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INHALTSVERZEICHNIS

Emiliano A r e n a

Una nuova evidenza di sigle “demotiche” e di synkletos dalla Sicilia tardoellenistica: SEG LIX.1102 e la storia di Kale Akte

François B é r a r d

Les carrières des sous-officiers de l’armée romaine : derrière la diversité des parcours l’affirmation d’une forte identité militaire

Francesco C a m i a

At the Crossroads of Different Traditions. Social and Cultural Dynamics in Roman Thrace Through the Epigraphic Practice

Massimo C a s a g r a n d e, Gianfranca S a l i s

I miliari di Capoterra (Cagliari – Sardegna). Notizia preliminare

Patrizia de B e r n a r d o S t e m p e l

Celtic Religion between Epichoric and Roman Epigraphy

Françoise d e s B o s c s

Épigraphie des amphores de la Bétique et épigraphie lapidaire. L’apport d’une approche croisée à l’histoire socio-économique des élites : Le dossier des Stertini

Paul E r n s t

L’usage du latin dans les pratiques épigraphiques des Italiens installés dans la Grèce égéenne aux II^e et I^{er} siècles avant notre ère

Concepción F e r n á n d e z - M a r t í n e z

CLE de las Galias: Estado de la cuestión y avances para la edición de CIL XVIII/3

Rossella G i g l i o, Rossana D e S i m o n e

Epigraphica Lilybetana. Tra Punici, Greci e Romani. Un decennio di ricerche (2006–2016). Note bibliografiche

Hernán G o n z á l e z B o r d a s, Jérôme F r a n c e

A Mention of conciliabula in the Imperial Regulation from Lella Drebbia (AE, 2001, 2083), Dougga, Tunisia

Takashi H a s e g a w a

Identités et statuts sociaux des commerçants connus dans les sanctuaires de Nehalennia

Christine H o ë t - v a n C a u w e n b e r g h e

Fanum Martis (Gaule Belgique) : L’écrit du quotidien dans un vicus Nervien

Sara K a c z k o

Greek Myths, Local Pottery and Vase-Inscriptions: Hellenic Culture and Indigenous Identity in 4th Century Magna Graecia

Urpo K a n t o l a

Römische Namen in griechischen Inschriften: Ein Überblick auf die Filiationen und andere Genitivbestimmungen im Späthellenismus und in der frühen Kaiserzeit

Tuomo N u o r l u o t o

Names and Social Distinction: How were Roman Female patronae Recorded in the Nomenclature of Their Slaves?

Julien M. O g e r e a u, Ulrich H u t t n e r

The Inscriptiones Christianae Graecae Database. Towards a Digital Corpus of Early Christian Inscriptions from Greece and Asia Minor

Taisuke O k a d a

Some Notes on IG P³ 1032 and the Crews of Athenian Triremes in the Fifth Century BCE

Werner P e t e r m a n d l, Astrid S c h m ö l z e r, Wolfgang S p i c k e r m a n n

Zum Start des FWF-Projekts ‚Die keltischen Götternamen in den Inschriften der römischen Provinz Germania Inferior‘. Mercurius Gebrinios: Ein Fallbeispiel

Catherine S a l i o u

Espace urbain et mémoire des empereurs en Orient dans l'Antiquité tardive

Felix H. S c h u l t e

Städtische Politik im kaiserzeitlichen Italien. Epigraphisch überlieferte Beschlüsse der städtischen Dekurionenräte und ihre Aussagen bezüglich der munizipalen Selbstverwaltung

Erkki S i r o n e n

Abteilung der Verse in den spätantiken Epigrammen von Griechenland

Marco T e n t o r i M o n t a l t o

Die Weihgaben des Kroisos für Amphiaraios: Herodot und BÉ 2015, n. 306

Ekkehard W e b e r

Lateinische Epigraphik in Wien

Serena Z o i a

Donne in Transpadana ai tempi della romanizzazione tra conservatorismo e innovazione

FRANCESCO CAMIA

AT THE CROSSROADS OF DIFFERENT TRADITIONS

Social and cultural dynamics in Roman Thrace through the epigraphic practice

Introduction

The large region of the Balkan peninsula known as ‘Thracia’ was characterized by a specific ethno-linguistic substrate, with a tribal organization that accounted for several differences. While the Thracian ethnic element maintained a recognizable character, which came in part to be crystallized by Greek and Roman literary tradition so as to assume an artificial connotation¹, the Thracian language was basically confined to the oral usage. A few variants of the Thracian alphabet are attested by some epigraphical testimonia, yet to date our knowledge of the Thracian language is limited to a few words, mostly anthroponyms and geographical terms, transmitted by Greek and Latin sources².

