Pannonia.

One can accept the opinion of Zs. Mráv, that the interpreter was used in the hinterlands of Pannonia inferior (sc. in the vicinity of Mursa and Cibalae) in order to communicate with the settled *Cotini* after the Northern Wars of Marcus Aurelius[22]. However, we must note, that the *Cotini* were most probably already Romanized at some level by the beginning of the 3rd c. AD, and in four decades (that are approximately two generations) they already served in the *cohortes praetoriae*[23], latest during the reign of Severus Alexander (222–235), so in the first decades of the 3rd c. AD, they probably did not need an interpreter to communicate with the Romans.

[11] DEAC 2013, 313.

[12] CIL III, 10988 = RIU 422

[13] sc. the *Antoniniana* epithet was not awarded to the *legio I Adiutrix* during the reign of Elagabalus (218–222); v. FITZ 1983, 54–55.

[14] DEAC 2013, 313.

[15] FITZ 1983, 13–17; FITZ 1983, 47. Nr. 108. (CIL XIII, 7261) & Nr. 109. (CIL XIII, 6618); FITZ 1983, 51, Nr. 141. (CIL III, 5189) & Nr. 142. (CIL III, 5185); FITZ 1983, 101. Nr. 351. (CIL XIII, 11771) & Nr. 352. (CIL XIII, 6738 = ILS 3156); FITZ 1983, 102. Nr. 359. (CIL XIII, 6669), Nr. 360. (CIL XIII, 6592 = ILS 9184) & Nr. 361. (CIL XII, 144); FITZ 1983, 107. Nr. 396. (CIL III, 3903), Nr. 397. (AE 1934, 79) & Nr. 398. (CIL III, 3899)

[16] FITZ 1983, 11.

[17] Note that being an *interprex* and the position of *salariarius* are unrelated to each other; cf. DEAC 2013, 314; MÉA 2012, 207–213.

[18] BARKÓCZI 1945, 178; BARKÓCZI 1951, 40; ERDÉLYI 1974, 68.

[19] ERDÉLYI 1974, 116–117; BESZÉDES/MRÁV/TÓTH 2003, 143. Nr. 38.

[20] POCHMARSKI 1998, 195; MRÁV 2005, 209–212.

[21] DEAC 2013, 316–317; cf. PERETZ 2006, 452; 457–458.

[22] v. sup.

[23] CIL VI, 2833+2389+2835 = CIL VI, 32542; CIL VI, 2800+2832+3419 = CIL VI, 32544; CIL VI, 2831+2852 = CIL VI, 32557

The other possibility is that he was required during or some time before the wars of Maximinus Thrax (235–238), which the emperor conducted against the Sarmatians and Dacians of the Great Hungarian Plain between 236 and 238[24]. The fact that the emperor bore the *cognomen devictarum gentium Dacicus maximus* in his titulature clearly shows, that his military campaign was waged against a Dacian population, which is likely to be identical with an archaeologically attested splinter group of Dacians, that drifted into the Sarmatian Barbaricum in the wake of the Northern Wars of Marcus Aurelius[25]. As our epigraphic sources suggest, the *legio I Adiutrix* also participated in the campaigns of Maximinus Thrax, since it bore the imperial epithet *Maximiniana*, at latest from 236[26]. The sarcophagus of M. Ulpius Romanus then might have been erected some time before, after or during this campaign.

In conclusion we can tell, that the sarcophagus can not be dated more precisely at this moment, than the first half of the 3rd c. AD. Its mentiong of Dacians thus can be related either to the *Cotini* or – as it is more likely in our opinion – to the Dacian population of the Sarmatian Barbaricum.

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