

STUDIA CLASSICA SERDICENSIA

ТОМ IV
СБОРНИК В ЧЕСТ
НА ПРОФЕСОР БОРИС ГЕРОВ
(1903–1991)

IN HONOUR OF
PROF. BORIS GEROV
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РЕДАКЦИОННА КОЛЕГИЯ

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СЪДЪРЖАНИЕ

Професор Борис Геров (<i>Анна Б. Николова</i>)	7
Библиография на Борис Владимиров Геров (18.05.1903–25.12.1991)	11

History, Epigraphy, and Archaeology

<i>Michel Christol</i> Remarques complémentaires sur la carrière de Marcianus : Gallien entre les Goths, Postume et Auréolus (266–268)	19
<i>Benoît Rossignol</i> Gouverneurs et procurateurs dans un temps de menaces : l'administration impériale de la province de Thrace durant le règne de Marc Aurèle (161–180)	39
<i>Slavtcho Kirov</i> Sur l'intégration des élites thraces dans le système administratif romain	79
<i>Ivo Topalilov</i> A Possible Solution to the Problem of How the Pseudo-Tribe Was Chosen in the Roman Imperial Period	91
<i>Zlatozara Gocheva</i> Die griechischen epigraphischen Denkmäler aus dem römischen Lager Novae	101
<i>Ilian Boyanov</i> A Duumvir of Colonia Ratiaria	115
<i>Radu Ardevan</i> Über ein römisches Weihdenkmal von Gherla (Dakien)	123
<i>Galena Radoslavova</i> Silver Plates Foils from Razgrad Region	131

Linguistics

<i>Mirena Slavova</i> The Thracian Diphthong /oi/ Revisited	139
<i>Svetlana Janakieva</i> Die Auskunft des Älteren Plinius über die thrakischen Flüsse <i>Bargus</i> und <i>Syrmus</i>	153
<i>Tatyana Ilieva</i> Greek Lexical Elements in the Terminology of Material Culture in Medieval Slavonic Manuscripts	159

Literature and Culture

<i>Violeta Gerjikova</i> Places of Closeness and Estrangement: Space in Three Poems of Catullus (68, 37, 58)	181
<i>Elia Marinova</i> M. Aquilius Regulus – trauernd und jubelnd: die Delatoren und das <i>genus demonstrativum</i>	189
<i>Maria Kostova</i> The Lawyer Tacitus on Thrace: Taciti <i>Annales</i> , 2.65	209
<i>Dobriela Kotova</i> Die Berichte der römischen Autoren über den ritualisierten Witwenselbstmord als Totenfolge bei den Thrakern	213
<i>Анна Б. Николова</i> Псалм 50 в Изповеди на Августин	229
<i>Kalina Boseva</i> Phytogonic Myths in Ovid's <i>Metamorphoses</i>	239
<i>Rita Sassu, Lyuba Radulova</i> Economic Activities in the Athenian Acropolis Sanctuary	253

A DUUMVIR OF COLONIA RATIARIA

In the keeps of the Regional Museum of History, Montana, catalogued under no. 2559, is an altar with a dedication to Mercurius in Latin. The monument was donated to the museum in 2006 and is of unknown provenance. Its dimensions are: height 64 cm; width 39 cm; depth 30 cm. Dimensions of the inscription: width 32 cm; height 27 cm. It features a clearly legible seven line inscription in Latin, with letter height as follows: l. 1: 5 cm; l. 2: 3 cm; l. 3: 4.5 cm; l. 4: 3 cm; l. 5: 3 cm; l. 6: 3 cm; and l. 7: 4 cm. Ligature: l. 3 – TE. Lines 3–7 are situated within the inscription field; lines 1 and 2 are situated above it. Triangular interpuncts are employed as word dividers. The letters are carefully engraved by a schooled hand. The inscription reads:

MERCVRIO
AVG·SACR·
PRO·SALVTE
AEL·VALERI
II·COL·RAT·
PAVLVS·SER·
EX·VOTO·POS·

Mercurio
Aug(usto) sacr(um).
Pro salute
Ael(ii) Valeri(ani?)
(duoviri) col(oniae) Rat(iariae).
Paulus ser(vus)
ex voto pos(uit).

