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DURA EUROPOS 'SHIELD MAP'
AND EXPEDITION OF GORDIAN III
AGAINST THE PERSIANS*

THE FAMOUS LEATHER 'SHIELD MAP', found by Franz Cumont underneath the so-called 'tower of archers' at Dura Europos,[1] is an object fraught with interpretation problems. Once it was considered to be a fragment of a shield cover, hence its name. The map shows the coasts of the Black Sea and a number of stations connected with them. The list of these stations, restored by Franz Cumont and René Rebuffat, looks as follows:[2]

$[\Pi]\alpha\nu[\upsilon\sigma\grave{o}s \; \pi o\tau(\alpha\mu\grave{o}s) \; ? \; \mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \; ...]$
$\text{'}O\delta\epsilon\sigma[\sigma\grave{o}s \; \mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \; ...]$
$B\upsilon\delta\acute{o}\nu\alpha \; [\mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \; ...]$
$K\acute{\alpha}\lambda[\lambda]\alpha\tau\iota s \; \mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \; ...$
$To\mu\acute{\epsilon}\alpha \; \mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \; \lambda\gamma\text{'}$
$\text{'}I[\sigma]\tau\rho o s \; \pi o\tau(\alpha\mu\grave{o}s) \; \mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \; \mu\text{'}$

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[1] F. Cumont, *Fouilles de Doura Europos*, Paris 1926, pp. 323–337.

[2] See *ibidem* and R. Rebuffat, 'Le bouclier de Doura', *Syria* 63 (1986), p. 86.

$$\Delta\acute{\alpha}\nu o\upsilon\beta\iota\varsigma \ \pi o\tau(\alpha\mu\grave{o}\varsigma) \ [\mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \ ...]$$
$$T\acute{\upsilon}\rho\alpha \ \mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \ \pi\delta'$$
$$Bo\rho[\upsilon]\sigma[\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu]\eta\varsigma \ [\mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \ ...]$$
$$X\epsilon\rho[\sigma]\acute{o}\nu[\eta\sigma o\varsigma \ .....]$$
$$T\rho\alpha\pi\epsilon[\zeta o\hat{\upsilon}\varsigma \ .....]$$
$${}^{\prime}A\rho\tau\acute{\alpha}[\xi\alpha\tau\alpha \ \mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \ ...]$$

The identification of the majority of these names with known places caused no serious difficulties.[3] It seems obvious that the Dura shield map depicted the western and northern coasts of the Black Sea, from $\Pi\alpha\nu\upsilon\sigma\acute{o}\varsigma$ near the Danube to the city $X\epsilon\rho\sigma\acute{o}\nu\eta\sigma o\varsigma$ on the west of the Crimean Peninsula. Yet, the identification of $T\rho\alpha\pi\epsilon[\zeta o\hat{\upsilon}\varsigma]$ with the later Trebizond and the presence of Armenian $'A\rho\tau\acute{\alpha}[\xi\alpha\tau\alpha]$ on the map led to many interpretation problems. These names seemed to be out of place on a map depicting the northern and western Black Sea coasts.

After the publication of the map most scholars were convinced that the recovered leather fragment served as a shield facing. We should also remember that only the hypothesis of the supposed military function of the recently found 'shield map' provided a satisfactory explanation of the very existence of Trebizond and Artaxata on it. Therefore, for some scholars the depicted itinerary was a physical record of an epic march, which brought a Roman soldier, probably of *cohors XX Palmyrenorum*, from the Black Sea coasts to Syria and Dura Europos.[4]

However, thanks to recent research[5] we know that the supposed buckler cover is only a fragment of a leather map.[6] The arguments are very simple: It lacks any traces of holes, usually made in leather shield cover-

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[3] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*

[4] See M. Levi, *Itineraria picta*, Rome 1967, p. 31; C. Hopkins, *The Discovery of Dura Europos*, New Haven – London 1979, pp. 20–21. For the critical approach to those theories, see Rebuffat, 'Le bouclier' (cit. n. 2), p. 87. For the most recent views, see S. James, *Excavations at Dura Europos 1928–1937. Final Report* VII: *The Arms and Armour and other Military Equipment*, London 2004, p. 25.

