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THE THRACIAN BESSI *DOMO ET MILITIAE*

Abstrakt: Der Zustand in der modernen Geschichtsschreibung über den thrakischen Stamm *Bessi* bewog die Verfasserin, die Angaben der antiken Autoren und die epigraphischen Quellen zu erforschen, die eine Interpretierung der bekannten historischen Belege und mit denen verbundenen Problemen gestatten. Dabei kam vor allem das Verfahren der Quellenstratifikation im entsprechenden historischen Kontext zum Einsatz.

In her monographs on the Central Balkan tribes in Pre-Roman times, Professor Fanoula Papazoglu dwelled several times on the problems related to the Bessi, with useful comments and views¹, which I have used in some of my studies on their history². The present paper is a generalization on the results of these studies and is thematically connected with the cited monograph of the lady to whose anniversary this volume is dedicated.

Ethnic belonging. The tribe of the Bessi inhabited the inner Thracian lands and in this context it is defined by the ancient authors as a Thracian tribe, with the variant ethnonym Βησσοι, Βεσσοι, *Bessi, Besi, Vesi*. Neither the ancient authors, nor modern historians doubt that the Bessi are a Thracian tribe, although they are hardly mentioned as such. Eustathios, the late author of scholia to *The Iliad*, added to *Il. B,532*: there was a Thracian tribe, Bessi. The certainty of that statement is also visible from the text of Cass. Dio (54, 34) for the Thracian Βουλογαϊσης, a priest of Dionysos, who led the uprising of the Bessi in 15/11 BC. In modern historiography, however,

¹ F. Papazoglu, *Srednobalkanska plemena u predrimsko doba*, Sarajevo, 1969; *The Central Balkan Tribes in Pre-Roman Times*, Amsterdam 1978.

² „Die thrakischen Bessen in der römischen Armee“, *Preatti del XI Congresso intern. di epigrafia Greca e Latina*, Roma, 1997, p. 877–884; „Die thrakischen Glossen *davaldeva*“, *Actes du VII Congrès intern. de Thracologie*, Bucarest, 1997 (in print); „Über die Stammesterritorien und die Sprache der thrakischen Bessen“, *Intern. Symposium „Macedonia and the Neighbouring Regions from the 3rd to the 1st Millennium BC*, Skopje, 1997 (in print).

there is hardly anyone who doubts W. Tomaschek's error in claiming *Bessos* to be an Illyrian name³.

The language. The Bessi communicated in the Thracian language with their Thracian neighbours from the Carpathian Mountains to the Aegean Sea and from the meridian of the Margus river (pres. Morava) to the Dniestr river. That view has its opponents in the discussion about the existence of what V. Georgiev called „Daco-Moesian“ language. The claim about the existence of Daco-Moesian and Thracian as separate related languages is maintained mainly by Romanian linguists, but also by many modern Bulgarian linguists. It inconsistency was disputed by the author by rejecting the main proof, namely that the toponyms with a second component *-dava/daba* were allegedly Daco-Moesian⁴. The study of the toponyms in Procopius of Caesarea (*De aedif.*) helped with new evidence also the rejection of the widespread idea that the language of the Bessi acquired all-Thracian use in the 4th century AD. This thesis is based on the evidence of the poet Paulinus of Nola about the translation of the Holy Scriptures into the language of the Bessi by Niceta, Bishop of Remesiana. In addition to the existing ethnonymic community in the areas occupied by the Bessi and known until then as well, the careful reading of the poetic narrative of the Nolan poet has shown that the Bishop disseminated the Word of God through preaching and texts among the Thracians in Scythia Minor as well, in the territories of Scupi, Ratiaria, Philippi, Tomis, etc.⁵ This gives grounds to claim that the Bessi and the remaining Thracians spoke the same, i.e. Thracian, language.

The tribal territories of the Bessi until the founding of Provincia Thracia in 45 AD. Studies on the Thracian tribal territories often fail to devote attention to a fact long postulated by I. Venedikov that Thracian ethnonyms were „in movement“, i.e. that the scope of the tribal territories depended on the possibility the rulers to exercise their power over the conquered lands; they were covered by the ethnonym of the victor, and the ethnonym of the defeated disappeared temporarily or forever from the historical sources⁶.

