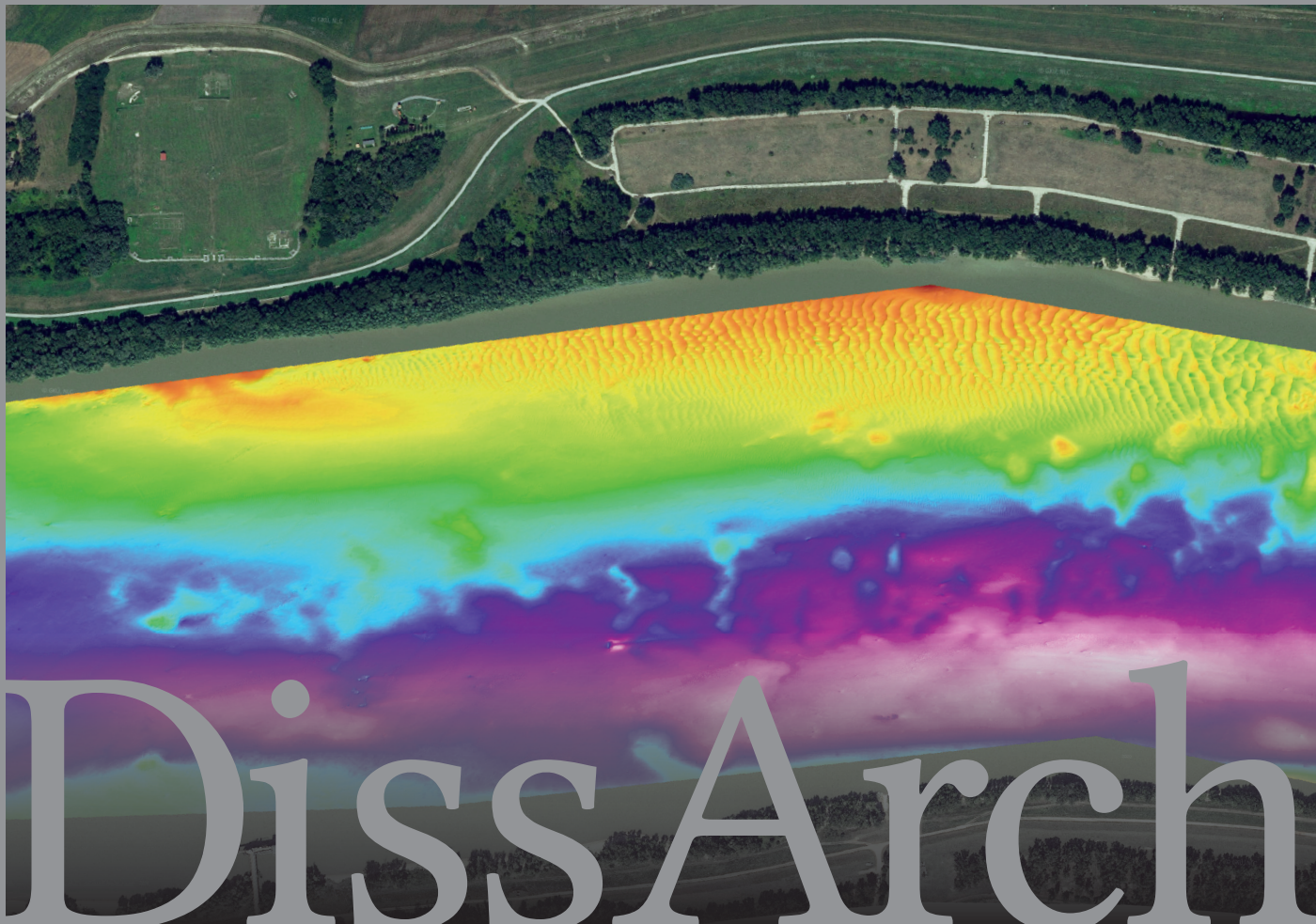


DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE

ex Instituto Archaeologico

Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



Ser. 3. No. 13. | 2025

Dissertationes Archaeologicae
ex Instituto Archaeologico
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ISSN 2064-4574 (online)

Publisher

Lénárd DARÁZS

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Budapest 2025



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Aequora Danubii cunctis transnare sub armis

A new interpretation of the poem CLE 427

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Received 26 June 2025 | Accepted 17 July 2025 | Published 30 January 2026

Abstract: The verse epitaph CIL III 3676, also published by Franz Bücheler in the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* (CLE 427), which celebrates the deeds of a Batavian soldier, who first of his unit swam across the river Danube under the eyes of Hadrian, is very famous. The episode mentioned in the text, known also from Cassius Dio, as well as the possible unit in which the soldier had served have placed the text at the centre of a such lively academic discussion that reached also popular media. Nevertheless, it has not been suggested until now that the text might in fact have never been engraved on a funerary monument, but it might just be a poem, written in the Late Antiquity, which uses as a main topic some astonishing historical episode (*mirabilia*). The elements which support this hypothesis are multiple: (i) the text is known only from manuscripts containing literary texts, (ii) there is no reference to the find place or the place of preservation of the inscription, (iii) the type of text itself would be for its style and content an *unicum* in the epigraphic panorama, especially if we look at the verse inscriptions dedicated to soldiers. In this paper the text is analysed in a new light as an artistic product, probably composed in Late Antiquity, and compared with its possible historical sources and literary models. Moreover, its historical value is also tackled.

Keywords: *carmina Latina epigraphica*, Roman army, Danube, *equites singulares Augusti*, manuscript tradition.

Introduction

Waterways connect or divide places, people, objects and thoughts, both physically and symbolically. The Danube has embodied all these meanings since ancient times. The river appears in the works of many authors as a physical and mental border, but also as a frontier to cross or a road to be travelled to create connections.¹ Among these texts there is a quite famous verse epitaph which celebrates the deeds of a Batavian soldier, who—during the reign of Hadrian—swam across the river Danube with his unit.

Its text reads as follows:

*Ille ego Pannoniis quondam notissimus oris,
inter mille viros primus fortisque Batavos
(H)adriano potui qui iudice vasta profundī
aequora Danubii cunctis transnare sub armis,
5 emissumque arcu dum pendet in aere telum*

1 *Apoll. Rhod.* 4; *Hdt.* 4.33; *Hdt.* 4.48–49; *Pol.* 4.41–42; *Strab.* 7.3.10; *Caes., de bell. Gal.* 6.25.2; *Hor., carm.* 4.15.21; *Ov., Trist.* 2.192; *RGDA* 30; *Mela* 2.8; *Tac., Ger.* 1.1; *Tac., Ann.* 4.5; *Florus* 2.28.

