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PUBLIC ACTIVITY OF *BENEFICIARII* IN DACIA POROLISSENSIS¹

Abstract: The aim of this article is to allow the reader a closer look at the public activity of *beneficarii* in Dacia Porolissensis. The available source material, which is for the most part epigraphic, makes it possible to specify over twenty military men who carried out various tasks in the second and third centuries AD in the vicinity of Porolissum, Napoca, Samum, and Buciumi. It is particularly noteworthy that the latest *beneficarii* activity attested to with certainty falls to the reign of Gordian III.

Keywords: Dacia, *beneficarii*, Roman army

Depending on need and opportunity, the governors of Roman provinces had a larger or smaller administrative apparatus at their disposal. Its members were mostly recruited from the people closest to those governors, that is, legionaries, freedmen, and slaves and facilitated the functioning of a given region of the empire by carrying out various tasks. The main group employed at the office (*officium*) was that of low-ranking officers, called *beneficarii* or “the favoured ones”.² According to Festus, the word meant legionaries exempt from carrying out their usual tasks through their commander’s special authorization³ or, very rarely, soldiers of auxiliary units (*auxilia*).⁴ Their status was highlighted by characteristic spears which were their *ornamenta dignitatis*.⁵

Those officers were often active away from the quarters of their unit and the governor’s seat, where a few of them tended to be stationed, referred to as *beneficarii consularis*, since the governors of most provinces with legions in them (formally speaking, *legati Augusti pro praetore*) had previously been consuls. The officers under their command were responsible for gathering intelligence, policing the area, and, indirectly, for certain religious tasks, as attested to by their many votive offerings.⁶ In the case of regions famous for their mines, such as Dacia, it is supposed the *beneficarii* were in some sort of administrative control of those;⁷ it is also possible they

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² RANKOV 1986; RANKOV 1999, pp. 17–18.

³ Festus, *Gloss. Lat.* 30: *beneficari dicebantur milites qui vacabant muneris beneficio; e contrario munifices vocabantur qui non vacabant, sed munus reipublicae faciebant.* *Beneficarii* are already attested to in sources from the 1st century BC, such as Julius Caesar’s *Bellum civile*, whose author in Book III mentions Pompey’s army

and remarks: *haec erant milia xlv, evocatorum circiter duo, quae ex beneficariis superiorum exercituum ad eum convenerant; quae tota acie disperserat.*; see Caes. *BCiv.* 3.88.5.

⁴ DISE Jr. 1997, p. 284.

⁵ GAIU 2014, pp. 60–65.

⁶ RANKOV 1986, p. 11.

⁷ HIRT 2010, p. 44.

co-operated with the *frumentarii* on supplying the camps with grain.⁸ In summary, the main duties of that part of the *officium* were to maintain public order in the province.⁹ Equally importantly, all tasks assigned to those officers were decided on directly by the official governing the province rather than the central administration.¹⁰

The activity of that class of soldiers intensified under the Antonines, when the number of outposts (*stationes*) administered by *beneficarii* authorized by the provincial governor was increased. There, they carried out their duties for six, twelve, or even twenty-four months.¹¹ Four types of outposts can be distinguished in Dacia where such officers were active: towns, the *limes*, major roads, and areas where metal or salt were mined. Most of the *beneficarii* in Dacia were recruited from two legions, *XIII Gemina* and *V Macedonica*.¹²

The aim of this article is to allow the reader a closer look at the public activity of *beneficarii* in Dacia Porolissensis. The available source material, which is for the most part epigraphic, makes it possible to specify over twenty military men who carried out various tasks in the second and third centuries AD in the vicinity of Porolissum, Napoca, Samum, and Buciumi.¹³ It is particularly noteworthy that the latest *beneficarii* activity attested to with certainty falls to the reign of Gordian III (AD 238–244). Therefore the question must be asked of what internal or external factors were involved in the activity of that group of officials ceasing suddenly immediately after that emperor's reign.

