IN ACIE MILES PROBATUR...
THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE
SOLDIERS FROM DACIA
TO THE DEFENCE OF ITALIA
DURING THE “MILITARY
ANARCHY” PERIOD

Abstract: In what follows, we have tried (at a certain moment), to clarify
the contribution that soldiers from the province of Dacia (namely from the
legiones XIII Gemina and V Macedonica), gave for defending Italia in the period
of the “military anarchy” period.

Keywords: the province of Dacia, “military anarchy” period, legio XIII Gemina,
legio V Macedonica, defence, Italia.

In 1966, in a few introductory lines of an article titled “Severus Alexander
și provincia Dacia” [“Severus Alexander and the province of Dacia”],
C. Daicoviciu optimistically spoke of the advances registered in the
enlightenment of the provincial history over the span of the four decades
passed by then¹, namely approximately for how long the scholar had been
active up to that point. It is not easy to appreciate the information progress
in that specific historiographic sector during the period of the precisely four
decades since his passing. We do not believe though to be mistaken if we
qualify it as satisfactory. Especially, we believe that overall results related
to the period of the “military anarchy” are satisfactory. However, to only a
smaller extent this is the case of the issue discussed here.

The topic, usually framed to that general of the Dacian units’
displacement outside the province towards and also after mid 3rd century,
thus counted among those disputed with other national historiographies,
mainly Hungarian. On the withdrawal of certain units from Dacia under
Gallienus the main expressed views were markedly inflamed. At one point,
when referring to the time of Regalianus’s usurpation (into which XIII
Gemina legion would have also been involved), A. Alföldi maintained that
the army was present in Dacia (which he believed territorially broken), but
also advanced the possibility that all soldiers from here might have been
withdrawn to Moesia now².

¹ DAICOVICIU 1966, 153 = DAICOVICIU [1970], 386; see in the same vein in extenso MACREA/
CRISAN 1964, 319-330; see also MACREA 1965, 156-157, 159-160. Of course, for many aspects –
given the times when the last two works had been written – superfluous, but we still want to specify
that the reader will show caution or intuit what has been transmitted to it subliminally.
² ALFÖLDI 1929, 257.
For decades, with an natural apex during World War II, approaches (those of the Romanian historians included), were often biased and lacking any substance. We believe though that since one and a half decade our historiography was able to provide quite enough undistorted images for whatever reason.

Nevertheless, such samples may be also offered for the period before. In 1975, I.I. Rusu discussed the fragment “legionis XIII Geminae aciae [sic!] desideratus” from an inscription3, metamorphosed by E. Ritterpling into “legionis XIII Geminiae Daciae desideratus” with a marked semantic change. Since both C. Daicoviciu and M. Macrea – themselves famous epigraphists – agreed without reservations with the version suggested by the German scholar, certain remarks by I. I. Rusu, although somewhat unjust with regards to the two above4, appear no less significant on the part of a specialist who for his entire scientific career had been a “continuity” defender: “...from such a rectified epigraphic text, the two quoted Cluj-based Romanian scholars, hastily got out an argument for the permanence of the occupation troops, having impression to «earn time» in extending the Roman mastery of the Carpathian-Danubian Dacia in all its fullness ...obviously, with such epigraphic arguments («Daciea» instead of aciae) one does not prolong the imperial occupation, one does not support and consolidate the Roman continuity in Carpathian Dacia”5.

The half of century comprised between the beginning of the reign of Maximinus Thrax (year 235) and the accession to the imperial power of Diocletianus (years 284/285), is generally labeled in the modern historical writing as the period of “military anarchy”, the German historiography circulating the very expressive construct of Soldatenkaiserzeit6. From
delivered in “military anarchy”7, the German historiography circulating the very expressive construct of Soldatenkaiserzeit8. From

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1 CIL V 7366 = ILS 2466 = IDRE 138; REUTER 2005, 260, no. 10 from the catalogue; see also RUSU 1975, 54-55: AVEL/(iu)s VETERA / NYS BENEF/(iciarum) LATI / CLAVI LEG/(ionis) XIIII G / MIN(iae) ACAIE (sic!) DESl / DERAVUS QVI VI / XIT ANNIS XXVI / MENES VII IEX XV

2 AVEL/(iu)s SECV / NIDANVS IMA / GINIFER LEG/(ionis) S(inus) S(cipiteae) CON / SBRINO BENE / MERENTI MEMO / RIAM POSVIT (Dertona-

3 For the governor, see more recently also PISO 2013, 42, no. 45.

4 “Anarchie militaire” (Hügel); “Zeit der Soldatenkaiser”: HEIL 2006, to be consulted together with SPEIDEL 2015.