*ac redit, ex alia fixi fregique sagitta,
quem neque Romanus potuit nec barbarus umquam
non iaculo miles, non arcu vincere Parthus,
hic situs hoc memori saxo mea facta sacravi.*

10 *Viderit anne aliquis post me mea facta sequatur:
exemplo mihi sum, primus qui talia gessi.*

I (was) that man once famous on the Pannonian shores, who, first among a thousand Batavians,—how brave!—under Hadrian’s eyes, could have swum over the wide stream of the deep Danube with all my armament; who, while an arrow shot from my bow was hanging in the air and coming back to earth, split and broke it with another arrow; whom neither a Roman, nor a barbarian soldier with the javelin or a Parthian with the bow could ever surpass. Here I lie, canonizing my deeds with this recording stone. It is up to others to see whether someone after me matches my achievements; I, who first achieved such things, am my own model.²

Geographically assigned to Pannonia inferior, the inscription was first published in the third volume of the *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum*. As a *carmen epigraphicum*, it was then included in the collection of Franz Bücheler.³ The former geographical attribution was kept in the corpus of the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica Pannoniae*, published by Paolo Cugusi in 2007.⁴

The epitaph is well known, mainly because of the exceptionality of the episode narrated, also reported in a passage of Cassius Dio (see the chapter on the source below). The attention of historians in more recent times, however, has focused more precisely on three aspects: first, the identification of the military unit that crossed the river under the eyes of the emperor Hadrian, second, the identity of the soldier to whom the monument is dedicated, and third, the place where the inscription was originally displayed.⁵ These aspects and the related academic discussion will be analysed within the paper. All these topics as well as the basis for the present discussion are provided by the precise and exhaustive synthesis in the most recent paper dealing with this inscription, published by Peter Kovács in 2018.

Taking into consideration all the main questions addressed in the previous publications, this paper represents a further step in the study of this inscription. Its aim is to demonstrate that the text of the epitaph might in fact have never been engraved on a funerary monument, but it might be the creation of a late antique poet. Some doubts about the authenticity of the inscription had already been put forward by Theodor Mommsen, who even though pointing out the uncertainty of the manuscript tradition,⁶ decided to include the inscription in the *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum*. In the first edition of CIL III, as the first manuscripts reporting the inscription had not yet been acknowledged, the author of the corpus decided to treat the text as genuine, believing that the mention of a *cohors milliaria Batavorum* (l. 2: *inter mille viros Batavos*) and the orthography of the word *Danuvius* could not have been possibly forged in the 15th century AD.⁷ After the publication of the inscription in the *Anthologia Latina*, which brought to light some earlier manuscripts pre-

2 CIL III 3676 = ILS 2558 = CLE 427 = CLEPann 59 = Kovács 2018 = MPL075034. Translation adapted from COURTNEY 1995, 125, no. 126.

3 CLE 427.

4 CLEPann 59.

5 MÓCSY 1962, 553–554; STROBEL 1987; SPEIDEL 1991; KOVÁCS 2018.

6 CIL III 3676, s. n.: *Auctoritas, qua carminis antiquitas nititur, ipsa non est optima, nam in sylloge illa, unde prodit, non desunt interpolata fictaque, acceditque, quod auctor eius carmen hoc ab alio accepisse se disertè testatur.*

7 CIL III 3676, s. n.: *Equidem tamen titulum verum esse iudico nec fingi potuisse cohortem Batavorum milliariam et Danuvii orthographiam saec. XV plane oblitteratam aliaque non vulgaria et certae antiquitatis.*

serving the text, from the 9th to the 13th century AD, Mommsen confirmed the genuine antiquity of the inscription, thinking that Carolingian and Renaissance scholars would have copied the text from the stone.⁸ Looking closer at the first manuscripts, however, their antiquity is in fact not an evidence for the authenticity of the inscription, but perhaps of the contrary. The early appearance of the text in manuscripts leads to think of a late antique anthology of poems in part attributed to Hadrian and other literary works, which were copied in the Early Middle Ages. In this particular case, the pseudo-funerary inscription would have used as a main topic an extraordinary fact, well known from historians.

The find place

The first element that raises strong doubts about the authenticity of the inscription is the lack of clarity around its find place or at least a place of preservation, which, to this extent, is rare also for inscriptions which are solely known from the manuscript tradition. Since the poem is preserved exclusively in anthologies of literary works (see the chapter about manuscript tradition below), rather than through any transcription of the original inscription or related documentation, there is no information about the provenance of the supposed inscription. These sources do not include any reference to the object itself or its original context.⁹ The first to attribute the inscription to Pannonia was Felice Feliciano, an Italian humanist, who put together a collection of Pannonian inscriptions on the occasion of his visit to the court of king Mathias Corvinus in Buda in the year 1479.¹⁰ Because of the particular occasion of his collection, it is possible that he tried to link this text with Pannonia. In his manuscript copied by Ferrarinus¹¹ and Rambertus¹² it is noted that the inscription was probably located along the Danube (*sub ripam Danuvii dicitur esse*) and then more precisely in Hungary (*in Hungaria, in sepulchro quod non vidimus*). Yet, in both cases it is specified that the location is only hypothetical and that the monument had not been seen by the author. In his recent paper Kovács completely deconstructed the tradition that attributes the provenance of this inscription to Pannonia. This assumption is, in fact, purely and solely based on the content of the text and to the original intention of Felicianus to collect the inscriptions from Pannonia for the Hungarian king.

Not doubting the authenticity of the funerary monument, Kovács suggests a completely different origin of the inscription from Italy, and more precisely from Sora.¹³ The new identification is based on the information given in the glossa or title of the poem in the *Cod. Paris. 6630* (*Item versus eiusdem de quodam milite Sorano*) and other medieval manuscripts.¹⁴ If this was in fact an inscription, which went lost before Late Antiquity, then it should at least have contained a *praescriptum* and / or a *postscriptum* providing some personal information about the soldier, including, very likely, his name and provenance. Until the edition by Kovács, the adjective Soranus had unanimously been interpreted as the *cognomen* of the soldier, probably recruited by Hadrian in Syria.¹⁵ It cannot be excluded, however, that the name of the soldier was forged. Sora, as M. P. Speidel remarks, was a colony of veterans in Latium, where also Hadrian had settled some of his former soldiers. Here the

8 CIL III, XXV. *Incertae* (p. 461) Ad n. 3676: [...] *videturque titulus referendus esse inter eos, quos ex lapidibus descripserunt viri docti aetatis Carolingicae*.

9 *Cod. Vales.* 393; *cod. Lat. Paris.* 6630.

