

ART. VI.—An inscription relating to Roman Kirkby Thore. By MICHAEL G. JARRETT, Ph.D.

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TWENTY-SIX years ago our President discussed in CW2 xxxiv 116-119 an inscription from Ksar Sbahi (the Roman Gadiaufala) in Algeria which mentioned a Roman officer who had commanded the garrison of the fort at Kirkby Thore. The inscription¹ is one, the interpretation of which poses several problems, and the solution proposed by Professor Birley was ingenious but, as he himself now admits, unconvincing.

The text of the inscription is as follows:

D MM P LIC AGATOPVS VETERANVS PRAEFECTVS IN BRITANIA EQ ALARIS MILITANS BRAVNIACO DISMISSVS REPETENS GADIAVFALA PAT[riae] SVAE VIX [it ann] LXXXI[] FILI IPS P LI [ci] IANVRIVS [. . .]

It is the funerary monument of Publius Licinius Agathopus, a native of Gadiaufala, set up by his sons P. Licinius Ianuarius and P. Licinius []. As Professor Birley showed (CW2 xxxiv 116-117) the *Brauniacum* of the inscription must be the *Braboniacum* of the *Notitia Dignitatum*;² this in its turn must be equated with the *Brovonacis* of Iter II of the Antonine Itinerary,³ which is clearly the modern Kirkby Thore. After military service which included the command of a cavalry regiment stationed at Kirkby Thore, Agathopus had retired to Gadiaufala. The abbreviation of his nomen *Licinius* implies a date in the 3rd century.

So much is not in question; but the words *veteranus praefectus . . . eq(uitibus) alar(i)is . . . dismissus* have

¹ CIL VIII 4800.

² O. Seeck, *Notitia Dignitatum* (Berlin, 1876) Oc. xl 12=27.

³ O. Cuntz, *Itineraria Romana* I (Leipzig, 1929) 72; Iter II no. 4.

been interpreted in two different ways, neither of which is entirely satisfactory. The words *veteranus* and *dismissus* are normally associated with legionary other-ranks; but a *praefectus equitum* (commander of a cavalry regiment) was of equestrian status, and had normally held at least two other equestrian commands before attaining that rank.⁴ Mommsen, in discussing this inscription in CIL, suggested that Agathopus was a time-expired legionary retained in the army as acting-commander (*praepositus*) of the unit at Kirkby Thore.⁵

This would be most unusual, but in any case is put out of court by the text of the inscription, which clearly describes Agathopus as *praefectus*, a title only given to the regular commander. Equestrian commands were occasionally given to legionary centurions, or even to veterans from the legions or the praetorian guard; but such promotions are increasingly rare after the reign of Claudius and appear to have ceased completely by the end of the 1st century. By that date equestrian officers were normally recruited from the upper classes of the towns of Italy and the provinces.⁶

Professor Birley's alternative interpretation of this inscription is that the term *veteranus* is used adjectivally, and is closely linked with *praefectus*, the phrase meaning no more than "ex-prefect"; the term *dismissus*, normally used of the honourable discharge accorded to private soldiers on completion of their term of service, would then merely describe the end of Agathopus's period of command. On this interpretation there arises no question of Agathopus having seen any service except as an equestrian officer.

Unfortunately this explanation does not face the problem of why Ianuarius and his brother should have used two words (*veteranus* and *dismissus*) normally applied to legionary other-ranks to describe a former equestrian

⁴ E. Birley, *Roman Britain & the Roman Army* (Kendal, 1953) 138.

⁵ CIL *ad loc.*

⁶ Cf.: *Roman Britain & the Roman Army* 139-140.

officer — especially when, in the 3rd century, there was the phrase *a militiis* in common use to indicate retirement from the equestrian military service. If our President's interpretation were correct, the terms used would indicate an unusual lack of respect for the deceased. It therefore seems far more probable that the words *veteranus* and *dismissus* were used because they were, in their normal sense, accurate; in other words that Agathopus had been, as well as an equestrian officer, a private soldier (or more probably N.C.O.) in the ranks of a legion or of the praetorian guard, and that he had retired as *veteranus* with *honesta missio* before his appointment as an equestrian officer.