8 “Anarchie militaire” (Hügel); “Zeit der Soldatenkaiser”: HEIL 2006, to be consulted together with SPEIDEL 2015.

9 For the governor, see more recently also PISO 2013, 42, no. 45.

10 For the governor, see more recently also PISO 2013, 42, no. 45.

11 For the governor, see more recently also PISO 2013, 42, no. 45.

12 For the governor, see more recently also PISO 2013, 42, no. 45.

13 For the governor, see more recently also PISO 2013, 42, no. 45.

14 For the governor, see more recently also PISO 2013, 42, no. 45.

15 For the governor, see more recently also PISO 2013, 42, no. 45.

16 For the governor, see more recently also PISO 2013, 42, no. 45.

17 For the governor, see more recently also PISO 2013, 42, no. 45.

18 For the governor, see more recently also PISO 2013, 42, no. 45.
Gordianus III on the maritime route: STARR 1941, 192. to the war theatre – between two fleets: STARR 1941, 38, 192-193. Otherwise, likely a portion of the road.

Another evidence likely to be linked to a possible disembarking in Aquileia while on the return from the Gordianic Eastern war is a cenotaph,20 probably mentioning Aquile(iensis) to be metamorphosed into the certainly valid solution. – The inscription incised on the sarcophagus (CIL V 599 = ILS 2344 = lupus 18939 = EDCS-47400337 = SPEIDEK 1990, 68-69, fig. 1, 2 = SPEIDEK 1992, 414-415, fig. 1, 2), sounds after M. P. Spidel: D(i)s M(anibus) / Marcus AVRGelius / SOSSIVS / V(ictorius) L(egionis) IIII F(iliae) / V(ivos) S(odi) ET / IVL(iae) VALENT / [I[NAE?]?] [—] [Aquileia]. – For the inscriptions brought into discussion in our work see generally: IDRE J., PAVAN 1991, 188-190, 196-199 (with the indication of the first place of publishing); SARTORI 2000, 630, n. 26; 633-635 (tab.); MENELLA 2000; SANNAZARO 2002, 76; REALI 2000, 659, no. 7.

After the reading of the letter group proposed by T. Mommsen, ad CIL V 1031.

RITTERLING 1925, 1337. – See also CALDERINI 1930, 221, 225, for whom this piety act together with the Mithraic dedication from the n. 15, also might suggest a continuous stationing of the soldiers there, not only the simple transit; on the temple: CALDERINI 1930, 154-155.

20 After the reading of the letter group proposed by T. Mommsen, ad CIL V 1031. – See also CALDERINI 1930, 221, 225, for whom this piety act together with the Mithraic dedication from the n. 15, also might suggest a continuous stationing of the soldiers there, not only the simple transit; on the temple: CALDERINI 1930, 154-155.
might date under Septimius Severus, during the operations against Didius Julianus in which soldiers of the two Dacian legions have also participated. Nonetheless, in these two latter cases, the fact that at Aquileia were recorded only those in the Apulum-based legion is at least curious.

On the other hand, solely that lustrum primiplum mentioned in the inscription presented in n. 5 is no evidence of a present detachment of legio XIII at Aquileia under Philippus Arabs. Almost half a century ago, it was concluded – we believe decidedly – that the soldiers in the legion recorded in connection with respective lustrum were here to perform certain food supply activities for the troop, alike the case of soldiers in other legions. These even held permanent administrative seats in the important north-Italian trading centre, which appear in epigraphs as stationes. A. Mócsy’s important explanation was assimilated in the Romanian historiography via D. Benea and P. Hügel.

Past the scientific gain carried by the explanation itself, we believe that it may also be valued in the topic discussed here. Some of the soldiers in legion XIII Gemina recorded at Aquileia and the surroundings might have been part of the staff of the presumptive Aquilean statio of the Dacian legion, staff detached from Apulum. We do not know whether the detachment was continuous or limited to a certain period (a few years?). And if detachment was restricted to only a few years, the soldiers’ families accompanied them to their posts in Aquileia regardless.