10 See CONTÒ – QUAQUARELLI 1995; RITOÓK-SZALAY 1989, 65–75; KOVÁCS 2018, 313 with further literature.

11 FERRARINUS 35.

12 RAMBERTUS 33.

13 See KOVÁCS 2018, 315–317.

14 *Cod. Laud.* 86; *Cod. B. M. Add. Mss.* 11983 fol. 36.

15 See FEHÉR 2008, 108–109, nos 44–46.

Batavian soldier might have retired.¹⁶ Kovács concludes that Soranus has to be more likely interpreted as the find place of the inscription and not as the name of the soldier. The find place close to Rome would have facilitated the inclusion of the poem in the early medieval anthologies.

Nevertheless, even though putting some order in the tradition regarding the find place of the inscription, the deconstruction of the origin of the inscription from Pannonia is not enough to dispel the uncertainty surrounding the origin of the epitaph, which constitutes part of the complexity and exceptionality of the text.

The manuscript tradition

The problem concerning the manuscript tradition is directly connected to the find place. The first branch of tradition, as we have seen, leads back to Felice Feliciano, who clearly had collected Pannonian inscriptions on a specific occasion.

When the inscription was published among the *incertae* of CIL III, it was pointed out that the fortune of this epitaph started in the 16th century. This happened, perhaps not accidentally, in the Netherlands, when in 1530 the Dutch humanist Gerard Geldenhower published his *Historia Batavica*.¹⁷ It is clear that the function of this text in this context was that of celebrating the military bravery of the ancient inhabitants of the Netherlands. From then on, the text became well known and it was copied and edited in various works.

Only with the publication of the *Anthologia Latina* by Alexander Riese in 1868 was a new *codex* added to the tradition of the text. In the modern *Anthologia Latina*, Riese added to the core of the *codices Salmasianus* and *Thuaneus* didactic poems and *carmina epigraphica* from other manuscripts. Some of these were taken from a Carolingian *florilegium* of the 9th century AD, the *codex Valesianus* 393, which today is kept in the Abbey of Saint-Amand-les-Eaux, close to Lille. This manuscript contains parts of treatises of the grammarians Marius Plotius and Marius Servius on different types of ancient metrical schemes, proverbs of Annaeus Seneca, and parts of works in verses like the *Apokolokyntosis* by Seneca. These compositions include also four epitaphs that have been considered inscriptions. Among these, three are Christian epigrams, while only the inscription that honours the Batavian soldier seems to be of pagan nature. This is the oldest testimony of the text and it provides no hint to the fact that this text was copied from a stone and was not a literary invention, on the contrary, it is presented exactly as a literary text. Differently from the other epitaphs that precede and follow it, the title *In memoria cuiusdam militis*, composed by the author of the *codex* to introduce the epitaph, does not mention the find place of the monument. The identification of the other three epitaphs reported in the manuscript could be questionable too. The first text, *Romae in imaginem Constantini*, was published as an inscription in ICUR II 4123 and *Anth. Lat.* 659.¹⁸ It relates to the statue of Constantine in Saint Peter's basilica in Rome. As it is preserved in a manuscript collecting all inscriptions from the basilica, we can take it more or less as granted that this was once an inscription. The third text, *Lugduni in memoria geminorum*, re-published in the thirteenth volume of the CIL, is only known from this *codex* and its existence on stone should be analysed

16 SPEIDEL 1991, 279–280.

17 BEJCZY – STEGEMAN 1998. This work was preceded by Cornelius Aurelius' *Chronycke van Holland* written in 1517, in which the author builds a narration about a Batavian hero ancestor of the Dutch people (see VAN LIEBURG 2004).

18 ICUR II 4123 = CLE 902: *Credite victuras anima remeante favillas / rursus ad amissum posse redire diem / nam vaga bis quinos iam luna resumpserat orbes / nutabat dubia cum mihi morte salus / inrita letiferos auxit medicina dolores / crevit et humana morbus ab arte meus / o quantum Petro largitur Christus honorem / ille dedit vitam reddidit iste mihi*. See on this inscription LIVERANI 2008.

more cautiously.¹⁹ The authors of the CIL attributed to Lugdunum also the fourth epitaph, *In tumulo cuiusdam medici*—also known only from this Carolingian manuscript—solely based on the analogy with the previous one.²⁰ Even admitting that the previous text was an inscription from Lugdunum, the provenance and identification of this one should at least be put to discussion.

The *cod. Vales.* is the oldest manuscript in which the text is handed down. However, the poem is also preserved in other manuscripts dated from the 11th to the 13th century AD, which seem to be attributed to another branch of tradition, as they preserve the name Soranus and poems of the *Anthologia Latina* attributed to Germanicus Caesar or Iulius Caesar and Hadrian.²¹ In all these manuscripts, the text is consequently kept together with the other poems of the *Anthologia Latina*. In the 12th-century AD *cod. Montpess.* 280 from Montpellier, the poem is copied with *Anth. Lat.* 659, the inscription for the emperor Constantine, also included in *cod. Vales.* 393, and *Anth. Lat.* 392 (this last is attributed to Hadrian).²² In the contemporary *cod. Laud.* 86, it appears together with *Anth. Lat.* 709, attributed to Iulius Caesar. In *cod. B. M. Add. Mss.* 11983, containing the work of Seneca, it is copied together with *Anth. Lat.* 392–393, attributed to Hadrian.²³ A further important manuscript in the tradition of the poem is the 13th-century AD *cod. Lat. Paris.* 6630, which contains a collection of literary works, in particular Seneca and verses attributed to Iulius Caesar (*Anth. Lat.* 709). Also, in this *codex* the poem is copied together with the other two poems ascribed to the emperor Hadrian (*Anth. Lat.* 392–393), exactly as in other medieval testimonies.²⁴ In none of the manuscripts there is a reference that any of these texts have ever been copied from a stone.

As Kovács correctly points out, the archetypus cannot have been the *cod. Vales.*, which stands alone in the tradition and might eventually only have influenced the *cod. Montpess.*, as they both contain the same *Anth. Lat.* 659 for Constantine. The common source must have therefore been a late antique anthology, which Kovács dates back to not later than the 6th century AD.²⁵

Stylistic and content problems

If one observes the form and the structure of the text as well as its content, it is difficult to frame it in an epigraphic genre as a funerary or honorific monument of any geographical area, era, or social group (which in this case, however, should correspond with the production of the military milieu).

