

CUNEUS EQUITUM ARCADUM AND CLASSIS [IN]PLATEYPEGIIS AT HALMYRIS. AN EXCHANGE OF TROOPS BETWEEN EGYPT AND THRACE DURING THE REIGN OF THEODOSIUS I. THE CASE OF SCYTHIA

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***Cuneus equitum arcadum* și *classis [in]plateypegiis* la Halmyris. Un schimb de trupe între Egypt și Thracia în timpul domniei lui Theodosius I. Cazul din Scytia**

Cuneus equitum Arcadum și *classis [in] Plateypegiis* par foarte probabil să fi reprezentat o parte din efectivele aduse din Egipt pentru întărirea capacității defensive a provinciei Scythia, conform programului theodosian descris de Zosimos. Termenul de *classis Inplateypegiis* din secțiunea Scythica a Notitiei Dignitatum implica o flotilă de *plateypegia* aptă de a naviga în apele puțin adânci ale Deltei Dunării și a dat naștere unui toponim ce denumea baza acestei flote, aflată fie într-unul din ostroavele Deltei, fie chiar la gurile brațului Sfântu Gheorghe în forma pe care o avea la acea dată.

Key words: Scytia, Egypt, Thrace, *Cuneus equitum Arcadum*, *classis in Plateypegiis*.

I. The Scythian section of Notitia Dignitatum records *cuneus equitum Arcadum* at Thalamonium¹. The name of the troop is unique in the long 4th century list of regiments². The 5th and 6th century sources ignore completely such a unit. As the category of unit is well known in the structure of the late Roman army and largely discussed in the modern literature, the issues which needs clarification is the specific term *Arcadum*, as well as the circumstances of the arrival of the regiment on the Lower Danube frontier.

Although not frequently, the Oriental section of Notitia records both regiments with Imperial title deriving directly from the name of the Emperor Arcadius (395–408) and from the Egyptian province of Arcadia. A high rank regiment, *equites Arcades*, is mentioned among *vexillationes palatinae praesentales*³. *Comites Arcadiaci* as a *vexillatio palatina* was placed

¹ *NDOr.* (O. Seeck, ed.) 39, 18.

² Hoffmann 1969, 278; Aricescu 1977, 116; Zahariade 1988, 82–83; 2006, 178. The Scythian section indicates a deployment scheme which, in general maintains the alternance of infantry (*militēs*) with cavalry (*cunei equitum*) units. A *cuneus equitum* is placed at Aegyssus, while at Salsovia a unit of *militēs* was billeted. At Thalamonium=Salmorus=Halmyris a *cuneus equitum* appears in the list, and another infantry regiment (*militēs*) is placed at Gratiana. The latter two regiments are later additions to the Scythian list. It is highly probable that the same deployment scheme must have functioned also during Constantine I and Constantius II period, which would imply the existence of a *cuneus equitum* at Halmyris, previous to the one recorded by Notitia Dignitatum, but there is no physical evidence whatsoever for the existence of such a cavalry unit. A suggestive example from this view point is the existence of the two *cunei equitum Stablesianorum* one next to another at Cius and Berroe, in a region where in 368 the military activity was rather intense. After 369, the Imperial program of refortification of the frontier could have modified the alternance scheme *cuneus equitum–militēs* for local tactical reasons. The two nearby cavalry squadrons were preferred in a key strategic position. On the other hand the alteration of the initial Constantinian scheme along the Lower Danube took also place in other sectors (Zahariade 1988, 80–81).

³ *NDOr.* 5, 32; Hoffmann 1969, 278, 492–493, 499.

under the command (*sub dispositione*) of *magister militum per Thracias*⁴. An *ala Arcadiana nuper constituta* appears under the command of *comes rei militaris per Aegyptum*⁵. The *ala* had been created “recently” (*nuper*), shortly before it was displayed in the list of the regiments under the authority of the Egyptian comes and previous to its final revision and delivery to the *primicerius notariorum* at Ravenna. The regiment bears the imperial *title* after Arcadius, the son of Theodosius I and does not have indicated the place of garrison.