In this situation, the firm chronological indication provided by the two inscriptions dated under Philippus Arabs should not be applied to the dating of all inscriptions that mention soldiers in legion XIII, recorded there during the province. Some could be earlier, other later, and the fact that the only datable epigraphs – two (but one dated in relation with the other) – belong to the reign of Philippus, may be a simple hazard.

Then, the inscription referring to the lustratio might be connected to the presumptive supply statio of the Dacian legion (an absolutely natural action at that time in connection with such a statio), and not the lustratio exercitus at vexillation level. Thus, the remaining or displacement of a legion XIII Gemina vexillation at Aquileia under this emperor should not be necessarily accepted. It was argued for a long time that this vexillation of the Apulum-based legion was present at Aquileia starting with under Philippus, while on the stationing duration, it was maintained it might have stretched over a longer period of time or even indefinitely.

In the current state of research, the possibility that a legion XIII vexillation had been present at Aquileia during the “military anarchy” remains still valid. The period of its presence there might start in 238, immediately after the siege of Maximinus, or sometimes later, without knowing how it lasted.

It is also possible that other undated inscriptions from Emona-Ljubljana, which mention soldiers of the legion, be in connection with the vexillation at Aquileia. One comes still from North-East of Italia, from Altinum (regio X). The epigraph of Concordia, from the North-East (regio X) as well, often brought in discussion, dates in the 1st century, under Claudius. Another epigraph from Concordia, in which a signifer of legio V Macedonica is mentioned, cannot be precisely dated.

More than one decade ago it was claimed that the other inscriptions from northern Italia recording soldiers of the Dacian legions (Dertona-Tortona, Ticinum-Pavia, Mediolanum, Novaria etc.), would belong to a later period than those at Aquileia and nearby (dated overall under Philippus Arabs). Namely, the time span when Gallienus ruled alone. Thus, two chronologically different epigraphic clusters could be distinguished. Those from the north-east of the peninsula with Aquileia and the North-West, with the remaining localities. The military events occurring in the North-West along the 60’s of the 3rd century and which required the presence of troops would be the reason of the existing inscriptions in the north-western localities.

In 260, Gallienus takes with him soldiers, from certain detachments of the two Dacian legions located on...
Rhine border for the defence of the Gallic and Germanic provincial space, beside others from various legions, and heads towards Italia to counteract an Alamanni invasion.40 But if the usurpation of Ingenuus really took place in 259 (summer), how it was accredited, then (a part of?) the troops on the Rhine border didn’t move directly to Italia, reaching the peninsula subsequently of their successfully using against the army of Ingenuus.41 As the famous epigraph from Augsburg make testimony, the German rushing labeled in the ancient and modern historiography as “Alamannic” – “generalisierenden (pseudo-ethnischen) Denomination”, had been concretely committed by the people of Iuthungi (Semnones).42 The operation would be completed with a relative success, the barbarians being defeated at the beginning of the year 260 (chronological level advanced with the label of probability), near Mediolanum.43 Did the soldiers in the two Dacian legions remained also after 260 in north-western Italia for its defensive, and their families to have followed them?

Another time level when the soldiers in the two Dacian legions might have reached north-western Italia is advanced by us only with much precaution. J. Drinkwater assumed that the security of the peninsula itself would have been increased by the emperor over the “to breathe” span between 261-265 of his troubled reigns.44 Would he amass new troops in its North-West? Whether yes, including detachments from V Macedonica and XIII Gemina legions? If this prophylactic amassment of legionaries from the army of Dacia would be proven in the future, the presence of their families besides them would be much easier to explain than in the case of swift displacements, dictated by imperative operational necessities, in general short-term displacements.

But in the same year 257, other troops from Dacia departed for the Eastern area to take part to a new Persian campaign. It took place between the end of 257 or early 258 and July 260, with an unfortunate denouement for the Empire. At Edessa, many soldiers fell captive, together with Valerian himself. Among the prisioners also counted soldiers from Dacia.45

Those not taken prisoners must have been included in the army body of Macrianus and Ballista,46 that further fought against the Persians. Since Macrianus’s two sons – Macrianus junior respectively Quietus –, were elevated to the imperial purple47 and the two Macrianis headed for Roma, a certain number of soldiers from the province of Dacia whether surviving or which didn’t fall to the hands of the Persians possibly moved within their army towards the European side of the Empire. The army of Macriani would be intercepted by Aureolus and defeated, likely at Serdica, in late summer or autumn of 261.48 It was believed that from there, these soldiers might have taken the road of either the province or were incorporated in Aureolus’s army.49

