

## THE *PEREGRINI* OF ROMAN DACIA (106-212)

KEYWORDS: Roman Dacia, *peregrini*, citizenship, social history, epigraphy, quantitative analysis.

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#### ABSTRACT

The present initiative and results are the outcomes of my doctoral research on peregrines in the province of Dacia. Though not necessarily new, the topic has not been monographically approached as yet. Thus, I believe that bringing together and synthesizing all available data on the topic is the only manner in which they can be truly valorized. A deeper analysis of peregrines attested in Dacia, centralizing and correlating data, brings actual information on how Roman juridical system applied at a provincial level and on the structure of the population in Dacia.

The present dissertation presents exhaustively (as much as possible) the issue of peregrines in Dacia and, in the same time, the annexed catalogue is a working tool for future research. The dissertation can be the starting point for wider and deeper studies on epigraphic manifestations of lower classes in this Danubian province.

From the point of view of juridical literature, I noted that peregrines feature as a special class of the Empire's inhabitants. Their place in Roman society is neatly delimited and their special status is clearly defined. What can be, nevertheless, noted at this level of juridical discourse, is a negative definition of the category of peregrines; thus, they are most often presented not through what they are, through their status and role, but as people who lack a number of legal functions. In this context, peregrines are only individualized in comparison to the favored class of citizens.

Leaving theory behind and turning to the analysis of legislative epigraphic sources, one discovers a much more detailed state of fact. In general, a peregrine was citizen of his/her own city or community of origin, even if he/she did not enjoy the official citizenship of the Empire. Naturally, local citizenship was more or less precisely established, according to the development level of each area, but it became effective through the habits and norms they

contained. The Roman state had to adapt its administration policies and civil law regulations to all these. As a consequence, inhabitants of peregrine settlements are often more than people undergoing Romanization or aspiring to citizenship: they are part of the Roman state population, often beneficiaries of a set of rights and privileges that surpass theoretical limitations. Thus, peregrines undoubtedly take part in juridical acts such as *mancipatio* that, according to jurists, should have excluded them. Peregrines also owned property and their testamentary rights were accepted as such, at least at the level of their own community. It also seems obvious that inhabitants of Latin law cities, though peregrines *de iure*, enjoyed ample sets of privileges. These facts and certain data in epigraphic sources suggest that this “Latin” status of a community was much more than a transition stage: it was the viable solution for certain peregrine communities.

The ways in which peregrines themselves perceive integration in Roman structures are extremely varied and, unfortunately, most often we can only know them intuitively or deductively. It is often obvious that they see themselves foremost as inhabitants of the Roman state, acting inside its limits and norms. When they intend to express their alterity, they do so especially through onomastics and religious practices, thus, as available sources suggest, without turning to negative ostentatious forms of expression.

The peregrines in the *auxilia* are the most profoundly involved in state structures and, in the same time, the closest to citizenship. They seem to be the driving force of the entire peregrine group, their rights superior to those of civilian peregrines; it is often that the various forms of *interpretatio humanior* refer to them directly.<sup>1</sup> Besides this special juridical status, military men also hold a special position from the point of view of their juridical situation: one must not forget that we have epigraphic evidence for these military peregrines only when they are, from all perspectives ready for Romanization or are even Romanized to a large extent.

As a group, individualized as such through the common traits of their juridical status, peregrines can be analyzed through juridical literature and administrative and legislative epigraphic sources. But as distinct personalities, they are only known through individual epigraphic manifestations that are culturally relevant and offer most varied data on the social behavior of peregrines and their means of self representation. Besides the value and significance of statistical analyses and the background function of such a research that demographic studies should include, inscriptions themselves are unique sources of particular

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<sup>1</sup> For a wider presentation of the notion, see also Palma 1992.

details. Understanding the inner and outer impulses that lead to the erection of each monument is essential for a general understanding of the epigraphic representativeness phenomenon. Social necessity and the desire for individualization inside the community are essential elements to this phenomenon. Sources in Dacia indicate that, in this province, epigraphic expression is not typical to wide masses, therefore, in this context, those peregrines that do use it are even more interesting.