19 CIL XIII 2402 = CLEGall 54 = CLE 2519: *Hic gemini fratres iunctis dant membra sepulchris / quos iunxit meritum consociavit humus / germine barbarico nati sed fonte renati / dant animas c(a)elo dant sua membra solo / advenit Sagile patri cum coniuge luctus / defungi haud dubie qui voluere prius / sed dolor est nimius Chr(ist)o moderante ferendus / orbat non sunt dona dedere deo.*

20 CIL XIII 2414 = CLEGall 51 = CLE 2516: *Praeteriens hominum sortem miserare viator / deque meis restent quae tibi fata vide / en (!) mihi terra domum praebet cin(er)isque sepulchrum / vermis et exiguus membra caduca vorat / conditor omnipotens paradysi (!) quem esse colonum / iusserat hanc tribuit culpa nefanda vicem / nomine Felicem me olim dixere parentes / vita dicata mihi hic ars medicina fuit / aegros multorum potui relevare dolores / morbum non potui vincere ab arte meum.*

21 On the following manuscripts see Kovács 2018, 314–315, with further literature.

22 *Anth. Lat.* 392: *Vt belli sonuere tubae, uiolenta peremit / Hippolyte Teuthranta, Lyce Clonon, Oebalon Alce, / Oebalon ense, Clonon iaculo, Teuthranta sagitta. / Oebalus ibat equo, curru Clonus, at pede Teuthras, / Plus puero Teuthras, puer Oebalus, at Clonus heros. / Figitur ora Clonus, latus Oebalus, ilia Teuthras. / Iphicli Teuthras, Dorycli Clonus, Oebalus Idae; / Argolicus Teuthras, Moesus Clonus, Oebalus Arcas.*

23 *Anth. Lat.* 393: *Almo Theon Thyrsis orti sub colle Pelori / Semine disparili: Laurente Lacone Sabina. / Vite Sabina, Lacon sulco, sue cognita Laurens. / Thyrsis oues, uitulos Theon egerat, Almo capellas, / Almo puer pubesque Theon et Thyrsis ephebus; / Canna Almo, Thyrsis stipula, Theon ore melodus. / Nais amat Thyrsin, Glauce Almona, Nisa Theonem; / Nisa rosas, Glauce uiolas dat, lilia Nais.*

24 On the authorship of CLE 427 see the chapter about the author below.

25 Kovács 2018, 315.

The poem seems to combine the features of a funerary monument with an honorific one. It stands out and can be considered as a *unicum* in the epigraphic panorama, also if compared to *carmina epigraphica* which often deviate from the epigraphic standards.

Moving from the function of the presumed epigraphic monument to more precise stylistic and content patterns, observations can be made at different levels.

Starting from the phonetics, the absence of aspiration in the name of the emperor, Hadrianus, spelled as Adrianus, is present in the whole manuscript tradition. This phenomenon, absent in the epigraphic testimonies mentioning the emperor,²⁶ is common in vulgar Latin.²⁷ Alternatively, the mistake could depend from an imprecise transliteration from the Greek Ἀδριανός, read by the poet in a written Greek source, like Cassius Dio.²⁸

One particular expression that appears in the verses seems formally hard to assign to a composition that should date during or to the years immediately after the reign of Hadrian not later than the mid-2nd century AD: this is the opposition *Romanus / Barbarus* (l. 7: *neque Romanus potuit nec barbarus umquam*).²⁹ The antithesis between Roman and barbarian became widespread in the Late Antiquity. A polarisation between the two terms, similar to the one between Greek and Barbarian, was not possible during the Empire, as the term *barbarus* was often put into perspective and used only to refer to the borders of the known world. A strong opposition was also not possible because of the continuous changes in the forms of power, the presence of ethnic units in the army, and commerce. Especially under the reign of Hadrian, commerce with areas beyond the borders of the empire was strengthened day by day, and in the tradition of the Roman army the auxiliary units that defended the borders of the Empire had always been composed by *peregrini*. The exceptional Batavian soldier celebrated in the poem, member of an equestrian *ala* of the Roman army, was one of them himself.

This view changed after the *constitutio Antoniniana* and in the course of the 3rd century AD. If we look at the imperial titulature and the *cognomina devictarum gentium*, which are basically what was moving the imperial propaganda and was present also on coins; these never indicate the enemies of the Empire as *barbari* but the names of the tribes and populations are always used. It is only in the 3rd century AD that this idea became more present, and during the Late Antiquity the word *barbarus* became part of the imperial attributes. Just to provide an example, emperor Constantine is called *debellator gentium barbararum*.³⁰ It can therefore be assumed that the author of CLE 427, who was probably writing much later than the 2nd century AD, was projecting the mentality of his time to an earlier period. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the terms *Romanus*, *Barbarus*, and *Parthus*³¹ can be read as a way to state that the Batavian soldier was the most formidable in the world. In the mental map of the Romans, Barbarians and Parthians represented the most threatening enemies and the soldier of the poem was superior to them.³²

26 An exception is an altar *pro salute* of Hadrian, set up by an auxiliary soldier in Pannonia inferior (the modern find place is Szigetszentmiklós): RIU Suppl. 152 = AE 2002, 1183 = TitAq IV 1801: [I(ovi)] O(p-timo) M(aximo) / pro salute / Im(peratoris) (H)adriani / Aug(usti) votum / Silv[a]nus Tesco/ris [fil(ius?)] mil(es) co(hortis) / vico Cuetrone. On this inscription see also below.

27 VÄÄNÄNEN 1966, 57–58.

28 On the possibility that Cassius Dio is the direct source for this late antique poem see the chapter about the source below I.

29 On this see also KRUSCHWITZ 2022, esp. 174–175 on the perception of barbarians in verse inscriptions and specifically on this poem.

30 LOSEMANN 1997, 439–443; CHRIST 1983; CHRISTOL 1997 on the Roman Empire in the third century; LE BOHEC 2004; ZUGRAVU 2022; CENATI – MATEI-POPESCU in preparation.

31 The use of the term *Parthus* instead of *Persicus* shows on the other side the awareness of an ethnonyms used in the second century.

32 On the ancient perception of the world to this respect see e.g. HARTOG 1980; ROMNEY 2017.

In the text, a series of historical imprecisions can be highlighted, which refer to the event in which the soldier is involved, his military unit, and his military skills. These seem to be hardly compatible with a contemporary source, which is not corrupted by the tradition and by later events and mentality.

Based on the poem it has always been assumed that the episode should have taken place in Pannonia. The Batavian soldier was famous in the shores of Pannonia (l. 1: *Pannoniis quondam notissimoris*), probably because he was serving in a provincial military unit. It cannot, however, be excluded that this unit was temporarily on a mission in another province, as we will see below.

