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AN EXTRAORDINARY MILITARY SACRIFICE IN FLORUS?
A NOTE ON FLORUS, EPITOME II. 24.¹

Summary: This paper examines a locus from the epitome of P. Annius Florus not yet interpreted (II. 24). After the victory over the Pannonians, Romans threw the weapons into the Sava and Drava rivers. According to written sources Romans offered their gods the weapons of the defeated enemy: they erected a *tropaeum*, built a hill of weapons, or burnt them. Either way, the archaeological finds show that the practice of throwing the weapons of the enemy into a river was also not unfamiliar to Roman soldiers. In my opinion Florus describes this kind of votive action.

Key words: Roman Military History, Roman Religion, P. Annius Florus II. 24., Marcus Vinicius, Pannonia.

The Roman Empire paid a considerable bloodshed for the occupation of Pannonia. Though we have only a few written sources concerning the events of the occupation and those are as general as the descriptions concerning the other provinces this few should be examined with severe criticism. In this paper we will examine the 24th caput of the second book from the Epitome of Florus. In this passage the author wrote about the events of the campaign in the years 14–13 B.C.

*“Pannonii duobus acribus fluviis, Dravo Savoque vallantur. Populati proximos intra ripas se recipiebant. In hos domandos Vinnium misit. Caesi sunt in utrisque fluminibus. Arma victorum non ex more belli cremata, sed rupta sunt et in profluentem data, ut Caesaris nomen eis qui resistebant sic nuntiaretur.”*²

Three other sources exist in connection with the campaign of Vinicius. The most important of them is the Roman History of Velleius Paterculus, who was the “court historian” of emperor Tiberius. Furthermore M. Vinicius to whom Velleius recommended his work was the nephew of the leader of the above mentioned cam-

¹ This paper was read at the conference *Classica – Mediaevalia – Latina* at the University of Debrecen on 12th September 2002. I would like to thank Prof. Thomas Köves-Zulauf (Universität Marburg) and Prof. László Havas (University of Debrecen) for their help.

² In the textual tradition of Florus in most occurrences we can find the form Vinnius (though other variants exist). Historiography identifies Vinnius with M. Vinicius. *P. Annii Flori opera quae exstant omnia. Curavit et edidit Ladislaus Havas.* Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, Debrecen, 1997, 207.

paign.³ The second remarkable source is the Roman History of Cassius Dio.⁴ The last one is the inscription of M. Vinicius, which, though fragmental, can be completed.⁵ Both Florus and Velleius Paterculus mention Vinicius as the commander-in-chief of the campaign, while Cassius Dio does not even mention his name. We can understand this phenomenon if we know that in the year 15 B.C. still the future emperor, Tiberius led the Roman army against the Scordisci, but in the year 13 B.C. already Agrippa was the commander of the operations.⁶ Vinicius was the commander during the short period between the two famous generals, whose role should not be underestimated as in the year 10 B.C. he won the day in the Great Hungarian Plain (Alföld) against the Dacians and the Bastarns as *legatus Augusti*.⁷

There is another important difference between our sources besides mentioning the name of Vinicius, that is the sacrifice offered after the victory over the Pannonians, the deposition of the spoils of war into the river. Even Florus mentions the ritual being unusual for the victorious Roman army (*"non ex more belli cremata"*). Breaking the weapons of the Pannonians and throwing them into the rivers Sava and Drava contradicts the Roman tradition of burning the enemy's weapons.