The origins of the Mercurius' cult are still subject of a lively debate, currently centered around two principle theories. According to the first one, Mercurius is in fact *interpretatio Romana* of the Greek Hermes, while in the second one he is an indigenous Italian deity which appropriated his Greek counterpart's aspects (Bonfante 1986: 265). Like Hermes, Mercurius is first and foremost characterized by diversity and versatility. He is worshiped as protector of roads and travelers, sailors and ports (*Viator*); protector of art, adroitness, and artisans (*Lucri conservator*, *Potens*, *Repertor*), guardian of the springs and thermal water, as well as of herds and agriculture (*Cultor*); life-death mediator, freeing the souls of the deceased and accompanying them to the afterworld (*Psychopompos*), protector

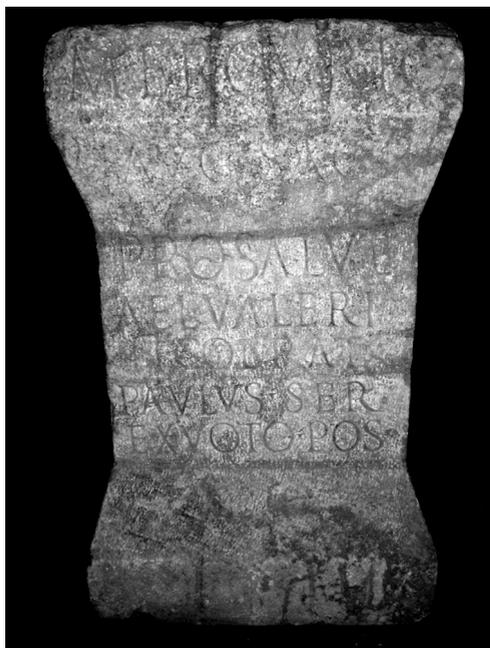


Fig. 1. Dedication to Mercurius, Regional Museum of History in Montana

of commoners (*Domesticus*), but also of statehood and the Emperor (*Victor, Pacifer*) (Gavrilović 2010: 58).

Throughout the Roman provinces other most common epithets honoring Mercurius are *Augustus, Conservator, Consentius, Fatalis, Felix, Finitimus, Gubernator, Malevolus, Negotiator, Nundinator* and *Sanctus* (Gavrilović 2010: 68). His cult is most clearly demonstrated in the western provinces of the Empire – Gaul, Germania, Belgica, and Britain. This is confirmed by the popular text by Caesar on the religion of Gaul (Caesar, *De bello Gallico* 6.17.1). This largely explains the over 500 epigraphic and more than 350 figural monuments dedicated to Mercurius in the Romanized Gaul territories, demonstrating the popularity of the cult to this deity, one that is not

typical of the Roman religion in general (Драганов 2011: 26).

Some of the most important evidence confirming the spread of a particular cult in the Roman provinces is provided by the epigraphic monuments. Realistically speaking those associated with the Hermes-Mercurius cult from Moesia Inferior and Thrace are not many; they are significantly outnumbered by the ones associated with other religious cults – i.e. of Zeus–Jupiter, Heracles, Apollo, Asclepius, etc. However, the surviving inscriptions are dedicated by individuals, not organizations, guilds, military or institutions of the provincial government, which in B. Draganov's view indicates that the Hermes-Mercurius cult was of no considerable social consequence, but enjoyed popularity among the commoners at the level of the individual instead (Драганов 2011: 36). This is an important observation, as it demonstrates the different from the western provinces nature of the Mercurius cult in the Balkan provinces of the Roman Empire. Of course, hitherto examined monument requires revision of the hypothesis, chiefly because of the epithet of the deity – *Augustus*, indicating a possible official sanction of the cult.

To-date Mercurius appears in only four inscriptions from Moesia Inferior. Due to the versatility of the god, his cult often overlaps with the cult to a number of Greco-Roman and eastern deities. This is obvious in the known epigraphic monuments. Only the *Durostorum* inscription is specifically addressed to Mercurius (Banev 2001: 31–35). In all other instances dedications list, alongside Mercurius, other

deities of the Greco-Roman and eastern pantheon as well. The new inscription, however, modifies this perception, of course, if the small number of inscriptions can be considered representative at all.