Over the centuries the Thracian ethnic and cultural substrate knew several influences, most important from Greek and Roman elements.

Greek culture and language exerted a profound influx starting already from the archaic age, mainly through Greek colonization along the coasts of the northern Aegean Sea as well as in the Propontid and the western coasts of the Black Sea. This led to a ‘Hellenization’ of Thrace which is mostly reflected in the diffusion of the Greek language and culture among the population. The influx and spread of the Greek language was also fostered by the immigration of ‘Orientals’ from the Greek East.

Starting from the late 2nd c. BC Thrace was gradually integrated into the Roman sphere. This integration was initially limited to the coastal areas of southern and south-eastern Thrace as well as to the western Pontus, but it later came to touch also internal Thrace and led to the creation of the Roman province of *Thracia*. This also fostered an urbanization process which had its peak during the 2nd c. AD³.

In the present paper I intend to analyse three interrelated aspects, which are a consequence of the integration of Thrace into the Roman sphere. They have an immediate reflection in the epigraphic habit, at the same time mirroring the interplay between different cultural and linguistic traditions which coexist in the Thracian region. These features are: the diffusion of the Latin language⁴; the diffusion of Roman names; the diffusion of Roman citizenship. To highlight them I shall consider the epigraphic production of three urban centres of the *provincia Thracia*: Maroneia, Perinthos, and Philippopolis. Due to their geographical position (in Aegean Thrace, Thracian Chersonesos, and mainland Thrace respectively), these three cities can provide an indicative picture of the social and cultural dynamics induced by the Roman presence in the Thracian territory.

¹ Due to a literary *topos*, Thracians were often represented as (and considered to be) rude and cruel warriors; cf. Dana, Ricci 2014, 524-525.

² Sharankov 2011, 135-139; Dana 2014, XLVI-XLVIII.

³ On Roman Thrace see most recently Lozanov 2015 (with further bibliography); cf. also Dana 2011, 39-42; Dana 2014, LIV-LVI.

⁴ Cf. Dana 2011, 42: “Plus que d’autres régions de l’Empire, l’espace Thrace offre une documentation en latin *et* en grec, ce qui soulève la question du bilinguisme – ou plutôt du trilinguisme, car la composante indigène est omniprésente – et du rapporte variable entre le grec et le latin, comme moyens d’expression orale et surtout écrite”.

Latin inscriptions

By the Hellenistic period the most common written language in Thrace seems to have been Greek, whose knowledge is documented already in the 5th c. BC even in central and northern Thrace⁵. The predominance of the Greek language and script was maintained during the imperial period as well. Thrace belonged to the Ellenophone area of the Roman Empire; it was just south of the so-called ‘Jireček line’, dividing the empire into two hypothetical language areas, one Latin and one Greek, roughly north and south of the Danube respectively⁶. This is reflected in the epigraphic production of the region, which is mostly in Greek. Latin inscriptions are just ca. 5% of the total. This predominance of the Greek language is also shown by the influx it exerted on Latin inscriptions: the latter present borrowings (from the Greek) and mistakes, which reveal a better familiarity with the Greek language. Latin was used almost exclusively by Roman provincial functionaries and soldiers (or veterans). Apart from a few official texts set up on the initiative of the provincial governor, basically *miliaria*, terminal *cippi* and building inscriptions pertaining to fortifications – but neither these types of texts are always in Latin –, most Latin inscriptions in Thrace are found among imperial dedications and above all among funerary inscriptions for soldiers or veterans of the Roman army⁷. Of course military diplomas are also to be mentioned in this regard⁸.

In the following section I will consider more in detail the situation for the three centres under analysis.