40 KÖNIG 1981, 154, with n. 30 (listing also other legions involved with personnel to this action); cf. DANA/NEMETI 2001, 248, n. 81, who quote the same page in the work of the German specialist yet do not retain the explanation according to which “...doch waren anscheinend genügend Truppenangehörige zurückgeblieben [an die Rheingrenze], um bei dieser Gelegenheit von Victorinus als Repräsentanten ihrer Legion gezehrt zu werden”; in this respect, referencing to a page in the doctoral dissertation of D. Ruscu still in manuscript (= RUSCU 2003, 211-212, who at his turn only partially follows ALFÖLDI 1967, 100 with n. 59), the two authors share his view according to which the soldiers in the two Dacian legions recorded at Ticinum and Dertona (and not only, we would add), would have been part of the Mediolanum army of Aureolus, which came called the side of Postumus, a Victorinus issued by G. (Postumus’s successor), being documented the two Dacian legions as well.

41 We considered infra that Aureolus’s army from Mediolanum was formed only of equites (and none of the soldiers in the two Dacian legions is recorded epigraphically as horseman). While on the absorption of Aureolus’s army into that of Postumus cannot be the case; on the contrary, it was incorporated in that of emperor Claudius II just after Aureolus subdued himself to him (for this see KÖNIG 1981, 129, n. 27, with quoting the ancient sources). – Assistant professor dr. S. Nemeti (whom we thank here also for a beneficial discussion), drew our attention especially on the four legions stationed in Orient which appear among those documented on Victorinus’s coin (see DANA/NEMETI 2001, 248, n. 81; 256 – tab. 1; NEMETI/NEMETI 2004-2005, 94). According to a movement scheme invested with much credibility through the authority of A. Alfoldi “Vexillationes of the Eastern legions came to North Italy in consequence of the victory over Macrianus...and when Aureolus went over to Postumus in 268, they seem to have been detached by the latter to Gaul (possibly against Lelantus), as their names appear on the gold struck at Trèves by Victorinus” (ALFÖLDI 1939, 214, see also 151 ≈ ALFÖLDI 1967, 404-405, see also 327 with n. 59). – B. OLDENSTEN-PFERDEHIRT (1984, 429), assumed that Gallienus had displaced towards Europe detachments from legions stationed in the East of the Empire “...erst nach dem Abfall der Rhein- und Donnaseen zur Bekämpfung des Postumus... und die dann hier im Laufe der Zeit zum Gegner überliefert”. According to K. STROBEL (1999, 22-23; 2009, 917-918), in 255/256 in the Rhine area were detached formations from legions stationed in the East and by the Danube, later siding with the separatist Empire. At his time, E. BUTTERLING (1925, 1343-1344, whose view was known to A. Alföldi), had the opinion that detachments from Eastern and Danubian legions recorded on the golden coin issued by Victorinus were displaced in the Gallic area against the separatist Empire by Gallienus – later passing to the usurper’s side. Lastly, the propagandist goal of Victorinus’s coinage for legions (without having to deal thus with a de facto incorporation within the army of the detachments), was supported by P. H. WEBB (1993/1972, 382-384, see also 440), following one of the variants proposed by C. Oman (opinions likewise known to A. Alfoldi); against, STROBEL 1999, 22-23 (to be consulted together with OLDENSTEN-PFERDEHIRT 1984, 429, 431, for the particular evolution of legion VIII Augusta, invoked in K. Strobel’s arguments). The de facto presence of the detachments in Victorinus’s army (we refer here to all appearing on his coinage, not only those which belonged to the legions from the East), had been previously inferred by G. ELMER (1941, 64-65), who does not even mention the propagandist version. – For the possible presence of a legionary from legio V Macedonica (or from legio XIII Gemina?) in the army of the “Gallic” Empire, see DANA 2015.

42 STROBEL 1999, 16, 23 (in the listing by the author of the legions from which the detachments withdrawn from the Rhine border came from and as opposed to Ingenuus, those two from Dacia are missing).