Workshops for Hermes-Mercurius figurines are confirmed at *Ratiaria*, *Oescus*, *Novae*, *Durostorum*, and in the vicinity of Popovo (Драганов 2011: 179–180). B. Draganov rightly notes that declaring all those, regardless of their administrative status, as cult centers would be an overstatement. *Novae* undeniably stands out in terms of artifacts number. Although a Mercurius temple has not yet been registered, the large number of artifacts, including rejects and unfinished objects, suggests that the production corresponded directly to demand, which should be taken as an indication of the religious perceptions of the military-administrative apparatus, and of the partially Romanized local population and the eastern immigrants alike.

The present monument illuminates in a new, different way the dissemination of the Mercurius' cult and its devotees. It is the first dedication to Mercurius to attest epigraphically a *duumvir* of *Ratiaria*. Epigraphically, it is also unique with the spelling of the office. Especially interesting is the deity's epithet – *Augustus*. As pointed earlier, this epithet is not unfamiliar to Mercurius, and particularly in his aspect as protector of statehood and the Emperor. Although the epithet is used to honor Mercurius relatively often, above all in the western provinces, it has not been previously attested in the Thracian provinces of the Roman Empire in general, and in Moesia Inferior in particular.

As mentioned above, although *Novae* has the greatest number of dedicated to Mercurius artifacts, *Ratiaria* too, with *Montana* and *Almus*, can be viewed as one of the foremost Lower Danube production centers associated with the Mercurius cult. The mass production of such objects in *Ratiaria* and its territory not only raises the possibility of the existence of an operating production center, but is also indicative of a strong cult to this deity in the region, and probably – of a still undiscovered temple (Александров 1977: 59; Огненова-Маринова 1987: 50–51; Александров 1983: 68; Найденова 1988: 25–26; Атанасова 1964: 24–27). Notably, almost all Moesia Superior and Moesia Inferior monuments are associated with the territories of the legionary camps in *Viminacium*, *Ratiaria*, *Oescus*, *Novae*, and *Durostorum*, or with those of auxiliary forts; which is also the case of the discussed here inscription in *Montana*. Accordingly it is reasonable to propose that the cult of Mercurius was in fact introduced to the two Moesia provinces by the Roman army. Save the eastern influences, iconography of the Lower Danube *Limes* finds follows almost exactly the traditions of the Roman Mercurius depictions. Although Mercurius is not a typical military deity, it is without doubt worshiped by the soldiers. The absence of organized forms of worship, combined with the great number of monuments that can be attributed to the sacred environment of the individual (small bronze plastics, glyptics, etc.), is characteristic not only of the Lower Danube *Limes*, but also

of Thrace, and indicates the popularity of the Hermes-Mercurius cult among widely diverse social classes (Драганов 2011: 179). However, since the god is patron of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, some of the predominantly imported monuments can also be considered Roman Imperial propaganda. I believe the epithet of the Montana Mercurius – *Augustus*, likely indicating official sanction of the cult at least within the territory of *Ratiaria*, supports this assertion. One should consider also the person, for the health of whom the monument was set up – the colony’s *duumvir*.