³ Cf. Detschew, *Die thrakischen Sprachreste*, Wien, 1976², p. 55. Recently, however, G. Schramm, *Anfänge des albanischen Christentums. Die frühe Bekehrung der Bessen und ihre langen Folgen*. Rombach, 1994, p. 103 sqq., note 140, pointed out unambiguously that the Thracian identity of the Bessi was not apparent from the ancient texts.

⁴ M. Tatscheva, „Die thrakischen Glossen“.

⁵ Paul. Nol. *Carm.* 17; G. Shramm, op. cit., p. 48 sqq., p. 106 sqq.; M. Tatscheva, „Die thrakischen Glossen“.

⁶ I. Venedikov „The Thracian toponymy in movement“, *Trakijski pametnici*, t. 3, part 2, Sofia, 1982, p. 32–170 (in Bulg.).

Incidentally, the oldest historical evidence about the earlier history of the Bessi is preserved in Herodotus (7, 111, 2). He mentions Bessi among the Satrai as prophets of the priestess of Dionysos in his sanctuary in the highest mountainous places dominated by the Satrai: they interpreted the prophesies of the oracle, which were given as in Delphi.

There are many candidates for the sanctuary of Dionysos, mentioned by Herodotus, in the high mountains of Thrace: in the Rhodopes, in the Balkan Range, in the Orbelos and in Dysoron – all according to interpreted evidence in other ancient authors. These data in the ancient tradition lead above all to the conclusion that there was a developed Dionysian cult in many sanctuaries of mountainous Thrace. Their discovering would hardly lead to the identification of the sanctuary known from Herodotus⁷.

And so, if the Satrai as a collective ethnonym were in control of the Pangaion and of the sanctuary with Bessi as oracles, mentioned by Herodotus, it would be necessary to assume that: in the Pangaion the priestly family of the Bessi was on its own land; after the Graeco-Persian wars and until the middle of the 5th century BC, when Herodotus wrote his history, the Satrai inhabited the Pangaion and the lands around it, most probably to the west of the Nestos river and in the *peraia* of Thasos, together with the Pieres, Odomantoi and Edonoi (Hdt. 7, 109, 2; 7, 112)⁸.

Consequently, the Bessi were ore-miners as well, they extracted precious metals from the numerous deposits in these lands, and perhaps this is the reason why they were mentioned as such in the written tradition until quite late⁹. This fame of theirs could have even been nurtured until then, because the Bessi are attested by the ancient tradition in other regions, gold-, silver- and iron-bearing to this day, along the Strouma river valley, in the mountains between the Mesta and Strouma rivers, in the Haemus and in the Rhodope Mountains.

The Bessi and the Satrai are not mentioned in Thukydides' narrative (2, 96) among those who joined the march of Sitalkas to the Chalkidike Peninsula in 429 BC, nor among the Thracians independent of the Odrysae. Apart from these Thracians, he mentions as participants in that war and under obvious obligations as Odrysian subjects „all Thracians who live between the Haemus and Rhodope mountains“, over whom the Odrysian ruled all the way to the Pontos

⁷ D. Boteva „St. Athanase d'Etropole, Sabazios et l'oracle de Dionysos“, *Dialogues d'Histoire Ancienne* 23/1, 1997, p. 287–298, recently proposed a new localization of the sanctuary in the Balkan Range, near the present Bulgarian town of Etropole.

⁸ About the Bessi as neighbours of the Edonoi, see also Strab. 7, 5, 12.

⁹ *Paneg.Lat.*, 12, 28; Fl. Vegetius Renatus, *Epit. rei milit.* 4, 24, cited after D. Detschew, *Die thrakischen Sprachreste*, p. 55.

Euxeinos (Thuk. 2, 96, 1). It would be logical to assume that the absence of the ethnonym Bessi in Thukydides' narrative, which contains surprisingly many data about mainland Thrace and about the participants in the march, is due to the fact that in the meantime they had lost their independence. This is why, Thukydides did not mention them, as he did for the autonomous Triballoi, most probably including them in the mountainous lands between the Haemus and the Rhodopes, subordinated to the Odrysae (see below).