The episode takes place in the presence of emperor Hadrian. It is therefore of crucial importance to understand what is the exact event mentioned in the text. It seems to be widely accepted that the poem refers of an event which happened during the travel of Hadrian to the Danube in spring AD 118, which, according to Helmut Halfmann, is supported by written sources.³³ However, upon close examination, the first one turns out to be the same poem, CLE 427, which inevitably creates a vicious circle in the information. The second would be Cassius Dio, who narrates the same episode, but just in an anecdotal form, without providing information about place and time. The only remaining source that attests the temporary stay of the emperor in the province—but cannot be connected in any way to this specific event—would be a passage of the lives of the Sophists by Philostratus, which narrates of an unfortunate meeting between the emperor and the young Herodes Atticus.³⁴ To this literary passage we can add the inscription raised by an auxiliary soldier in Pannonia for the health of Hadrian, which can hardly be explained if not with a direct contact between the soldier and the troop.³⁵ That Hadrian travelled through Pannonia in AD 118 is out of question. On his way to Rome he crossed Illyricum, presumably along the *via militaris* and then through Emونا down on the *via Flaminia* until Rome,³⁶ but it is impossible to place this episode in Pannonia in the year AD 118 based on any known source.

At the beginning of AD 118, Hadrian, who had just become emperor and was heading from Syria to Rome, travelled to Moesia inferior to settle the tumults with the Roxolani and negotiate with them.³⁷ Due to his prolonged absence from the capital, a conspiracy against him forced him to hasten his travel to Rome. Avoiding a conspiracy and stating his role of emperor became the absolute priority. Not being able to deal in person with the problems on the Dacian and Pannonian border, the emperor appointed his most trusted man, Q. Marcius Turbo, as commander of the legions in

33 HALFMAN 1986, 190.

34 Philostr., *vita soph.* 2.1.14: “οἱ δὲ προφέροντες αὐτῷ νέῳ ἔτι τὸ λόγου τινὸς ἐν Παιονίᾳ ἐκπεσεῖν ἐπὶ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος ἡγνοηκέναι μοι δοκοῦσιν, ὅτι καὶ Δημοσθένης ἐπὶ Φιλίππου λέγων ταῦτόν ἔπαθεν: κάκεινος μὲν ἦκων Ἀθήναζε τιμὰς προσήτει καὶ στεφάνους ἀπολωλυίας Ἀθηναίοις Ἀμφιπόλεως, Ἡρώδης δέ, ἐπεὶ τοῦτο ἔπαθεν, ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰστρὸν ἦλθεν ὡς ρίψων ἑαυτὸν, τοσοῦτον γὰρ αὐτῷ περιῆν τοῦ ἐν λόγοις βούλεσθαι ὀνομαστῶ εἶναι, ὡς θανάτου τιμᾶσθαι τὸ σφαλῆναι.” Translation by W. Cave Wright: “And those who cast in his teeth the fact that while he was yet a youth he broke down in a speech before the Emperor in Pannonia are, I think, not aware that the same thing happened to Demosthenes also, when he spoke before Philip. And Demosthenes returned to Athens and demanded honours and crowns, though the Athenians never recovered Amphipolis; but Herodes after the humiliation rushed to the river Danube as though he would throw himself in; for so overwhelming was his desire to become famous as orator, that he assessed the penalty of failure at death.” See also HALFMAN 1986, 67, 190 and BIRLEY 1997a, 89 on Herodes’ visit to Hadrian in Pannonia.

35 See footnote 26.

36 The passage (HA, *Hadr.* 5.9: *per Illyricum Romam venit*) must be interpolated and anticipates a later event. See FÜNDLING 2006, 432–435. On the journey of Hadrian, see also HALFMAN 1986, 40–47; SYME 1988.

37 FÜNDLING 2006, 450–451.

Dacia superior and Pannonia inferior.³⁸ In this circumstance it is likely that one *ala* stationed in Pannonia was sent to support the military operations in Dacia, but at this stage Hadrian had already left the region. If one wants to set the episode of the crossing of the Danube in AD 118, it is more likely that this took place in Moesia inferior, where the Roxolani did not expect the arrival of the emperor (Dio LXIX.9.6: “ἃ ὁρῶντες οἱ βάρβαροι τοὺς μὲν Ῥωμαίους κατεπλήττοντο, τρεπόμενοι δὲ ἐπὶ σφᾶς αὐτοὺς ἐχρῶντο αὐτῷ διαιτητῇ τῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλους διαφορῶν”).

However, it is also possible that the encounter between Romans and some tribe beyond the *limes* did not happen in AD 118 but earlier, in AD 107, when Hadrian was still governor of Pannonia inferior. As it is narrated in the *Historia Augusta*, during his short governorship Hadrian was busy keeping at bay the problems with the Sarmatians.³⁹ This stage of his career defending the borders of Pannonia is associated in the *Historia Augusta* with the *topos* that he kept the *disciplina militaris*. The passage shows some similarities with the one by Cassius Dio, reported in the epitome of Xiphilinus. The event appears in Cassius Dio’s work in not a chronological, but in an anecdotal form, providing an example of the great skills of Hadrian as commander (“οὕτω γὰρ καλῶς ἦσκητο τὸ στρατιωτικὸν αὐτῷ”) and mentioning the crossing of the Danube by a Batavian unit, which had to be in Pannonia and which was facing barbarians, perhaps the Sarmatians.⁴⁰

A second point of historical nature in the poem is the strength of the unit crossing the Danube. From the inscription we learn that they were thousand Batavians, while from Cassius Dio we get the supplementary piece of information that these were horsemen.⁴¹ M. P. Speidel has suggested to recognise here the *ala* of the *equites singulares Augusti*, who in the 2nd century AD were in part still recruited among the tribe of the Batavians.⁴² The mention of Parthians at l. 8 is a strong evidence that led Speidel to argue that the unit mentioned in the text had taken part in the Parthian War and to identify it with the *equites singulares Augusti*.⁴³ However, if we set the episode in AD 118, the new emperor was still on his way to Rome from Syria where he served as a governor. It might be assumed then, that the *equites* with him were in part the *equites singulares* of the governor, already upgraded to *equites singulares Augusti*. The soldiers of the horse guard followed the emperor everywhere and were, as defined by Speidel, the “cutting edge of the Roman army”.⁴⁴ The question that still remains open is if the freshly reorganised unit of the imperial horsemen was accompanying the emperor in this travel through

38 HA, Hadr. 6.6–8: *Audito dein tumultu Sarmatarum et Roxolanorum praemissis exercitibus Moesiam petiit. Marcium Turbonem post Mauretanium praefecturae infulis ornatum Pannoniae Daciaeque ad tempus praefecit. cum rege Roxolanorum, qui de inminutis stipendiis querebatur, cognito negotio pacem composuit.* Translation by D. Magie: “Then, on hearing of the incursions of the Sarmatians and Roxolani, he sent the troops ahead and set out for Moesia. He conferred the *insignia* of a prefect on Marcus Turbo after his Mauretanian campaign and appointed him to the temporary command of Pannonia and Dacia. When the king of the Roxolani complained of the diminution of his subsidy, he investigated his case and made peace with him.” HA, Hadr. 7.3: *Dacia Turboni credita, titulo Aegyptiacae praefecturae, quo plus auctoritas haberet, ornato.* Translation by D. Magie: “Whereupon Hadrian entrusted the command in Dacia to Turbo, whom he dignified, in order to increase his authority, with a rank analogous to that of the prefect of Egypt.” On Turbo, see PISO 1993, 30–32; PISO 2013, 67–109; WEBER 2024. In order to entrust him with the command, Hadrian must have personally met Turbo, but their meeting must have taken place in Dacia rather than Pannonia.