[5] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*

[6] See P. Arnaud, 'Une deuxième lecture du «bouclier» de Doura-Europos', *CRAI* 133 (1989), pp. 379–380, 383.

ings to facilitate the attachment of iron shield bosses and other elements, such as grips and rims. The theory of its supposed military function was based only on the fact that it was discovered underneath the so-called 'tower of archers', alongside other pieces of military equipment.

Nowadays the acceptance of the non-military function of the 'shield map' led to a new interpretation of the find. As the map was not a record of an epic military march, the identification of some places has changed. The new list of names, given by Pascal Arnaud,[7] looks as follows:

$[\Pi]\alpha\nu[\nu\sigma\grave{o}s \ \pi o\tau(\alpha\mu\grave{o}s) \ ? \ \mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \ ...]$
$\text{'}O\delta\epsilon\sigma[\sigma\grave{o}s \ \mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \ ...]$
$B\nu\beta\acute{o}\nu[\alpha \ \mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \ ...]$
$K\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\langle\alpha\rangle\nu\tau(\iota s) \ \mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \ ...$
$T o\mu\acute{\epsilon}\alpha \ \mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \ \lambda\gamma'$
$\text{'}I[\sigma]\tau\rho o s \ \pi o\tau(\alpha\mu\grave{o}s) \ \mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \ \mu'$
$\Delta\acute{\alpha}\nu o\nu\beta\iota s \ \pi o\tau(\alpha\mu\grave{o}s) \ [\mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \ ...]$
$T\acute{\nu}\rho\alpha \ \mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \ \pi\delta'$
$B o\rho[\nu]\sigma[\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu]\eta s \ [\mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \ ...]$
$X\epsilon\rho[\sigma]\acute{o}\nu[\eta\sigma o s]$
$T\rho\alpha\pi\epsilon[\zeta o\hat{\nu}s]$
$\text{'}A\rho\tau\acute{\alpha}$
$[\mu\acute{\iota}(\lambda\iota\alpha) \ ...]$

The name $T\rho\alpha\pi\epsilon[\zeta o\hat{\nu}s]$, which was earlier identified with Trebizond, can be connected with another place.[8] Strabo in his *Geography* describes Mount $T\rho\alpha\pi\epsilon\zeta o\hat{\nu}s$ located on the southern coast of the Crimean Peninsula.[9] From the reign of Catherine the Great onwards it is widely accepted that the name $T\rho\alpha\pi\epsilon\zeta o\hat{\nu}s$ referred to in Strabo's work should be identified

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[7] *Ibidem*, p. 378.

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 377.

[9] Strab. VII 3: $\dot{\epsilon}\nu \ \delta\grave{\epsilon} \ \tau\hat{\eta} \ \dot{o}\rho\epsilon\iota\nu\hat{\eta} \ \tau\hat{\omega}\nu \ T\alpha\acute{\nu}\rho\omega\nu \ \kappa\alpha\grave{\iota} \ \tau\grave{o} \ \ddot{o}\rho o s \ \dot{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\grave{\iota}\nu \ \dot{o} \ T\rho\alpha\pi\epsilon\zeta o\hat{\nu}s, \ \dot{o}\mu\acute{\omega}\nu\nu\mu o\nu \ \tau\hat{\eta} \ \pi\acute{o}\lambda\epsilon\iota \ \tau\hat{\eta} \ \pi\epsilon\rho\grave{\iota} \ \tau\grave{\eta}\nu \ T\iota\beta\alpha\rho\alpha\nu\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu \ \kappa\alpha\grave{\iota} \ \tau\grave{\eta}\nu \ K o\lambda\chi\acute{\iota}\delta\alpha$ – 'In the mountainous district of the Taurians is also the mountain Trapezus, which has the same name as the city in the neighborhood of Tibarania and Colchis.' (tr. H. L. JONES, *The Geography of Strabo*, Cambridge – Harvard – London 1924).

with present day Chatyr-Dag,[10] mostly due to the shape of the mountain, which indeed resembles a table.

It is also possible that Ἀρτά is not an abbreviation of Ἀρτά[ξατα]. They seem to be a Greek transliteration of the Latin word *arta*, which means 'straits'.[11] If this is true, the term Ἀρτά could have been used to describe the Strait of Kerch.[12] Moreover, there were also some earlier suggestions about the presence of the toponym [Π]αν[τικάπαιον] on it.[13] If that is the case, then we should accept the fact that the leather 'shield map' was made only to depict the northern and western shores of the Black Sea.

