

THE IMPORTANCE OF SALT EXPLOITATION IN ROMAN DACIA. THE CASE OF OCNA MUREȘ (*SALINAE*)

Abstract: The current paper presents a part of the epigraphic file of Ocna Mureș (the ancient *Salinae*), taking into account the brick stamps containing the name of the legio XIII Gemina and the names of *magistri figlinae*. Putting together the epigraphic evidences, the author shows the importance of the salt exploitation at Ocna Mureș for the Roman army.

Keywords: *Roman Dacia, Salinae, salt exploitation, Roman army*

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Rather recently I published a study on the personnel of the saltmines from Roman Dacia, in which I showed that the salt functionaries under lessees (*conductores*) were extremely engaged in this economic sector, directly operating on the field.¹

The exploitation of salt in this province has enjoyed attention particularly in the wider context of analysing how its underground riches were exploited. V. Wollman compiled the list of the main salt exploitation centres of Dacia: Ocna Mureș, *Potaissa*, Ocna Sibiului, Cojocna Sic, Pata, Ocna Dejului, Domnești, Ocnele Mari.² In a study concerning the administration of the Dacian saltworks, D. Benea noted that the locations of salt exploitation are linked to the presence of the Roman army in the area, meant to safeguard the resources.³ She exemplifies with the *castra* from Sânpaul (for the halite deposits from Mărtiniș), Sărățeni (for Sovata), Inlăceni (for Praid), Ilișua (for Domnești), Gherla (for Ocna Dejului), and *Potaissa* (for Turda).⁴ These military camps have been documented both archaeologically and epigraphically.⁵

Now, what can be said about Ocna Mureș? Identified with the ancient settlement *Salinae*, the archaeological excavations in this site have revealed the traces of a *castrum*. V. Wollmann states that the remains of a Roman surface exploitation and of buildings used for this purpose between Ocna Mureș and Șpălnaca were still visible in the 19th century.⁶ On the other bank of the Mureș is the camp from Războieni–*Cetate*, which garrisoned the *ala I Batavorum*, documented and investigated archaeologically.⁷ In any case, Ocna Mureș is located at ca. 55 km to the north-west of Alba Iulia, the headquarters

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¹ MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2016, 51–58.

² WOLLMANN 1996, 240–244.

³ BENEA 2007, 42–43.

⁴ BENEA 2007, 42.

⁵ See more recently MATEI-POPESCU/ȚENȚEA 2016, 10–11 (Sărățeni, Inlăceni), 13 (Sânpaul).

⁶ WOLLMANN 1996, 241. see also OLTEAN 2007, 182.

⁷ Selective bibliography: POPOVICI/VARGA 2010; VARGA 2012, 806–820; BOUNEGRU/VARGA 2017, 47–51.

of the *legio XIII Gemina* (see map).

Foremost represented by the stamped bricks of the aforementioned legion, the epigraphic assemblage from Ocna Mureş also contains other interesting inscriptions, which we will discuss below. The bricks bearing the stamp of the legion are accompanied by anthroponyms of *cives Romani*, which are probably *magistri figlinae* (or *figlinarum*) — soldiers tasked with overseeing the manufacturing workshops. This is indicated by a stamp from *Apulum* in which the name of Aurelius Godes (also mentioned at Ocna Mureş) is accompanied by the group of letters 'M F' (interpreted by C. Băluţă as *manu fecit*, but actually designating responsibility — *magister figlinae* or *figlinarum*)⁸. B. Lörincz holds that these *magistri figlinarum* were regular soldiers, perhaps *immunes*⁹, a view also shared by Y. le Bohec. The few stone inscriptions with direct or indirect references—from Germania Inferior (Iulius Victor — *magister figlinarum*,¹⁰ two *immunes figlinarum*¹¹), Germania Superior (one *custos castelli figlinarum*)¹², and Dacia (*Drobeta* — one in *figlinis magister super milites LX*)—confirm that these *magistri* were soldiers of the legion tasked with superintending the production of bricks on the property (properties) in which the legion's workshops were found.

Besides Aurelius Godes, to whom this responsibility can be assigned, the other individuals lack such functions assigned to their names, but it follows that they were likewise soldiers of the legion (being Roman citizens) with similar attributions.

