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Cohors II Britannorum milliaria eq. c. R. p. f. in the 3rd century CE

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Cohors II Britannorum milliaria eq. c. R. p. f. in the 3rd century CE

There are still significant difficulties in identifying the military units garrisoned in the auxiliary forts in the province of Dacia during the 3rd century CE.[1] The situation of the auxiliary fort at Brusturi, better known in the scientific literature as the auxiliary fort from Romita,[2] presumably ancient *Certiae*,[3] in north-western Dacia Porolissensis, is similar to the rest of the province (fig. 1).[4]
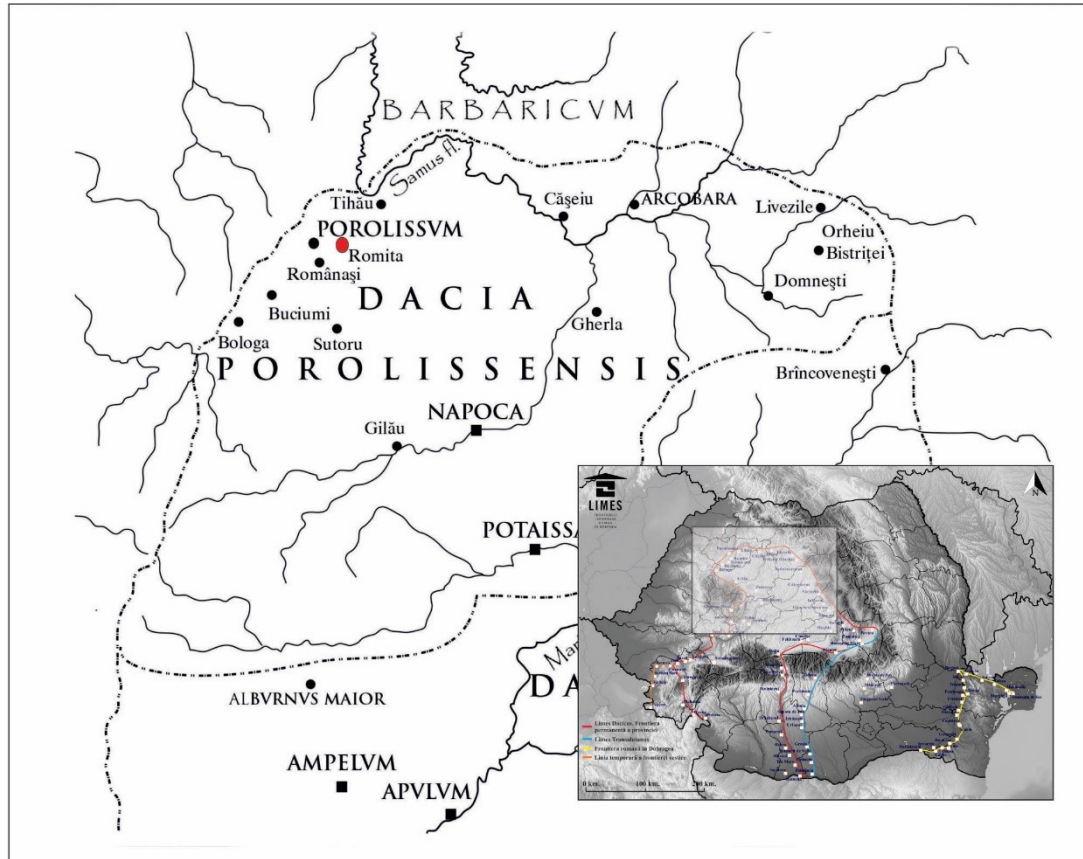

Fig. 1. Map of Dacia Porolissensis with the location in red of the auxiliary fort from Romita (author D. Dana, modified by D. Deac). In the medallion, the map of Dacia (© limesromania.ro).

[2] The fort is now situated in the village of Brusturi, Creaca commune, Sălaj county. However, the auxiliary fort has been known since the 19th century in the scientific literature as the fort from Romita (Romlott in Hungarian), a nearby village from Românași commune. In order not to confuse the reader, we will name it Romita.
[3] The ancient name is known from the Tabula Peutingeriana: https://tp-online.ku.de/trefferanzeige.php?id=1012 (last visit: 24.10.22); see further Deac 2013 with references.
[4] For the auxiliary fort, see, for instance: Matei and Bajusz 1997; Franzen et al. 2004-2005; Marcu 2009, 101-110; Opreanu and Lăzărescu 2016, 71-74, no. 3.