Regiments had been successively created during the reign of Theodosius I through the transformation of both field and frontier units⁶. Two units, the palatine and riparian ones, *equites Arcades* and *cuneus equitum Arcadum* bear the clear indication of the province of Arcadia part of the diocese of Egypt. The terms *Arcades* (Arcadians)/*Arcadum* (of those from Arcadia) shows specifically that they had been established with recruits drawn from the province or rather with troopers from older units stationed in the province of *Arcadia*.

Arcadia, as a province, was created by Theodosius I sometimes between 386 and 392 through the reorganization, of the two already extant provinces since 341: *Augustamnica* (the former *Aegyptus Herculia=Heptanomia*, to which had been added the eastern part of the Nile delta and therefore enlarged); the small province of former *Aegyptus Iovia*, which in 341 had been diminished and renamed simply *Aegyptus*. Theodosius I detached most of the territory of *Augustamnica*, specifically the former *Heptanomia* into a separate province and renamed it *Arcadia* in honor of Arcadius, his son who had been proclaimed Augustus in January of 383 at the age of five or six. The territories of the remaining part of *Augustamnica* together with *Aegyptus* were reunited into a new province, *Aegyptus*, as a military district under the command of a *dux* in 381⁷.

Thalamonium, the fort in Scythia where the *cuneus equitum Arcadum* was billeted is a *hapax* in the Roman toponymy. The place name is a corruption from the *Salmorus* which is recorded in *Itinerarium Antonini* as a Latin variant of the Greek *Halmyris*⁸. The fort is situated 2.5 km east from the present day Murighiol commune, Tulcea County, on the southern shore of the Sf. Gheorghe branch of the Danube⁹.

The history of regiment and particularly the term *Arcadum* focused the attention of D. Hoffman, A. Aricescu and the author of this article¹⁰.

D. Hoffmann suggests the setting of this regiment on the basis of the cabaline stock in the Peloponesian Arcadia. He invoked the exceptional quality of the horses from that region backing his assumption on a passage of Sidonius Apollinaris¹¹ who mentions a delivery of such good quality horses for the army. That there was a good stock of Arcadian horses is perfectly possible and even probable, but it is hardly acceptable that a horse gathering in Arcadia, a

⁴ *NDOr.* 8, 25; Hoffmann 1969, 17–18;243–244; 278–279. As some of the regiments labelled *comites* hold an ethnical significance (*Alani: NDOr.* 6, 8=50=7, 163; *Armeni: NDOr.* 6, 31; *Taifali: NDOr.* 5, 31) one might think, as D. Hoffmann believes, that *comites Arcadiaci* could have been also recruited from among *externae gentes*.

⁵ *NDOr.* 28, 8=21; Hoffman 1969, 23.

⁶ Jones 1964, 359–360; Hoffmann 1969, 278. Williams, Friell 1994, 64, 159.

⁷ For the successive 4th century reorganizations of Egypt see: Gelzer 1909, 57–71; Bury 1923, 129–130; Jones 1971, 336 and note 50.

⁸ *It. Ant.* 226, 4 (*Salmorus*); Moisil 1909, 89; *Scutum Durae Europi*, as the earliest source (ca. 238/240), records it as OYLYMYRIA, while the 6th century Greek sources give invariably Halmyris ('Almurif). *De SS Epicteto presb. et Astione monaho martyribus Almiridensibus in Scythia* (ActaSS II Iulii 540–551) uses invariably *Almiris*, a term borrowed from Greek. On *Thalamonium* as a corruption: *Thalamonium–Thalamorium–Salamorium–Salmorus*, with Th (Q) read in Greek manner as S, an equivalent for Halmyris, see also Suceveanu, Zahariade 1987, 87–96 with the bibliography.

⁹ Suceveanu, Zahariade, Topoleanu, Poenaru–Bordea 2003, 9.

¹⁰ See note 2.

¹¹ *Carm.* 5, 54 (C. E. Stevens, ed. Oxford 1933).

province which usually did not offer recruits, in the benefit of the Roman army, had such an impact on the naming and officially listing of a military regiment¹².