Modern historiography is based most frequently on Strabo's information about the Bessi and their neighbours (7, 5, 12; 7, frg. 36, 48, 58a). According to him (7, 5, 12), they were named among the population along and above the Haemus Mountain as neighbours of the Maidoi and Denteletai. „The Bessi ... inhabited predominantly a large part of the Haemus, also touching the Rhodope, the Paiones and the Illyrian Authariatai and Dardanoi“. This localization becomes clear from the evidence in 7, frg 36, according to which the Strymon river sprang from the land of the Paionian Agrianes, „who are near the Rhodope, close to the Macedonian Parorbelia.“

Strabo reports (7, fr. 48) that Korpiloi lived along the Hebros river, and higher up – „B(r)enai, followed by the remote Bessi. It was possible to sail up the river all the way to them. ... All these tribes were bandits, above all the Bessi ... about whom Strabo said that they were the neighbours of the Odrysae and of the Sapaioi“. The text and the listing of the tribes allows to think that the river was navigable all the way to the Bessi, but not in their lands (at least after 148 BC). Consequently, the Bessi did not control the middle course of the river, where their lands were localized until recently on account of later and unreliable evidence¹⁰, and where the necropolis of the kings of the Odrysae was localized in the 6th-4th century BC¹¹. During the time of the Odrysian kings Metokos and Kotys I, and his heir Amatokos (ca. 415 – ca. 339 BC), the lands of the Odrysae stretched to the west along the Diagonal Route at least to the Pistiros emporion, the Roman station Bona Mansio being not far from it¹².

¹⁰ Cf. I. Venedikov, *The Secret of the Thracian Burial Mounds*, Sofia, 1963, p. 43 sqq. (in Bulg.); A. Fol, *Thrace and the Balkans in the Early Hellenistic Age*, Sofia, 1975, p. 79 (in Bulg.).

¹¹ About the lands around Philippopolis, with the royal necropolis near Duvanlii, Plovdiv district, as an Odrysian royal sacred place, cf. M. Tacheva, „The funeral mounds near Duvanlii (district of Plovdiv): a hereditary burial-ground of kings Teres' Odrysian dynasty (6th-4th century BC)“, *First Intern. Symposium „Seuthopolis“*, Veliko Tarnovo, 1994, 145–148 (in Bulg.).

¹² According to *Itiner. Burdigalense* (Cuntz, IR, p. 86 sqq., 567, 11; 568, 2), it is localized near the village of Vetren, Pazardjik district, more than 36 Roman miles west of Philippopolis; along the Diagonal Route and 15 miles eastward, near the village of Sinitovo was the Roman road station (*mansio*) Bessapara – a name preserved or introduced by the Romans after their victory over the Bessi.

The military and political upsurge of the Bessi should be sought in the time after the campaigns of Philip II and Alexander the Great, who destroyed the military power of their adversaries, the Odrysae – an event noted by the sources after an oblivion of more than two centuries. Polybius (23, fr. 8) refers to a march of the Macedonian King Philip V in 183 BC in the land of the Odrysae, Bessi and Denteletai; the tribal territories are cited from east to west, i.e., Philip must have entered first the land of the Denteletai and then of the Bessi. From there he must have headed to the Odrysian lands, more specifically along the Diagonal Route near the upper course of the Hebros river, where the Bessi were localized along and around the Haemus, touching the Rhodope, according to Strabo; the latter, similar to many ancient authors, perceived the Haemus and the Sredna Gora as one mountain massif, just as he did not differentiate between the Rhodopes and the Rila Mountain (with Vitosha). The Bessi along the upper Hebros river, which was later included in the territory of Roman Serdica, was preserved as an ethnic community until the 3rd century AD, when from the inscriptions of warriors and veterans it can be seen that they were from the tribe of the Bessi, born on the territory of Serdica¹³.

According to Strabo's evidence, the land of the Bessi along the Haemus Mountain should be sought in western direction, i.e. from Ihtiman Sredna Gora (which is the mountain link with the Rila-Rhodope Massif) to the Western Haemus, because only then it would be possible to accept Strabo's claim (7, 15, 12) that the Bessi were neighbours of the Illyrian tribes Dardanoi and Autariatai¹⁴. In the opposite sequence, he mentions them again as the northern neighbours of the Paiones (7, fr. 4). F. Papazoglou pays attention to this discrepancy and explains it with the chronologically different dates of Strabo's sources in the incompletely preserved Book 7. She explains the information that the Autariatai were to the east of the Dardanoi with the settlement of 20,000 Autariatai near Orbelos in 310 BC¹⁵. There are many discussions in modern historiography about the Orbelos mountain. In this connection, B. Gerov pointed out that for Strabo these were the mountains along the western bank of the Strymon river, including Belassitsa¹⁶.