Bishop and Coulston in their book, *Roman Military Equipment* also underlined the uniqueness of this action: *"When Augustus general Vinnius made a grand gesture of depositing spoils of war in a river, it was noted that the normal Roman practice was to burn them"*⁸

Sources exist on the sacrifice of the spoils in many ancient authors.⁹ Gauls usually built a mount out of the enemy's weapons, creating a *tropaeum*. Caesar writes about this tradition in his Commentaries on the Gallic Wars:

"huic (sc. Marti), cum proelio dimicare constituerunt, ea quae bello ceperint, plerumque devovent; cum superaverunt, animalia capta immolant reliquiasque res in unum locum conferunt. Multis in civitatibus harum rerum extractos tumulos locis consecratis conspiciari licet; neque saepe accidit ut neglecta quispiam religione aut capta apud se occultare aut posita tollere auderet, gravissimumque ei rei supplicium cum cruciatu constitutum est." (Caesar BG 6, 17, 3–5)¹⁰

³ *"Subinde bellum Pannonicum, quod inchoatum <ab> Agrippa Marcoque Vinicio, avo tuo, consulari, magnum atroxque et perquam vicinum imminebat Italiae, per Neronem gestum est."*

⁴ Hist. Rhom. LIV. 28. 1.

⁵ See in ILS 8965, or Arpadus DOBÓ: *Inscriptiones extra fines Pannoniae-Daciaeque repertae ad res earundem provinciarum pertinentes*. Budapest, 1975, No. 489. With a rich bibliography on M. Vinicius.

⁶ *Pannonia Régészeti Kézikönyve [The Archaeological Handbook of Pannonia]* (Ed. FITZ J.–MÓCSY A.) Budapest, 1990, 32; NAGY, Tibor: Die Okkupation Pannoniens. *ActaArchHung* 43, 1991: The campaign of Vinicius had two main directions, one is through the valley of Sava to Siscia, the other is through the valley of Drava to Poetovio.

⁷ *Pannonia Régészeti Kézikönyve*, 33.

⁸ BISHOP, M. C.–COULSTON, J. C. N.: *Roman Military Equipment*. London, 1993, 34.

⁹ Spolia in: RE XXIII. 1843–1845. Recently on spoils: CHURCHILL, J. Bradford: Ex qua quod vellent facerent: Roman Magistrates' Authority over Praeda and Manubiae. *TAPA* 129 (1999) 85–116.

¹⁰ Livy also mentions the hill of weapons of the Gauls: *"Gallos quoque velut obstupefactos miraculum victoriae tam repentinae tenuit, et ipsi pavore defixi primum steterunt, velut ignari quid accidisset; deinde insidias vereri; postremo caesorum spolia legere armorumque cumulos, ut mos eis est, coaceruare."* Liv V. 39. 1.

This method of sacrifice of spoils is similar to the Greek and Roman *tropaeum*. Although there is a slight difference, namely Romans hung the defeated enemy's weapons onto a tree, thus their *tropaeum* was a tree itself.¹¹ Plutarch writes in the Life of Romulus that there was a Sabin king named Acron who didn't want to live in peace with the Romans. Romulus had a single combat with Acron, the king of the Caenienses. Romulus made a vow: if he conquers and overthrows his adversary, he carries home Acron's armour and dedicates it in person to Jupiter. After his victory he cut down a monstrous oak that grew in the camp, hewed it into shape of a trophy and fitted and fastened the armour of Acron to it, each piece in its due order. Then he himself, girding his raiment about him and wreathing his flowing locks with laurel, set the trophy on his right shoulder, where it was held erect, and began a triumphal march. Plutarch says that his trophy was styled a dedication to Jupiter Feretrius, so named from the Roman word "*ferire*" (to smite) for Romulus vowed to smite his foe and overthrow him.¹²

Another example from Plutarch's Life of Marcellus: Marcellus also had a single combat. His adversary was Britomarus the king of the Gaesatae, a Gallic tribe. Marcellus won the combat and after his victory he held a triumphal procession in Rome. In the procession Marcellus himself – as previously Romulus – carried the armour of the defeated barbarian king. Marcellus had the trunk of a slender oak, straight and tall, cut, and fashioned it into the shape of a *tropaeum*. On this he bound and fastened the spoils, arranging and adjusting each piece in due order. When the procession began to move, he took the trophy himself and mounted on a chariot and passed through the city. In the Capitol he entered the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, he set up and consecrated his offering.¹³