The term *Arcadum* for the Scythian *cuneus*, which accords in genitive plural with the noun, *equitum*, is not an imperial title, as it is the case of ala **Arcadiana**, otherwise the designation would have been *cuneus equitum Arcadianorum*, as shown by other examples among which one on the very border of the Danube line, in Dacia Ripensis, *cuneus equitum Constantinianorum*¹³. A. Aricescu thinks that the province of Arcadia provided recruits for the Scythian *cuneus equitum Arcadum*¹⁴. In 1984 and later in 2006 I brought new fresh arguments in favour of this assumption. The creation of a new regiment whose name mirrors its origin in the province of Arcadia, as well as its composition with recruits and/or troopers transferred from other units stationed in the province, what prompted the very specific term *Arcadum*, remain thus far the most judicious explanation.

According to a passage in Philostorgios the town of *Halmyris* was taken by surprise by the barbarians in the winter of 384/5, by the time when the Arian bishop Eumenius lived in exile in this very place: [...] τὸν δὲ Εὐνόμιον ἐκ τῆς Καλχηδόνας τὴν ταχίστην τοὺς ἀρπασαμένους ἐκπέμπει, καὶ πρὸς τὴν Ἄλμυρίδα φυγάδα ποιεῖν ἐγκελεύεται. Τὸ δὲ χωρίον τῆς ἐν Εὐρώπῃ Μυσίας ἐστίν, ἐν χώρᾳ τοῦ Ἰστρου διακείμενον. Ἄλλ' ἢ μὲν Ἄλμυρις κρυσταλλωθέτος τοῦ Ἰστρου ὑπὸ τῶν διαβάντων αὐτὸν βαρβάρων ἀλίσκεται [...].

Transl. *As for Eunomios, he (i. e. the Emperor) sent people to pick him up immediately from Chalcedon and ordered to be banished at Halmyris. This is a place in Moesia, in Europe, situated nearby Hister River. But Halmyris was taken by the barbarians who crossed the Hister River when it was frozen over [...]*¹⁵.

The inroad, whose authors must have been either some remnant Gothic bands in the Danube delta or the Huns, was certainly a disaster for the fortress. We ignore the name of the auxiliary unit billeted at Thalamonium/Salmorus previous to 384. It must have perished during the sack of the fort, a fact that would entail the erasing of its name from the official list of the Roman army.

The fortress shows clear archaeological evidence of a massive reconstruction by late 4th and early 5th century¹⁶. The place maintained its strategical importance at the mouth of the Danube which required a new garrison involved in the general rebuilding activity. As the regiment *cuneus equitum Arcadum* can not be conceived to have been created previous to the establishment of the province of Arcadia, from where its contingents could have originated, the setting of the new garrison at Thalamonium/Salmorus shortly after the 384/385 disaster appears most likely.

The late record of this regiment in the Scythian section of the *Notitia Dignitatum* (after 384/5) is only explainable through a constant updating of its successive but distinctive segments

¹² cf. *Them.Or.* 24, 305 d.

¹³ *ND Or.* 42, 21.

¹⁴ Aricescu 1977, 116.

¹⁵ *Phil. Hist. Eccl.* 10. 6 (J. Bidez, ed. Leipzig 1913).

¹⁶ The 1983 and 1985 and 1991 and 1997 archaeological and architectonic observations at the North–Eastern gate seem to confirm the late 4th century disaster the fortress went through. The massive late 3rd–early 4th century Tetrarchic reconstruction, displays in its first phase a three vaulted gateways monumental portal opening between the towers I and II, as the most important access gate towards the port. The right side of the tower II contained a rectangular room with a door opening outwards which seems to have served as a customs point in a transit area during the first three quarters of the 4th centuries. In its second phase the North–Eastern gate was completely sealed by a massive wall made of cyclopean limestone blocks, set as a curtain wall between tower gate I and curtain tower II shortly after the 384/385 disaster. The customs point which fell outside of the new wall line, together with the traffic and commercial activities through the North–east gate ceased completely. It is also in this period when the Halmyris harbour ceased to function.

which compose this document. It is widely accepted that the editor(s) of the Western and Eastern sections used older lists which had been updated regularly and wrote up a rough sketch of what we know today as *Notitia Dignitatum in partibus Orientis* and *Notitia Dignitatum in partibus Occidentis*¹⁷. Hoffmann accurately defined the updating of the oriental section of the Notitia up until May 394¹⁸. The list of the Scythian section could have been therefore updated with the last modifications in the tactical scheme even after 384/385 when the garrison of the Halmyris fort was presumably taken over by the *cuneus equitum Arcadum*.

