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THE MOBILITY OF MILITARY RECRUITS FROM RURAL MOESIA INFERIOR: DESTINATIONS, ROUTES, ESTIMATED DISTANCES

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Abstract: The rural milieu was an important source of recruitment for the Roman army from the second quarter of the 1st century AD until the reorganisation of the province under the Diocletian. This paper provides a synthesis on the mobility of soldiers recruited from this environment, following three research axes: direction of soldier’s mobility, the cases of the veterans who return home and those of veterans who remained in the province where they performed their service. Another objective of the study is mapping the mobility directions in order to trace the routes taken by the Roman army and to highlight the links between the origin province and the service regions.

Keywords: *Moesia Inferior, Roman army, rural environment, mobility.*

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Soldiers recruited from rural Moesia Inferior are increasingly attested in epigraphic sources (especially military diplomas) in recent decades.¹ They can be identified by the explicit mention of their rural origin, by the place of discovery when they returned home and (with a greater degree of uncertainty) by their ethnonyms (Thracus, Bessus, Dacus).² In the overwhelming majority of cases, the place of discovery of the military diplomas is not mentioned, since they come from the antiquities market, but there is always a degree of probability that many of these diplomas still come from the rural environment of the province. We are going to analyse the mobility of these soldiers, including the “probable” situations, by following the directions of mobility, the distances travelled and the veterans’ decisions to return home or to remain in the place where they had performed their service.

The following tables show the mobility of soldiers in various provinces, indicating not only the mobility direction(s), but also the distances and the number of days needed for their mobility. Distances were calculated using the ORBIS application and the fastest route function.

Table 1. One-way mobility.

Directions of mobility	Occurrences	Km/days
Rome	>146	1532/21
Italy	62	1532/21

¹ See recently the preliminary studies or analysis of one of the authors (MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2018a, 329–337; 2019a, 19–30.

² On the soldiers’ origin, see more recently SPEIDEL 2017, 35–50, especially 42–47 (for the villages).

Directions of mobility	Occurrences	Km/days
Britannia	6	2810/41
Germania Superior and Inferior	12	2067/35,3
Moesia Superior	3	436/8
Raetia	2	1576/28,9
Noricum	1	1072/19,3
Pannonia Superior and Inferior	12	1130/20,4
Tres Daciae	9	485/8,8
Moesia Inferior	13	-
Judea	1	2689/16,1
Syria	16	2447/18,2
Arabia	1	2968/19,8
Mauretania Tingitana and Caesariensis	9	3674/34,3

Table 2. Two-way mobility.

Directions of mobility	Occurrences	Km/days
Moesia Inferior-Italy-Baetica	1	1532/21+2314/17,8
Moesia Inferior-Italy-Mauretania Caesariensis	1	1532/21+1362/8,9
Moesia Inferior-Noricum-Pannonia	1	1072/19,3+393/5,5
Moesia Inferior-Italy-Achaia	1	1532/21+1444/9,2
Moesia Inferior-Galatia-Cappadocia	1	1449/13,9+601/11,3
Moesia Inferior-Galatia-Syria	1	1449/13,9+652/11,6
Total	6	

Table 3. Three-way mobility.

Directions of mobility	Occurrences	Km/days
Moesia Inferior-Germania-Pannonia Inferior-Dacia Porolissensis	1	2067/35,3+1708/19,7+773/10,4
Moesia Inferior-Germania-Pannonia-Moesia Superior	1	2067/35,3+1708/19,7+216/1,2
Total	2	

Let us first discuss the information from Table 1 (Fig. 1). We can see that the military units of Rome and Italy are the best documented thanks to the inscriptions erected by the praetorians, the *equites singulares* and the sailors of the praetorian fleets. We should not forget that many of these soldiers do not explicitly mention their origin, but they may have originated from Lower Moesia according to their Thracian and Dacian names and their ethnonyms, which betray an origin in the Balkan-Danubian provinces (names like Thracus-Thraex-Bessus). With the exception of Rome and Italy, most of the cases (36) are from the western provinces or, more explicitly, the Latin-speaking provinces, with the exception of Africa, while only 25 cases are from the Hellenic-speaking provinces and the Latin-speaking provinces of Africa. However, the province with the most occurrences is Syria (Syria-Palestina), mainly because of the major