Reaching now the peregrines attested in Dacia, researchers first noted the wide diversity of the group and the various ways in which they are documented. This group is rather well represented at the level of provincial epigraphy, but in the same time it includes numerous particular situations and atypical cases, with special status. The fact that a rather high percentage of peregrines manifest themselves outside urban contexts is encouraging for the final results of our research; on the other hand, inscriptions erected by those that express themselves in urban contexts can be partially regarded as indicators of a vain desire for distinguishing oneself. In rural contexts, one can note the influence of the military elements and, where such is the case, the corresponding increases in the level of epigraphic manifestation. While performing such a social analysis, one must take into account the spiritual value of each monument, either votive or funerary.

Beyond global data that they provide, monuments also bring interesting details. Almost all we know on family relations and the way such relations were expressed comes from funerary inscriptions (military diplomas are typical for a sub-category and are official documents, not intentional manifestations). Votive items, even if they are not extremely rich in information, are significant because they manage to sketch an extremely rich and full of particularities picture of the cults. Even if epigraphs dedicated to the official gods of Rome predominate, there are several inscriptions that either make reference to local, rare, particular gods, or focus on epithets attributed to the respective deity. All these are proofs of the extremely varied cultural and spiritual levels of peregrines in Dacia. There are various ways in which peregrines make themselves noted in the epigraphic sphere in Dacia: they erect epitaphs with Latin inscriptions, have dedications to gods in the official pantheon placed in public locations, bring homage according to the Roman style to people carrying strong ethnical names, or they adore local gods. All these are expressions of their integration in the Latin world and, in the same time, of the acceptance of a certain degree of alterity.

Onomastics is essential in the very definition and identification of peregrines. Onomastic data must always be analyzed on multiple levels and must be understood in all

their complexity. People speaking Latin and/or Greek could have chosen foreign names, apparently indicating certain ethnic backgrounds, but in the same time Greek and Roman names could feature in every family.<sup>2</sup> Onomastics itself pertains to political and cultural history, not only to linguistics<sup>3</sup> and data that can be extracted from the analysis of names must be regarded as such.

Though largely predictable, their names are extremely illustrative and essential in determining several major cultural circles. Thus, there is an impressive percentage of civilian peregrines, spread throughout the province, that bear Roman or Greek names. If in the case of Greek names one can sometimes invoke real oriental roots, Roman names – especially in the case of *nomina nuda*, lacking even minimum indications of patronymics – reveal nothing on the person's real origin. There is then the group of Illyrian names, concentrated around the center of *Alburnus Maior* of which we know they are real ethnic names. Illyrian names outside this settlement are more likely the result of outer influences, but even in their case there is a real possibility that people bearing such names were connected to the rather wide Illyrian area. The final major onomastic circle is that of the military contexts, dominated by Celtic names, plus the never absent Roman names. The first are often correlated to the specifics of an *auxilia* or one of the areas where it was stationed, thus suggesting a certain degree of relevance in connection to names as ethnic indicators.

Onomastics also raises the issue of the place Dacians occupied in the social network of this Roman province. It is a delicate issue, difficult to clarify and understand on the basis of sources available so far. The few Dacian names are insufficient for reaching truly valid conclusions. Also, the lack of Dacian peregrine onomastics is intriguing and it raises doubts on the existence of epigraphic manifestations of this conquered population. The few external inscriptions, quoted and analyzed as collateral in this work, point to the under average epigraphic representativeness of people related to the province that have an apparently peregrine status. In this context, one does not know if, according to the two coordinates – life in the province of Dacia and the peregrine status – ever overlapped in their case. Returning to the minuses in the attested autochthonous population at the level of this province, it has been suggested that after the conquest Dacians might have had the status of *dediticii*. Proofs of this are nevertheless more than indirect, and it seems improbable that such a status, imminently temporary according to the Roman perception, became permanent for the entire existence period of the province. There is still the possibility that some of the Dacians became

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<sup>2</sup> Noy 2000, 179.

<sup>3</sup> Russu 1975, 354.

completely integrated in the Roman society, giving up their traditional names – and, logically, they would be the ones we know through epigraphy – and others chose a life that did not involve the necessity or desire for epigraphic expression.

As distinct groups in the wide peregrine mass of people, one can distinguish the category of those that can be associated to the military context and those inhabiting the settlement of *Alburnus Maior*. The significant proportion of the military group is only natural in a border province, where auxiliary soldiers and their families formed an important segment of the population and played a significant role on all levels of social and economical life. The massive local recruiting can be noted among auxiliary soldiers attested in Dacia, especially through ethnically varied onomastics and the constant presence of mixed names. An important trait of peregrine soldiers in Dacia is directly related to the epigraphic source typical for them, i.e. the military diplomas. Thus, such diplomas, official documents by excellence, bring to our knowledge a wide variety of ethnical *agnomina* that do not feature in stone epigraphy. Such *agnomina* are most often associated to soldiers' names, but also, in a few cases, to those of their wives that received citizenship. The detail is interesting since it offers an inner view on the manner in which such soldiers, who became citizens, were individualized in connection to the official system.