The basic tactical frontier arrangements of Constantine, Constantius II and Valens as illustrated by the Scythian section of the document could have survived, for there is hardly conceivable that all the 22 garrisons on the Danube recorded in the document had perished during the events following the disaster of the Roman army at Hadrinople, in 378, when the Gothic banditry stressed on plundering the rich towns and countryside south of the Haemus mountains. Beside the general strategic consequences, the repair of the serious casualties suffered by the Roman army in the two years continuous combats (377–378), clashes and skirmishes required long term and steady imperative recovery measures under the pressure of the events, not always favorable to the Empire¹⁹.

According to Zosimus, measures have been taken shortly after the Hadrinople disaster to restore the Imperial authority in the ravaged Balkan provinces. R. T. Ridley's chronology of Zosimus dates the first significant Theodosian intervention in the military field in 379–380²⁰, which is quite early but a reasonable date for the restoration of the Imperial authority way before the conclusion of the peace treaty of 3 October 382. Zosimus alludes to a period shortly after the Roman army's disaster which entailed the allowance of some Germanic groups to be enrolled into the feeble, at that time, Roman army. Although the chronology of Zosimus is often erratic given the the author's penchant for contraction of the events, the information in itself remain highly reliable²¹.

For these early measures there is one main passage in Zosimus under discussion:

IV 30. 1: “[...] *When the emperor Theodosius saw the army much depleted, he allowed any of the barbarians beyond the Danube who wished to do so to come to him, promising to enrol the deserters in the legions. Many accepted this agreement and joined the Roman soldiers, with the idea that as soon as their numbers increased they could easily attack and gain complete control. 2. The Emperor, seeing that the deserters were already more numerous than the other soldiers and realising that they could not be restrained if they decided to mutiny, thought it better mix some of them with the soldiers in Egypt and to replace them with some of the soldiers serving in the legions there [...]*”. **3.** *So one detachment came and the other went as the emperor ordered, but while the Egyptians marched quietly through the cities and bought what they needed at a fair price, the barbarians proceeded in disarray and behaved selfishly in the markets. 4. When the two detachments met at Philadelphia in Lydia, the Egyptians, who were much fewer than the barbarians, observed discipline, while the barbarians began to be arrogant. And when one of the traders in the market-place asked payment for the goods he had sold, the barbarian used his sword on him. He shouted and another man who tried to help was struck also. The Egyptians took pity and urged the barbarians in reasonable terms to refrain from such offensive behaviour, saying that this was not the action of men who wished to live*

¹⁷ Jones, 1964, 347–358; Clemente 1968, 25–63; Hoffmann 1969, 49–53.

¹⁸ Hoffmann 1969, 52.

¹⁹ Williams, Friell 1994, 2–9; Whitby 2002, 44–45.

²⁰ Ridley 1982, 83–84.

²¹ Petre 1965, 263–272; Goffart 1971, 412–441; Cameron 1969, 106–110; Scavone 1969, 57–67; Ridley 1972, 277–302.

under Roman law. 5. Thereupon the barbarians drew their swords against them also until the Egyptians lost their temper and attacked them. More than two hundred were killed, others wounded, and the rest forced to flee to the sewers, where they died. This is what the Egyptians did to the barbarians in Philadelphia to convince them that unless they were more restrained, they would not lack enemies. The Egyptians then continued on their way, and the barbarians marched towards Egypt, as they were required, under the command of the Persian Hormisdas.

31. 1. When the Egyptians reached Macedonia and joined the legions there, there was no discipline among the soldiers; no distinction was made between Roman and barbarian, with everyone living together indiscriminately, and no record kept of those enrolled in the army. And the deserters, even those already enlisted in the legions, were allowed to return home and send others in their place, and then to serve again under the Romans whenever they wanted. 2. When the barbarians understood, on the information of the deserters who had unrestricted access to the Romans, the confusion prevalent in the legions, they thought that now, while chaos was widespread was their opportunity to attack. 3. They crossed the river easily and reached Macedonia without opposition because the deserters allowed them to cross wherever they wanted. Learning that the emperor was advancing against them with his whole army and seeing a great fire burning in the dead of night (which they concluded was near the emperor and his army, as was confirmed by the deserters who came over to them), they used the light to guide them to the emperor's tent. 4. When the deserters joined them, only the Romans and such of the Egyptians as were present opposed them. Although vastly outnumbered and unable to hold out, they nevertheless gave the emperor a chance to escape; they themselves all fell fighting bravely and not before they had killed a vast number of barbarians. 5. Had the barbarians followed up their advantage and pursued the fleeing emperor and his retinue they would have overpowered them completely without a blow, but satisfied with their victory, they took over the unprotected provinces of Macedonia and Thessaly, and let the cities go without doing them any harm, in the hope of gaining a reasonable tribute from them [...]" (transl. T Ridley 1982).