Maroneia

Despite Aegean Thace’s early contacts with the Romans and a well documented presence of Roman *negotiatores* in the region in the Late Republican period⁹, Latin inscriptions in Maroneia are very scarce. I could find just five texts, plus one bilingual (Greek-Latin) inscription¹⁰. They date from the 1st c. BC (one) to the 2nd c. AD. With the possible exception of a votive dedication on a column’s capital (*I.Thrac.Aeg.* E339), all the remaining texts are most likely funerary. Due to their fragmentary status, however, in several cases it is not possible to state for certain their nature. For the same reason these inscriptions do not provide hints as for the reason the Latin language was used. The fact that in a few cases Roman names appear, and that one of these texts concerns a Roman *civis* (*I.Thrac.Aeg.* E339), is of course not illuminating at all. It is instead worth mentioning a funerary inscription on a sarcophagus for the imperial freedman Αἴλιος Ἐλπιδηφόρος, which is written in Greek but presents the Latin invocation formula to the *Di Manes* (*I.Thrac.Aeg.* E313); Elpidiphoros may have been responsible for the administration of some imperial property in the area.

Perinthos

Of the three centres considered in this study Perinthos has preserved the largest number of Latin inscriptions. This is mainly due to the fact that it was the seat of the provincial governor: several Roman civil and military officials were present in the city and its territory. In fact, the great majority of Latin inscriptions from Perinthos involved individuals belonging to these two categories. This is evident from the epitaphs, the most represented category among the Latin inscriptions of Perinthos: about twenty Latin funerary inscriptions, or with single parts in Latin, are known (ca. 13% of all funerary inscriptions dated to the imperial period), all of them but six belonging to soldiers of the Roman army¹¹. It is further to be noted that among the six epitaphs for non soldiers¹² two are bilingual – one of them was set up by

⁵ Dana 2014, XLVI.

⁶ Gerov 1980, 147-165.

⁷ Sharankov 2011, 139-153.

⁸ Dana 2013.

⁹ Loukopoulou 1997, 181-192; Camia 2013, 181-183.

¹⁰ *I.Thrac.Aeg.* E337 (bilingual), E338-342.

¹¹ *I.Perinthos* 72-73, 75-79, 81-87, 108, 109 (with *AE* 2001, n° 1742), 128, 207-209, 242.

¹² *I.Perinthos* 108 (bilingual), 109 (with *AE* 2001, n° 1742), 128 (bilingual), 207-209.

a Roman *eques* for his wife (*I.Perinthos* 108; 1st-2nd c. AD) – and another one was made by individuals who probably hailed from the western part of the Empire (*I.Perinthos* 207; 1st-2nd c. AD).

Honorary inscriptions show a similar situation. To my knowledge, among those for private individuals only two are in Latin, one for a Pannonian senator who was honoured by the *equites singulares* following his *adlectio* into the Senate (*AE* 2005, n° 1371; AD 194/5-211), the second (very fragmentary) for a *princeps civitatis* who may have distinguished himself as an ambassador to Rome on behalf of his city (*I.Perinthos* 33). The remaining honorary inscriptions in Latin are a statue for the provincial governor L. Pullaienus Gargilius Aniquus, which was set up in AD 161 by the *cornicularii* of his *officium* (*I.Perinthos* 19)¹³, and three imperial dedications for Titus, Antoninus Pius, and an emperor whose name is not preserved on the stone¹⁴. The statue for Titus was dedicated in accomplishment of the will of the Thracian *strategos* Ti. Claudius Theopompus by his son Ti. Claudius Sabinus (*I.Perinthos* 6), who significantly bears a purely Roman onomastic formula.

As for votive dedications, Latin texts are not known from Perinthos.

On the other hand, even in the official realm the use of the Latin language is by no means predominant in Perinthos, and Greek still maintains an important role. This is shown by the inscriptions pertaining to public buildings and roads. Of the three known building inscriptions only one, very late in date (5th c. AD), is in Latin, by the praetorian prefect of the East, under Theodosius II, Flavius Monaxius (*I.Perinthos* 39), while the remaining two, regarding the Temple of Hadrian and Sabina and the city's walls respectively, are in Greek¹⁵. The two known *miliaria* from the city are both in Greek¹⁶, while four further late *miliaria* coming from the territory of Perinthos contain parts in Greek and parts in Latin¹⁷. Moreover, only one of the seven known catalogues of names is in Latin, and it pertains most likely to a cavalry auxiliary unit of the Roman army (*I.Perinthos* 67; 2nd c. AD). There is also a fragment of an imperial constitution of Severan age, which however may have contained parts in Greek as well (*I.Perinthos* 36).