mobilizations during the Roman conflicts in the region, including the Gn. Domitius Corbulo's expedition against the Parthians, the two Judean wars (66–70 and 132–135), and Trajan's expedition against the Parthians. A large number of military recruits is recorded in Germania(e). They began to be recruited in 65, probably a regular recruitment. In 71, the military forces were renewed after the civil war. Other soldiers were recruited towards the end of the second century, probably as part of regular recruitments, and between the two Dacian wars. In the north of the Empire, Britannia was another province with a large number of recruits. These were mainly operations carried out in 101–102, 126–128 and 153, affecting the population of the southern Danube, first in the context of the Dacian wars and then as regular recruitments. There were others in the Danube provinces, especially in Pannonia(e) and Dacia(e).³ Of course, distance may be one explanation, but let's not forget that Pannonia was a large province. Moreover, the first recruitments began early, in 46 AD, just as the province of Thrace was founded and Moesia was reorganized. In addition, most of the soldiers were recruited in the *ala I Ulpia contariorum*, created by Trajan after the Dacian wars, which enlisted soldiers from south of the Danube in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. In the case of Dacia, recruitments took place shortly after the Dacian wars during Trajan's reign, and then continued under Hadrian and Antoninus Pius as regular recruitments. The high number of soldiers arriving in Mauretania may seem surprising at first view. But for the most part, these were regular recruitments intended to replenish the army after the first Dacian war and in the decades that followed.

Certain types of mobility are complex (see Table 2 and 3, Fig. 2, 3), illustrated, it is true, by only a few examples. They indicate the mobility either of the military unit or of sub-units in various provinces. Some movements, from Germania to Pannonia and Dacia, or from Germania to Pannonia and Upper Moesia and from Galatia to Syria, involve the transfer of the unit to several provinces. The fleet soldiers mentioned in Baetica, Mauretania Caesariensis and Achaia certainly had other reasons for their presence in these provinces. We should not forget the fleet soldiers who fought in the Bar-Kochba war:⁴ although the sources do not attest to the presence of people from rural Lower Moesia, their presence is plausible. The case of T. Valerius Marcianus provides additional proof of the mobility of legionaries.⁵ Born around 125 in the *canabae* of the Legio V Macedonica, probably the son of a soldier, he was recruited into the legion in 145. He took part in Lucius Verus' expedition to the East, certainly in Armenia under Statius Priscus, then in the Marcomannic wars under Calpurnius Agricola and Claudius Fronto, ending his service in Dacia, where the legion was involved in combat before finally being transferred there. It is remarkable that, after a long career holding the rank of *beneficiarius consularis*, he preferred to return to Troesmis (*reversus ad lares suos*) in 170. It is true that Dacia is not so far from Troesmis, but family and landed property were important reasons for his decision to return.

³ See especially DANA/MATEI-POPESCU 2009, 234–240.

⁴ ECK/PANGERL 2006, 239–252; ECK/PANGERL 2007, 283–290; ECK 2012, 249–265.

⁵ ISM V, 160.

Table 4. Multiple mobility.

Directions of mobility	Occurrences
Moesia Inferior-Rome-Ostia-Rome-Orient-Rome-Sardinia-Rome-Luna-Pisae-Rome	1

Aurelius Mucianus, a soldier in the *cohors vigilum* in Rome, is a special case⁶ (see Table 4). He began his service in under Gordian III on 16 June 239, and was sent to Ostia for four months on 13 April 241. On 2 August 241, he left for the East, probably as part of Gordian's expedition against the Parthians. On 1 March 243, he received *frumentum publicum*. Mucianus returned to Rome on 23 December 244 after the accession of Philippus Arabs, but was again detached to Sardinia on 28 May 245. He returned to Rome again on 15 August 245, but was again detached to Luna and Pisae from 13 April to 21 June 246. He was discharged for health reasons after his return to Rome on 21 June 248. It is not surprising that he was discharged because of one or more illnesses contracted during his secondments. His case demonstrates the extraordinary mobility of soldiers throughout their service. Consequently, the available sources, and especially the military diplomas, attest to the destination(s) of the units where these soldiers did their service, although we do not know the detachments.

Finally, we must not forget the reduced form of mobility associated with local recruitment in the province from which the soldiers originated. In the *auxilia*, according to the sources, these recruitments began in the last quarter of the 1st century, when the army of Moesia became larger and better organised. It continued over the following centuries.

The following table presents the soldiers who came back in Moesia Inferior after being discharged.

Table 5. Veterans returning to their home province (Moesia Inferior) after military service.