Although sketchy and apparently contradictory, the dramatic story of the transfer of the Egyptian effectives to the Lower Danube sounds entirely veracious. Changes of troops between Egypt and Danube lands occurred since 2nd century although not as a continuous and preferential process²². The military circumstances described by Zosimus were exceptional and the diocese of Egypt, which might have had intact military forces, was at that moment the best fit to sustain such a transfer.

The local disaster at Halmyris in the winter of 384/385 and any urgent transfer of a regiment destined to replace the lost garrison would have been preferable and could have happened after that date.

Any attempt to identify some other transfers from the Egyptian field army regiments to Thrace during the reign of Theodosius I bear a high degree of uncertainty. The Thracian list of the field army and the account of Ammianus displays indeed traces of a transfer of *legiones comitatenses* of Egyptian origin: *Prima Maximiana Thebaeorum*, *Tertia Diocletiana Thebaeorum* and possibly *Iulia Alexandria* but they had been moved already by mid 4th century²³. The army lists for the Egyptian provinces and Thracian diocese, as well as those in the city capital, Constantinople show weak sign of such transfers as yet, which makes the identification of such regiments highly uncertain and less successful. However, the fact is far

²² Transfer from Egypt to the Danubian provinces: e. g. *cohors I Hispanorum veterana quingenaria* (Fink 1958, 102–116; Syme 1959, 26–33; Vulpe 1960, 337–357; Petolescu 2002, 109–110); *ala II Hispanorum* (P. Cairo 78).

²³ The Egyptian sections in Notitia: *NDOr.* 28, 14–46 (*comes limitis Aegypti*); 31, 23–67 (*dux Thebaidos*); Hoffmann 1969, 238; 337; 353; 508–509; 511–513; *Amm. Marc.* XIV 11. 15 (*Thebaeas legiones in vicinis oppidis <i.e. Hadrianopolis> hiemantes*).

from affecting the credibility of the Zosimus' account²⁴ and the reassigning of troops from Egypt to the Lower Danube and viceversa must be considered as an important detail. Nevertheless, the only regiment to have been transferred from Egypt, highly identifiable on the Scythian duke's list seems *cuneus equitum Arcadum*.

The insertion of the name of the regiment in the Scythian list could have been done sometime between 386/392 and before ca. 394/395 the date of the delivery of the *Pars Orientis* towards *primicerius notariorum* at Ravenna. The final editor of the Scythian section placed therefore the regiment in the very place where it took position, i.e. at Thalamonium = Salmorus = Halmyris. It must have replaced a previous regiment presumably completely or in its biggest part destroyed during the events of 384/385. The replaced unit must have been also of a *cuneus equitum* type according to the initial Constantinian scheme.

On the other hand, once garrisoned at Thalamonium/Halmyris, *cuneus equitum Arcadum* was massively involved in the Theodosian considerable reconstruction works archaeologically identified in the fort with the level of occupation VIII²⁵.

II. The Scythian section of ND records some naval units as follows:

35. *Praefectus ripae legionis primae Ioviae cohortis [...] et secundae Herculiae musculorum Scythicorum et classis Inplateypegiis.*

A. Aricescu suggested *cohors musculorum Scythicorum* under the competence of both legions, while for *classis Inplateypegiis* the author proposed a particular naval unit of *classis* formed of flat bottom boats under the command of a *praefectus*. He rejected Remondon's and Pippidi's suggestions of a place name born as a result of the existence of a base sheltering a particular type of ships, πλατυπήγια²⁶.