As we have seen, such promotion would have been unusual in the 2nd century; but in the 3rd century conditions were changing rapidly. More and more the Empire was being forced on to the defensive (as the increasingly complex dispositions on the British frontier show), and maintenance of *pax Romana* came to involve almost continuous fighting on many frontiers; we do not always realise that Hadrian's Wall was perhaps the most peaceful frontier of the Empire in the 3rd century. Virtually continuous fighting on the Danube and eastern frontiers meant that equestrian military service became less attractive to men of wealth and position. The municipal dignitaries who had provided the majority of the equestrian officers in the 2nd century ceased to come forward in such numbers, and their ranks had to be supplemented from other sources. The North African evidence, which I hope to discuss in detail elsewhere, shows clearly that in the 2nd century the bulk of the African contribution to the equestrian service came from the wealthy and highly romanised towns of Africa Proconsularis (modern Tunisia); in the 3rd century these towns produced far less equestrian officers.

By contrast Numidia and Mauretania Caesariensis (modern Algeria) supplied a far higher proportion of the

total. Most of the men from these two provinces came from the frontier districts — from towns like Lambaesis, Batna, Timgad and Auzia, places which had a military origin and a strong military tradition, even if they did not retain a garrison in the 3rd century.

For the most part the men recruited in these areas do not appear to have served as local magistrates before the granting of equestrian commissions. In those cases where municipal office was held it appears normally to occur after the equestrian military service. It is likely that most of these men were the sons of serving soldiers or of veterans, and would have had the opportunity of acquiring some military knowledge from their fathers. The conditions of service in the 3rd century were such as to attract young men, since more fighting was likely than at earlier dates, and since the chances of advancement were far better. For the creation by Septimus Severus (193-211) of a large number of junior procuratorships⁷ provided a far better chance of a permanent career in the emperor's service for an ambitious equestrian officer. In the 2nd century the chances of appointment as a procurator were slight. Among the North Africans about one-third of the 2nd-century equestrian officers obtained procuratorships, but more than one-half of those whose careers began after the accession of Severus received similar promotion. Moreover, imperial policy in the 3rd century must have required the recruitment of a substantial number of young men as equestrian officers so that they could be retained on the payroll for longer periods to fill these junior procuratorships.

However, Agathopus was manifestly not a young man when he received his commission as an equestrian officer. Even if he had served in the praetorian guard he would have been in the army for at least sixteen years before receiving his commission, and in the legions his service

⁷ H-G. Pflaum, *Les procurateurs équestres sous le Haut-Empire romain* (Paris, 1950) 103-107.

would have been at least twenty-five years. We do not know whether he served as prefect of a cohort and as military tribune before becoming *praefectus equitum* (the usual course), or whether his earlier service was regarded as sufficient qualification for promotion to a cavalry command without passing through the lower ranks of the equestrian service. Nor do we know anything about his father, though we may postulate that the family was of native African origin, since the area around Thubursicu Numidarum and Gadiaufala shows little evidence of Italian colonisation and much of the continuing use of the Punic language.⁸ Most probably Agathopus started his military career with *legio III Augusta*, which was stationed at Lambaesis and drew virtually all its recruits from the African provinces; but between 238 and c. 253 the legion was not in existence, and if he was recruited at this period he is more likely to have served in the praetorian guard, which had many African soldiers in the 3rd century. Such service cannot of course be ruled out at an earlier or later date. The career does not fit into the pattern described above, but represents another, rarer, attempt to cope with the critical shortage of normally qualified equestrian officers by appointing men from the ranks of the legions who had (presumably) gained experience as N.C.O.s.

We shall probably not be wrong in seeing this as another aspect of the problem posed at a higher level by the failure of sufficient senators to offer themselves for military posts, which resulted in the virtual exclusion of the whole order from military commands. The continuance of this problem was to mean that the army became more and more estranged from the people it was defending, and that in the 4th century it became very largely barbarian not only in the ranks but even amongst its officers.

⁸ Cf.: R. Syme, *Tacfarinas, the Musulamii and Thubursicu* in *Studies in Roman economic and social history in honor of Allan Chester Johnson*, edited by P. R. Coleman-Norton (Princeton, 1951) 126-127.