The number of *Ratiaria* officials presently attested epigraphically is quite considerable – mostly *decuriones* (AE 1984, 743; AE 1938, 95; AE 1938, 101; AE 1927, 78; AE 1919, 81; AE 1913, 186; AE 1911, 213; CIL III, 14501; CIL III, 8086; CIL III, 8088; CIL III, 8090; AE 2005, 1310) and *augustales* (AE 1979, 537; AE 1966, 344; CIL III, 12646; CIL III, 8089; CIL III, 1641; CIL III, 6294; AE 2005, 1311), as well as a *duumviralis* (CIL III, 8091); yet the discussed inscription is the first one to mention *duumvir*. Traditionally Romans distinguished senior and junior magistrates. The principle distinction between the two ranks is that the former had an *imperium* and hence could exert duress. This also explains why the junior magistrates held no right of *restitutio* over the decisions of their senior colleagues (Dmitriev 2005: 137–138). Similar classification grounded in the Roman administrative principles is attested also in the provincial cities, especially in the western provinces. Thus, for example *Lex municipii Salpensani* and *Lex municipalis Malacitana* determine *duumviri* to have highest judicial authority in the cities (Dmitriev 2005: 137; Spitzl 1984: 120). Another document – *Lex Irnitana*, declares that the decisions of all colony magistrates must be ratified by the *duumviri*, who also collected all fines imposed by the *decuriones* (González 1986: 147–243; Horstkotte 1989: 169–177; Rodger 1990: 147–161). Of course, the distinction between senior and junior officers was somewhat provisional, as the two foremost magistrates were *duoviri iure dicundo*, followed by *duoviri aediles*, but quite often the four served in a collegium called *quattuorviri iure dicundo* or *quattuorviri aediles* (Abbott, Johnson 1926: 59).

The two senior magistrates – *duumviri* embodied the colonial government. They were also a judicial authority, which according to *Lex Irnitana* was limited to disputes worth up to 1000 sesterces – above this sum the *duumvir* only had the right of *vadimonium* to the provincial governor (Rodger 1990: 150–151). Often Rome or some provincial cities elected the ruling Emperor, or a member of his family, as one of the two *duumviri* (Lex Irn. 24–25). However, since he was unable to fulfill his duties, a deputy – *praefectus* was appointed in his place (Galsterer 2000: 350).

The monument discussed here, apart from testifying to the observance of the cult to Mercurius, offers valuable information and simultaneously raises important issues regarding the territory of the colony of *Ratiaria* and the

constitution of its governing body. The absence of conclusive diagnostic evidence for the date of the inscription considerably hampers the interpretation of the provided information. Based on the *duumvir*'s family name – *Aelius*, suggesting first generation Romanization by Emperor Hadrian (117–138 AD), the *terminus post quem* for the erection of the monument should be the initial year of his rule. The upper chronological limit is much more obscure, but according to palaeography it should be in the mid-, or second half of the second century AD. Thus *terminus ante quem* might be the year of administrative transfer of *Montana* and its territory to Moesia Inferior – namely AD 134 (Геров 1980: 79–80; Тачева 2000: 60). Although religion recognizes no administrative boundaries, I have strong reservations regarding the presence of a Ratiarian *duumvir* in the *Montana* region after the transfer. Reservations are further exacerbated by the fact that the monument is set up by a slave of the *duumvir*, suggesting that the *duumvir* owned a large estate within the *Montana* territory – hardly possible for a Ratiarian magistrate if *Montana* was already part of another province, although this is not excluded. The large agrarian reforms within the *Ratiaria* territory from the beginning of the second century AD resulted precisely in the emergence of medium-large estates, typical of the colonial aristocracy (Геров 1980: 72–75). Thus the inscription can be assigned to between AD 117 and 134/136, which is in agreement with the palaeographic evidence. Yet on the other hand, the *tabula Heracleensis* compiled under Julius Caesar sets the minimum age requirement for a *duumvir* at 30, which towards the end of the first century AD is revised to 25. This was likely introduced by Octavian Augustus (Abbott, Johnson 1926: 59). Based on these regulations the earliest possible *terminus post quem* for the erection of the monument should be AD 142, invalidating the formerly suggested AD 134 *terminus ante quem*. Thus, it is much more plausible that the inscription was dedicated not before the transfer of *Montana* and its territory to Moesia Inferior in AD 134–136, but prior to AD 162 – the date of the inscription mentioning *regio Montanensis* (Велков, Александров 1994: n. 59), suggesting the rising of *Montana* to *municipium*, and the attribution of city territory (Велков 1992: 395–398).