Province of service/city	Occurrences
Syria	4
Rome	6
Ravenna	2
Italia	1
Misenum	1
Noricum	1
Germania Superior and Inferior	2
Dacia	1
Mauretania Tingitana	2
Moesia Inferior	14
Total	34

Looking at the soldiers who returned to their country of origin (see Table 5, Fig. 4), we see that the majority of them, 14 out of 34⁷ were recruited in the same province, Moesia Inferior. These inscriptions date from the 2nd century onwards because local recruitment was only mentioned in the last quarter of the 1st century. It is logical, because most of the occurrences refer to soldiers serving in their home province, as they would return home quickly. It should also

⁶ RGZM 75.

⁷ AE 1919, 78; 1940, 34; ISM IV, 116, 179–180, 187; V, 117, 160; RGZM 10; XVI 83; ILB 82 (2 cases); ILB 430 (2 cases).

be noted that these are military diplomas only, the rest being funerary inscriptions. Of the total number of texts attesting the return of veterans to their province of origin, almost half (18) are military diplomas, found exclusively in non-stratigraphic contexts. This is clear evidence that ex-soldiers kept their copy of the *constitutio* and confirms the importance of diplomas for former soldiers. With the exception of Bithus Solae f., who served in Dacia,⁸ the other veterans travelled long distances. These movements began at the start of recruitment in the province: Romaesta Rescenti f. finished his service in Syria.⁹ Other soldiers were enlisted for the army of Syria in the 1st century, due to the Roman military campaigns against the Parthians led by Domitius Corbulo or against the Jews by Vespasian and then Titus. Many soldiers returned home from Rome and Italy. They were recruited for the praetorian fleets and the emperor's guards, the praetorian cohorts and the *equites singulares Augusti*. The occurrences show two soldiers returned from Tingitana in the 2nd century, which is also a long distance.¹⁰ The sources also mention two soldiers returning home from Noricum and Lower Germania,¹¹ and one from Germania before the division of provinces.¹² We have not counted the cases where the editors of the inscriptions did not mention the place of discovery. Thus, the probability that the number of soldiers returning home after service is higher has a sense.

What are the reasons why veterans have travelled such great distances? The sources are silent. However, if we consider that M. Aurelius Statianus returned home to get involved in the administration of a *uilla*,¹³ that may be one of the reasons. His career has been, in our opinion, correctly highlighted by A. Tomas and T. Sarnowski.¹⁴ M. Aurelius Statianus also known as Apta, originally from the *uicus Zinesdina Maior* in the same region, is attested in a diploma dated in 225, also granted for the Ravenna fleet.¹⁵ One Aurelius Statianus, dedicates an altar to Deus Aeternus after being saved from danger at sea.¹⁶ The inscription was found in Novae, but Statianus was identified as the sailor above.¹⁷ His name and surname are Dacian.¹⁸ He returned home, adopting only the Roman *cognomen* of Statianus, which he had acquired after obtaining the right of citizenship. The peregrine name in the military diploma was added because when the sailor returned home, he was first known by his former name and not by his citizen name.¹⁹ The name of M. Aurelius Statianus also appears on the stamps on the tiles, as he was probably responsible for the production of the building material, which was delivered in at least two cities in the Lower Danube.²⁰ The reintegration of veterans into the life of their home province was certainly one of the

⁸ RMD I, 39.

⁹ CIL XVI 3.

¹⁰ RMD V, 398; CHIRIAC/MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA/MATEI 2006, 383–390.

¹¹ RGZM 3; RMD IV, 239.

¹² CIL XVI 158.

¹³ RMD V, 311; IGLNovae 8, 9, see also TOMAS/SARNOWSKI 2006, 231–234; TOMAS 2007, 41.

¹⁴ TOMAS/SARNOWSKI 2006, 231–234; TOMAS 2007, 41.

¹⁵ RMD IV, 311.

¹⁶ IGLNovae 8.

¹⁷ TOMAS/SARNOWSKI 2006, 5–8.

¹⁸ For Atsutsia, see DANA 2011, 77.

¹⁹ MIHAILESCU-BIRLIBA/RĂILEANU 2014, 203.