The rule of Gordian III coincides with dedications left by *beneficarii* in Samum, a *statio* right on the border of the province and one of the outposts where *beneficarii* are best confirmed epigraphically in all of Dacia Porolissensis. So far, fourteen inscriptions have been discovered there,¹⁴ and they are extremely interesting for several reasons. First of all, the dedications from AD 239 and 243 mention a region of the province otherwise unknown — a *REGIO ANS*:

*Deae [Ne]mesi | Reg(inae) M(arcus) Val(erius) Va(lentinus) b(ene)ff(iciarius) | co(n)s(ularis) [mi]l(es) le[g(ionis)] | XIII G(eminae) Gordi(anae) | aed[il(is)] col(oniae) Nap(ocae) | agens sub sig(nis?) | Samum cum reg(ione) | Ans(amensium) v(otum) l(ibens) m(erito) | Imp(eratore) d(omi)no n(ostro) M(arco) Ant(onio) Gordi(ano) Augus|to et Aviola co(n)s(ulibus) X[---]*¹⁵

*I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) | P(ublius) Ae(lius) Marcellinus | b(ene)ff(iciarius) co(n)s(ularis) leg(ionis) V M(acedonicae) | Gord(ianae) agens Sa|mo cum r(e)g(ione) Ans(amensium) | sub s(i)g(nis?) pro sa(lute) sua | et suorum v(otum) l(ibens) p(osuit) | [Ar]riano et P[apo] (?) co(n)s(ulibus)]*¹⁶

The terse mention has been analyzed by many researchers, some of whom believe the texts should be read to say *regio Ans(amensium)*.¹⁷ According to that hypothesis, the name refers to the area stretching from Samum all the way to Napoca some 60 kilometres away, since Marcus Valerius Valentinus, the *beneficiarius* of *legio XIII Gemina* stationed in Samum, was also listed in the inscription as *aedilis coloniae Napocensis*.¹⁸ However, no other sources confirm that line of

⁸ ROTH 1999, p. 274. The range of duties carried out by *frumentarii* was very broad; under the empire, it was not limited to provisioning. The same officers were often assigned policing missions and looked after the security of the province.

⁹ ZANINOVIĆ 2007, p. 181.

¹⁰ DISE JR. 1997, p. 295.

¹¹ DISE JR. 1997, p. 285. However, the starting dates and their length varied greatly across the empire depending on the province.

¹² CUPCEA 2012, p. 245.

¹³ ARDEVAN 1991, p. 163.

¹⁴ CUPCEA 2010, p. 389; CUPCEA 2014. Cupcea has compiled an accurate list of all officers active in Dacia.

¹⁵ *CIL* III 827 = 7633.

¹⁶ *CIL* III 822. There is another inscription discovered at Samum and dated to AD 243, dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus by one Publius Aelius Proculus; see *CBI* 525.

¹⁷ VĀTAVU 2011, pp. 225–234; DEAC 2013, p. 266.

¹⁸ *CIL* III 827 = 7633.

thought, so one ought to be cautious drawing any conclusions about Valentinus' prerogatives in Dacia Porolissensis. Another theory would have that region lie across the *limes*, take its name from a people inhabiting it, and be under Roman control.¹⁹ Coriolan H. Opreanu reconstructs *REGIO ANS* differently still, as *regio Ans(ae)*. Reading into the data an analogy to Britain, he thinks the term referred to lands which went “all the way to the banks of the river”, here specifically the Someş.²⁰ Unfortunately, lack of further source material forces one to treat those three suggestions in terms of mere research hypotheses.

In the context of those two dedications, made by Valentinus and by Publius Aelius Marcellinus, an officer of *legio V Macedonica*, scholars have pointed out one more significant place, namely the phrase *AGENS SUB SIG*, where the last word can be reconstructed as *signo*, *signis*, or *sigillo*. If the reading *sub signo* is adopted, then it could refer to the spear of the *beneficarii* which signified their power in the province. On the other hand, *sub signis* could be a purely military expression indicating service under military standards, while the reading *sub sigillo* might be a reference to some statues of the emperor, Nemesis or Jupiter, to whom the two altars and their inscriptions were dedicated.²¹