On the basis of an inscription dating from AD 162 (Велков, Александров 1994: n. 59), which mentions *regio Montanensis*, it is assumed that *Montana* was promoted to the rank of *municipium* and a certain urban territory was attributed to town (Велков 1992: 395–398). Several inscriptions featuring *decuriones* of *Montana*, as well as one *duumvir*, are cited as evidence of the *municipium* rights received (Велков, Александров 1994: nn. 101, 116, 123, 12). It is assumed that a *vicus* located on the left bank of the Ogosta river developed into a *municipium* (Бинев 2003: 164) at the time of the governor of Moesia Inferior *L. Iulius Statilius Severus*. Boris Gerov was of a rather different opinion about the status of *Montana* in the 2nd–3rd century. According to him, this was a territory independent of the colonies of Oescus and Ratiaria, and, at least initially, did not have an urban

centre. Control of *regio Montanensis* was in the hands of a *centurio regionarius* or his authorized deputy – *optio agens* (Геров 1980: 79). In his opinion, the inscriptions featuring *decuriones* from Montana do not mean that the settlement was awarded *municipium* rights, but that it had also had civilian self-governance as *regio Montanensis* was also quoted as a separate administrative unit during the reign of Gordian III (238–244 AD). Nevertheless, B. Gerov did not rule out the possible existence of a *municipium* on the sidelines of the *regio* (Геров 1980: 79–80). In support of this, he showed that the general trend was to promote the legal status of the peregrine *civitates* without urban centres, their central settlements being promoted to *municipia*. According to him, in this case too, just as in those of *Novae* and *Durostorum*, the coexistence of a military camp and a town in close proximity – situation which was actually sought after – was legally possible from the 2nd century onwards (Геров 1980: 80). M. Tacheva also thinks this territory did not have an urban centre and was administered by the legate of *legio I Italica* or by the governor of the province. In her opinion, the inscription in which one can decipher the expression *castrensium et civium Montanensium* should not be interpreted as evidence of the existence of a *municipium*. She thinks that in this case the term *cives* can be used for the civilian settlement which was awarded quasi-municipal rights probably under the Severi at earliest (Тачева 2004: 78–79).

Recently, D. Nikolov voiced the opinion that the inscriptions which mention *regiones* were not made by the governing bodies of the local urban centres but by military authorities. Therefore, they did not mention military regions, which did not coincide with the administrative urban territories. This is also the reason why the inscriptions frequently mention both – the urban territory and the military region (Николов 1982: 92–93). It is obvious from what has been said so far that the matter of the existence of the *municipium* still cannot be resolved with finality. Nevertheless, it seems to me that this problem should be resolved in favour of its existence, and that *regio* should mean not an independent territory without an urban centre but a military territory, probably designated for the recruit of soldiers, for which a *centurio regionarius* specially sent for the purpose was responsible (Hirschfeld 1913: 576–612; Speidel 1984: 185–188; Топбаров 2012: 132). This territory probably provided the recruitment of soldiers for *I Italica*, as it seems epigraphic monuments show (Боянов 2008: 125). With all these considerations in mind, I believe that the date of the presented here inscription falls between AD 117 and 162, inasmuch as the presence of a Ratiarian *duumvir* after the latter date is difficult to explain.

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Дуумвир от колонията Рациария

Илиян Боянов

Авторът публикува епиграфски паметник с неизвестно местонамиране, съхраняван в Регионален исторически музей – Монтана. Текстът на надписа представлява посвещение на Меркурий за здравето на неизвестен до този момент дуумвир на колония Рациария – Елий Валериан (или Елий Валерий). В статията са разгледани данните за култа към този бог, като съществено внимание е обърнато на разпространението му в територията на Рациария. Настоящият паметник хвърля нова, по-различна светлина върху разпространението на култа към Меркурий и неговите контрагенти. Особено внимание заслужава епитетът, с който той е представен – *Augustus*. Този епитет не е чужд за Меркурий, особено в аспекта му на пазител на държавността и императора. Въпреки че с този епитет Меркурий е почитан сравнително често и най-вече в западните провинции на империята, той не е засвидетелстван до този момент в епиграфските паметници от тракийските провинции на Римската империя като цяло и в частност – Долна Мизия. Новият паметник дава солидна основа и за проучването на различни аспекти от градския живот на колонията, но същевременно поставя и някои нови проблеми, свързани с развитието на града и територията му през римската епоха.

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