39 HA, Hadr. 3.9: *legatus postea praetorius in Pannoniam inferiorem missus Sarmatas compressit, disciplinam militarem tenuit, procuratores latius evagantes coercuit;* BIRLEY 1997a, 52–53.

40 See HA, Hadr. 3.9 (cited in footnote 39 above). Hadrian was facing Sarmatian also in AD 118 (HA, Hadr. 6.6–8, cited in footnote 38 above). In general on Sarmatians, see KOVÁCS 2022.

41 This last piece of information is somehow implied in the text of the inscription.

42 SPEIDEL 1991. On the Batavian’s identity, see ROYMANS 2004.

43 SPEIDEL 1994b, 46.

44 SPEIDEL 1994b, 46.

Moesia and Pannonia or, as we should expect, just major military expeditions like the war against the Parthians. If the soldiers mentioned in CLE 427 and in Cassius Dio were members of his personal guard, it is more likely that only a part of the *ala* was travelling with him.⁴⁵

Even if the attempt to identify the cavalrymen of the poem with the highly-specialised horse guard is very fascinating for several reasons, it cannot be ignored that Cassius Dio clearly writes that the equestrian unit was named after the Batavians (“τὸ ἵππικὸν τῶν καλουμένων Βατάουων”). The unit mentioned here should have been an equestrian unit like the *ala I Batavorum milliaria c. R.* or the *ala I Ulpia contariorum milliaria c. R.*, both in Pannonia under Hadrian.⁴⁶ A *vexillatio* of this unit might have been sent to Moesia inferior to support the emperor in the operations with the Roxolani (HA: *praemissis exercitibus*). If we discard the framing of the episode in AD 118, yet, this would fit well in the period of the governorship of Hadrian, who was at the head of the army in Pannonia, including of course the Batavian cohorts.⁴⁷

Finally, to the Batavian hero several military specialties are attributed: he was a cavalryman able to cross the river on horseback in full armour, a Bowman, an expert with the javelin. ‘Batavian’ could refer to his origin or simply to his belonging to a cavalry unit, originally formed by Batavians, masters in horse riding. What makes one sceptical about his profile is that he was additionally a skilled Bowman and an expert with the javelin. In this circumstance, the advantage of Speidel’s hypothesis is that some *equites singulares* were bowmen, namely those coming from Syria and Arabia, where members of the personal guard of the future emperor might have been recruited. If we give up the assumption that they were *equites singulares* and accept the more logical hypothesis of an *ala Batavorum* stationed in Pannonia, this combination of skills seems more improbable, even though mounted auxiliary units of archers were deployed also along the *limes*.⁴⁸ The identification of the soldier with a member of the imperial personal horse guard is a valid attempt to explain the combination of two of the three specialties (horse-riding and archery) mentioned in the inscription. Nevertheless, the use of the javelin is difficult to explain as well as the identification as a Batavian for a soldier who should theoretically be of Syrian origin. This narration seems hard to conceive historically and is more suitable to the poetic creativity of an author who sums up different literary *topoi* attributed to soldiers without paying attention to historical accuracy.⁴⁹ These can also probably derive from the description of military training.⁵⁰ In particular, the evocative *topos* of the Roman soldiers swimming across rivers against their enemies, taken by his source, likely Cassius Dio (see the chapter about the source below), can be one the motives that inspired the composition of the poem.⁵¹

The authorship

It was (and it still partially is) a just as common as unfounded opinion that certain epigraphic poems in Roman times could not possibly be composed by regular people but only by members of the most educated classes. In studies on *carmina epigraphica*, the authorship of poems was (and still is)

45 SPEIDEL 1994b, 45–47 assumes that all *equites singulares Augusti* followed the emperor, while smaller groups of *equites* might have left on smaller missions with or without him (SPEIDEL 1994a, 116). Hyg., *de mun. castr.* 7 and 29 on the 900 *equites singulares Augusti* in Hatra against the Parthians.

46 See LŐRINCZ 2001, 15 and 18–19.

47 PETOLESCU 2021, 184–186.

48 See DAVIES 1977 on the *sagittarii* and ȚENȚEA 2012, 87–95.

49 See also the image of the arrow split in two in *Sil. Ital. Pun.* 1.316 and below. On bowmen who shoot sharp, see the speech of Hadrian in Lambaesis, field 22 (SPEIDEL 2006).

50 See, e.g., Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* and especially the *Ars Tactica* written by Hadrian’s governor of Cappadocia, Arrianus.

51 See, e.g., Trajan’s Column (Scene XXXI); *Herod.* 8.4.3; *Amm.* 25.6.13–15, 7.3, 8.1.

frequently assigned to members of the intellectual elite.⁵² Because of its exclusivity, it has been (and it still is) assumed by many that the author of this funerary epitaph was the emperor Hadrian himself.⁵³ It is known that the emperor wrote poems, which might have circulated even for centuries in anthologies collecting also compositions ascribed to him. At least another poem in form of an epitaph in Greek, which is contained in the *Anthologia Palatina*, compiled in the Byzantine period, has been attributed to the emperor.⁵⁴ However, only for CLE 427 an epigraphic nature has been inferred.⁵⁵

According to this interpretation, the emperor would have been the author of a funerary inscription for a simple soldier—the rank is not made explicit—very likely several years after the event which he had witnessed. This is a quite singular, if not improbable circumstance, even admitting that the honoured soldier was a member of the *equites singulares Augusti*, who were personally chosen by the emperor to become part of his personal guard and might have had a close relationship with him.⁵⁶

If one accepts that Hadrian was in fact the author of the poem, it would be an exaggeration to presume that this was engraved on a funerary monument. In this case, we should consider the epitaph a literary work on par with the others. Eventually, the attribution to Hadrian in part of the manuscript tradition is strongly questionable itself. As the identification of the provenance of the monument in Pannonia relies solely on the mention of the Danubian shores of Pannonia at the beginning of the poem, the attribution of the epitaph to Hadrian is based only on the mention of the emperor in the third line.⁵⁷ This might also have influenced the ascription of the other poems copied with this in medieval anthologies. In fact, from a merely stylistic point of view, the *carmen* seems to have hardly been written by Hadrian, as its literary taste, containing Vergilian and Ovidian ech-

52 See the study of Cagnat (CAGNAT 1889) on this reference. On the question of authorship in verse inscriptions, see KRUSCHWITZ 2023.