Cohors II Britannorum milliaria eq. c. R. p. f. was stationed in Germania inferior and arrived in Moesia superior before the Dacian wars. After the hostilities ceased, the cohort was moved to the newly established province of Dacia. More specifically, the cohort was garrisoned at *Samum* (Cășeiu) and possibly at *Arcobara* (Ilișua) before moving to Romita in the newly established Dacia Porolissensis during the reign of Hadrian.[5] So far, only tile and brick stamps provide direct evidence for the garrisoned units at Romita.[6] The other unit with whom this unit shared the fort was *cohors VI Thracum*, which had been garrisoned here since Trajan's reign.[7] A fragment of a funerary stela dated, on paleographic reasons alone, to the late 2nd or the 3rd century CE and reused in the fort's *porta praetoria* may mention active personnel or a veteran of the *cohors VI Thracum* at Romita, implicitly providing circumstantial evidence that the unit was still in the fort during this period.[8]

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[5] Maybe the fragmentary inscription from Romita, mentioned at the end of this paper (EDCS-09700726), is the only stone inscription from this unit in Dacia. Otherwise, its presence in Dacia is only attested through military diplomas (e.g. EDCS-12100013; EDCS-12300367) and several brick and tile stamps. Before the excavation of the *tetrapylon,* 96 stamps of the unit were inventoried in the Zalău County Museum of History and Art and eight in the National History Museum of Transylvania Cluj-Napoca; see FN 6. During the excavation of the *tetrapylon,* 20 stamps of the unit were found, among them two of the new type presented in this paper. For the current state of research on this unit, see: IDR-App-01, page 45; IDR-App-02, pages 95-96; Matei-Popescu and Țentea 2018, 40-41, no. XVI and Petolescu 2021, 193-194, no. 26 with references.

[6] 96 stamps of the unit are published from the collection of the Zalău County Museum of History and Art. Among them 43 stamps of the type: IDR-App-01-18, 00001-00043; 19 stamps of the type: IDR-App-01-19, 00001-00011; 21 stamps of the type: IDR-App-01-20, 00001-00021; 2 stamps of the type: IDR-App-01-21, 00001-00002; 1 stamp of the type: IDR-App-01-22; 3 stamps of the type: IDR-App-01-23, 00001-00003; 3 stamps of the type: IDR-App-01-24, 00001-00003; 4 stamps of the type: IDR-App-01-25, 00001-00004; 8 stamps of the type: IDR-App-01-26, 00001-00008.
8 stamps of the unit are published from the collection of the National History Museum of Transylvania Cluj-Napoca. Among them 1 stamp of the type: IDR-App-02-113; 2 stamps of the type: IDR-App-02-114, 00001-00002; 1 stamp of the type: IDR-App-02-115; 1 stamp of the type: IDR-App-02-116; 1 stamps of the type: IDR-App-02-117; 2 stamps of the type: IDR-App-02-118, 00001-00002.
Some of the stamps were also found in the neighboring Roman settlements of *Porolissum* and Românași. For an overview of the recent epigraphic evidence from the auxiliary fort from Romita, see Dana and Deac 2018; Dana et al. 2019; Deac and Dana 2019.

[7] Also connected to this fort based on the tile stamps found here. 41 stamps of the unit are published from the collection of the Zalău County Museum of History and Art. Among them 12 of the type: IDR-App-01-70, 00001-00012; 8 of the type: IDR-App-01-71, 00001-00008; 1 of the type: IDR-App-01-72; 15 of the type: IDR-App-01-73, 00001-00015; 1 of the type: IDR-App-01-74; 4 of the type: IDR-App-01-75, 00001-00004.
2 stamps of the unit are published from the collection of the National History Museum of Transylvania Cluj-Napoca. Among them 1 of the type: IDR-App-02-152; 1 of the type IDR-App-02-153.
Some of the stamped bricks at *Porolissum* were found in Severan contexts. F. Marcu points out that the unit might have been transferred to Britannia at some point, given the discovery of lead seals from Brough under Stainmor mentioning this unit (Marcu 2009, 113). See latest on this unit Petolescu 2021, 245-246, no. 60.