43 STROBEL 1999, 16-21, 26, the quote at 21.
Starting with 265 (when armed forces of the legitimate power – including Aureolus’s soldiers – would unsuccessfully assault those separatists in the Gallic area) and until 268, one army commanded by Aureolus would remain displaced in Raetia, with the goal of preventing Alamanni raids towards South. Respective army would be composed from a part of the mobile corps and legionary detachments – the latter likely. If soldiers from exercitus Daciae returning from the East with the two Macrian or arrived by other circumstances were to be found within the rows of this army, their mention here is necessary, since the defence of Raetia against Alamanni incursions primarily aimed at blocking their access towards Italia (simultaneously with holding off an invasion on the part of the separatist forces of Postumus). In fact, the “Alamanni” (iuthungi) would plunder Raetia (the “buffer zone”, in the year 268, summer) and descend to Italia after the departure of Aureolus’s army – revolted against Gallienus – from the “buffer province”, being yet intercepted successfully at Lake Garda by emperor Claudius II, in autumn.

The rebelled commander would set his base at Mediolanum (regio XI). The possibility that legionaries from the army of the province of Dacia present in north-western Italia (with those deceased buried in the areas of Ticinum, Novaria and Dertona), to constitute the Dacian troops returning from the East beside the two sons of Macrianus included in Aureolus’s army, does not seem valid. As Aureolus’s army was likely composed only of cavalry. We believe this because the latter’s coinage issues for Postumus have the legends PIDES/CONCORDIA/VIRTUTIS AEQVITIUM or EQVITIUM, PAX EQVITVM (to which add pieces with legend SALVS AVG), while issues of Postumus with legend (and depiction) CASTOR (deity in close connection with the equestrians), were convincingly labelled as ones “in response” to Aureolus. However, we believe there is another explanatory variant. Since the forces of the legitimate Empire of Gallienus would besiege at Mediolanum in the summer of 268 those of Aureolus (proclaimed emperor), and since it was obviously insufficient, additional troops would be brought to Aureolus’s army (proclaimed emperor), and since it was obviously insufficient, additional troops would be brought to Aureolus’s army – revolted against Gallienus – from the “buffer” province, being yet intercepted successfully at Lake Garda by emperor Claudius II, in autumn.

That amongst also counted detachments of the two Dacian legions, dispatched either from within the province or displaced (partly or fully) by the strategic site of Poetovio, where they had already been stationed for quite some time (since 260 or about the year 264).

The presence at Mediolanum in this period of soldiers from Dacia might be also reinforced by the inscription of a immunes of legion XIII and by the Christian epitaph of a former protector, “german Dacius”.

If and when we introduce the discussion the epitaph of a former centurion of legion V Macedonica, dedicated by the spouse, everything becomes much clearer. The fact that both spouses are Aurelius suggest to a dating post 212.

Soldiers from Dacia might have been taken part at Ticinum-Pavia (regio XI), in a military concentration of 268 under the command of the future emperor Claudius, a funerary inscription belonging to an optio spei of legion XIII may suggest this. It is though uncertain whether such group was real, considered as such by E. Ritterling after Aurelius Victor’s Liber de Caesaribus, 33, 286, “Nam,

For this year: FITZ 1976, 79, see also 10; followed by OPREANU 1999-2000, 400 = OPREANU 2001, 72; OPREANU/U 2004, 14, 16.

For version Daucus instead of Dacus, see also an Aurelius Victorinus, eques singularis Augustus, still natione Daquae (CIL III 3236 = ILS 2204 = IDRE 53) or a Dacian Dida, son to Damanais, likewise eques, nationis Daquae: DANA 2003, 172 with n. 35; 176; 182 with n. 79.

For version Daucus instead of Dacus, see also an Aurelius Victorinus, eques singularis Augustus, still natione Daquae (CIL III 3236 = ILS 2204 = IDRE 53) or a Dacian Dida, son to Damanais, likewise eques, nationis Daquae: DANA 2003, 172 with n. 35; 176; 182 with n. 79.

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cum profuillo sanguinis uulnere tam graui mortem sibi adesse intelligeret, insignia imperii ad Claudium destinauerat, honore tribunatus Ticici retinendum praesidialium manum. Most likely, we are dealing in this case with a forgery. The tribune command which Claudius would have exercised at Ticinum had been likely invented in order to "remove" him from the location of the successful plot against emperor Gallienus (Mediolanum). Since Claudius was believed the ancestor of the Constantinian imperial house and, the so-called work Emmannsche Kaisergeschichte (lost), from which Aurelius Victor inspired to the matter, was in its favour, the forgery is easy to explain. Claudius was also at Mediolanum during the siege against Aureolus, being precisely his replacement at the command of the mobile cavalry corps (but a distinct cavalry corps from that commanded by Aureolus who was presumably beside him in the besieged city?).

