

The Many Faces of War in the Ancient World

Edited by

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

A NEW MILITARY INSCRIPTION FROM NUMIDIA, *MOESIACI MILITES AT LAMBAESIS,* AND SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE PHRASE *DESIDERATVS IN ACIE*

RICCARDO BERTOLAZZI

There are many interesting photos concerning inscriptions from the ancient Roman city of *Lambaesis* stored in the photographic archive of *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* in Berlin. This city is identified not far from the modern town of Lambèse-Tazolut, in the Algerian region of Aurès, 11 km southeast of Batna and 27 km west of Timgad. This documentation was collected during an epigraphic survey undertaken by Hans-Georg Kolbe in Algeria and Tunisia in the spring of 1966. One of these pictures reproduces a military epitaph kept in the lapidary of the city (Fig. 1). As far as I know, this text is still unpublished.¹

The monument is a block of local marble or limestone lacking the superior part. However, a small portion of the upper frame is still visible.

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Manfred G. Schmidt, *Arbeitsstellenleiter* of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* at the *Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften*, for the permission to study the materials kept in the archive. I would like to extend my thanks to Dr. Johannes Heinrichs, Dr. John Yardley and Dr. Lawrence Tritle for their useful comments. All errors and omissions are my own responsibility. An approximate reading of this text has already been presented on the Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby (EDCS-43600026).

The text, which is surrounded by a simple frame, seems to have been carved in a very clumsy and hasty way. The letters, in fact, are extremely irregular and the last lines tend to become smaller and closer to one another. This is probably due to a stonecutter's poor evaluation of the space for engraving, since the last line has been carved on the lower frame. Finally, it is interesting to note that four *hederae distinguentes* have been used to separate the words in ll. 5, 7, 11 and 13.

I would suggest the following reading:

*Hoc usque,
Aurelius
Marcinus,
miles prov(inciae)
5 Mossie (!) Su-
perioris
acie dessi-
deratus (!), vi-
xit an(n)o(s) XXXV,
10 milit(avit) an(n)o(s) XIII.
Aur(elius) Victor, Fla(vius)
Severianus bene
mer(enti) posuere.*

Critical notes: l. 3: ligature between the N and the V; l. 13: ligature between the V and the E.

The limit is until here. Aurelius Marcinus, soldier from the province of Moesia Superior who died (the meaning of the term will be shown in what follows) in battle. He lived for thirty five years, he served for fourteen years. Aurelius Victor and Flavius Severianus set up [this monument] for him, well deserving.

The inscription commemorates *Aurelius Marcinus*, a soldier from Upper Moesia who died in battle after fourteen years of service,² and was set up

² About the expression *desideratus in acie* see *infra*.

by two friends, relatives or, more likely, comrades in arms, *Flavius Severianus* and *Aurelius Victor*.

To my knowledge, the formula *hoc usque* is attested at the beginning of a funerary text only in this inscription. As stated above, the survival of a small portion of the upper frame indicates that this is probably the first line, although some other words could have been carved on the frame itself. However, a funerary inscription from *Faventia* bears the expression *usque hoc*, which appears in the last line and apparently separated from the rest of the text.³ Furthermore, this formula is documented by two other inscriptions. The first one is the indication of a property line, *hoc usque Aveorum*,⁴ and the second is a graffito from Pompeii, whose text is *a porta Salis usque hoc*.⁵ From these attestations it is possible to assume that the formula *hoc usque* or *usque hoc* was used in funerary inscriptions as well as in other kinds of texts with the purpose of indicating the limit of a particular measure of land. With regard to the text here examined, the words *hoc usque* could have had, therefore, the function of delimiting a funerary area. Moreover, the letters seem to have been carved in a different way in comparison with those of the other lines, since the incision is narrower and shallower. For this reason, it is possible that this block bore originally only the inscription *hoc usque* and had the function of delimiting a certain space somewhere else. It could have been later reused for the funerary inscription of *Aurelius Marcinus*, either with the purpose of delineating the burial of him alone, or defining the area where he was buried together with other comrades, whose names were reported by other inscriptions similar to this.

³ CIL XI 655: *D(is) M(anibus) / Valeriae Ge(mellinae, im/maturae / aeta/tis / puellae. / Vix(it) ann(is) X, m(ensibus) II, / dieb(us) VII. / Marrucia Ve(neranda / ma/ter filiae pi/entissimae / usque hoc*. (“To the Spirit-Gods of Valeria Gemellina, girl of immature age. She lived for ten years, two months, seven days. The mother Marrucia Veneranda to the very faithful daughter. [The limit] is until here.”)

⁴ ILGN 344 = ILN V 2, 452.

⁵ AE 1937, 130.

