



# INHALTSVERZEICHNIS

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Tafeln 1–25

# A lead tag inscribed in Greek from *Durostorum* (Moesia Inferior)\*

Plate 11

The paper analyses a lead tag inscribed in Greek, found in 1972 by Dan Elefterescu during a field-walk on the beach of the Danube river, in front of the settlement known as “Farm 4” (“Ferma 4” in Romanian)<sup>1</sup>, thus some distance east from the legionary fortress of *Durostorum*, where the *legio XI Claudia* had been camped.<sup>2</sup> The text is incised with cursive capital letters. The artefact is now housed in the Lower Danube Museum of Călărași, Romania, inv. 45604.

The lead tag has the following dimensions: length = 2.95 cm; width = 2.39 cm; thickness = 0.1 cm (Pl. 11, Fig. 1 a–b). It weighs 5.06 grams, and the letter height ranges between 2.2 and 5.4 mm. The tag was cut in an irregular and winding fashion on its right side from a larger lead sheet and it is currently exfoliated in the lower right corner. On the left side, a circular orifice was made for the tag to be attached onto another item. Interestingly, although we are dealing with one handwriting, the *beta*, *alpha*, *lambda*

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\* We would like to express our gratitude to the late Alexandru Avram (Le Mans), as well as to Dan Dana (Lyon) and Hélène Cuvigny (Paris) and to the editors and anonymous reviewers of the journal for their useful comments and observations regarding our interpretations. All errors are our own.

Abbreviations:

IG = A. Avram, *Inscriptiones Graecae. Epiri, Macedoniae, Thraciae, Scythiae, pars III. Inscriptiones Thraciae, fasc. III. Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris, section I. Callatis et ager Callatianus*, Berlin 2022.

ISM = E. Popescu, *Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris IV. Tropaeum – Durostorum – Axiopolis*, Paris 2015.

<sup>1</sup> See a detailed introduction of the area in S. Boțan, D. Elefterescu, *Vase de sticlă de epocă romană descoperite la Durostorum/Ostrov - Ferma 4 (secolele I p. Chr. – IV p. Chr.)*, Iași 2018, 11–16. As it becomes apparent the area in question seems to have been dominated by manufacturing activities.

<sup>2</sup> See further for this legion: F. Matei-Popescu, *The Roman Army in Moesia Inferior*, Bucharest 2010, *passim*. For the region in question, see the introductory part of D. Deac, R. Petcu, *A Magical Amulet from Durostorum (Moesia Inferior)*, *Tyche* 32 (2017) 7–14, pl. 3–4 and P. Donevski, F. Matei-Popescu, *Der duumviralis primus des neuen Munizipiums Durostorum von Untermösien*, *ZPE* 218 (2021) 329–332. For the inscriptions found in this settlement see *ISM* IV, 86–154 and *IG* X, 3, 3, 1, 306–328.

and *sigma* are always rendered in different ways. The back does not present any traces of writing.

In 2020, before submitting the paper for publication, we sent a previous version of the manuscript to Prof. Alexandru Avram for corrections and observations and for its upcoming inclusion in the future *IG X* 3,3,1 edited by him. Indeed, the artifact was included in the edited volume, which was published in 2022, one year after the passing of A. Avram, through the effort of the curators of the manuscript — K. Hallof and D. Hälmagi — while the current paper was undergoing the review process. A drawing of the artifact is provided in the *IG* volume, where the reader is informed that the editors of the text of the artifact are the authors of the present paper (*IG X* 3,3,1 323). However, Hälmagi's entry in the volume diverges to a significant extent from the original manuscript we sent to A. Avram. In *IG* the artifact is interpreted as a *pondus*, the dimensions are slightly different from ours,<sup>3</sup> a date between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD is proposed, and the text reads as follows:

Βεῖτάλης  
Λίβρα ΠΗ  
ΒεΙΚ' —.

It is suggested that *pi* stands for *pondo* and the next signs represent 8 ½; for the third line, the proposed reading is Βεῖκά[ριος]? (D. Hälmagi).

The reading as λίβρα (Lat. *libra*) should exclude the possibility of the *pi* standing for *pondo*, as so far, there are no existing pieces of evidence in either epigraphy or papyrology transliterating the Latin weight measurement into Greek. The fact that usually the products appeared first and then the weight and/or price followed also stands against this proposal.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, we offer our own interpretation, largely in the form in which it had been communicated to A. Avram years ago:

BEITAAH`C'  
ΛIBPATH`C'  
BE..[ca. 2]  
  
Βεῖτάλη`ζ'  
λίβρά(ριος) τῆ`ζ'  
βει..[ca. 2].