The acceptance of that theory deprived the find of all its military significance. For recent scholars the Dura shield map 'does not necessarily say anything about the troop movements, but does at least reflect Dura's wider general contacts with other provinces'.[14] Such a cautious approach is the main virtue of any research work. However, in the case of the Dura shield map some important clues still remain overlooked. For example, we have to ask why, in a caravan city like Dura Europos, someone needed a map of the northern Black Sea coastline?

There is a possible answer to that question. Sometime in AD 244 the Romans led by Emperor Gordian III launched an invasion on Persian lands.[15] It was a time of enormous military effort for the whole empire, for example soldiers from the *legio II Parthica* were again transferred to Apamea in Syria[16] and units of the Ravenna and Misenum fleets were mobi-

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[10] See P. S. PALLAS, *Nablyudeniya sdelannye vo vremya puteshestviya po yuzhnym namestnich-estvam russkogo gosudarstva v 1793-1794 godakh*, Moscow 1999, p. 87.

[11] See *TLL* II, *s.v.* 'arta', and Amm. Marc. XIV 2.6: *per arta et inuia*, see also ARNAUD, 'Une deuxième lecture' (cit. n. 6), p. 377, n. 13.

[12] *Ibidem*, p. 377.

[13] See R. UHDEN, 'Bemerkungen zu dem römischen Kartenfragment aus Dura Europos', *Hermes* 67 (1932), p. 117.

[14] See JAMES, *Excavations at Dura Europos* (cit. n. 4), p. 25.

[15] *Ibidem, loc. cit.*

[16] J. C. BALTY, 'Apamea in Syria in the second and third centuries AD', *JRS* 78 (1988), p. 100; F. MILLAR, *The Roman Near East 31 BC – 337 AD*, Cambridge – London 1993, p. 146; JAMES, *Excavations at Dura Europos* (cit. n. 4), p. 25.

lized for the needs of the campaign.[17] Despite the huge effort, the expedition ended in disaster somewhere near Ctesiphon. Due to the dating and distribution of coin finds from some military sites on the southern coasts of the Crimea we can suspect that *vexillatio Moesiae Inferioris*, a detachment of Roman troops that garrisoned the peninsula, took part in the disastrous enterprise of Gordian III and shared the fate of the emperor.[18] At least one scholar is convinced that Gordian's soldiers passed through Dura Europos.[19] If that was the case, then it is highly probable that the shield map had belonged to one of them and was left at Dura during the march.

[17] Millar, *The Roman Near East* (cit. n. 16), p. 153.

[18] Obviously, in the third century AD the Roman soldiers from the Crimean garrisons were subjected to many withdrawals and comebacks. For example, finds from the Roman fort discovered at Kadykovka (Balaklava) may suggest the involvement of one of the *vexillationes Ponticae*, mentioned in an inscription from Mactar (cf. *CIL* VIII 619 = *ILS* 2747: *trib(unus) milit(um) leg(ionis) I Italic(ae) praepositus vexillationibus Ponticis aput Scythia<m> et Tauricam*), in the Persian campaign of Severus Alexander in AD 231 (cf. Hdn. VI 3.1–4.3). The inscription suggests that more than one *vexillatio* was present on the Crimean soil, see T. Sarnowski & V. M. Zubar, 'Römische Besatzungtruppen auf der Südkrim und eine Bauinschrift aus dem Kastell Charax', *ZPE* 112 (1996), p. 214. In the hoard discovered at Kadykovka the latest item, a coin of Severus Alexander and Iulia Mammea (*RIC* IV 351), can be dated to the years AD 222–235, see N. A. Aleksenko & A. A. Filippenko, 'Der römische Münzschatzefund von Balaklava', [in:] T. Sarnowski & O. J. Savelja, *Balaklava: Römische Militärstation und Heiligtum des Iupiter Dolichenus* [= *Światowit, Supplement Series A: Antiquity* 5], Warsaw 2000, pp. 167-168. However, there is another possible explanation of that find. It is noteworthy that some Roman soldiers carried coins minted many years earlier, as it was the case of the 'marine' and carpenter who served in the Misenum fleet and died during the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79. As his skeleton has been discovered at Herculaneum, it became clear that the coins present in his purse were struck under Nero more than ten years earlier, see R. D'Amato & G. Sumner, *Imperial Roman Naval Forces 31 BC – AD 500*, Oxford 2009, pp. 15-16. A similar situation may have taken place in the Balaklava fort, as in the period of turmoil there were problems with distribution of the latest issues. Therefore the hoard could have been buried some years later, perhaps just before AD 244. The subject warrants further investigation. We should also bear in mind that the latest known coin recovered at the Roman fort at Charax was minted by Gordian III, see M. I. Rostovtzeff, 'Römische Besatzungen in der Krim und das Kastell Charax', *Klio* 2 (1902), p. 93; see also T. Sarnowski, 'Das römische Heer im Norden des Schwarzen Meeres', *Archeologia Warszawa* 38 (1988), p. 93. Therefore, it is possible that the site was abandoned at that specific time. However, that evidence comes from the old excavations and must be treated with caution.