Still, regardless of the extent of power wielded by the Samum *beneficarii*, being stationed there was a dangerous task due to the pressure, be it permanent or temporary, from barbarian peoples. That tension is for example expressed in an inscription by Scantius Lucius, who in AD 224 had the words *multis insidiis numinibus liberatus* carved onto an altar to Nemesis.²² Apparently, the goddess had saved the officer from the many pitfalls awaiting him while he served there.²³ Like Jupiter,²⁴ Nemesis enjoyed great popularity among the *beneficarii* stationed in Dacia Porolissensis; suffice it to say there was a shrine to her in Samum itself, which was rebuilt around the end of the second or the beginning of the third century by Cassius Erotianus.²⁵

However, neither commissioning votive inscriptions nor funding sanctuaries was the principal task of officers active on Dacia's northern border. For years, researchers wondered what specific duties were assigned to the *beneficarii* active in the region. According to one theory, they were in charge of the salt mine at Dej, roughly 10 kilometres from Samum. Another suggested they monitored the movement of people crossing the bridge on the Someş,²⁶ and strictly commercial duties must not be discounted either, since the *beneficarii* at Samum may have been responsible, as they were in other places, including Porolissum, for exchanging goods (perhaps grain) with the barbarians and may have supervised the local market.²⁷ Even so, their activity in Samum increased in the last years of the reign of the Severan dynasty and it cannot be ruled out that their main task was to collect intelligence about the movements of barbarians across the *limes*, a possibility indicated by archaeological investigations at the fort, pointing among other things to expanding the *praetorium*.²⁸

Unfortunately, the material available does not allow for resolving another question, namely that of the length of service the *beneficarii* put in at the outpost in Samum. Under the model known from Germania, officers would be stationed at one place for roughly six months,²⁹ but in the case of the Danubian provinces, determining the length of their “tours” is extremely difficult. Even though we have two inscriptions from Samum dated to the same year (AD 243),³⁰ they are not enough to definitively establish that the officials in question served exactly six months each.

¹⁹ DAICOVICIU 1970, pp. 386–402.

²⁰ OPREANU 1994, pp. 69–78.

²¹ CLÉMENT 2000, pp. 29–30.

²² CBI 528.

²³ CLÉMENT 2000, p. 39.

²⁴ ILD 771, 772, 773, 778 — inscriptions dedicated by officers stationed at Samum to Jupiter.

²⁵ CIL III 825; CUPCEA 2010, p. 390.

²⁶ CUPCEA 2010, pp. 390–391.

²⁷ OPREANU, LĂZĂRESCU 2015, p. 64.

²⁸ GĂZDAC, ISAC 2007, p. 22.

²⁹ DISE Jr. 1997, pp. 284–299.

³⁰ ILD 765, 769.

As Robert L. Dize Jr. already demonstrated, in many provinces mission length varied depending on the tasks involved,³¹ so we must not rule out the possibility that in Dacia Porolissensis, two or more officers would often be active in one *statio* at the same time, for a while.

It is not only in Samum that *beneficiarii* were active in northern Dacia. Other equally important locations were the above-mentioned Porolissum, Buciumi, and Potaissa, and two inscriptions are known from the first of those centres, one placed on an altar dedicated by Flavius Valentinus to Pater Liber, while the other was preserved on the tombstone of Cassius Martialis' wife.³²

There is not much source evidence for the nature of the tasks assigned to those *beneficiarii*, but it is supposed they were to do with trading with the barbarians, and they probably carried them out in co-operation with the customs clerks whose office was discovered there. Moreover, archaeologists found an inscription in the same building mentioning emperor Commodus as a restorer of trade (*restitutor commercii*).³³ In Jocelyne N. Clément's opinion, the tasks of those Porolissum officers revolved around supervising the order of market days, which tended to coincide with religious festivals, usually resulting in increased movement of people.³⁴

It is possible the dedication to Commodus should be seen in connection with another inscription, this one found outside Dacia: in Transaquincum (Rákospalota) in present-day Budapest, an inscription was found dedicated by *beneficiarii* to the *Genius Commercii*.³⁵ The year the altar was erected is uncertain, but the turn of second and third centuries is likely, directly highlighting the restoration of trade with barbarians after the Marcomannic War, which had affected Dacia and the neighbouring provinces directly.³⁶

In Buciumi, in turn, one such inscription has been found so far, dedicated by Publius Iulius Firminus. Regrettably, in that case the duties of the officer are not known either, but the inscription on the altar is interesting for a different reason:

*I(ovi) o(ptimo) m(aximo) | Doli|cheno | pro sa|lute dd(ominorum) | nn(ostrorum) M(arci) Aur(eli) | Antonini Pii | Aug(usti) n(ostri), P(ublius) Iul(ius) Fir|minus, b(ene)ff(iciarius) | co(n)-s(ularis), v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*³⁷

The dedication is for Jupiter Dolichenus, but in addition, it can be read that the monument was originally intended for the good fortune of two emperors, Geta and Caracalla, but after the former's death at the beginning of AD 212, his name was chiselled out of the inscription, which thus provides a classic example for the *damnatio memoriae* of one member of the imperial family in favour of another.³⁸

In Potaissa, a collective dedication draws attention, made by several officers during the governorship of Octavius Iulianus (that is, in AD 202–203). The altar was put up for a *genius scholae*;³⁹ the building presumably served as the office of the *beneficiarii*, allowing them facilities separate from the *praetorium*.

The inscriptions from Samum, Porolissum, Buciumi, and Potaissa presented here are the only examples from Dacia Porolissensis where the activity of individual *beneficiarii* can be dated precisely. In all other cases from the region, we may only hypothesize they were put up in late second or early third century. The dates oscillate between the reigns of the Severan dynasty and emperor Gordian III, begging the question of what could have caused the activity of *beneficiarii* to decrease after AD 244.

³¹ Dize Jr. 1997, p. 285.

³² *ILD* 687, 701.

³³ *AE* 1988, 997; Clément 2000, p. 254; CUPCEA 2010, p. 391.

³⁴ Clément 2000, p. 254.

³⁵ *CIL* III 3617 = *CBI* 420.

³⁶ Clément 2000, p. 254.

³⁷ *CIL* III 7645.

³⁸ POPA, BRACIU 1978, p. 16.

³⁹ *CIL* III 876.

One reason for there being no more tasks for them to undertake could be that the two legions stationed in Dacia were moved further east. From elsewhere we know Gordian III used soldiers from the legions *XIII Gemina* and *V Macedonica* to fight the Persians. Weakening the potential of the army immediately led to problems staffing the *officium*, since, as noted right at the beginning of this article, *beneficarii* were for the most part recruited from legionaries. That lowering of the combat capability of the province was already clearly visible in the years 242–244. During that period and due to pressure from the Carpi, Rome abandoned the outpost in the *limes Transalutanus*, where activity of *beneficarii* was attested to in inscriptions.⁴⁰ In other words, constant pressure from barbarians may have constituted another reason why their activity ceased in the several *stationes*. If we also take into account the Romans abandoning in the first half of the 3rd century two mines administered in part by *beneficarii*,⁴¹ a fairly clear picture will emerge of no tasks left to be assigned to them, and so no administrative duties either—not merely in Dacia Porolissensis, but throughout the province.

To summarize, the material available paints the activity of *beneficarii* in the northern regions of the province as follows: they were likely used chiefly in trade contacts with representatives of barbarian peoples, and prospered best at the end of the second and beginning of the third century when contacts with those barbarians had been restored, as indicated for instance by the inscription mentioned above honouring emperor Commodus as *restitutor commercii*. Then they continued under the Severi, when perhaps in addition to tasks to do with trade and supervising the customs they may have monitored the flow of the people inhabiting the lands across the *limes* and gathered intelligence. Until inscriptions documenting any activity of *beneficarii* after AD 244 are discovered or published, we must conclude that the reign of Gordian III saw the end of those officers' work in Dacia Porolissensis.

Abbreviations

<i>AE</i>	<i>L'Année épigraphique</i> .
<i>CBI</i>	<i>Corpus der griechischen und lateinischen Beneficiarier-Inschriften des römischen Reiches</i> , ed. E. SCHALLMAYER, Stuttgart 1990.
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum</i> , Berlin.
<i>ILD</i>	<i>Inscripții latine din Dacia (Inscriptiones Latinae Daciae)</i> , ed. C. C. PETOLESCU, Bucharest 2005.

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⁴⁰ *CBI* 539; CLÉMENT 2000, p. 165.

⁴¹ CIUGUDEAN 2012, p. 104.

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