[8] EDCS-70100079: *D(is) [M(anibus)] / Ael(ius, -ia) B[- - -   vix(it)] / an(nis) XX[- - - Ael(ius)] / T(h)eimeș [- - -] /⁵ tata C(?)[- - -] / vix(it) a[n(nis) - - - / Ael(ius)?] / Bas[sus(?) ... coh(ortis) VI? Th]/ra[cum(?) - - -] / b(ene) [m(erentibus) p(osuit)?].* See the discussion in Piso et al. 2015, 224-225.
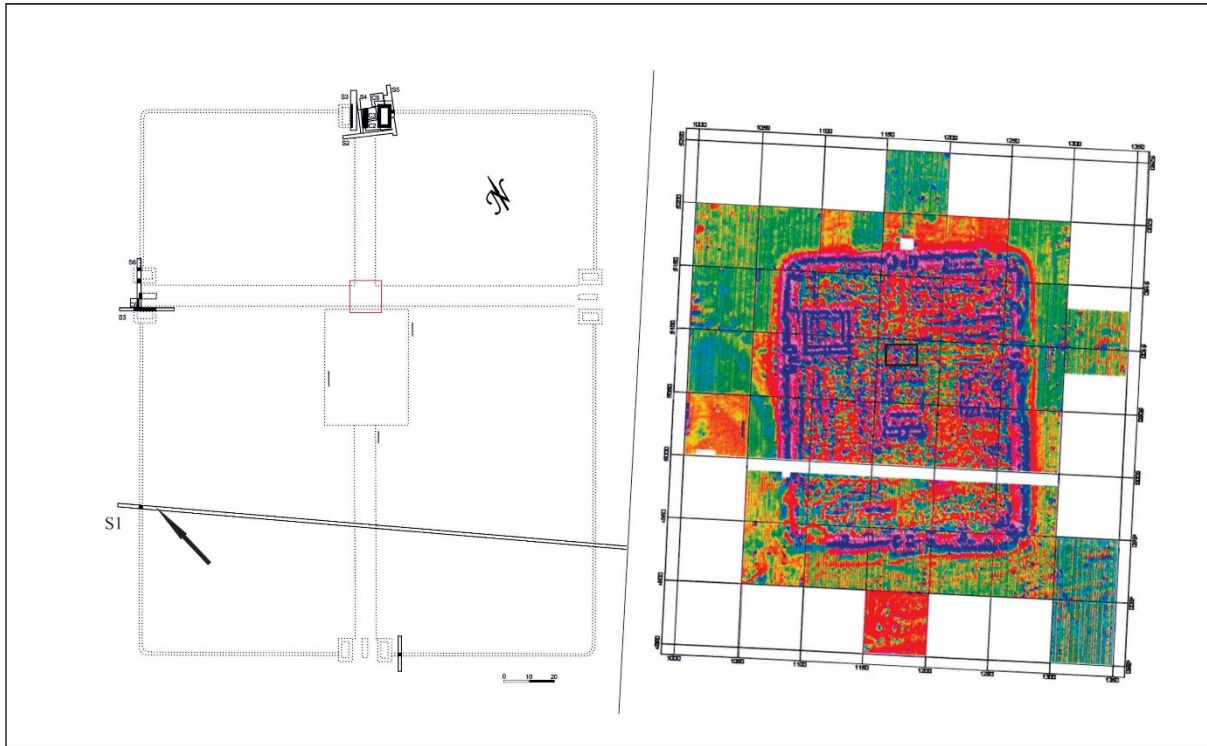
Fig. 2. Left: the plan of the auxiliary fort with the red lines marking the location of the archaeological investigations (© authors). Right: geophysical measurements of the fort with the black lines marking the location of the *tetrapylon* (after Franzen et al. 2004-2005, 176, fig. 1).