53 Galletier writes that the *carmen* was written by the emperor himself; see also the *carmina* of the *Anthologia Latina* for the *equites singulares Augusti* (GALLETIER 1922, 180, 239). More recently, it has been assumed that the *carmen* was composed during the time of Hadrian on the occasion of a military expedition (CUGUSI 2007, 104).

54 *Anth. Pal.* 7.363: “†Τετμενάνης ὄδε τύμβος ἐν γλύπτοιο μετάλλου / ἥρωος μεγάλου νέκκος κατὰ σῶμα καλύπτει / Ζηνοδότου. Ψυχὴ δὲ κατ’ οὐρανόν, ἥχι περ’ Ὀρεφεύς, / ἥχι Πλάτων, ἱερὸν θεοδέγμονα θῶκον, ἐφεῦρεν. / Ἴππεὺς μὲν γὰρ ἔην βασιλῆος ἄλκιμος οὔτος, / κύδιμος, ἀρτιεπής, θεοείκελος. Ἐν δ’ ἄρα μύθοις / Σωκράτους μίμημα παρ’ Αὔσονίῳσιν ἐτύχθη. / Παισὶ δὲ καλλείψας πατρώιον αἶσιον ὄλβον / ὠμογέρων τέθνηκε, λιπὼν ἀπερείσιον ἄλγος / εὐγενέεσσι φίλοισι καὶ ἄστει καὶ πολήταις.” See SPEIDEL 1991, 277.

55 A verse inscription from Apta, Gallia Narbonensis (CIL XII 1122 = CLE 1522), which is also only known from manuscripts, seems to be a poem composed by Hadrian for his horse Borysthenes. An anecdote about Hadrian’s horse is reported by Cassius Dio in the 69th book, similarly to the episode of the Batavian soldier. Although accepted by Mommsen and Bücheler, the authenticity of the monument is questionable, thus the source should be treated with caution in a further and broader study.

56 On the *adlectio*, see CENATI 2023, 133. An example of the close relationship between the emperor and his officers might have been that of M. Calventius Viator, on whom M. P. Speidel reconstructs a quite impressive story, which is however not supported by evidence (SPEIDEL 1994b, 47–49). This proves the fascination that some roles in the army must have had in antiquity and still have in the modern research. Nevertheless, it seems to be clear that the promotions in the career of Viator—legionary *centurio* to commander of the horse guard of Hadrian—has to be connected to his close relationship to the emperors Trajan first and Hadrian later from the Parthian War on (see PETOLESCU 2005; CUPCEA 2013, 346–348). On the relationship between the emperor and his troops, see *Plin.*, *Paneg.* 15; SPEIDEL 1994b, 44. On Hadrian’s troop visits and their epigraphic legacy, see the exceptional inscription from Lambaesis, the only record of speeches of the emperor to his troops (LE BOHEC 2003; SPEIDEL 2006).

57 KOVÁCS 2018.

oes,⁵⁸ does not correspond at all to that of the emperor, whose style is closer to the second Sophistic.⁵⁹ Closer to the style of Hadrian is the presumed verse inscription for his horse Borysthenes (see footnote 55) to which a separate study will be dedicated.

The source

As mentioned throughout this paper, exactly the same episode appears in Cassius Dio, in one of the chapters which have reached us through the epitomator Xiphilinus, court intellectual who lived in the 11th century AD:

“οὕτω γὰρ καλῶς ἤσκητο τὸ στρατιωτικὸν αὐτῷ ὥστε καὶ τὸ ἵππικὸν τῶν καλουμένων Βατάουων τὸν Ἰστρον μετὰ τῶν ὅπλων διενήξαντο. ἃ ὁρῶντες οἱ βάρβαροι τοὺς μὲν Ῥωμαίους κατεπλήττοντο, τρεπόμενοι δὲ ἐπὶ σφᾶς αὐτοὺς ἐχρῶντο αὐτῷ διαιτητῇ τῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλους διαφορῶν.”

“So excellently indeed, had his soldiery been trained that the cavalry of the Batavians, as they were called, swam the Ister with their arms. Seeing all this, the barbarians stood in terror of the Romans, and turning their attention to their own affairs, they employed Hadrian as an arbitrator of their differences.”⁶⁰

Cassius Dio not only narrates the same episode, but the formal similarities between the passage and this inscription, even if carrying different meaning are striking. The most significant one is use of the word *iudex* in the poem (*Adriano iudice*), which seems to be the exact translation of ‘δαιτητής’ used by Cassius Dio. In the passage of the historian Hadrian acted as an *arbiter* among the barbarians, who recognised the superiority of the Roman army, while in the poem he is simply an observer of the military undertaking.⁶¹ Moreover, the mediation in the controversies between different tribes might not belong to the events of AD 118, as assumed by modern research.⁶² The mediation process must have needed time and the stable presence of Hadrian, who, perhaps, was at the time governor of Pannonia Inferior and, in this quality, had also the duty of chief judge in his province (*iudex*).

Another close similarity between the two texts is the opposition *Romanus / Barbarus* (“οἱ βάρβαροι τοὺς μὲν Ῥωμαίους κατεπλήττοντο”). This would be more fitting to the time when Cassius Dio was writing; however, still in the passage of the historian this is not an end in itself, but it is contextualised in the negotiation of the tribes from beyond the Danube with the emperor. The change in the meaning of the juxtaposition of the two terms turns the historical event narrated by Cassius Dio into a literary *topos*.

The use of very similar expressions in the inscription and by Cassius Dio seems to be more questionable than the attribution of the poem to Hadrian. It is beyond debate that Hadrian composed poems (albeit not for funerary monuments) for his closest soldiers. However, it would be a singular

58 l. 1: cf. Verg., *Aen. proem.* 1 (*Ille ego, qui quondam gracili modulantes avena*). This verse has influenced also the epigraphic verse production: CIL VI 1372 = CLE 426 (*Ille ego qui quondam prae[tor]*); CIL XIV 914 = CLE 1318 (*hoc ego su(m) in tumulo Primus notissimus ille*); l. 2: cf. Ov., *met.* 11.528 (*inter mille viros murum tamen occupat unus*); ll. 3–4: Hor., *Odes* 4.15.21 (*Non qui profundum Danuvium bibunt*); l. 5: cf. Sil. Ital., *Pun.* 1.316 (*Permissum ventis abscondit in aere telum*). For all these literary parallels, see COURTNEY 1995, 334–335.