There are no other attestations of the name *Aurelius Marcinus*,⁶ while *Aurelius Victor* is very common and documented by four other inscriptions from *Lambaesis*.⁷ However, an identification of the *Aurelius Victor* mentioned by the inscription of *Marcinus* as one of these soldiers remains hypothetical. No other attestations of the name *Flavius Severianus* are so far known in *Lambaesis*. At any rate, both *Aurelius Victor* and *Flavius Severianus* are too common to be able to look for comparisons in any other place of the Empire. In consequence, it is impossible to ascertain with certainty to which unit *Aurelius Marcinus* belonged.

Nevertheless, other soldiers from Moesia are documented in the city. With the exception of one centurion of the legion III Augusta, *P. Aelius Romanus*,⁸ whose epitaph can be dated to the second half of the 2nd century AD,⁹ the onomastic of the other soldiers, as in the case of *Aurelius Marcinus*, is characterized by the name *Aurelius* and by the lack of *praenomina*. For this reason, their inscriptions can be easily dated to the third century AD after the Antonine Constitution (212), which caused the diffusion of the name *Aurelius* in all the provinces of the empire. The texts are as follows:

- A) CIL VIII 3050 = 18164: *D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum). / Aur(elio) Celso, eq(uiti) ex / sin(gularibus) pro(vinciae) M(o)es(iae) Sup(erioris) in/terf(ecto). Aur(elii) Estea / et Pris(cus) et Long(inus) et Cl(audius) / Faustin(us) po(suerunt) frat(ri) merito. / V(ixit) ann(os) XXXVI.* ("Sacred to the gods of the lower world. For Aurelius Celsus, cavalryman from the *singulares* of the province of Moesia Superior, who has been killed. The Aurelii Estea, Priscus, Longinus, Claudius

⁶ *Marcinus* shows a certain diffusion in the western provinces: cf. OPEL III 56; only one attestation from North Africa: AE 1975, 922.

⁷ The first two certainly belong to other persons, since they attest a soldier of the legion III Augusta buried by his wife (CIL VIII 3059) and an unknown individual buried by his father *Victor* (CIL VIII 3458). The third attestation mentions a soldier registered with an *ordo signiferorum* (CIL VIII 2561 = 18073). The fourth *Aurelius Victor*, a *duplicarius* of the III Augusta, appears in a list of soldiers who set up a dedication *pro salute* of Elagabalus, Julia Maesa and Julia Soaemias (CIL VIII 2564 = 18052 = ILS 470 = AE 1947, 201 = AE 1978, 889).

⁸ CIL VIII 2786 = ILS 2659.

⁹ Malone 2006: 107-8

Faustinus justly set up [this monument] to their brother [= comrade]. He lived for thirty-six years.”)

- B) CIL VIII 18290: *D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum). / Aurelius / Nigrinus, / miles Moes(iae), / provinci(a)e M/emesi (!) Superio/ris, stupendio/rum (!) V. Vix/it annis / XX. Aurelius / Ursinus / fratri s/uo bene / merenti / posuit.* (“Sacred to the gods of the lower world. Aurelius Mercurius, soldier from Moesia, from the province of Moesia Superior, who served for five years. He lived for twenty years. Aurelius Ursinus set up [this monument] for his well deserving brother [= comrade].”)
- C) Besnier 1898, 465 n. 28 (Fig. 2): *D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum). / Aurelius Mercurius miles prov/ince (!) Mesis (!) / Superioris, / stipedioru(m) (!) V, / vixit anni[s] / XXX. Aurel(ius) / Mucia(nus) frat/ri suo bene / mer(enti) p(o)s(uit).* (“Sacred to the gods of the lower world. Aurelius Mercurius, soldier from the province of Moesia Superior who served for five years. He lived for thirty years. Aurelius Mucianus set up [this monument] for his well deserving brother [= comrade].”)

Moreover, another soldier from Upper Moesia, a *decurio V Hispanorum desideratus in acie* like *Marcinus*, is attested in *Lambiridi* (ca. 20 km west from *Lambaesis*):

- D) CIL VIII 4416: *Aurelio / Marco, dec(urioni) / V Hisp(anorum) pro/vincia Mo/esiae Sup(erioris), desiderato / in acie. Aur(elius) Su/ruclio d(uplicarius) fr[a]/tri bene mere(enti).* (“For Aurelius Marcus, decurion of the fifth [cohort] of Hispanics from the province of Moesia Superior, who died in battle. The *duplicarius* Aurelius Seruclio set up [this monument] for his well deserving brother [= comrade].”)

As stated above, all the individuals mentioned by these inscriptions are characterized by the name *Aurelius*, which, as well as in the inscription of *Aurelius Marcinus*, appears both in its complete form and through the abbreviation *Aur(elius)*. It is therefore possible to date these texts with more precision, viz. to the middle of the third century AD, since normally the abbreviated form only prevails during the last quarter of this century.¹⁰ According to Yann Le Bohec, both *Nigrinus* (text B) and

¹⁰ Cf. Speidel 1979: 184.