*Vitalis, librarius of the BE(...).*

<sup>3</sup> We examined the artifact in the fall of 2019. The dimensions given in this paper are based on that examination.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. I. Radman-Livaja, *Tesserae Sisciensiae. Les plombs inscrits de Siscia/Olovne tesere iz Siscije*, Zagreb 2014.

*Apparatus*

1 It should be noted that the *gentilicium* is missing on this tag; the transliteration of Vitalis is frequently attested in Greek everywhere in the Roman world. However, this transliteration offers some uncommon features. For example, in the first line, *epsilon* is added before the *iota*, as in another occurrence from Moesia Inferior itself, where the name is encountered at *Tomis*, dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE: Βειτάλιον (accusative) (LGPV IV, 72 and *ISM* II, 100 (66) = *ISM* VI.2, 100).<sup>5</sup> By the time of the Principate, this confusion is frequent in papyri from Egypt as well as in other epigraphic sources.<sup>6</sup> Further down the line, *eta* is used after *lambda* instead of an *iota*; this *itacism* — a process also quite frequent in Koine Greek<sup>7</sup> — occurs for this name in the last syllable, for instance, on a funerary monument from *Catinae* (*IG* XIV 463: Αὑρήλις Βιτάλης), or after *beta* on another funerary monument dated to the 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> c. CE from *Deultum* (Βητάλιος).<sup>8</sup> A lunate *sigma* is inserted above the line, as there was no space left at the end.

2 One can propose to read λιβρά(ριος) (Lat. *librarius*) which is perfectly readable and otherwise encountered abbreviated in this way. The next word could be the genitive feminine singular article τῆς with the *tau* and *eta* in ligature and, like in the first line, one can observe the incision of a lunate *sigma* above the line due to lack of space.

3 The first two letters, *beta* and *epsilon*, can be read without difficulty while the next letters can only be presumed; the next two letters are partially visible, and their interpretation is difficult as these were incised in the area which is now exfoliated, and which completely covered one or two completely lost letters. Given the article in the previous line, not only should one seek a singular feminine noun starting with the letters mentioned above, but also take into consideration that here too like in the first line, one could have been dealing with a *betacism* and use of *epsilon* and *iota* standing for a pronunciation of the “I” sound, just like at the beginning of the name of Vitalis.<sup>9</sup> Based on the current situation, any further interpretation remains speculative.

The lead tablet most likely accompanied products connected to a *librarius* named Vitalis. In some cases, in the European provinces, these Latin lead tags are connected to or mention the military, mostly starting with the typical formula which mentions the *centuria* and the name of the soldier, in a form encountered on other kinds of ownership marks such as graffiti on pottery or *tesserae militares*.<sup>10</sup> The office of *librarius* was

<sup>5</sup> Sometimes *epsilon* is used instead of the habitual second *iota*, i.e. Βειτάλες (*SEG* XXXIX 598).

<sup>6</sup> A detailed analysis is found in F. T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods. Vol. I. Phonology*, Milan 1976, 190–191.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Gignac, *Grammar* (see n. 6), 237–239, especially 239.

<sup>8</sup> D. Dana, *Une nouvelle épitaphe grecque tardive de Bulgarie*, *ZPE* 174 (2010) 106–108.

<sup>9</sup> This interpretation is suggested also by D. Hálmagi (see above).

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance: R. Wedenig (with a contribution by M. Kronberger), *Ein Bleietikett mit Zenturiengraffito von der Freyung in Wien I*, *Fundort Wien* 12 (2009) 104–112, especially 109–110, who first observes these characteristics while comparing the commercial tags bearing military texts with the graffiti and *tesserae militares*; T. Becker, M. Scholz, *Decken für die Truppe – ein Bleietikett aus Groß-Gerau*, *Hessen Archäologie* (2015) 66–69.

essentially that of a clerk with secretarial duties, part of the core *immunes*.<sup>11</sup> One should note that no *librarii* of the *legio XI Claudia* are attested so far, at least during its deployment in Moesia Inferior during the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD.<sup>12</sup>

The hastily incised writing and the irregular cut of the tablet may reflect the fact that these tablets were mass produced with the same text, perhaps two tags being cut from one single sheet. In the present case, the tag represents the piece from the left side. No conclusive evidence seems to indicate a precise date range; therefore, one can only advance a wide span during the Imperial period, perhaps the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD.