²⁰ TOMAS/SARNOWSKI 2006, 1.

reasons for their return. It is difficult to know whether they returned exactly to their village or preferred to have a house in another settlement. One praetorian veteran decided to return to his native province after military service.²¹ Aurelius Dalenis²² was from the *vicus Amlaidina*, probably located on the site 23 August, in the territory of Callatis; he decided to come back in the *vicus* where his wife, Aurelia Cuthis, probably had been born.²³ In the case of Tutius, son of Butius, the text informs us about the deduction in Paestum of soldiers who had received the *honesta missio*.²⁴ As a result, the veteran preferred to return to Moesia Inferior, even he received a home in southern Italy. *Jus civitatis* is very important in these decisions: even if ex-soldiers are aware of the long distance, they feel that returning to their province of origin, as a citizen is an advantage over staying in the regions where they did their service. The distance between Syria and Mauritania Tingitana may be surprising, but in these cases, the provinces are fundamentally different from the original rural environment – Syria is not even a Latin-speaking province, while the local culture in Tingitana is still present. What’s more, the conflicts in these regions that coincide with their period of service are another important factor in their decision to return.

Table 6 shows the cases of soldiers who preferred to remain in the provinces where they had served (Fig. 5).

Table 6.

Province of retiring/city	Occurrences
Rome	1(?)–80+
Italy	9
Germania Superior	1
Pannonia Superior	3
Moesia Superior	1
Dacia	2
Mauretania Tingitana and Mauretania Caesariensis	3
Total	20 (?)–99+

It has to be said that many of these cases, over 80, are listed on monuments (*laterculi*) erected in Rome by praetorians or *equites singulares* on the occasion of their *honesta missio*.²⁵ This is why we do not know exactly whether these veterans remained in the capital of the Empire or made their way back. In this respect, we should not trust the statistics resulted from the epigraphic record. One veteran has chosen to settle in the Urbs; M. Aurelius Optatus, *veteranus*, deceased in Rome, *natione Thrax* (so, it is not sure he is coming effectively from Moesia Inferior).²⁶ Nine cases involved former soldiers in the imperial fleets, while one case was recorded

in Germania Superior,²⁷ another in Moesia Superior,²⁸ four in Dacia²⁹ and three in the Mauretaniae.³⁰ In Pannonia Superior, two veterans of the *ala Ulpia contariorum* remained in the province at a time when the Thracian presence in this unit was quite strong.³¹ We also mention Decineus, a comrade of a veteran who died at the age of 60.³² Even if his status is not indicated, it is likely that he is a veteran, given the age of the deceased.

We can see that more soldiers from Moesia Inferior returned to their province of origin than decided to stay where they had served, not counting veterans in the collective inscriptions from Rome. Returning soldiers was also common in other provinces, although in some – Germania(e), for example – local recruitment was much higher. On the other hand, we have noted on other occasions that many veterans from other provinces settled in Moesia Inferior, especially former legion soldiers.³³

The tables give the distances in km corresponding to the mobility types of soldiers. But how did they travel? We can simulate the distances, time and costs of travel by land, river and sea across the roman road network using ORBIS – The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World.³⁴ The use of simulation for studding ancient history is still regarded as a ‘dark art’.³⁵ Computer simulation belongs to the field of mathematics and statistics, and is widely used for obtaining numerical answers to many questions, which we often cannot obtain otherwise. It starts with the evidential parameters and builds ‘possible’ hypotheses. Such hypotheses must be treated as a tool of interpretation, not as a goal in itself.³⁶ The data incorporated in ORBIS simulation model are described in detail on the web site and need not to be repeated here. We simulated the special case of travel of M. Aurelius Mucianus, who traveled several times through Italy, once to the East, before systematically returning to Rome. Using faster path finding function provided by ORBIS application in order to reconstruct ancient movement patterns, we obtained faster routes between Moesia Inferior (we chose Novae as our departure point) to Rome, Rome-Ostia (and return), Rome – Eastern provinces (and return), Rome-Sardinia (and return), Rome to Luna and after to Pisa (and return to Rome). We got three scenarios: time and distance in km for land route (Fig. 6), coastal route (Fig. 7), and combined route, using also open sea route (Fig. 8). For land route we selected the horse as a means of transport. As a result we obtained the following distances: Moesia Inferior (Novae) – Rome 31.1 days, covering 1723 km; Rome-Ostia and return – 0.8 days, covering 46 km; Rome-Orient (Ancyra) and return – 94,2 days, covering 5242 km; Rome-Sardinia and return (using also coastal sea route) – 14,4 days, cover-

²¹ CIL III 13743.

²² For the name of veteran, see MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2018a, 70–71 and MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2018b, 431–434. See also FERJANČIĆ 2009, 110–111.