It must be stated from the onset that the presence of these stamped bricks at Ocna Mureş does not necessarily imply the presence of the legion in that place. But considering the number of such materials, the proximity to *Apulum*, and the economic and strategic importance of the exploitation from *Salinae*, the discussion is more complex and will be detailed after enumerating the more important epigraphic mentions from this settlement.

Thus, Ocna Mureş yielded two bricks of the *legio XIII Gemina* bearing the name of Lucretius Aquila¹³. Besides *Apulum*,¹⁴ tiles bearing the name of the same soldier are furthermore found at *Germisara*,¹⁵ *Micia*,¹⁶ *Sebeş*,¹⁷ *Sighişoara*,¹⁸ *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*¹⁹, and *Ampelum*.²⁰ C. Băluţă places these *tegulae*, on the basis of an archaeological context (presented superficially), not earlier than the rule of Marcus Aurelius²¹, but it's not excluded that they date from much later, starting with Caracalla²².

Flavius Heliodorus is another name mentioned on

the stamped *tegulae* from Ocna Mureş.²³ The same name is found on bricks of the *legio XIII Gemina* from *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*,²⁴ *Micia*²⁵ and, surely, *Apulum*.²⁶ The archaeological contexts in which the stamps were found are not relevant, so we can date these bricks to the last quarter of the 2nd century and the first half of the 3rd century.

Iulius Deiotarus²⁷ and Ulpius Fronto²⁸ are two names of *magistri figlinarum* attested at Ocna Mureş. Both names are recorded elsewhere in Dacia. Besides *Apulum*²⁹, Iulius Deiotarus is also attested at *Micia*.³⁰ Ulpius Fronto is attested only at *Apulum*.³¹ Like in the previous cases, the *tegulae* date not earlier than the last quarter of the 2nd century.

Another soldier mentioned on the stamped bricks from Ocna Mureş is Aurelius Dionisius³², a name also found at *Apulum*.³³ An Aurelius Dionisius consecrates an altar at *Micia* to the Genius Turmazgadas³⁴, a Syrian god³⁵. With the *cohors II Flavia Commagenorum* having stationed at *Micia*, we can presume that the Aurelius Dionisius from here was a *curator* in this military unit. This makes it hard to identify this *curator cohortis* with the soldier from the stamps of *Apulum*. In any case, the gentilicium Aurelius argues for a dating of these stamps starting with Caracalla.

Another name encountered on the bricks from *Salinae* is that of Aurelius Callistratus.³⁶ Besides *Apulum*,³⁷ tiles mentioning his name have also been found at *Micia* and its environs³⁸. His onomastics point to a dating starting with the rule of Caracalla.

I also propose the same dating for the stamps bearing the name of soldier Aurelius Caius³⁹ attested, besides *Apulum*⁴⁰, at *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*⁴¹ and also *Sighişoara*.⁴²

A frequent name encountered on the *tegulae* is that of Aurelius Enthimus. At Ocna Mureş it is found once⁴³. Besides *Apulum* and its environs⁴⁴, his name is also attested on bricks at Şard,⁴⁵ *Sighişoara*,⁴⁶ *Brucla*,⁴⁷ *Cenad*⁴⁸, and *Sănnicolau Mare*.⁴⁹ Al. Flutur proposed in the case of the discoveries from *Cenad* and *Sănnicolau Mare* that the bricks

⁸ IDR III/6, 163. see BENEÀ 2005, 143-150; BENEÀ 2010, 207.

⁹ LÖRINCZ 1991, 192-194; LE BOHEC 1992, 51-52.

¹⁰ CIL XIII 8739.

¹¹ AE 1930, 33.

¹² KURZMANN 2005, 412.

¹³ IDR III/6, 225, 228.

¹⁴ AE 1965, 39-14; 1995, 1293s; IDR III/6, 226-227, 229; OTA/LASCU 2011, 208-209 etc.

¹⁵ IDR III/3, 226-4B.

¹⁶ IDR III/3, 195-18A-B.

¹⁷ AE 1971, 375E.

¹⁸ CIL III 8065-31I.

¹⁹ IDR III/2, 541-7.

²⁰ AE 1911, 37.

²¹ IDR III/6, 226 *sqq.*, *sub numero*.

²² OTA, LASCU 2011, 209.

²³ IDR III/6, 183.

²⁴ IDR III/2, 541-6.

²⁵ CIL III 8065-25B.

