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AN ADDENDUM TO THE PLRE? THE CASE OF THE *CUBICULARIUS* NOVIANOS

ABSTRACT: The short article deals with the existence of a court eunuch that was named Novianos. The person in question can be found in a study of the French Byzantinist Rodolphe Guiland, but seems to be non-existent in the classical sources.

KEY WORDS: Byzantine Empire, Eastern Roman Empire, Eunuchs, Court

In 1943, Rodolphe Guiland, a famous French Byzantinist, published a paper on “Les eunuques dans l’empire byzantin. Etude de titulature et de prosopographie Byzantines”.¹ The article gives a great overview of the different fields of action of court eunuchs. Moreover, Guiland names many individuals that were active at the Byzantine court from the times of Constantine the Great to the end of the empire in the 15th century.

One focus of the study is the role of eunuchs in the army. Since the mid-6th century eunuchs took on prominent roles in the Byzantine forces.² Among the names that Guiland provides one can find a certain Novianos who supposedly held the post of *cubicularius* under the emperor Heraclius. Guiland provides the following information: “Sous

¹ Guiland 1943.

² Solomon in Africa and Narses in Italy are just two of the many popular examples that can be given.

Héraclius, le cubiculaire Novianos fut chargé, comme stratège, d'arrêter les progrès des Arabes en Egypte. Il fut vaincu et tué (Nic. de CP 28)."³

Novianos would be another good example for a eunuch that held an important post in the Byzantine army in the 7th century. It is surprising that the PLRE does not mention any Novianos at all.⁴ Would the *cubicularius*, therefore, be a good fit for a new addendum to the prosopography? One could think so by looking at new publications that have taken the information of Guiland. In his doctoral dissertation on "The Transformative Impact of the Slave Trade on the Roman World, 580 – 720", Thomas J. MacMaster writes about eunuchs in the Byzantine army: "Other eunuch generals included Novianus, sent by Heraclius to Egypt to unsuccessfully fight the Egyptians".⁵ As his source, MacMaster refers to "Nicephorus, *Breviarium*, 28" (and in the same place fails to mention Guiland as his source, while the paper of the French Byzantinist is, however, named in the bibliography of the dissertation).⁶ In his "A Brief History of Castration" Victor T. Cheney names the same Novianos as a eunuch who fought the Arabs in Egypt for the emperor Heraclius.⁷

The evidence presented here clearly suggests that a Novianos existed who was a *cubicularius* that fought the Arabs in the name of the emperor Heraclius. A look into the original source, the *breviarium* of Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople, however, suggests something different.

In his short history, Nicephorus reports:

"While Herakleios was dwelling in the eastern parts, he appointed John of Barkaina general of the army and sent him against the Saracens in Egypt. He joined battle with them and was himself killed. Likewise, Marinos, commander of the Thracian contingents, engaged them in battle and was defeated: he lost many soldiers and himself barely escaped. In succession to him (Herakleios) conferred the army command on Marianos, who held the Roman rank of cubicularius, and dispatched him with instructions to consult with Kyros, archpriest of Alexandria, that they might take joint action with regard to the Saracens. Now Kyros

³ Guiland 1943: 207.

⁴ Cf. PLRE III B.

⁵ MacMaster 2015.

⁶ Mac Master 2015: 93 n. 313 and cf. 297 for the bibliographical entry of Guiland's study.

⁷ Cf. Cheney 2006: 86.

had informed the emperor that he was going to conclude an agreement with Ambros, phylarch of the Saracens, and (pay him) tribute which, he stated, he would raise by a commercial levy, while the imperial taxes would not be affected. (He also recommended) that the Augusta Eudokia or another of the emperor's daughters should be offered in marriage (to Ambros) with a view to his being consequently baptized in the holy bath and becoming a Christian; for Ambros and his army had confidence in Kyros and regarded him with great affection. But Herakleios would not brook any of this. Since Marianos, too, was aware of these matters, he rejected the policy of Kyros and, having attacked the Saracens, fell in battle as did many of his soldiers."⁸

As is apparent, Nicephorus does mention a *cubicularius* of Heraclius that fought the Saracens and died; however, his name was not Novianos, but Marianos. This Marianos is known to the PLRE as Marianus 5.⁹

But how exactly did the name Novianos find his way into the paper of Guiland? This question might be answered by looking into the different editions of the *breviarium*. The *breviarium* can be found in the Bonn Corpus from 1837 edited by Immanuel Bekker, the Teubner edition of Carl de Boor from 1880 and the newest edition by Cyril Mango