In 1988 I set forth the likelihood that the passage in NDOr could be read *classis in [loco] Plateypegiis*. The noun *locus* is to be interpreted possibly as a base (*reliquatio*) of the fleet formed of flat bottom type of boats²⁷. Πλατυπήγια were especially designed boats to navigate in the deltaic environment of the Nile delta. The large scale utilization of such boats in this region prompted their record in a significant number of Egyptian papyri²⁸.

It is difficult to ascertain the circumstances in which these boats commenced to be used in the Danube delta. The sending of such boats from Egypt overseas to Scythia Minor is unlikely, as long as the two deltaic areas were alike and the solutions of navigation could have been similar. The operation would have been very risky for such a long way. Boats of that type could have existed also in the Danube delta, possibly long time before their record in Notitia Dignitatum, although we ignore how they were called in the local milieu²⁹. The main issue is when the term πλατυπήγια began to be applied for this type of boats in the Danube delta to such a scale that it became generalized and imposed a specific designation of an entire naval unit and even, presumably, a place name.

Remondon thinks that the term the soldiers of the Danubian legions involved in the military operations in Egypt during Diocletian's time made acquaintance with was introduced in Scythia after they returned to the Danube, by the end of the 3rd century³⁰. It could be so, but

²⁴ Zos. 4, 30, 3–5; 31, 1–5.

²⁵ Suceveanu, Zahariade, Topoleanu, Poenaru–Bordea 2003, 36.

²⁶ Aricescu 1977, 120–121. On *platypegia* see: Remondon, 1954, 199–210; Pippidi 1965, 330–332; Bounegru, Zahariade 1996, 69.

²⁷ Bounegru, Zahariade 1996, 27.

²⁸ Remondon 1954, 199–210, especially 205–207.

²⁹ Pippidi 1965, 332.

³⁰ Remondon 1954, 209–210.

many of the Danubian legionary detachments never returned to their homes after they were split from their mother units and assigned for specific missions outside the province.

In mid 4th century, Themistios adduces some fresh lights on the subject³¹. The rhetor insists on the fact that the deltaic regions were “poorely defended against the barbarians, for the river which crosses it over does not have a continuous course and it is mixed with firm land and forms a marshy and unnavigable gulf which deepens much, where the to walk is impossible. This region had been a kind of a hide out before, wherefrom their attacks were fomented; daring to overtly invade by bands because the peace, which was only for the sake of appearance, stopped them, they did thefts and unlawful actions in single row oared boats; they were on the watch in their boats, hidden in the aits and rushed unexpectedly at the local people in the proximity. Then, until the garrisons, set far from one another, to take notice they raided at their will and after that sunk into the river. From that moment on, nobody could ever chase them, for either the boats or foot could not break through the marshes. It was something unbearable to see pillage in sight of everybody, without the accomplisher can be punished”.

The passage is an excellent picture of the then situation in the Danube delta, and in the neighboring areas. Otherwise accurate and detailed on the description of the reconstruction and repair of the frontier defence structures, which augments its credibility, Themistios refers mainly to the right bank of the river but also contains elements which bring up the maritime component of the program. The rhetor speaks about: λιμένες τῆς γειτνιώσης θαλάσσης (“porturi la marea vecinã”). The Halmyris port was identified through aerial photography and it could have been well included in the list³². Even if not complete and envisaging only some critical segments of the frontier, the reconstruction activity would have implied measures taken to increase the efficiency of the naval component to patrol, prevent, and thwart future inroads.

The period between 369 and 372, when the entire Imperial rebuilding program was carried on, could be considered as a time for the implementation of the new term πλατυπήγια at the Lower Danube, but the date is not undebatable. Another episode which could have triggered the commencement of the circulation of the term is that of the transfer of some Egyptian units to the Lower Danube in or shortly after 379–380.

It is true that Zosimos' text does not indicate what specific units had been transferred. Among infantry or cavalry regiments which left Egypt some soldiers involved in naval activity could have been presumably assigned for specific activities in the Danube delta, as part of the reconstruction program of the Danubian naval forces. On the occasion of the transfer of the *cuneus equitum Arcadum* the implementation of the term *platypegia* could have come into being in the Danube delta where, very likely, such type of boats have been already functioning, although had presumably been labelled differently from the Egyptian term.

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³¹ Them. Or. X 136 (R. J. Penella ed. U. C. Press, 2004).

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