²⁶ IDR III/6, 182-184; OTA/LASCU 2011, 208.

²⁷ CIL III 8065-29a.

²⁸ CIL III 8065-34a.

²⁹ CIL III 8065-29c; AE 1995, 1293m; IDR III/6, 202-205.

³⁰ AE 1975, 729m, CIL III 8065-29b, IDR III/3, 195-15a.

³¹ AE 1995, 1293v, IDR III/6, 249, 251-253, 254b, 456.

³² IDR III/6, 150a.

³³ IDR III/6, 150b.

³⁴ IDR III/3, 149.

³⁵ SANIE 1981, 99-103; NEMETI 2005, 235-238; NEMETI 2013, 140.

³⁶ CIL III 8065-13a.

³⁷ IDR III/6, 143-147.

³⁸ CIL III 1629-10a-c; 8065-13f.

³⁹ La Ocna Mureş; CIL III 8065-17b-c.

⁴⁰ IDR III/6, 140a-d.

⁴¹ IDR III/2, 235.

⁴² IDR III/4, 194.

⁴³ CIL III 8065-18b; OTA/LASCU 2011, 208.

⁴⁴ IDR III/6, 151a-c; III/4, 47-2.

⁴⁵ IDR III/4, 51-2.

⁴⁶ IDR III/4, 194-1.

⁴⁷ CIL III 8065-18d.

⁴⁸ IDR III/1, 277g.

⁴⁹ IDR III/1, 275b.

were carried there sometimes in the Middle Ages.⁵⁰ This is possible, but a Roman military presence should not be excluded. That no Roman fortifications have been found does not necessarily prove that soldiers of the *legio XIII Gemina* were not stationed there. In this case too, I incline towards a dating post-Caracalla.

Aurelius Menander is attested on the stamps of two bricks from *Salinae*⁵¹. Besides *Apulum* and its environs⁵², this name is attested at *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*,⁵³ Sebeș,⁵⁴ *Potaissa*⁵⁵ and *Micia*⁵⁶. I'm inclined to assign these bricks likewise to the 3rd century, in any case after 212.

Also from the same period date the stamped bricks bearing the name of Aurelius Mommo, numbering two at Ocna Mureș⁵⁷. The name of this *magister figlinae* is found, besides *Apulum*,⁵⁸ at *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*⁵⁹ and *Micia*.⁶⁰

Finally, Aurelius Godes, *magister figlinae* of *legio XIII Gemina*, is found in two instances at *Salinae*.⁶¹ His name is obviously attested at *Apulum* and the surrounding area,⁶² but also at *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*,⁶³ Păuca,⁶⁴ Cenad⁶⁵, and Sânnicolau Mare.⁶⁶ Like in the case of the other Aurelii *magistri figlinarum*, these bricks date from the period after 212.

The epigraphic assemblage from Ocna Mureș contains several other interesting texts. One is a votive inscription to Apollo by Atilius Celsianus, *decurio*.⁶⁷ The character is undoubtedly *decurio* in an auxiliary unit, very likely the *ala I Batavorum*, located nearby, at Războieni–Cetate (*Ad Vatabos*).

An extremely fragmentary funerary text mentions another *decurio*, most likely belonging to the same unit⁶⁸: Aurelius C[api?]to, *tesserarius* in *legio V Macedonica* is commemorated by his wife Aelia Candida. On account of the name of the character and the date of the legion's presence in Dacia, the inscription can definitely be dated after Caracalla, but it also shows that the soldiers of this legion had brief missions at *Salinae*.

Finally, we cannot conclude the review of the most important inscriptions from this settlement without mentioning the altar dedicated to the goddesses Diana and Terra Mater by a character (or characters) whose name(s) has not been preserved.⁶⁹ Terra Mater is a divinity worshiped in the mining areas of the Balkan-Danubian provinces.⁷⁰ In Moesia Superior, in the Rudnik mining area, the temple of the goddess, ruined by old age, is rebuilt under the rule

of Septimius Severus.⁷¹ In Dalmatia, in the Ljubija mining district, Terra Mater is found on six dedications, on part of functionaries from the iron exploitation administration.⁷² In Dacia, three inscriptions come from the *Alburnus Maior* area, the main centre of gold mining. They were produced by the workers of the gold mines.⁷³ Besides the inscription from *Salinae*, Terra Mater is also mentioned in two centres of salt exploitation, specifically at *Potaissa* (Roman citizens from the *vicus* through the intercession of *magistri*)⁷⁴ and Domnești (by Atticus, *actor* of Publius Aelius Marius, *conductor pascui et salinarum*).⁷⁵ The text from *Salinae*, albeit fragmentary, is linked to the exploitation of salt in this place.