¹³ CIL 10, 1754: *natione Bessus, natus regione Serd(icensi), vico Magari*; B. Gerov, „Untersuchungen über die westthrakischen Länder in römischer Zeit, Teil III“, *Annuaire de l'Université de Sofia, Fac. Philologique* 62, 2, 1968, p. 113 (231), No 64 from the Serdica necropolis: *M. Aurelius Teres veteranus ex ala prima Ast(r)orum, natione Bessus...*

¹⁴ F. Papazoglou, *Les villes de Macédoine à l'époque romaine*. Paris, 1988, p.73 sqq., localizes the Illyrians along the Nisava river and until the St. Nikolas mountain pass in the Haemus, without stratifying the sources used.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 78, on the basis of Diodorus and Justinus.

¹⁶ B. Gerov, „Untersuchungen über die westthrakischen Länder in römischer Zeit, Teil I“, *Annuaire de l'Université de Sofia, Fac. Philologique*, 54, 3, 1959/60, p. 15–16 (in Bulg.).

So if one is to accept the explanations of F. Papazoglu about Strabo's Autariatai near Orbelos, then they must have been southern neighbours of the Bessi in the Western Haemus, to the east of the Dardanoi. Consequently, Strabo's evidence (7, 5, 12) about the Bessi refers to relatively later sources, after 310 BC, i.e. from the time of Lysimachos at the earliest¹⁷.

How to intertwine in the historical narrative the evidence about the Bessi in Strabo (7, fr. 48) that they were neighbours of the Odrysae and the Sapaioi? It can be associated with a text in Pliny the Elder (*NH* 4, 11, 40), according to which Digjerri and Bessi inhabited the left bank of the Strymon, having many names and reaching all the way to the Nestos river. The evidence is repeated briefly by Solinus (10, 1-11), who points out that many tribes of the Bessi reached all the way to the Nestos which irrigated the foothills of the Pangajon Mountain.

This evidence about the „expansion“ of the lands of the Bessi was apparently later, insofar as their presence between the Nestos and Strymon rivers, i.e. in Strabo's Rhodope (with Rila), appeared for the first time after Thukydides in a chronological plan, moreover being confirmed by an author after Strabo as well. In fact, here we are referring not so much to an expansion, but rather to a restoration of the independence of the Bessi from the Odrysian rulers all the way to the Lower Nestos, where the Sapaioi – allies of Rome since the first half of the 2nd century BC – were rallying their forces.

The political power attained by the Bessi seems to have been brief and impressive, having been attained before 148 BC, when the newly-established Macedonia province became the target of individual or united campaigns of its neighbours: Scordiskoi, Denteletai, Bessi, Maidoi and Dardanoi¹⁸.

The numerous defeats of the Romans against the Bessi, who resisted the longest and most manly, are commensurate both in numbers and in their effect with the triumphs of their victors Lucullus (71 BC), Crassus (27 BC) and M. Lollius (11 BC), when the Bessi reached the Thracian Chersonesos¹⁹. Many perished in these wars,

¹⁷ The same time, perhaps slightly earlier, is implied in the evidence that Alexander's deputy in Macedonia, Antipater, fought against Strabo's Tetrachorites (in Steph. Byz. 618, 8). Recently it has been argued convincingly that the Tetrachorites must have been the subjects of the Macedonian king in the four military colonies founded by him in the conquered Odrysian lands: Philippopolis, Kabyle, Drongilon and Masteira, and that Masteira could have been identified with Pistiros, cf. K. Boschnakov, „Masteira“, *Actes du VII Congrès de Thracologie*, Bucarest, 1997 (in print).