Mercurius (text c) could have been dispatched to either the legion III Augusta or one of its auxiliary units after having served in Moesia Superior.¹¹ Indeed, onomastic peculiarities and formulas (the phrase *desideratus in acie* is not documented elsewhere in North Africa) in both the texts A-D and in the inscription of *Aurelius Marcinus* indicate that these soldiers probably came to North Africa during the same period and perhaps while serving in the same unit. Particularly interesting, in this respect, is the mention of the cohorts *V Hispanorum* from Moesia Superior by text D. This is the only attestation of this unit in North Africa,¹² and in consequence its presence could be motivated by extraordinary circumstances that required the dispatch of reinforcements from other areas of the empire.

The most important military events between the reign of Caracalla and the advent of the Tetrarchy are a series of rebellions among the Berber populations that occurred around the middle of the third century AD.¹³ In this period the legion III Augusta was reconstituted by Valerian after the disbanding ordered by Gordian III in 238.¹⁴ The first rebellion started in 254 but was easily crushed. Four years later, in 258, an uprising of the *Bavares* (who are for the first time mentioned by the sources) caused more serious troubles, but they were soon after repressed by the equestrian governor *M. Cornelius Octavianus*, who was appointed *dux per Africam, Numidiam Mauretaniumque*.¹⁵ The last rebellion occurred soon after, in 259, and was led once again by the *Bavares*, who invaded the province of Numidia after forming a coalition of tribes under the guidance of a tribal leader called *Faraxen*. The revolt was suppressed by the senatorial legate *C. Macrinus Decianus* with the help of a

¹¹ Le Bohec 1989: 279.

¹² Spaul 2000: 135.

¹³ On this topic cf. Le Bohec 1989: 466-73; Kuhoff 1998: 1504; and Id. 2004: 1658 with previous bibliography.

¹⁴ Cf. Le Bohec: 451-66.

¹⁵ CIL VIII 21000 = AE 1900, 125 = AE 1954, 136.

commander of equestrian rank, *Q. Gargilius Martialis*, who in 260 captured and killed *Faraxen*.¹⁶ This uprising certainly had a considerable importance, as demonstrated by the invasion of Numidia at various times and by the death of *Gargilius Martialis* himself in an ambush. It is therefore highly probable that during the years 254-260 a certain number of soldiers from European provinces were posted to North Africa in order to reinforce the units that were already operating in this area. Troop transfers from the Danube are after all not a novelty for the African provinces. An inscription from *Caesarea* (Mauritania Caesarensis) documents the transfer of one thousand *Bessi iuniores* (an expression used to denote people from Thrace, where the population of *Bessi* was from) in the province of Mauretania Tingitana under the command of *Sex. Iulius Iulianus*, tribune of the *numerus Syrorum Malvensium*.¹⁷ According to Michael Speidel, this text could be dated to the Severan age, and it would attest to the transfer of Thracian recruits destined to enforce the auxiliary units stationed in Mauretania Tingitana.¹⁸ In the light of this, the *Moesaci* attested in *Lambaesis* could have come to strengthen the *V Hispanorum* mentioned by text D, although their belonging to other units, as for example the reconstituted III Augusta, is not impossible.¹⁹ During the 250s several pitched battles surely took place between Numidia and the Mauritanian provinces, thus explaining the death *in acie* of some of these soldiers. The new inscription of *Aurelius Marcinus* is thus useful evidence for reconstructing the events

¹⁶ These events are reported by the honorary inscriptions set up in honor of *Macrinus Decianus* (CIL VIII 2615 = ILS 1194 = AE 1987, 1059) and *Gargilius Martialis* (CIL VIII 9047 = 20736 = ILS 2767).

¹⁷ CIL VIII 9381 = 20945 = ILS 2763 = AE 1977, 864. On the contents of this inscription cf. the detailed analysis in Speidel 1977.

¹⁸ Speidel 1977: 168. Wesch-Klein 1998: 73; Spaul 2000: 339 and Rocco 2014: 435 also accept this interpretation.

¹⁹ The practice of sending recruits in a body to a distant province for assignment and enlistment in different units appears to be all but exceptional. Cf. the discussion in Gilliam 1966: 94 and Speidel 1977: 169.

that affected North Africa during the central years of the third century's crisis.