²³ The place of discovery of the veteran’s epitaph indicates the territory of Callatis (MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2018a, 70; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2018b, 431). See also FERJANČIĆ 2009, 110–111.

²⁴ CIL XVI 13.

²⁵ For example, CIL VI 2391, 2399, 2807, 31146, 31147, 32627, 32912, 32623, 32624 etc.

²⁶ CIL VI 3217. See also CENATI 2023, 351, C350.

²⁷ AE 2005, 1738.

²⁸ AE 2011, 1118.

²⁹ CIL XVI, 33, 108; RMD I, 63; PROTASE 2010, 164–165.

³⁰ CIL XVI, 162; AE 1951, 144; CIL VIII, 21021.

³¹ RIU I, 260, 261.

³² AE 1951, 144.

³³ MIHAILESCU-BIRLIBA 2018a, 304–310, 319–323; MIHAILESCU-BIRLIBA 2016, 223–226, 229–230; MIHAILESCU-BIRLIBA 2019b, 136–145, see also PÁZSINT 2019, 5–6.

³⁴ <https://orbis.stanford.edu/>, accessed 03.02.2024.

³⁵ DUNN 2012.

³⁶ DUNN 2012.

ing 1870 km; Rome-Luna – 6.3 days, covering 354 km, Luna – Pisa – 0.9 days, covering 51 km, Pisa-Rome – 5.4 days, covering 302 km. For coastal route we obtained 21.1 days, covering 1542 km for the journey Moesia Inferior-Rome; 0,8 days and 46 km for Rome – Ostia and return; 51 days, covering 5276 km from Rome to Ancyra and return; 14,4 days, covering 1870 km Rome – Sardinia and return, 3,6 days and 409 km from Rome to Luna; 0,4 days, 58 km Luna-Pisa and 2,6 days, 351 km Pisa-Rome. The fastest journey from Novae to Rome using combined route (with open sea route) took 21,1 days for 1542 km; 0,8 days and 46 km from Rome to Ostia and return; 51 days, covering 5276 km from Rome to Ancyra and return, 7 days, covering 912 km Rome – Sardinia and return, 3,6 days and 409 km from Rome to Luna; 0,4 days, 58 km Luna-Pisa and 2,6 days, 351 km Pisa-Rome.

We can draw the first conclusions that confirm ancient literary sources: the land route, it is always longer in time than the sea route. Overall, even if longer in distance, the sea route saved time.³⁷ By applying simulation methods, we can distinguish between well-connected routes, fast or short routes. Could we consider the fastest routes as the most used? And if we are talking about the militaries, we must keep in mind that the goal was not speed, but certainty of arrival within a reasonable and calculable time.³⁸ The information provided confirms the geographical mobility of recruits and veterans, sometimes reaching hundreds of kilometers. In terms of destinations, four types of mobility have been identified: one-way mobility (Fig. 1), bidirectional mobility (Fig. 2), three-way mobility (Fig. 3) and one case of multiple mobility. These movements can be as large scale as interprovincial mobility or as small as regional, internal mobility. In general, the mobility of active soldiers is an organized mobility, determined by the relocation of the military units of which they were part, while the mobility of veterans is motivated by personal reasons.

A final question arises: if we look at the texts on soldiers from rural Moesia Inferior, can we distinguish a certain recruitment policy of the Roman state for this province or a recruitment model for the whole Empire? We believe that, in terms of policy, the Roman state followed operating rules that were valid for all provinces: regular recruitment and recruitment in times of war or crisis. The special feature of Moesia Inferior was the very high number of enlisted soldiers, most of whom came from rural backgrounds, having served throughout the Roman Empire from Britannia to Africa, from Germania(e) to Syria and Arabia. Of course, ancient writers noted the fighting skills of the Thracians and Dacians.³⁹ To these qualities should be added loyalty to their commanders, which also explains their recruitment over the centuries.

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³⁷ For sea routes see ARNAUD 2005, 203.

³⁸ RAMSAY 1925, 60.

³⁹ VEGETIUS 1, 28; *Expositius Totius Mundi et Gentium* 50.

CIL

Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (Berlin).

IGLNOVAE

Inscriptions grecques et latines de Novae (Bordeaux).

ISM

Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris (Bucarest-Paris).

RGZM

Römische Militärdiplome und Entlassungsurkunden in der Sammlung des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums (Mainz).

RIU

Die römischen Inschriften Ungarns (Budapest).

RMD

Roman Military Diplomas (Londres).