Florus in another passage also mentions that Romans just as Gauls also made a heap of weapons, in Latin called *tumulus*: "*Marcomannorum spoliis et insignibus quandam editum tumulum in tropaei modum excoluit.*"¹⁴

On other occasions victorious Romans put the weapons of the defeated enemy into their homes.¹⁵ Later on they belonged to the house itself thus when the house was sold, these weapons became the new owner's property.¹⁶ Romans used weapons even in their public institutions as ornaments.¹⁷ The best-known examples of them

¹¹ For Greek sacrifices see JACKSON, A. H.: *Hoplites and the Gods: The Dedication of captured Arms and Armour*. In: *Hoplites. The Classical Greek Battle Experience*. (Ed. by HANSON, V. D.) Routledge, London–New York, 1998⁴, 228–253 (mainly p. 235).

¹² Plut. Rom. 16.

¹³ Plut. Marc. 6–8.

¹⁴ Flor. II. 30.

¹⁵ Serv. Comm. 7, 183 "*sacris in postibus ubi spolia consecrabantur*"; Liv. X. 7. 9 "*quorum domos spoliis hostium adfixis insignes inter alias feceritis*"; Liv. XXIII. 23. 6 "*spolia ex hoste fixa domi haberent*"; Liv. XXXVIII. 43. 11 "*spolia ... fixurus in postibus suis*"; Cic. Phil. II. 68 "*ille in vestibulo rostrorum spolia*"; Suet Nero 38 "*domus priscorum ducum arserunt hostilibus adhuc spoliis adornatae.*"

¹⁶ Plin. Nat. Hist. XXXV. 7 "*adfixis hostium spoliis, quae nec emptori refigere liceret*"

¹⁷ See for example the dedication of the Temple of Mars Ultor (ALFÖLDY, Géza: *L'iscrizione dedicatoria del tempio di Mars Ultor*. In: *Studi sull'epigrafia augustea e tiberiana di Roma*. Roma, 1992, 17–32.)

are the so-called *rostra*, which were the beaks of the defeated warships used as speaker's platforms.

Plutarch in the Life of Marius describes another method. After the battle of Aquae Sextiae the Romans made a huge pyre out of the weapons of Germanic warriors and they burnt them. Perhaps the function of this method was not a ritual activity, but it had a rather practical purpose: not to leave a huge amount of weapons behind for further enemies who could still destroy Northern Italy.¹⁸

In this case Plutarch's description is in accordance with that of Florus: "*arma ... ex more belli cremata*", namely they burnt the weapons of the enemy. We know from other sources that a burning sacrifice of the weapons was offered to Vulcanus¹⁹, Mars, Minerva, or Lua Mater.²⁰

Returning to our topic let us take a look at the cult of water among ancient peoples.²¹ For the ancient world water was extremely important, mainly because of its function of fertility and life-giving.²² The springs, thermal-springs, brooks, rivers, lakes, wells and marshes were all the residence of particular gods or goddesses in connection with water.²³ For example we know many such gods from the Celtic Pantheon. Aciannis was a local god of a fountain in Camaret. The meaning of his name