The families of such soldiers are a complex issue, often hard to reconstruct in its details. A significant number of attested families record ethnically different names, sometimes in no apparent connection to each other. Naturally, the disparities suggest lacunas in our knowledge and the impossible detailed prosopographical reconstruction. *Diplomata* are the main source for members of such soldiers' families. Stone epigraphy, mainly funerary, reveals especially brotherly or friendly relations (in the case of monuments erected by comrades and heirs). Probably due to the young age of death, funerary monuments reveal few names of soldiers' wives and children.

As previously mentioned, the second remarkable sub-group is that in *Alburnus Maior*. The research of this community often involves bringing into discussion communities with peregrine status in Dacia. As indicated above, this issue remains, for the time being, obscure due to the lack of conclusive data on the city territories and the actual extent of areas benefiting from Roman law and, implicitly, of citizenship granted to their permanent inhabitants.

Going beyond these methodological impediments, the natural step to take is the detailed analysis of the only peregrine community in Dacia that produced a multitude of sources and on the status and inhabitants of which one knows a number of important details. It

is thus a mining settlement defined and modeled by the immigration of the Illyrian group here. In this case, a phenomenon of migration determined by professional reasons becomes apparent. Despite the fact that I tend to believe that the vast majority of people attested here established definitively in *Alburnus*, one must not forget that some might be temporary inhabitants.

Correlating wax tablets and stone epigraphic monuments creates the overall image of a community with special territorial and administrative organization, dominated by the peregrine element. On an administrative level, one must note the division of the settlement into *kastella* and the frequent grouping of inhabitants into *collegia*. On the level of personal representativeness, one notes a rather vigorous manifestation – in comparison to the settlement's status and specificity – on the part of the small citizen elite. Wax tables, juridical documents typical for the community in *Alburnus*, are the most relevant epigraphic sources on the *de facto* juridical condition of peregrines in Dacia. They indicate their multiple legal capacities and their inclusion in the Roman system; peregrines in this community closed various types of contracts according to the procedures of Roman law, and played all roles, from vendors and witnesses, to debtors.

One can also note in this community the self-expression, at the level of self-representative epigraphic manifestations, of relatively strong local substrata, worthy of being taken into consideration. In this context, names of people or tribes that can be associated with certain areas of Illyria can be identified. Also, through onomastics, gods adored, and the language of inscriptions, connections of people with the eastern areas of the Empire become apparent, either with simply Greek-speaking areas, or connections with certain regions.

The significance of data from *Alburnus Maior* rests in its value as sample and in the same time, particular example. The Illyrian presence and its economic activity have decisively modeled this community, but it also offers an image of how other rural peregrine communities of Dacia might have looked, *mutatis mutandis*.

One does not know, in the detriment of this study, what was the impact of the changes of 212 on Dacia. It is obvious that they marked the end of an era for this Danubian province as well, but we do not know what the direct reaction of the peregrine group was, or of its representatives. It is possible that in Dacia, as well, the good juridical integration of peregrines played its significant role and the legitimizing of a new citizen status came as a formality.

In the social and juridical mosaic the Roman Empire was, peregrines were defined and united by their condition of non-citizens of Rome. It is hard to say how these foreigners



understood the wide citizenship of the Empire, but it is obvious that besides the multiple local citizenships, strictly related to a city and a territory, Roman citizenship appeared as the most abstract. In the same time, it was granted with relatively large permissiveness, as previously indicated, as long as a series of juridical norms were accepted and respected – even if they were no more than *fictio iuris*.

When one analyzes the Roman state from the perspective of the juridical conditions it was able to include, peregrines appear as a unitary group. Under a closer study though, they form a multitude of distinct entities, uniformly modeled by a series of special conditions, but that manifest their identity, and their alterity implicitly, in various ways.

Indispensable for the deeper understanding of the Roman Empire, peregrines are, from certain points of view, the most heterogeneous group of Roman society. Officially defined rather by the rights they do not enjoy, peregrines find various means of integration and make use of multiple means of expression that indicate their enormous cultural plurality.