Recent archaeological investigations conducted in the fort since 2018, at the crossroads of the *via principalis* and *via praetoria* – where geophysical measurements suggested the presence of a *tetrapylon* – have yielded some important preliminary results (fig. 2).[9] For example, the collapsed roof of the *tetrapylon* was excavated, from where 33 roof tiles with the stamps of the two units and graffiti with *cohors II Britannorum milliaria*, as well as other *graffiti*, were recovered.

Among the stamped roof tiles are two of a new type, bearing the Imperial epithet *Severiana*, abbreviated through the letters S and E. The stamp has a cartouche in the form of a *tabula ansata*, 8 cm wide and 2 cm high, with letters 1.1 cm high.[10] Housed by the Zalău County Museum of History and Art, Zalău (fig. 3), site inv. T 24/2019 (fig. 1). The text goes as follows:

coh(ortis) II Br(itannorum) Se(verianae)

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[9] The archaeological excavations are directed by George Cupcea in a joint project of the National History Museum of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Zalău County Museum of History and Art, Zalău, Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca (represented by Dan Deac) and the University of Bayreuth (represented by Markus Zimmermann). So far, short reports have been published by Cupcea et al. 2018; Cupcea et al. 2019; Cupcea et al. 2021. A more detailed study of the archaeological investigations and the finds will be published soon.

[10] One of the stamps is just partially preserved (4 x 2 cm), namely, its right side; the unit's numeral is missing, site inv. T 24/2019. The two roof tiles were found in trenches S3A and S3B in August 2019.

Fig. 3. Tile stamp of the *cohors II Britannorum milliaria* bearing the imperial epithet *Severiana* (photo and drawing Dan Deac).

Before the excavations started in 2018, nine tiles with a cartouche type with the letter S inscribed after the abbreviated name of the unit were already known. This was interpreted, with a certain degree of caution, as the abbreviation of the imperial epithet *Severiana*.[11] Seven roof tiles with this stamp have been identified in the roof of the *tetrapylon* as well, one being part of the collapsed roof of the northern portico of the *principia*. The presence of the imperial epithet *Severiana*, now clearly identified through the new tile stamps, demonstrate that the roof of the *tetrapylon* was either constructed anew or reconstructed sometime during the reign of Alexander Severus. After the Severan dynasty, we are aware of a dedication on an altar or statue base made to Jupiter Dolichenus and the health of the emperor Gordian III and his wife Sabina Tranquilina by a certain Scribonius? Flavinus?, who held the position of a *tribunus*,[12] perhaps of the *cohors II Britannorum*.[13] Thus, one can imply that by the middle of the 3rd century, the unit mentioned above was still camped at Romita. After this, nothing is

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[11] IDR-App-01-26, 00001-00008; IDR-App-02-118, found in the collapsed roof of the bathhouse from the *vicus*, the porta praetoria of the fort at Romita, and the *porta decumana* of the Pomet hill auxiliary fort at *Porolissum*. There are also 4 stamps of this unit bearing the imperial epithet *Antoniniana* (IDR-App-01-25, 00001-00004). Stamps of military units bearing Imperial epithets in the 3rd century CE are extremely rare in Dacia.

known about this unit, but it is generally assumed that it remained here until the Roman withdrawal.[14]

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[12] EDCS-09700726: *I(ovi) o(ptimo) m(aximo) D(olicheno) / pro s(alute) d(omini) n(ostri) / M(arci) Ant(onii) Gor/diani p(ii) f(elicis) Aug(usti) / et Saḅ(iniae) Tran{t}/quilinạe Aug(ustae) / Scṛ[ib(onius)? Fla?]vinus / ṭṛiḅ(unus) c̣[oh(ortis) cu]ṃ suis.* See the discussion in Piso and Deac 2019, 253-256. The inscription is now used as a base for the altar at the wooden church in the village of Romita.

[13] Piso and Deac 2019, 255.

[14] For the last decades of Roman rule in Dacia the bibliography is abundant, and it is not our scope to analyze this matter here; see for example the discussion in Piso 2018, although one has to take his conclusions with caution. Recent suggestions imply that Dacia was lost as early as 260 CE, e.g. Öztürk and Dana 2021, 39-40.

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