It is also possible that other inscriptions from northern-western Italy recording legionaries from XIII Gemina and one from V Macedonica had been set up in the context of actions taken at Mediolanum or Ticinum, although a military concentration at Ticinum under the command of the future emperor Claudius seems unlikely (see supra). These come from Dertona, Novaria (regio XI), Clastidium (regio IX or rather VIII?), Castidium (V regio). As the "Alamanni" – Iuthungi attacked Italy in 271, soldiers from the two Dacian legions might have been stationed in its North-West since then. This would have been a measure required by this attack of the Germanic people under Claudius II-Aurelianus. 

It still remains to be explained why these soldiers were in north-western Italy together with their families. Counting the epigraphs’ content and leaving aside that of Novaria (presented in the n. 73), we observe that except one of Mediolanum (presented in the n. 62), and one of Dertona (presented in the n. 3), in all of the other soldiers appear beside their families. The suggested explanation was that respective troops were stationed for a longer or an indefinite term – explanation that appear as credible at this moment. Displacing the soldiers from the Dacian legions to the peninsula ultimately aimed to defend Roma itself, the soldiers departed from Dacia serving together with those brought from other provinces by virtue of the idea that "Roma communis nostra patria est" and because "in acie miles probatur".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND OTHER INFORMATION

Work partially produced during the stay at the Accademia di Romania from Roma, October 2012-March 2013, obtained with the support of the Romanian state through the national scholarship program "Vasile Pârvan". – We are transmitting a cordial thank to our professor, prof. dr., correspondent member of the Romanian Academy, Mihai Bârbulescu, for his interes on our project, and to dott.ssa Anna Maria Liberati for having coordinated our research from the Italian side. We are also thanking our former "Pârvan" colleague, dr. Dan-Tudor Ionescu, for various useful conversations. – The translation in English belongs in part to Mrs. Gabriela Balica, for her work we are pleased to thank here also. – The Italian identical version of this paper is published in Ephemeris Dacoromana XVIII, 2016, 157-178. Regrettably, in that version are to be found quite many translation errors, for them only myself is to be blamed (as I didn’t carefully proofread the finally translated product), and not the translator, which tried to do her best and that of the “Alamanni” in summer 268, whose repetition had to be compulsory stopped. Beyond the provided safety and the emperor’s propagandist message, the construction of “the Aurelianus Wall” in Rome78 remains indicative of years of insecurity but also of the emperor’s intent to implement opportune defensive measures. In fact, in 273, the “Alamanni” would attack again Italia and will target it also in the first part of Probus’s rule.

The words belong to jurist Herennius Modestinus, S. Cyprianus, (quoted at 95, supra), and because "Roma communis nostra patria est" and because "in acie miles probatur".

HARTMANN 2006, 95-96 with n. 37, 39; 102, n. 51; there were though specialists who deemed real such tribune command at Ticinum (quoted at 95, n. 39); see also N. Zugrava, ad AURELIUS VICTOR, Liber de Caesaribus, 416, n. 651; idem, ad PSEUDO-AURELIUS VICTOR, Epitome de Caesaribus, 449, n. 517; see also 57-58 with n. 197.

HARTMANN 2006, 93, 96 with n. 38; see also 101, 103; POTTER 2004, 264, 266.

HARTMANN 2006, 101-102 with n. 51 (referring to the sources); 118; see also N. Zugrava, ad PSEUDO-AURELIUS VICTOR, Epitome de Caesaribus, 449, n. 517.

Cf. DRINKWATER 2005/2007, 47, for the possible splitting of the "mobile force" into several parts, by this mobile force of course understanding not only equestrians, but also pedestrians. – But we wonder, the "mobile cavalry corps" ("Schlachtenkavallerie") could have also been divided? Either this, or there properly existed several mobile cavalry corps, cf. the excellent analysis by SIMON 1980, 441-448.

Already the connection seen in RITTERLING 1925, 1722, followed by DANA/NETI 2001, 248. We mention though again the fact that the minimum duration of the soldiers' stationing there would have been a measure required by this attack of the Germanic people.
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