Philippopolis

In Philippopolis as well the only conspicuous group of epigraphical texts in Latin is represented by the epitaphs, which number a little more than ten¹⁸. Apart from two fragmentary texts (one mentioning a provincial officer), all the remaining epitaphs in Latin pertain to soldiers or veterans. Moreover, three of them are bilingual inscriptions¹⁹. Among the latter it is worth mentioning the second century epitaph set up by an *optio* for his brother (*AE* 2007, n° 1258): the Latin part is shorter than the Greek one, which comes first, and the formula *donum posuit*, evidently taken from a votive dedication, shows that the Latin text basically owes its existence to the fact that the dedicant was a soldier²⁰. In another epitaph the only part in Latin is the formula *Dis Manibus* incised beneath the Greek text²¹.

I could find only three honorary inscriptions in Latin from Philippopolis, all of them for emperors. One was set up by the governor's personal guard (*stratores*) for Septimius Severus (*AE* 2007, n° 1257); as noted by N. Sharankov, it is virtually a mechanical translation from the Greek, as is revealed by the presence of three absolute ablatives, which are unusual for Latin inscriptions and were evidently transposed from the absolute genitives of the Greek text²². The remaining two Latin honorary

¹³ Cf. Thomasson 1984, 165-166, n° 28.

¹⁴ *I.Perinthos* 6, 9, 33.

¹⁵ *I.Perinthos* 37 (Hadrianic), 38 (2nd-3rd c. AD).

¹⁶ *I.Perinthos* 40 (AD 198-209); 41 (AD 259/60-268).

¹⁷ *I.Perinthos* 290-293 (late 3rd-4th c. AD).

¹⁸ *CIL* III 14207¹⁴ (*AE* 1903, n° 245) (2nd-3rd c. AD); *IGBulg* III.1 1006 [= V 5446 (2nd c. AD)]; 1075 (first half 3rd c. AD?); *IGBulg* V 5462 (2nd-3rd c. AD); Slawisch 2007, 192, n° Ph2 (2nd c. AD); 195, n° Ph21 (second quarter 2nd c. AD); 198, n° PhUm17 (end 2nd-beginning 3rd c. AD); *AE* 2001, n° 1750 (mid 1st c. AD) and 1751 (early 2nd c. AD); *AE* 2002, n° 1269 (AD 170-230); *AE* 2007, n° 1258 (2nd c. AD); *AE* 2013, n° 1367bis.

¹⁹ *IGBulg* III.1 1006 (= V 5446); 1075; *AE* 2007, n° 1258.

²⁰ Sharankov 2007.

²¹ *IGBulg* V 5462 (2nd-3rd c. AD).

²² Sharankov 2007, 185-186.

inscriptions were set up by an equestrian procurator of Severan age (*CIL* III 746 = 14207¹³) and by the veterans of Caracalla and Julia Domna (*AE* 1939, n° 115) respectively.

Unlike for Maroneia and Perinthos, votive dedications in Latin are also known from Philippopolis' territory. In addition to a fragmentary bilingual dedication to the Nymphs set up by a woman²³, which was found in a Roman bath, two further Latin dedications, both set up by private individuals, are known to me²⁴. Noteworthy is the one which was dedicated in AD 76 by a veteran of the *legio VII Claudia Pia Fidelis* to a god whose name is written in Greek (Μηδύζει) (*IGBulg* III.1 1410 = V 5520bis). This element, along with the presence of errors in the text, reveals that its author, C. Minutius Laetus, was more familiar with the Greek language, as is confirmed by his *origo* from Antiochia, which is made explicit by a brief Greek inscription incised beneath the Latin dedication.

As for official texts, one has to mention the bilingual building inscription that refers to the construction of new fortification walls for the city of Philippopolis in AD 172 (*IGBulg* III.1 878). The two versions differ in their content: the Latin text, which comes first, gives the merit of the construction to the emperor Marcus Aurelius, while the Greek text to the most splendid *metropolis*, though stating that the funds came from the emperor²⁵. A Latin inscription on an architrave pertaining to the dedication of the municipal treasury (*aedes thesaurorum*) by an emperor (most likely Commodus) is also known from Philippopolis (*AE* 1985, n° 768).