¹⁸ About the events, cf. F. Papazoglu, *Srednobalkanska plemena*, p. 139, 230–233, 313–315; M. Tacheva, *Ancient History of the Bulgarian Lands in Hellenistic and Roman Time*, Sofia, 1997², p. 61 (in Bulg., Engl. summary), p. 245–246.

¹⁹ The sources about these events, cf. in Oberhummer, *PWRE*, II, 1897, kol. 329–331 s.v. *Bessoi*; M. Tacheva, *Ancient History ...*, Chapter II, summary, p. 243–245.

even more must have been taken in captivity and sold in the slave markets. The evidence about the Bessi and about other Thracians in the Roman fleet, who had been recruited there before the Thracian Province was founded in 45 AD, in which the Bessi were included, suggest that they must have originated from those lands conquered by Crassus, which were placed under the control of the Macedonian provincial rulers. This view is proved by the two powerful uprisings of Odrysaes, Dioi and Koilaletai in 21 and 26 AD, who were subordinated to the last Thracian dynasty (Tac. *Ann.* 3, 38 sqq.; 4, 46 sqq.), against the recruitment of their strongest sons for the Roman army, i.e. the Bessi were already in possession of the information about the hard fate of their fellow-tribesmen in the Roman fleet.

Strategia Bessike. After the organizing of the Thracia Province in 45 AD, the administrative division into strategies which the Romans found there was preserved in Thrace until the reform in 133–138 AD; from Ptolemy (3, 11, 6) it is known about the existence of the „Bessike strategy, which was located above Maidike: below Bessike was Benike, and then Samaike.“ If that very nebulous phrase is placed in the context of the data about the other strategies, as well as of the new evidence about their situating, it may be assumed that Bessike also comprised the lands along the left bank of the Strymon river, with the semi-mountainous and mountainous lands of the Rila-Rhodope massif (with Vitosha), and of Haemus. The reform also changed the trace of the boundaries between the two Moesias and Thrace, because the lands of the Bessi near the Haemus Mountain were transferred to Moesia Inferior²⁰. The division of the mountainous population of the Bessi between the three provinces can be explained with a long-lasting tradition in the literature from the Augustan age onward, with characteristics of *furor bessica*. It emerged under the influence of the resistance put up against the Romans who lost many battles against the Bessi for more than two centuries.

The data from the epigraphic monuments show that Ptolemy's *Strategia Bessike* was divided through the same reform into attributed territories to the cities of Scupi, Serdica, Philippopolis and Apri²¹. The mountainous population in these territories, which was almost not affected by Hellenism and Romanism, was connected with the last anti-Roman demonstrations in Thrace at the time of Antoninus Pius. Being attested from literary and epigraphic data, they resurrected the memories about the furious Bessi and about their

²⁰ Recently cf. M. Tacheva, „The northern border of the Thracia Province until 193 (I. From Almus to Nicopolis ad Istrum“, *Settlement Life in Ancient Thrace, Third Intern. Symposium „Cabyle“*, Jambol, 1994, p. 115–124.

²¹ Cf. M. Tacheva „Die thrakischen Bessen“, (not. 2) p. 879–880.

difficult pacifying. Against them, the provincial rulers of Thrace had to build frantically numerous fortresses, to recruit units of guards and police with which to close the mountain passes in the Haemus and the roads to the rich towns and villages in the plains²².

The Bessi in the Roman army. The cited topography can be additionally argued with the inscriptions and the military diplomas of soldiers-Bessi, which contain evidence about their place of birth. It proved that the indication of the ethnonym *Bessi* in the military diplomas was more of a danger sign for these people as soldiers in all branches of the Roman military forces (without the legions), while the sepulchral monuments of the Bessi-sailors testify to their genocide in the Roman fleets of Misenum and Ravenna²³. Although after the administrative reform of 133–138 AD the place of birth of the soldiers was determined by the urban territories and not according to strategies (Bessike accordingly), the ethnonym *bessus* remained mandatorily in the military diplomas and the inscriptions (most of them funerary) of the *auxilarii*, *classarii* and *equites singulares Augusti*; it disappeared only after Caracalla's *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212 AD; since then the data about the Bessi were lost among the remaining Thracians which left epigraphic traces.