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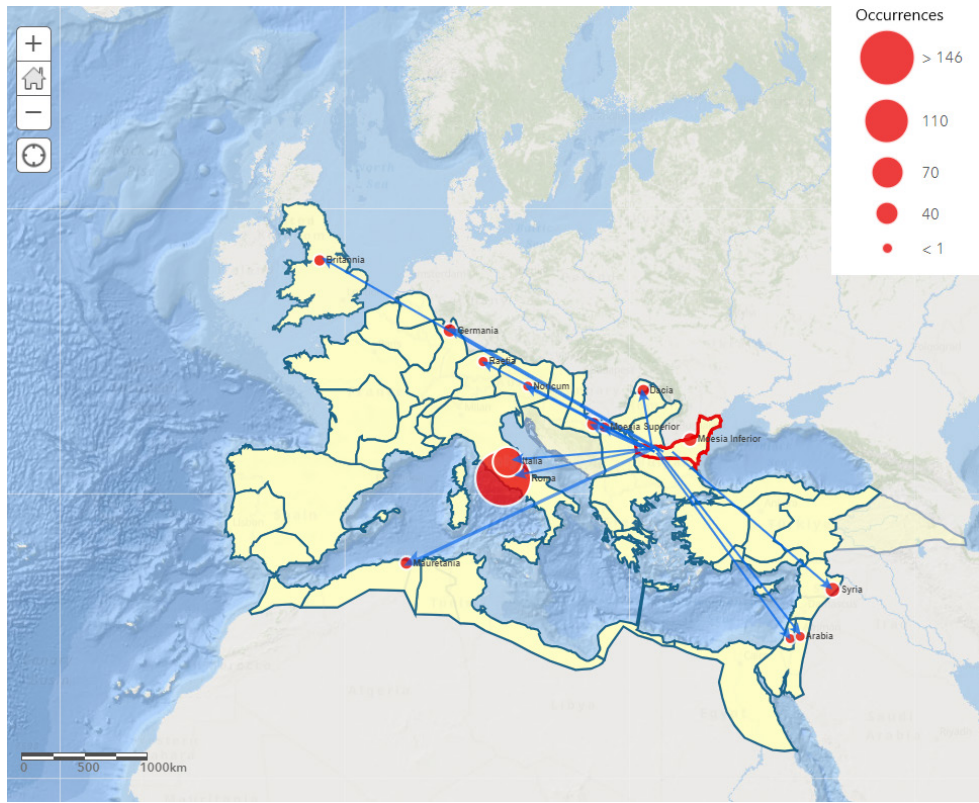


Fig 1.



Fig 2.



Fig 3.