With regard to the phrase *desideratus in acie*, in my opinion some clarifications are necessary. This expression particularly recurs on military funerary inscriptions from the 3rd century.²⁰ It can be considered a variation of *in bello desideratus*, which is typical of the same period.²¹ Both these phrases are normally used in epitaphs of soldiers who served in the Danubian units (both legions and auxiliaries), but they also appear on tombs of people from the Danubian provinces, as in the case of the *Moesiaci* stationed at *Lambaesis*. The participle *desideratus* has been traditionally interpreted by scholars as “missing in action.”²² However, an examination of the use of this expression in both epigraphic and literary sources does not seem to confirm this interpretation. An inscription from Noricum that records a legionary *in bello Ducco* (i.e. *Dacico*) *desideratus* reports also the *theta nigrum* (Θ), which appears to have been carved together with rest of the text:²³

*D(is) M(anibus). / Veponius / Avitus / viv(us) fec(it) sibi / et Diacoxi(a)e /
Meitim(a)e / con(iugi) karissim(a)e / et Vep(onio) Quart[ino], / mil(iti)
leg(ionis) [II] Ital(icae) P(iae) F(idelis), / Θ ann(or)um XXXV,
stip(endiorum) IIII, bel[lo] / Ducco (!) desider(ato) IEILIRA[---] / -----*

To the gods of the lower world. Veponius Avitus, who set up [this monument] when he was alive for himself and for the most beloved wife Diacoxia Meitima and for Veponius Quartinus, soldier of the legion 2nd Italica, Faithful, Loyal, who died at the age of thirty-five with four years of service. He died during the war in Dacia...

It cannot have therefore been added later in order to register the death of a soldier who had been originally reported missing. Moreover, Caesar

²⁰ CIL V 6998, 7366 = ILS 2406; CIL VIII 4416; CIL XI 705.

²¹ CIL III 3553, 4310 (= 10969 = AE 1962, 221 = 1991, 305), 4835, 4857 (= ILLPRON 528), 11700, 15159; CIL XIII 7323 (= ILS 9148), 8070. Cf. Reuter 2005: 258.

²² Reuter 2005: 258; Carroll 2009: 829-30. The inscriptions of the *desiderati* have also been collected by S. Perea Yébenes 2009 (tab. 2), but the author does not take a stand on this topic.

²³ CIL III 4857 = ILLPRON 528.

normally uses *desiderati* to signify the fallen soldiers. Reporting the casualties after the Battle of Gergovia, for example, he states that *eo die milites sunt paulo minus septingenti desiderati*.²⁴ The use of the verb *desidero* is also interesting. After the fighting near *Dyrrachium* he writes that:

*Duobus his unius diei proeliis Caesar desideravit milites DCCCCLX et notos equites Romanos Tuticanum Gallum, senatoris filium, C. Fleginatem Placentia, A. Granium Puteolis, M. Sacrativirum Capua, tribunos militum et centuriones XXXII.*²⁵

In these two actions, Caesar lost nine hundred and sixty private men, thirty officers, and several knights of note - Tuticanus Gallus, son of a senator; C. Fleginas, of Placentia; A. Granus, of Puteoli; and M. Sacrativir, of Capua—and thirty-two military tribunes and centurions.

The same use of this verb is also attested during the early and the late Empire, from the first to the fourth century AD. According to Frontinus, in fact, after the Battle of Asculum against Pyrrhus, *apud Romanos V milia desiderata sunt*.²⁶ Further, Apuleius uses *desideratis* to signify some bandits killed during a robbery.²⁷ Julius Valerius reports that after the battle of Gaugamela Alexander the Great gave the order to heal those who had been wounded (*vulnerati*) and to honor those who had been killed in battle (*desiderati bello*) with burials reflecting their merits.²⁸ Finally, according to the anonymous *Itinerarium Alexandri*, after the battle of Issus he ordered that every fallen man (*quisque desideratus*) had to be buried.²⁹

Accordingly, on military inscriptions *desideratus* should be interpreted as “killed” and not “missing.” Although the reasons for its

²⁴ Caes. *Gall.* 7.51.4.

²⁵ Caes. *Civ.* 3.71.1.

²⁶ Frontin. *Strat.* 2.3.21.

²⁷ Apul. *Met.* 4.21.

²⁸ Iul. Val. 2.29.

²⁹ *Itin Alex.* 15.

late appearance on inscriptions remain unclear, its meaning is actually equivalent to other common expressions that were popular during both the late republic and the early empire, such as *obitus*, *defunctus* or *occisus*.³⁰ Moreover, since the word *acies* can also generically refer to ‘fighting,’³¹ the phrase *desideratus in acie* is to be read as “fallen in battle.” Consequently, the inscription of *Aurelius Marcinus* cannot be considered a cenotaph, since the dead body of the soldier or his ashes could have been carried to *Lambaesis* and buried. Unfortunately, the lack of more precise information does not allow us to establish with certainty in which circumstances he died.

³⁰ *Occisus* in particular seems to be the oldest. It appears through the archaic form *occeisus* on CIL I² 792 = CIL X 3886 = ILS 2225 = ILLRP 497.

³¹ TLL I 1 c. 409 ll. 41-81.



Figure 1



Figure 2

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