It also proved that the Bessi were not allowed in the Roman legions after the military reform as well, which gave the right to the peregrines as well to participate in that branch of forces from which the elite praetorian cohorts were selected. The epigraphic sources known so far about Bessi-praetorians before 212 AD suggest that they had won that right only after 192 AD with participation in the military units which supported Septimius Severus. After that date, the Thracian participation in the praetorian cohorts strongly increased, probably also paralleled by a rise in the percentage of the Bessi who had attained fame as *equites singulares Augusti*, though this percentage cannot be accounted for after 212 AD.

Bessi consistentes. The inscriptions about *veterani*, *cives romani et bessi consistentes* from Dobroudja were the object of many studies concerning the present topic, and above all the issue of when and why were the Bessi stationed there. In the historiography on the problem there is no doubt that there had been Bessi there at least since the time of Augustus, insofar as the poet Ovidius Naso, exiled in Tomis, mentions them in his *Tristia* of 8 AD (3, 10, 5; 4, 1, 67).

²² M. Tatscheva, "Widerstand gegen die römische Herrschaft in Thracia zur Zeit des Antoninus Pius", *Forms of Control and Subordination in Antiquity*. Tokyo, 1986, p. 23–34.

²³ Here and further below the analyses of the participation of the Bessi in the fleets are presented *in extenso* by M. Tatscheva „Die thrakischen Bessen“, (not.2) p. 879.

Usually the numerous and severe wars waged by the Bessi against the Odrysae and the Romans are cited as the reason for their settlement undertaken by the Romans²⁴. However, in 42–45 AD Dobroudja was not entirely under Roman power²⁵ and therefore a sort of settlement of the Bessi there was possible after the founding of the Moesia province in 10–15 AD.

If the ethnonym of the Bessi in Ovid had not been used, which is not impossible, in order to give a hyperbolic picture of the grave situation in the environs of Tomis, on account of the Bessi who became famous as *fera gens*, their settlement there could have taken place after the uprisings in 21–26 AD. If there were self-settled Bessi near Tomis during Ovid's time, or if the Bessi attacked Mesambria in the 1st century BC²⁶, they could hardly have been the *bessi consistentes*, for two reasons. Above all, the designation *consistentes* betrays the statute of a population resettled by the Romans²⁷; a no less important fact is that they have been attested in the nearby hinterland of Histria – in *Vicus Quintionis* and *Vicus Ulmetum* – to the west of the same city. Both settlements, however, are too far from Tomis.

Bessi consistentes are known from the epigraphic monuments about the resettled population from the 2nd century AD only in the confines of Moesia Inferior – to the north of the *Sexaginta Prista-Callatis* parallel and until the Danube delta, i.e. in present-day Northern Dobroudja:

Sexaginta Prista – cives Romani (consistentes), an. 101–102, AE 1966, 356.

Troesmis – cives Romani consistentes (ad canabas leg. V Mac(edonicae)), an. 117–144, ISM V, 141, 154.

Durostorum – cives Romani consistentes in canabis Aelis leg. XI Cl(audiae), 138–161, ILS 2475=CIL III 7474

Vicus Noviodunum – cives romani veterani, an. 139–178, ISM V, 157, 233

Vicus Quintionis– veterani et cives Romani et Bessi consistentes, 139–177, ISM I, 324, 326–328, 330–332.

Vicus Ulmetum – cives Romani et Bessi consistentes, 140–172, ISM V, 62–64.

Callatis – cives Romani consistentes (AE 1964, 412)

²⁴ Cf. the opinions in Mihailov, *IGB* I² 344, p. 305.

²⁵ M. Tatscheva, „Die thrakischen Könige und die westpontischen Apoikien“, *Relations thrako-illyro-helléniques*“, Bucarest, 1994, p. 263–265.

²⁶ Cf. Mihailov, *IGB* I² 344 lemma; according to V. Velkov „Civitas Bessica Diniscorta in Moesia Inferior“, *Studia in honorem Borisi Gerov*, Sofia, 1990, 253–258, the Bessi were resettled in the period 11 BC–8 AD and the inscription has to be related with this event.

²⁷ Cf. Mihailov, l. c.; cf. B. Gerov, *Landownership in Roman Thracia and Moesia (1st–3rd century)*, Amsterdam, 1988, p. 9.