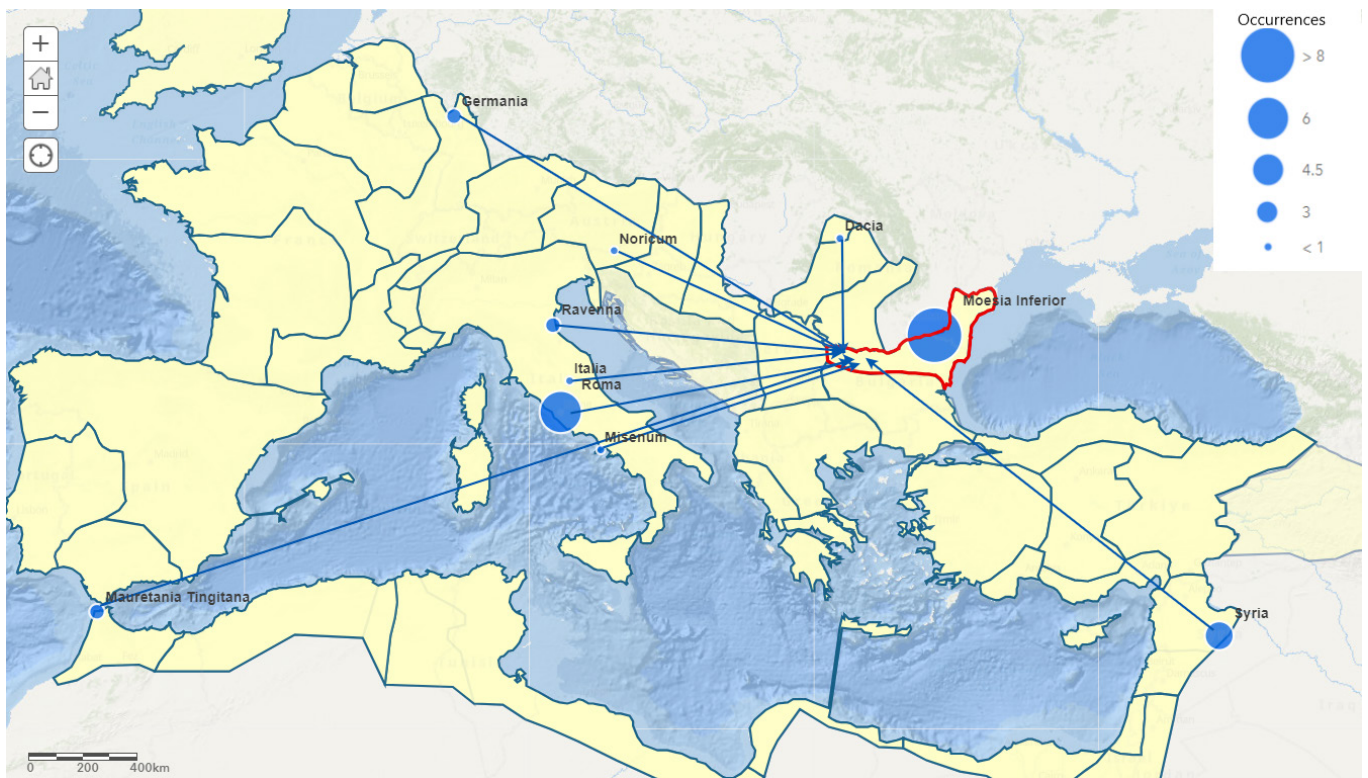


Fig 4.

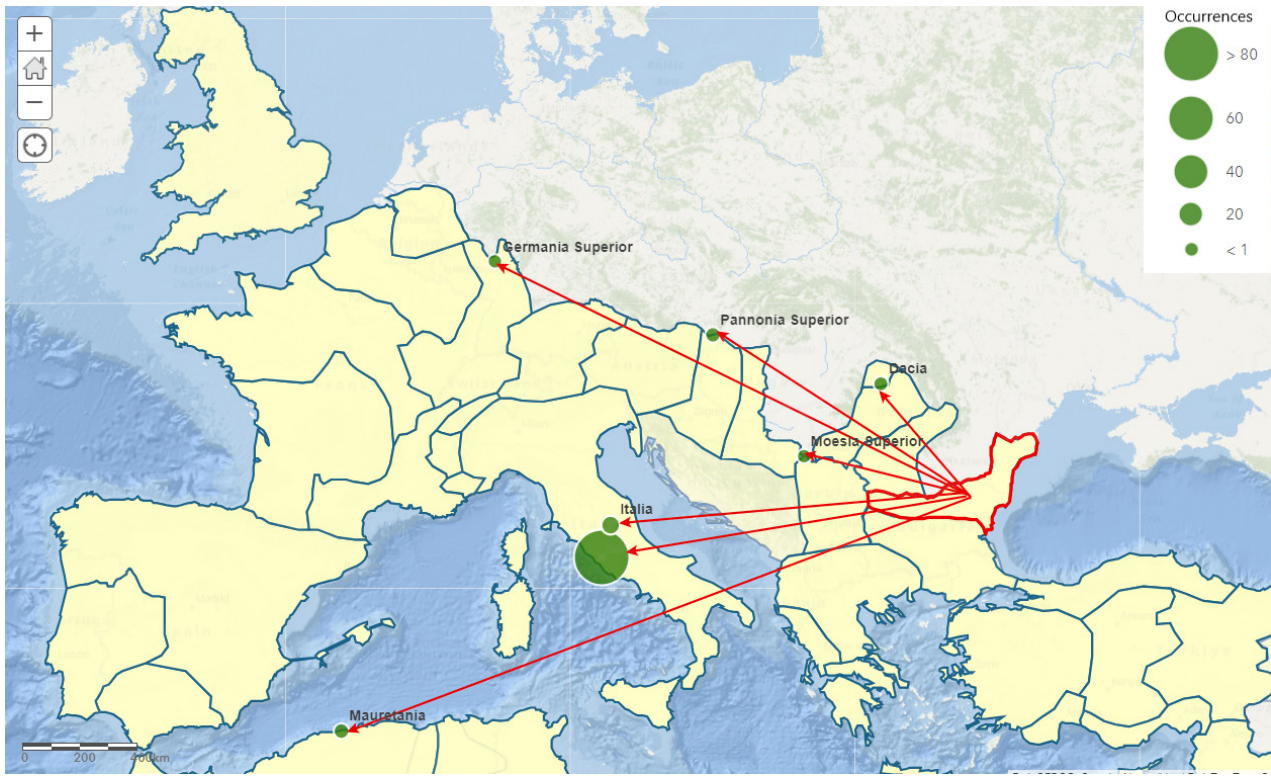


Fig5.