The use of the Latin language for official but also private inscriptions (epitaphs, dedications) may have been fostered by the strategic importance of Philippopolis within the Roman province of Thrace. Though not the capital city (yet, according to N. Sharankov, between the late 2nd and the first half of the 3rd c. AD it would have become the temporary, if not permanent, seat of the provincial governor), Philippopolis hosted the Thracian *koinon* and in the late 1st c. AD it was awarded the title of *metropolis*²⁶.

Roman names and civitas

The adoption of Roman names and their occurrence in inscriptions (both Latin and Greek) from Thrace may also point to an influx of Rome, although it cannot be taken *per se* as a hint of 'Romanization'. Generally speaking, it is well known how names follow trends, often independent of any specific cultural influence. As for Roman names in particular, their presence in a region is closely connected with the diffusion of the *civitas*. In fact, the percentage of Roman names in a city's onomasticon is affected by the number of individuals provided with Roman citizenship, who bear a Roman *gentilicium* (and in some cases a *praenomen* as well). In these cases the individual's *cognomen* is usually the simple name of that person before acquiring the *civitas* (in Thrace in most cases a name of Thracian or Greek type). On the other hand, Roman type names (either *praenomina* or *nomina* or *cognomina*) are sometimes used by *peregrini* as simple names. In evaluating the diffusion of Roman names in a region and its socio-cultural implications one has to take into account these aspects.

In Thrace Roman names are well attested, and occur several times in inscriptions independent of the juridical condition of their bearers, i.e. both for *cives* and *peregrini*²⁷. Yet the use of Roman names, especially but not only for those individuals who were not Roman citizens, was circumscribed due to the persistence of a quite rich stock of Thracian names, and above all due to the success of Greek names. As for Roman citizenship, in Thrace it knew a late and limited diffusion²⁸. The picture offered by the three cities under analysis is indicative of the general trend, yet a few significant differences can be highlighted. I have excluded from my analysis the *Aurelii* and the provincial governors as well as Roman magistrates such as consuls, who happened to be cited in inscriptions yet are by no means indicative of the resident population of Thrace.

²³ *IGBulg* III.1 1477; the Latin text, which according to Mihailov was incised earlier, follows the Greek text, of which it does not seem to be a literary translation.

²⁴ *IGBulg* III.1 1410 (= V 5520bis); *CIL* III 7411 (=12331).

²⁵ Sharankov 2007, 186.

²⁶ Sharankov 2007, 185.

²⁷ Parissaki 2007; Dana 2011.

²⁸ Camia 2013; see also Camia 2015.

Cives

The Roman citizens attested at Maroneia are very few; I could detect about twenty individuals²⁹. Half of the relevant epigraphic *testimonia* date to the late Republican/first imperial period and concern immigrants from the Italian peninsula, mostly *negotiatores*. This datum, along with the limited incidence of imperial *gentilicia*, shows that the acquisition of the Roman citizenship at Maroneia remained extremely rare. A similar situation can be observed in the other centres of Aegean Thrace as well³⁰.

The *cives* attested in the inscriptions from Perinthos are much more numerous (about 80 without the *Aurelii*). More than half of these *cives* bear an imperial *nomen gentile*, and most epigraphic *testimonia* date to the 2nd c. AD. The most remarkable feature is that more than a third of the *cives* attested at Perinthos were soldiers or officers of the Roman army. A few members of the civic elite and their relatives are also recognizable in the inscriptions. The rest of the population is scarcely represented in the sample of Roman *cives*. These data show that the diffusion of the Roman citizenship in the capital city of the province of Thrace basically reflects the political role of this city and the remarkable presence, both numerically and socially, of civil and military officers belonging to (or linked with) the Roman administration.

The largest number of Roman citizens is attested in Philippopolis' inscriptions, more than one hundred. As in Perinthos, the majority of the Roman *cives* attested at Philippopolis bear an imperial *gentilicium*. Moreover, most *testimonia* date to the 2nd and 3rd c. AD. This indicates a late diffusion of the *civitas*. On the other hand, the marginal presence of soldiers and officers of the Roman army (just fourteen) along with the presence of several members of the civic and provincial elite seems to indicate that the Roman citizenship, though late, knew a broader diffusion among the population of Philippopolis.