Apulum – cives Romani consistentes in canabis legionis XIII, ILS 9106 .
 Vicus Classic(orum) – cives Romani consistentes, an. 171–200, AE 1988, 966.
 Vicus Secundini cives Romani et lai consistentes, an. 198–246, ISM I, 343–347, 349²⁸.

The flat and depopulated steppe of Dobroudja was perceived by the Romans as being strategically most important for the security of the Lower Danubian *limes*, while it was being built. The unsuccessful attempts of the king of the Sapaioi and friend of Augustus, Rhoemetalkes I, to cope with the incursions against the Danubian fortresses are an indisputable reason for the large-scale reduction of veterans undertaken by the Romans there over a long period of time. They had to be the guarantee for an effective resistance against the invaders when *res ad triarias venit*, as well as the social support of the Roman rule.

The reliably dated inscriptions show that the settling in the area thus outlined started already before Trajan's Dacian Wars. Again the same emperor must have undertaken the organizing of the quasi-municipal system of *Vicus Quintionis* and *Vicus Ulmetum*, as suggested by the inscriptions of magistrates and quaestors.

The administration of *Vicus Quintionis* seems to have not been accidental and this should be associated with the fact that, for the time being, the inscriptions only in that settlement mention not only *cives Romani*, but *veterani* as well. Two magistri appear in each inscription²⁹, the first of them being always named as Roman citizens, whereas the second one is with a peregrine Thracian name. The quaestors were almost always with Roman names, which suggest imperial Romanization: Iulii, Claudii, Flavii, Cocceii and Aelii, whereas their cognomen tend to testify to a non-free origin (Ianuarius, Narcissus, Phoebus, Primigenius and Secundus). There were very few individuals with *nomen gentile* Cocceius and Aelius.

Consequently, judging by the names, the *veterani* were among the first magistri, the Bessi – among the second, and the Roman citizens – among the first magistri and quaestors.

The only Aelius, Aelius Bellicus (*ISM I*, 327, 330), was from the last generation of administrators, epigraphically attested in *Vicus Quintionis*. He was the only one to be indicated twice as the first magistrate (for 167 and 175 AD). That individual was also unique

²⁸ On the discussion about whether the *Lai* were the famous *Laianoi* in Thukydides (2, 96, 3) or whether they were a dependent population (*laoi*), cf. *ISM I*, p. 456. F. Papazoglou, *Laoi et Paroikoi. Recherches sur la structure de la société hellénistique*, Beograd, 1997, p. 78, not. 162, „les lai consistentes étaient, selon toute probabilité, des descendants de la tribu péonienne, mentionnée par Thuc. 2, 96, 3.“ In my opinion, it is possible that they were *dediticii* stationed in a *vicus* near the military camp, who in their capacity had not received yet the status of Roman citizens under the *Constitutio Antoniniana*.

²⁹ This is also the case in *Vicus Secundini*.

on account of the fact that he had a name-sake: *P. Aelius Bellicus natione Bessus, eques singularis Augusti*³⁰, for whom a sepulchral monument was erected in Rome in 117–150 AD. Obviously, the link between the two was not accidental, because the name is not a conventional soldier's name, and at least for the time being no other coincidence of that type has been attested. Its Romanization is of a second generation – a sufficient justification of his settlement and function as magistrate as *cives Romanus (consistentus)* in the *vicus*. If this is so, the magistrate must have owed his Roman name and his citizenship to the military service of his father, from the tribe of the Bessi by origin, in the elite cavalry of the Emperor.

In each of the inscriptions from *Vicus Ulmetum* there was only one magistrate with a one-year mandate. Among the magistrates there was only one with peregrinal Thracian name Iulius Teres (*ISM V, 69*) and also a peregrine whose inscription relates him to the Bessi in the settlement (*ISM V, 64*).

The participation of the Bessi in the Roman fleet has been attested by a small number of military diplomas from the 1st century AD. There are many more sepulchral inscriptions from Italy, which suggests the high death rate of these sailors in the fleets of Misenum and Ravenna before they completed their military service. The latest inscription among the few known inscriptions of *classarii* and the only one dated among them is from 120–130 AD³¹. The absence of diplomas for Bessi-sailors in the 2nd century AD could be explained with the assumption that they did not require such documents, because they were settled in places where it was not necessary to prove their Roman citizenship and their Bessi origin. This in turn leads to the conclusion that they were deduced veterans in military *vici* in their native provinces, e.g. in *Vicus Quintionis*. Their presence there, in addition to the already cited presumptions of Roman power, could transform them into a reliable reserve of sailors who were needed both for the Danubian and for the Pontic fleets of the Empire.