[19] James, *Excavations at Dura Europos* (cit. n. 4), p. 25.

An inscription from Naqsh-e-Rustam, the so-called *Res gestae divi Saporis*, which describes the deeds of the Sassanian king Shapur I, may provide further support to that theory. Among other events, it records the circumstances of the defeat and death of Gordian III: 'Gordian Caesar raised in all of the Roman Empire a force from a Goth and German realms and marched on Babylonia' (tr. R. Frye).[20]

Information on the presence of Gothic warriors alongside Roman and Germanic soldiers during the campaign of Gordian III,[21] quoted in Shapur's inscription, seems to be of some significance. There are other traces of Goths in the East that can be dated to the earlier years, but the very nature of the available evidence demands a very cautious approach to them.[22] Therefore, the inscription from Naqsh-e-Rustam remains the

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[20] R. FRYE, *A History of Ancient Iran*, Munich 1984, p. 371; see also F. MILLAR, *The Roman Near East* (cit. n. 16), p. 154.

[21] The presence of Germanic warriors among Gordian's soldiers was a result of a successful campaign in Moesia in AD 242 (*Hist. Aug. Gord.* 26: 'fecit iter <in> Moesiam atque in ipso procinctu, quidquid hostium in Thraciis fuit, delevit, fugavit, expulit, atque summovit'); see D. BANEA, 'L'armée de la Dacie et la campagne de l'empereur Gordien III en Orient', [in:] *Miscellanea Romano-Barbarica. In Honorem Septagenarii Magistri Ion Ioniţă Oblata*, Bucharest 2006, pp. 97–106. We may suspect that the victorious campaign ended with a treaty. It is also possible that terms of that treaty included an obligation that some barbarian soldiers should serve in the Roman army, see J. KOLENDO, 'Novae during the Goth raid of AD 250/1', [in:] T. DERDA. P. DYCZEK, & J. KOLENDO (eds.), *A Companion to the Study of Novae* [= *Novae. Legionary Fortress and Late Antique Town* 1], Warsaw 2008, p. 120.

[22] For example, a funerary inscription from I'nat in Hauran mentions a certain Γύθθα, a son of Ἑρμιναρίος, a commander (*praepositus*) of an unit of Germanic *gentiles*. The inscription was dated to 28 February AD 208, see *AE* 1911, p. 244, and M. P. SPEIDEL, *The Roman Army in Arabia* [= *ANRW* II.8], Berlin – New York 1977, pp. 712–713. However, the personal (not tribal) name of the son of the commander is not sufficient proof of Gothic presence in the East in that time, as it can simply mean 'the good one' or something else. We have to bear in mind that at the very beginning of the third century AD the Goths had only undertaken an effort to fight their way to the Black Sea coasts. There are archaeological traces of these conflicts, in the form of isolated grave assemblies, which belonged to their opponents. These finds, like the one from Swaryczów in Poland or another one from Hromówka (Gromivka) in present-day Ukraine, are connected with the warriors belonging to the Przeworsk culture, foes of the Goths, see A. KOKOWSKI, *Starożytna Polska* [Ancient Poland], Warsaw 2005, pp. 285–287, and IDEM, 'Bemerkungen zu Schildbuckeln des Typs Jahn 8 (Ilkjær Typ 5a-5b)', [in:] C. VON CARNAP-BORNHEIM (ed.), *Beiträge zu römischer und barbarischer Bewaffnung in den ersten vier*

first certain piece of information about the presence of Gothic troops in the Roman East.