Roman names

The data concerning the diffusion of the *civitas* are largely mirrored by those concerning the presence of Roman names in the three cities under analysis. At Maroneia Roman names are poorly attested. In absolute figures a little more than thirty individuals bearing a Latin name are epigraphically attested in the city³¹. Most were Roman citizens, while a few of the latter were of Italian origin and were active as *negotiatores* in the region in the late Republican/early imperial period. On the other hand, only about 10 occurrences of Roman type names (*praenomina*, *nomina* or *cognomina*) used as simple names by *peregrini* of non Italian origin are known to me. Though early in date (2nd-1st c. BC), the known catalogue of the *therapeutai* of Serapis and Isis is indicative of the onomastic situation at Maroneia³². Out of 114 individuals mentioned in this list, just 8 bear a Latin name, and six of them are Roman citizens of Italian origin (the other two have a Greek onomastic formula). The great majority of *therapeutai*, namely 102 individuals, bear a Greek name. As Maroneia alone accounts for almost half of the entire onomastic stock of Aegean Thrace, the picture offered by its epigraphic material can be considered to be indicative of the onomastic trend in Aegean Thrace at large.

Much more numerous are the Roman names attested in the inscriptions from Perinthos and Philippopolis. For what has been said above about the immediate relationship between diffusion of the *civitas* and diffusion of Roman names, the difference between Maroneia on one side, Philippopolis and Perinthos on the other is of course a direct consequence of the much higher number of Roman citizens, the latter bearing Roman *praenomina* and *nomina gentilia*. Yet another element must be stressed in this regard, namely the number of *cives* who bear three or two names all of Roman type (in other words, those who bear a Latin *cognomen*): at Philippopolis and Perinthos they are about half the total and a little more than two thirds of the total respectively, while at Maroneia, if we do not consider the Italian *negotiatores* of the Late Republic/early Empire, they are very few.

A larger presence of Roman *cives* may have contributed to a larger diffusion of Roman names even among non citizens. In particular at Perinthos, the presence of the governor and civil and military officers of the Roman administration will have played some role in rendering Roman names more familiar. In

²⁹ Even considering the *Aurelii*, the number of Roman citizens is still very low; cf. Parissaki 2007, 296.

³⁰ Parissaki 2007.

³¹ Parissaki 2007, 282-288, 330-333.

³² I.Thrac.Aeg E212.

this regard, it can be useful to point out another datum: inscriptions from Perinthos yield about thirty occurrences of Roman names (*praenomina*, *nomina* or *cognomina*) which were used as simple names by *peregrini* of non Italian origin.

Concluding remarks

The scarce presence of Latin inscriptions in Thrace shows how the integration into the Roman sphere brought with it only a limited influence on the epigraphic habit of this area. In fact, Greek remained the most used language in inscriptions, even in public documents, and only by the late imperial period Latin came to be adopted for some types of official texts such as *miliaria*.

Several Latin names occur in the Greek inscriptions from Thrace, yet the concurrence exerted by Thracian and above all Greek names limited their diffusion. Independent of (and beyond) its onomastic value, the presence of a name of Roman type bears a deep historical and social significance when that name is integrated in a Roman onomastic formula, which is a direct sign of the acquisition of the Roman citizenship. In Thrace the *civitas* had a limited diffusion: its granting not only concerned, as usual, mainly the members of the higher social strata, but it was also late and never approached the percentages observed in other areas of the Empire, even in its Hellenophone part.

It can be said that in Thrace there is only one category of individuals whose epigraphic habit shows a remarkable degree of ‘Romanisation’: soldiers. Starting especially from the late 2nd c. AD a very large number of Thracians were enrolled in the Roman army. Some of them went back home upon their discharge; by then they had acquired Roman citizenship, and quite often (but not always) used Latin for their inscriptions (mostly funerary). For Roman soldiers the use of the Latin language is a precise sign through which they declare their membership in a fully Romanised realm. This identity is only conceivable in the light of Thrace’s integration into the Roman empire and, more in general, in the context of the latter’s historical evolution. In this specific socio-professional category one can see a close interconnection between the three aspects analysed above: military service for Rome leads to the acquisition of the *civitas*, which is followed in turn by the adoption of a Roman onomastic formula and of the Latin language (as an identity sign). The rest of the population of Thrace, both indigenous and foreign, was much less touched by ‘Romanisation’. The Thracian ethnic substrate on the one hand, the profound and prolonged influx exerted by Greek culture and language on the other, limited the Roman influence even after the constitution of the province of Thrace. And this finds a clear reflection in the epigraphic habit of this part of the Balkan peninsula.

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