¹⁸ "Μετὰ δὲ τὴν μάχην ὁ Μάριος τῶν βαρβαρικῶν ὅπλων καὶ λαφύρων τὰ μὲν ἐκπρεπῆ καὶ ὀλόκληρα καὶ πομπικὴν ὄψιν τῷ θριάμβῳ δυνάμενα παρασχεῖν ἐπέλεξε, τῶν δὲ ἄλλων ἐπὶ πυρᾷ μεγάλης κατασφραγεύσας τὸ πλῆθος ἔθυσσε θυσίαν μεγαλοπρεπῆ. Καὶ τοῦ στρατοῦ παρεστῶτως ἐν ὅπλοις ἐστεφανωμένου περιζωσάμενος αὐτός, ὥσπερ ἔθος ἐστίν, ἀναλαβὼν τὴν περιπόμφρον καὶ λαβὼν δᾶδα καιομένην καὶ δὶ ἄμφοτέρων τῶν χειρῶν ἀνασχὼν πρὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἔμελλεν ὑψήσῃν τῇ πυρᾷ· καὶ προσελαύνοντες ἵπποις ἑωρῶντο φίλοι σὺν τάχει πρὸς αὐτόν, ὥστε πολλὴν γενέσθαι σιωπὴν καὶ προσδοκίαν ἀπάντων. Ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐγγὺς ἦσαν, ἀποπηδήσαντες ἐδεξιόυντο τὸν Μάριον, εὐαγγελιζόμενοι τὸ πέμπτον αὐτὸν ὑπατοὺς ἡρῆσθαι, καὶ γράμματα περὶ τούτων ἀπέδοσαν. μεγάλης οὖν χαρᾶς τοῖς ἐπὶ νικίῳις προσγενομένης ὃ τε στρατὸς ὑφ' ἡδονῆς ἐνοπλίῳ τινὶ κρότῳ καὶ πατάγῳ συνηλάλαξαν, καὶ τῶν ἡγεμόνων τὸν Μάριον αὐθις ἀναδούντων δάφνης στεφάνοις ἐνήψε τὴν πυρᾶν καὶ τὴν θυσίαν ἐπετελείωσεν." Plut. Mar. 22.

¹⁹ LATTE, Kurt: *Römische Religionsgeschichte*. (Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft V. 4) München, 1960, 129.

²⁰ For example L. Aemilius Paulus after his victory over the kingdom of Macedonia: "*Edito ludicro omnis generis clupeisque aereis in naues inpositis cetera omnis generis arma cummulata in ingentem aceruum, precatus Martem, Minervam Luamque matrem et ceteros deos, quibus spolia hostium dicare ius fasque est, ipse imperator face subdita succendit*" Liv. XLV. 33.

After the defeat of the Volsci C. Plautius, the consul of the victorious Roman army offered the weapons of the defeated enemy to Lua Mater: "*Armorum magna vis cum intercaesa hostium corpora tum in castris inventa est. Ea Luae Matri dare se consul dixit finesque hostium usque ad oram maritimam est depopulatus*." Liv. VIII. 1.

On Lua Mater see Gell. Noct. Att. XIII. 23; Georg WISSOWA: *Religion und Kultus der Römer*. München 1912², 148.

²¹ SIMÓN, Francisco Marco: *Die Religion im keltischen Hispanien*. Archaeolingua, Budapest, 1998, 41; TODD, M.: *The Northern Barbarians. 100 BC–AD 300*. London, 1975, 182.

²² About the ancient cult of water: M. NINCK: *Die Bedeutung des Wassers im Kult und Leben der Alten. Eine symbolgeschichtliche Untersuchung*. (Philologus, Supplementband XIV, Heft II) Leipzig, 1921.

²³ OLMSTED, Garrett S.: *The Gods of the Celts and the Indo-Europeans*. Archaeolingua-Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft, Budapest, 1994, 181–186, 380–402.

is perhaps “water god”.²⁴ Avicantos was a god of the spring at Airan.²⁵ A dedication to a fountain deity comes from Notre Dame du Grosel, formerly known as Grasellus. The Grosel spring is nearby.

Big rivers also had their own god, which is well-known from many inscriptions, for example the god of the river Danube and the god of the river Rhine. From Ofen in the Agri Decumates come two inscriptions: “*DANUVIO DEFLUENT*” (CIL III. 3416.) and “*DANUVIO*” (CIL III. 10395.) A third inscription from Risstissen (in Würtemberg) was written on an *ex voto* by Primanus Secundus in honour of the divinities: “*I(OVI) O(PTIMO) M(AXIMO) ET DANUVIO*” (CIL III. 5863.).²⁶ We also know inscriptions from Germania Inferior and Agri Decumates which were erected to the god Reinos, or Rhenus.²⁷ These latter inscriptions can be connected with Romans. Also, we know of votive objects presented to deities of rivers or springs by Roman soldiers.²⁸

Maria Sasel-Kos published an article in which she collected the inscriptions being in connection with the river Sava and Adsalluta.²⁹ Here she clearly demonstrated that the inscriptions dedicated to Sava and Adsalluta were the typical memorials of the Celtic and the Roman cults of water. These inscriptions were erected in order to make certain “the divine protection” over commercial shipping.