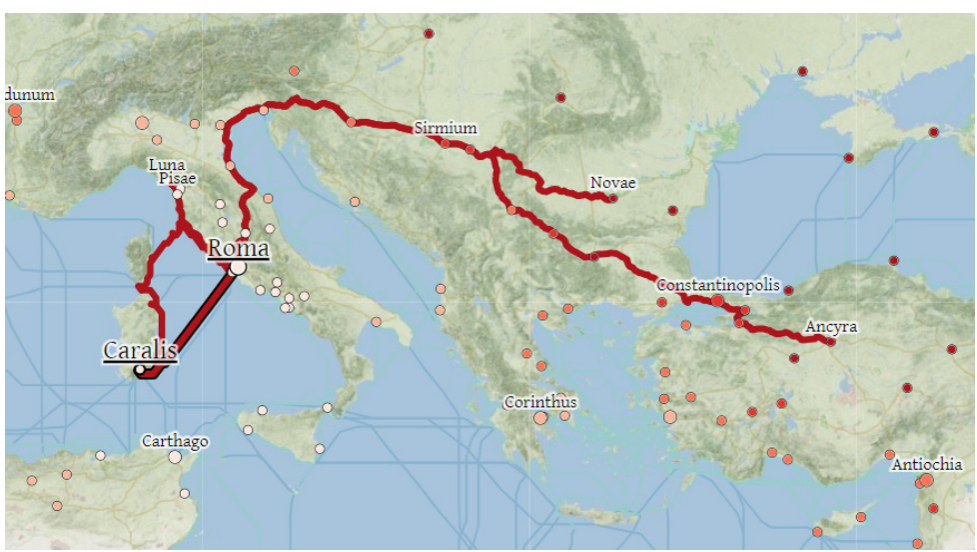


Fig 6.



Fig 7.

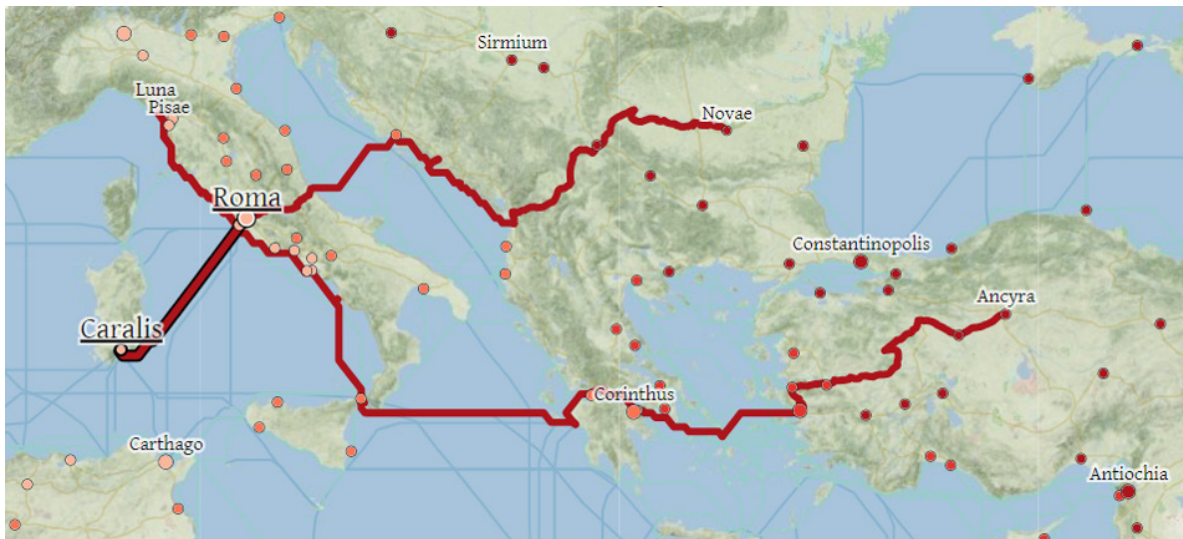


Fig 8.