The epigraphic dossier from Ocna Mureș, even if it has not been presented exhaustively, is particularly relevant for underlying the importance of salt exploitation in the area. The ancient name of the settlement, corroborated by the altar dedicated to the goddess Terra Mater, discussed above, confirm the exploitation of this resource in the present-day Ocna Mureș. The stamped bricks likewise have special significance. It could be argued that their presence does not necessarily imply the presence of legionnaires. But we notice that at *Salinae* the most frequent mentions are of *magistri figlinarum* of *legio XIII Gemina*, whose activity span most probably from the end of the 2nd century to the middle of the 3rd century. The stamped bricks bear the name of no less than eleven *magistri figlinarum*: Lucretius Aquila, Flavius Heliodorus, Iulius Deiotarus, Ulpianus Fronto, Aurelius Dionisius, Aurelius Callistratus, Aurelius Caius, Aurelius Enthimus, Aurelius Menander, Aurelius Mommo, Aurelius Godes. Many of these (foremost the Aurelii) bear Greek (Heliodorus, Dionisius, Callistratus, Enthimus, Menander) or Eastern (Godes) *cognomina*. The proximity to *Apulum* and the importance of the resource for the army, as well as for the civilian populace, explains the large number of individuals mentioned on the stamped bricks. Even if a castrum of a military unit has not been discovered, the presence of soldiers in mission cannot be denied. In point of fact, the inscription Atilius Celsianus or the epitaph of Aurelius C[api?]to clearly shows that the soldiers of the *alae I Batavorum* and of the *legio V Macedonica* were present at *Salinae*. Even though the castrum from Războieni–Cetate was closer to *Salinae* than *Apulum*, the number of soldiers from the legion and the power of the legion account for the control of this territory by the *legio XIII Gemina*. In point of fact, a stamped brick with the name of the legion was even found in the camp from Războieni–Cetate⁷⁶.

To conclude, several soldiers were present at *Salinae*, most from *legio XIII Gemina*, tasked with ensuring the protection of the salt exploitation in the region. Very probably, their number varied throughout time and according to the efficiency of exploitation, though a higher concentration of troops occurred at the end of the 2nd century and probably

⁵⁰ FLUTUR 2010, 63–67.

⁵¹ IDR III/6, 164a, 167.

⁵² IDR III/6, 165b, 165, 166; AE 1998, 1075d; IDR III/4, 47–5.

⁵³ CIL III 1629–17a, 8065–20c–d.

⁵⁴ AE 1971, 375e.

⁵⁵ CIL III 1629–17b, 8065–22e.

⁵⁶ AE 1975, 729j.

⁵⁷ CIL III 8065–14 (very probably Mommo); IDR III/6, 170.

⁵⁸ IDR III/6, 168–169.

⁵⁹ CIL III 1629–11e, 8065–23e.

⁶⁰ IDR III/3, 195–11.

⁶¹ CIL III 8065–20a; IDR III/6, 155.

⁶² IDR III/6, 156–163; IDR III/4, 42, 47–4, 51–3.

⁶³ IDR III/2, 541–2.

⁶⁴ IDR III/4, 45.

⁶⁵ CIL III 8065–20e.

⁶⁶ IDR III/1, 275e.

⁶⁷ IDR III/4, 72.

⁶⁸ IDR III/4, 68.

⁶⁹ IDR III/4, 67.

⁷⁰ See also DUŠANIĆ 1999, 129; NEMETI/NEMETI 2010, 119–120.

⁷¹ ILJug 71. See also HORSTER 2001, 411.

⁷² ILJug 158–159, 161, 778–781. S. also MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2006, 153–154, 162–163.

⁷³ ILD 378, 397, 409.

⁷⁴ ILD 500.

⁷⁵ ILD 804. I have adopted the lecture of DANA/ZĂGREANU 2013, 31, more plausible than that of BENEĂ 2007, 43 (see also MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2016, 54, 57).

⁷⁶ IDR III/4, 77.

under the Severans.

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