This unique artefact reveals yet another important aspect — to our knowledge, this is the first lead tag found written in Greek, discovered in a military context dominated by Latin. Commercial tags inscribed on lead are known everywhere in the European Latin West, stretching east up to Pannonia Inferior, with a high concentration of around one thousand discovered at *Siscia* alone, but as stated, none were found inscribed in Greek so far.<sup>13</sup> It is striking that in the Hellenophone Roman East, there are situations when these lead tags are written in Latin as well, as indicated by a recently published exemplar now kept in a Lebanese private collection, presumably found in the Near East.<sup>14</sup> This brings us to the final question: why was a tag from the military context from *Durostorum* written in Greek and not in Latin, as was apparently customary? Given the singularity of the find, a definite answer cannot be advanced. However, although the monumental stone inscriptions (honorific, votive and funerary) from this settlement are mainly written in Latin, the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD ‘minor epigraphy’ includes almost exclusively Greek texts, excluding, of course, the military and manufacturer stamps.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, in Moesia Inferior, the ‘epigraphic habit’ of the legionary

<sup>11</sup> See further G. R. Watson, *Immunis librarius*, in: M. G. Jarrett, B. Dobson (eds.), *Britain and Rome. Essays Presented to Eric Birley on his Sixtieth Birthday*, Kendal 1966, 45–55. For the *librarii legionis* see for instance M. A. Speidel, *Specialisation and Promotion in the Roman Imperial Army*, in: L. De Blois (ed.), *Administration, Prosopography and Appointment Policies in the Roman Empire: Proceedings of the First Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire*, Amsterdam 2001, 50–61, especially 55–57; K. Stauner, *Das offizielle Schriftwesen des römischen Heeres von Augustus bis Gallienus (27 v. Chr. – 268 n. Chr.). Eine Untersuchung zur Struktur, Funktion und Bedeutung der offiziellen militärischen Verwaltungsdokumentation und zu deren Schreibern*, Bonn 2004, especially 132–138 for *librarii* in general.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Matei-Popescu, *Roman Army* (see n. 2) 141–163 for the prosopography of the legion.

<sup>13</sup> See I. Radman-Livaja, *Tesserae Sisciensiae* (see n. 4) 31–51 on the distribution of this kind of artifacts in other parts of Europe and a shorter overview in *idem*, *Roman Siscia and its Textile Industry: Hazards and Limits of Epigraphic Evidence*, in: T. Grull (ed.), *Mobility and Transfer Studies on Ancient Economy*, Budapest 2018, 153–169. See as well D. Deac, C. Timoc, *A Commercial Lead Tessera from Roman Siscia*, ZPE 220 (2021) 321–324, for the latest find from *Siscia* and the distribution of commercial tags in Pannonia, and H. Grassl, *Römische Bleietiketten aus Trier: Neue Lesungen und Interpretationen*, ZPE 219 (2021) 289–298 for the ones discovered at *Augusta Treverorum* with a new reading. For the social status of the individuals attested at *Siscia*, see Radman-Livaja, *Tesserae Sisciensiae* (see n. 4) 130–137.

<sup>14</sup> J. Aliquot, *Regio Parhalia. Genèse et administration d'un district domanial de la Syrie romaine*, Syria 95 (2018) 121–132.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. ISM IV, 86–154 and IG X, 3, 3, 1, 306–328.

milieu — at *Durostorum*, *Troesmis* or *Novae* — illustrates at times examples of monuments, both votive and funerary, written in Greek (some of these are found in far-away provinces but refer mostly to veterans from the legions stationed in Moesia Inferior), in a landscape dominated by Latin.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps Vitalis was himself a Hellenophone, or perhaps the products that accompanied these tags, which had been in turn connected the *librarius* named Vitalis, had been sent to or retrieved from a mainly Greek-speaking milieu, either a local or a distant one.

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<sup>16</sup> Matei-Popescu, *Roman Army* (see n. 2) *passim*.



Fig. 1 a–b: The lead tag from Durostorum (photo and drawing – © authors)