Archaeology divides water finds into different groups. In the first group there are those finds that got into the water accidentally. These could be accidents like dropping weapons in the river while crossing it. The second group consists of votive articles offered to a god of a river or a god in some connection with water. The third group, sometimes not easily distinguishable from the second one, represents the finds connected with the cult of water. For example for the Celts weapons thrown into a river were a kind of sacrifice offered to certain deities. These votive offers are interpreted either as means of an apotropaic rite or as sacrifices offered to deities so that they assure the crossing over the river.³⁰

Another theory is that these deposited weapons in rivers had to assure the supernatural protection of the river’s region. The sacrifices can be a symbol of the conquerors’ respect for the newly occupied territories. For example we know of huge armour hoards from La Tène and from Port (in Switzerland) and from the island Anglesey (Llyn Cenig Bach).³¹

²⁴ Inscription: EX IMPERIO ACIANNI -AcS III. 482. See OLMSTED 1994, 438.

²⁵ Inscription: MINERVAE, NEMAUSO, URNIAE, AVICANTO -CIL IX. 3077. See OLMSTED 1994, loc. cit.

²⁶ See OLMSTED 1994, loc. cit.

²⁷ Danuvios can be derived from the root *dānu- meaning “river, stream”; Rhenos: the Gauls referred to the river as Renos, apparently derived from *reinos “river, stream”, ultimately from a no-suffixed form of Indo-European *reiǵ- “flow”, which gives Latin rivus. OLMSTED 1994, 439.

²⁸ Examples: TORBRÜGGE, Walter: Vor- und frühgeschichtliche Flußfunde *BRGK* 1972, 51–52; HENIG, Martin: *Religion in Roman Britain*. London 1984, 149.

²⁹ ŠAŠEL KOS, M.: Savus and Adsalluta. *Arheolosky Vestnik* 45, 1994, 99–122.

³⁰ BRADLEY, Richard: The Destruction of Wealth in later Prehistory. *Man* 17/1 (1982) 110–111.

³¹ About the Celtic cult of water: J.-L. BRUNEAUX: *Les Gaulois. Sanctuaires et rites*. Paris 1986, 96–97; SZABÓ, Miklós: Kelta kard a Dunából. [A Celtic Sword from the Danube] *Antik Tanulmányok [Studia Antiqua]* 40, 1996, 51; G. WEGNER: *Die vorgeschichtliche Flussfunde aus dem Main und aus*

What should be then the proper interpretation of the above cited passage of Florus? Since the deposition of the weapons is mentioned only in the work of Florus but neither by Velleius Paterculus, a contemporary of the events, nor by Cassius Dio, who is regarded generally a trustworthy source, we can assume that the entire story is a fiction of Florus. On the other hand, this assumption does not seem to be very likely since Florus mentions triumphal sacrifices many times in his work and these are connected to actual Roman traditions. Thus the only presumption we can make is, that he mentions this action for he has found it curious and as such noteworthy. This leads us to the conclusion that there is a possibility of the existence of weapon sacrifice in the Roman religion as well, though the only source for it can be Florus. According to this hypothesis Vinicius made a sacrifice to the deities of Drava and Sava in order to gain their protection and symbolize his rule over their territories.

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dem Rhein bei Mainz. Kallmünz 1976, 41–44; A. BENEŠ–P. SANKOT: Der erste Flussfund einer frühlatènezeitlichen Schwertscheide aus Böhmen. *Arch. Rozhledy* 46 (1994) 556.