Moreover, even a glimpse of the shield map from Dura convinces us that almost all stations depicted on it were somehow connected with the areas of later Gothic settlement. We should bear in mind that the earliest archaeological traces of the 'Gothic' presence in these lands can be dated to the last decades of the third century AD.[23] However, the very nature of the evidence can provide us with an explanation of that paradox: a settlement would have to be occupied for a time to produce traces recognizable by archaeological methods. Cemeteries are connected with communities that enjoyed a period of stability. The earlier period of turmoil simply failed to produce enough traces. Nonetheless, thanks to historical evidence we are sure that the Goths were present in these areas even earlier. In AD 230 Gothic warriors tried to capture Olbia, a Greek city on the northern coast of the Black Sea.[24] In AD 250 a Gothic incursion under the command of King Cniva devastated the provinces of Moesia and Dacia.[25] The onslaught continued until AD 267–269. The Goths captured the Crimean Peninsula and launched an invasion on Greece and Asia Minor.[26] However, in AD 244 the majority of these events was only a thing of the future. Yet, anyone involved in the recruitment of Gothic warriors for obvious reasons had to have some knowledge of the northern shores of the Black Sea. Therefore, it is possible that maps, such as the one recovered at Dura Europos, were somehow connected with that process.

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nachchristlichen Jahrhunderten, Marburger Kolloquium 1994 [= Veröffentlichung des Vorgeschichtlichen Seminars Marburg, Sonderband 8b], Lublin – Marburg 1994, pp. 369–376. Therefore, the information provided by the Hauran inscription must be treated with caution.

[23] Connected with the Chernyakhov and Sîntana de Mureş cultures, see A. KOKOWSKI, Goci. Od Skandzy do Campi Gothorum [The Goths. From Skandza to Campi Gothorum], Warsaw 2007, pp. 200-201.

[24] Ibidem, p. 165.

[25] Iordanes, Getica XVIII; see also H. WOLFRAM, Die Goten: Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte der sechsten Jahrhunderts, Munich 1990, pp. 54–65, and KOLENDO, 'Novae during the Goth raid' (cit. n. 21), pp. 117–131.

[26] See KOKOWSKI, Goci (cit. n. 23), pp. 163–166.

Despite the sketchy and very fragmentary nature of the collected evidence we can make an attempt to reconstruct the circumstances in which the Dura Europos 'shield map' made its way to the caravan city. In AD 244 or somewhat earlier, a Roman soldier, a naval captain, or a clerk somewhere on the northern shores of the Black Sea was involved in preparations that marked the beginning of the Persian campaign. It is possible that all Roman garrisons located on the southern coasts of the Crimean Peninsula were ordered to take part in that enterprise and the Gothic auxiliaries were hired or conscripted somewhere in the Black Sea region. It seems that the 'shield map' was taken to Dura Europos as someone's personal property and left there when the orders came to abandon all unnecessary burden. As the Roman Crimean garrisons never came back from the disastrous expedition,[27] the map had to quietly wait for excavator's shovel.

If that was the case, the Dura shield no longer reflects 'Dura's wider general contacts' but should be connected with the preparations and troop movements that preceded the Persian expedition of Gordian III and in which, very probably, the Roman Crimean garrison was involved.

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[27] Curiously, some other garrisons of the northern Black Sea, like Tyras or Chersonesos, endured longer and were abandoned somewhat later, perhaps after AD 248, cf. SARNOWSKI, 'Das römische Heer' (cit. n. 18), pp. 92–93. Some of them were replaced with units of barbarian auxiliary warriors, who had left traces on Crimean soil, in the form of graveyards and grave assemblies, which contained typical Germanic artifacts alongside products of Mediterranean culture. The process lasted for a while, e.g. the earliest coins recovered from the Chatyr-Dag necropolis were connected with the emperors Gallienus and Trebonianus Gallus, but these were certainly found with somewhat later items, like in a grave of a child, see V. L. MYC *et alii*, *Chatyr-Dag – Nekropol' Rimskoj Epokhi v Krymu*, Sankt-Peterburg 2006, pp. 17, 192.