Bessi classarii could be assumed to have existed also among *cives Romani consistentes* in *Vicus classicorum*, whose name defined their population as active soldiers. The discovered inscriptions with the name of the settlement and with a dedication by one magistrate are dated to the time between 106(?) and 200 AD. According to the hypothesis launched, the *vicus* was *vicus (canabiarum) stationis classis* (resp. of *classis Flavia Moesica*) to another settlement in its environs³². In fact, *Vicus classicorum* could be the *vicus* to that Danu-

³⁰ M. Speidel, *Die Denkmäler der Kaiserreiter Equites Singulares Augusti*, Bonn, 1994, No 209.

³¹ *AE* 1929, 145, cf. M. Tatscheva „Die thrakischen Bessen“, p. 878, 883.

³² Al. Suceveanu, M. Zahariade, „Un nouveau 'vicus' sur le territoire de la Dobroudja romaine“, *Dacia, N. S.*, 1986 1–2, p. 109–120; 1987 1, p. 87–96. See also the inscriptions in *AE* 1988, 986–991.

bian fleet in the Delta region (and the fortress connected with it, accordingly), which developed from the older Thracian settlement³³; the families of the sailors lived there, as well as deduced sailors-veterans who represented the Roman citizens in the *vicus*. Here they did not need the diplomas of the veterans. The latter probably participated in the administrative governing of the settlement (*conventus*) and in the preparation of the recruitment for the fleet out of the families of the soldiers – a phenomenon known from other civil settlements along the Lower Danubian *limes* as well. Few names of magistrates in *Vicus Classicorum* have been preserved, most of them peregrinal and concealing their local origin.

The views and hypotheses presented above were also based on the use of soldiers and veterans in the Egyptian villages, known from epigraphic evidence; the argumentation is logical, insofar as there was no developed urban network there and hence local recruits were used; every village had to make available young men, fit for military service, every other year. These men went to the local militia which looked after the security of the local government and the interests of the local farmers; it consisted of police (*demosioi*), a criminal service of thief-catchers and civil servants (*praepositi pagum*)³⁴. Individuals charged with similar tasks were also known from the inscriptions of Histria and Tomis from Hellenistic and Roman times³⁵.

The Christianization of the Bessi at the end of the 4th century AD resulted from the good will of the Bishop of Remesiana and of the institution of monks created by him to attract the last pagans in the Thracian lands to the new religion³⁶. Among these pagans were not only the Bessi in Dardania, but also the Bessi who were untouched by Christianization and other Thracians in the mountainous Thracian lands, as well as the Arianized population of Dacia Ripensis. The Bishop of Remesiana deserved his apology by the poet Paulinus of Nola, because his work most probably represented a part of the hard achieved final act in the Christianization of the Balkan Thracian lands in the dioceses of Thracia, Dacia and Macedonia³⁷.

³³ According to the stratigraphy of the archaeological site, proposed by the authors, a Dacian(?)–Roman settlement dated to the 1st–2nd century AD appeared over the Getic-Dacian(?) settlement of the 4th–2nd century BC. Actually, it is difficult to claim that there were Dacians in the lands of the Moesia Inferior province till 119 AD, cf. M. Tatscheva, „Die thrakischen Glossen“.

³⁴ Jean-Jacques Aubert, „Policing the country-side: Soldiers and civilians in Egyptian villages in the third and fourth century AD“, *L'hierarchy (Rangordnung) de l'armée Romaine sous le Haut-Empire*, Paris 1995, p. 257–265.

³⁵ Cf. Em. Popescu, „Die Inschriften aus Kleinskythien“, *Actes du VII^e Congrès Intern. d'épigraphie grecque et latine (Const., 1977)*, București-Paris, 1979, p. 273–292.

³⁶ Cf. G. Schramm, op. cit., p. 48 sqq.

³⁷ M. Tatscheva. „Über die Stammesterritorien“.