59 On Hadrian’s style of writing, see BARDON 1940, 422; BOLLANSÉE 1994, 283.

60 Dio LXIX.9.6; translated by E. Cary.

61 This narrative closely resembles the speeches of Hadrian in Lambaesis, where the emperor was observing and judging their manoeuvres. It is possible that a similar episode was narrated by Hadrian in his autobiography and perhaps included in the *History* by Cassius Dio (see below).

62 HALFMANN 1986, 190; SPEIDEL 1991; BIRLEY 1997a, 89, note 36.

coincidence if a funerary inscription—whether it was set up in Pannonia or close to Rome in the 2nd century AD—served as a source for the historian writing several decades later.

Some historical imprecisions present in the poem have been discussed above and it has been anticipated that these are absent in the version of Cassius Dio. The historian does not specify the number of the soldiers taking part in the crossing of the Danube but simply writes that these were Batavian cavalrymen. The number must have been added in the poem to explain that the complete unit was composed by thousand cavalrymen, not considering that it is unlikely that the whole cavalry unit followed Hadrian in such an expedition (see the chapter about stylistic and content problems above). Moreover, the combination of different military specialties, all attributed to a single soldier—which seems to have the only purpose to combine different literary *topoi*—is omitted in the passage of Cassius Dio.

Considering that 1) the find place of the presumed inscription is completely unknown and, if expressed in the later manuscript tradition, it was made up for a specific occasion; 2) that the manuscript tradition does not include any testimony of a direct copy of the text from the stone; and 3) that some expressions and historical pieces of information in the poem are imprecise or incorrect, we could reverse the point of view and assume that Cassius Dio was the direct source of the poem. Even though in Greek, we know that Cassius Dio was still read in Rome between the 4th and 5th centuries AD.⁶³ A lost Latin source cannot be excluded either, but it should have contained the anecdote and the same set of information as Cassius Dio. The possibilities in this direction are quite considerable, as we know that several lost biographies of Hadrian and even his autobiography circulated in antiquity. Some of the possible biographers are among those whose works have not survived but were used as sources for the *Historia Augusta* where, however, the episode of the crossing of the river is not narrated. Among these we can enumerate the biographer Marius Maximus,⁶⁴ Ignotus, the Good Biographer⁶⁵ or the author of Enmann's *Kaisergeschichte*⁶⁶ who had written biographies of Hadrian, as well as Hadrian for his autobiography.⁶⁷ We know that Cassius Dio had read Hadrian's autobiography and, apparently, also his letters and likely his poems too, as he refers in more than one passage directly to his writings.⁶⁸ It is possible that Hadrian had reported this exceptional episode from the time of his governorship in his autobiography. The soldier who speaks in the first person in the poem was the first to cross the river, followed by his fellows, and he might have been mentioned by name (perhaps Soranus, as in the manuscripts). This recalls very closely the centurions Pullo and Vorenus, whose story is narrated by Caesar in his *De bello Gallico*, that in turn Hadrian had certainly read.⁶⁹ The history written by Cassius Dio contained more details that are known to us from the epitome of Xiphilinus, and to this full version the late antique poet, who was clearly inspired by Cassius Dio and has readapted it, must have had access.

Conclusion and outlook

This paper analyses for the first time several elements which put in question the existence of an ancient funerary monument carrying the poem dedicated to a Batavian soldier, which, because of

63 Re-discovery of Cassius Dio at the court of Justinian in the 6th century AD (MECELLA 2016).

64 SYME 1971, 45–49, 113–134; BIRLEY 1997b; SALLMANN 1997, 53–56, § 405.1.

65 SYME 1971, 30–53; SALLMANN 1997, 56–57, § 405.2; BENARIO 1997. Ignotus, the Good Biographer would have been the source of the *Historia Augusta* of the lives until Caracalla. A change is clear between Caracalla and Macrinus.

66 BLECKMANN 1997.

67 BOLLANSÉE 1994.

68 Dio 69.11.2: “ὡς Ἀδριανὸς γράφει”; Dio 69.17.3: “ἔστι γε αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπιστολὴ αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐνδεικνυμένη”; see DAVENPORT – MALLAN 2014.

69 *Caes., de bell. Gall.* 5.44.

the exceptionality of the narrated event, has been treated in the modern historiography as a source for the reconstruction of the life of emperor Hadrian and the political events along the Danubian *limes* under his reign. The uncertainty of the find place, the characteristics of the manuscript tradition, the historical imprecisions in the poetic narration, and the close similarities with a passage of Cassius Dio seem to prove that the poem was in fact a late antique literary composition, which had the work of Cassius as its primary source. Furthermore, this allows to correct an assumption on the life of Hadrian—that he employed his army in Pannonia in AD 118—primary evidence of which was the existence of this funerary monument. The crossing of the river by Hadrian's soldiers, likely the *equites singulares* accompanying him from Syria, must have happened in Moesia inferior when the emperor settled the uprising of the Roxolani. However, this episode seems to be related to the time of his governorship in Pannonia inferior in AD 107, when he was acting as *arbiter* of the disputes between the tribes on the other side of the Danube and was the head of a perfectly trained army that included—of course—the *alae Batavorum*.

In a long-term perspective, this kind of study opens new ways on how to deal with verse inscriptions which are known only from manuscripts. As we know that poems often imitate epitaphs, the use of an epigraphic style cannot be used as an element to distinguish verse inscriptions from merely literary works. The authenticity of these texts should therefore to be examined and discussed case by case.⁷⁰

Funding

This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 832874 – MAP-POLA). This contribution was completed within the framework of the JESH (Joint Excellence in Science and Humanities) Fellowship of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, carried out at the Vasile Pârvan Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest in 2025.

Acknowledgement

I am extremely grateful to Fritz Mitthof and Florian Matei-Popescu, whose invaluable advice allowed to improve the quality of this paper.

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70 Just looking at the three texts preserved in the *Codex Valesianus* and the epigram examined here, doubts arise regarding the epigraphic nature of the poems, which were included in the volume of the *Carmina epigraphica* published by Franz Bücheler as *pars posterior* of the *Anthologia Latina* by Riese and in the CIL. A comprehensive study should also be dedicated to the poems attributed to or written by Hadrian and transmitted in the tradition as verse inscriptions.

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