⁸ Nic. Brev. 23 (Transl. Mango 1990): Ἐν ᾧ δὲ ἐν τοῖς ἀνατολικοῖς μέρεσι διέτριβεν Ἡράκλειος, Ἰωάννην τὸν Βαρκαίνης στρατηγὸν προχειριῖται καὶ πέμπει κατὰ Σαρακηνῶν τῶν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ οἷς συμβαλὼν πίπτει καὶ αὐτὸς. ἔτι καὶ Μαρῖνος ὁ τῶν Θρακικῶν ἐκστρα τευμάτων ἡγεμὼν συμμίζας αὐτοῖς ἡτ' ἤθη, πολὺν τε στρατὸν ἀποβαλὼν καὶ αὐτὸς μόλις διασώζεται. μετ' ἐκείνου προβάλλεται στρατηγὸν Μαρριανὸν κουβικουλάριον παρὰ Ῥωμαίων τὴν ἀξι' ἀν καὶ πέμπει ἐκείσε, παραγγειλας ὡς ἀνακοινοῦσθαι Κύρῳ τῷ Ἀλεξανδρείας ἱεράρχῃ. καὶ ὡς ἂν κοινῇ βουλευσύνοντο (καὶ) τὰ πρὸς τοὺς Σαρακηνοὺς διάθοιντο. Κῦρος δὲ ἦν δεδηλωκῶς βασιλεῖ σπει' σέσθαι ἐπὶ τελέσασιν Ἰαμβρῶ Ἰῶ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν φυλάρχῳ, ἃ δὴ καὶ ὑπέχειν δι' ἐμπολαίου συνεισφορᾶς ἐσημαίνε, τὰ δὲ τῷ βασιλεῖ παρεχόμενα ἀδιάπτωτα μένειν κατεγγυηθῆναι δὲ αὐτῷ Εὐδοκίαν τὴν Αὐγούστην, [ἢ] μίαν τῶν θυγατέρων τοῦ βασιλέως ὡς ἐντεῦθεν καὶ τῷ θεῷ λουτρῷ βαπτισθισομένη καὶ Χριστιανῶ χρηματίσονται. ἐπειθετο γὰρ «Ἄμβρος τῷ Κύρῳ καὶ ὁ τούτου στρατός- καὶ γὰρ ἡγάπων αὐτὸν λίαν. καὶ τούτων Ἡράκλειος οὐδενὸς ἠνείχετο. ἐπειδὴ δὲ καὶ Μαρριανὸς ταῦτα ἐξῆπιστάτο, δίστάτο τῆς τοῦ Κύρου γνώμης, καὶ συμβαλὼν Σαρακηνοῖς πίπτει τε αὐτὸς καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ στρατὸς ἰκανός.

⁹ PLRE III B, s.v. Marianus 5, 829-830. The PLRE names as the main source Nic. Brev. 24-25, however, the right reference is chapter 23.

from 1990.¹⁰ Neither of these editions knows a Novianos or provides his name in the critical apparatus as a variant. Even a look into the original codices does not help to answer the question. The Vatican codex, and the codex in the British Museum both have the name Marianos for the *cubicularius* in question. How Guiland came to the name Novianos must remain a riddle. He might have just been unable to read his own notes and confused the first three letters. Therefore, unfortunately, Novianos is not an addendum to the prosopography, but just a minor error of a great Byzantinist.

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¹⁰ Cf. I. Bekker (ed.), *Sancti Nicephoris Patriarchae Constantinopolitani. Breviarium Rerum Post Mauricium Gestarum*, Bonn 1837; C. de Boor (ed.), *Opuscula historica*, Leipzig 1880; C. Mango (ed.), Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople, *Short History*, Dumbarton Oaks 1990.

“Classica Cracoviensia”, the annual devoted to the studies of Greek and Roman antiquity, was established in 1995 as the initiative of the Director of the Institute of Classical Philology of the Jagiellonian University, Professor Stanisław Stabryła. From 1996 to 2019, the function of the scientific editor was held by Professor Jerzy Styka and as of 2019 by Professor Michał Bzinkowski. From the very beginning “Classica Cracoviensia” has been planned as a forum for scientific cooperation between the Institute of Classical Philology of the Jagiellonian University and European university centres of studies on the classical Greek and Roman culture in its various forms – literature as well as politics, philosophy, religion, law, art and reception studies. Periodically organised conferences, research projects, guest lectures, together with new publishing series are a few examples of this cooperation. It has made a significant contribution to the development of the Greek and Roman antiquity studies; at the same time, it brings academics working in this area of study together. Through the presentation of research on various forms of the Greek and Roman culture, we are trying to reveal the processes which have shaped this culture and the complexity of cultural transformation which had been taking place within it, as well as accentuate its universal character and the inspirational role in the creation of modern Europe. The very broad formula of this periodical supports intercultural and interdisciplinary research, which allows for a multifaceted and in-depth presentation of cultural phenomena and teaches the respect for otherness. The versatility of research methods serves as an argument for defending the heritage of antiquity in the modern world. “Classica Cracoviensia” are aimed mainly for the academic community as they allow a broad exchange of opinions on the subject of the Greek and Roman antiquity. This is reflected in the linguistic form of the periodical, in which texts are published in English, German, French and Italian (occasionally in Polish in case of issues in honorem alicuius, but even then always with a detailed summary in another language), languages commonly used in disciplines referring to antiquity. The periodical can also be of interest for everyone interested in the in-depth knowledge of the ancient Greek and Roman culture. “Classica Cracoviensia” have already found their place among European academic periodicals and their subsequent issues can be found in many university libraries of Europe and North America.