

## **Two Roman soldiers in Istanbul – Praetorian Guardsmen or Centurions?**

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### *Abstract*

A relief panel exhibited in the National Archaeology Museum, Istanbul, shows two Roman soldiers in their ‘field-service kit’. The relief belonged originally to a monument built in AD 108/109 near what is now the village of Adamclisi in Romania in connection with the conclusion of the Emperor Trajan’s Second Dacian War. The monument had been furnished with 54 figured panels or metopes, the 49 surviving examples all with scenes relating to the Roman army at the time of Trajan and of considerable importance in Roman military studies in particular and in the field of Roman provincial ‘classical’ art in general. The panel in Istanbul demands greater attention as it appears to be a rare depiction of either Praetorian Guardsmen or Centurions in their ‘field-service kit’.

### **Introduction**

The Archaeological Museum in Istanbul is famed internationally for its classical-period sculpture, as with the ‘Alexander Sarcophagus’ and the companion ‘Sarcophagus of the Mourning Women’. One particular piece displayed there, however, rarely gets the attention it deserves, namely a Trajanic-period relief sculpture of two soldiers in a naïve provincial style which originated from one of the Roman Empire’s major architectural monuments and so featured in almost all text-books on Roman sculpture.<sup>2</sup> Its importance lies especially in how it provides *inter alia* a realistic view of the Roman soldier wearing his actual battle panoply quite different from the ‘classic’ view of this as exemplified by the contemporary Trajan’s Column in Rome. As such the panel is without doubt one of the more important pieces in the Museum’s collections, well worth detailed discussion and wider publicity.

What survives of the monument the panel came from originally is located near the modern village of Adamclisi, often rendered in English language literature as Adamklissi, and formerly Adam Kilisse (‘Adam’s church’), in Constanța County, a part of Romania’s Dobrogea (Dobruja) region. The remains are situated some two km distant from a settlement re-founded by the Emperor Trajan as the *Municipium Traianum Tropaeum*, its status as a *municipium* indicating a place organised on Roman lines with Roman citizens

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E.g., Hannestad 1986, 154-167; Kleiner 1992, 174-175; Ramage and Ramage, 2015, 220-221.

The primary and secondary bibliography relating to the monument is extensive.

in the majority.<sup>3</sup> In this re-founded form the settlement was probably intended as the home for numbers of Trajan's veteran auxiliary soldiers after the second Dacian War of 105-106, the residents proudly calling themselves the *Traianenses Tropaeenses*.<sup>4</sup> For this reason scholars normally refer to the monument as the *Tropaeum Traiani* although there is no ancient authority for that name

The surviving remains were first examined in detail in 1837 by four Prussian army officers, *Ingenieurhauptmann* H.Mühlbach, and *Hauptleute des Generalstabes* F.L.Fischer, H.von Moltke, and K.-F.von Vincke.<sup>5</sup> All four were on secondment to Constantinople to assist in Sultan Murad's military reforms, and while on a mission into what was then Bulgaria to inspect the existing defences of the Balkans and Danube Delta region, they studied the Roman fortifications in the area also. In doing so they visited what local people claimed was a ruined türbe, but which they realised from the sculptures lying around it was a Roman monument of some kind, possibly a cenotaph.<sup>6</sup> It was not until 1882-1884, however, the Romanian scholar G. Tocilescu organised the first detailed examination of the site, with a repeat campaign in 1890 resulting in the seminal publication of the monument.<sup>7</sup>

However, before placing the Istanbul panel into its original context through an overview of the *Tropaeum Traiani*, it is vital to know the latter is but one of three Roman-period structures at the location. One survives today as a low earth and rubble mound 125 m to the north containing a series of concentric masonry walls with a central stone chamber. Long interpreted as a greatly reduced *tumulus* or funerary monument, more recent studies

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See, e.g., Matei-Popescu 2014, and Panaite 2016.

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CIL 3, 12740. Unlike legionaries, auxiliaries did not qualify for a land or cash grant after completing their military service, their receiving Roman citizenship being considered sufficient compensation. However, the discovery at *Municipium Traianum Tropaeum* of an auxiliary *diploma* issued 111-112 (CIL 16.58), along with seven inscriptions there recording residents with Ulpia as their *gentilicium*, indicating ex-auxiliaries who took the emperor's *nomen* when granted citizenship, points strongly to the possibility that the settlement was re-founded on Roman lines as a 'home' for retired auxiliaries.

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Cf. Tocilescu, *et al.*, 1895, 7: this Prussian *Hauptmann* von Moltke is by far better known as *Generalfeldmarschal* Graf von Moltke, while von Vincke, from 1841 Vincke-Olbendorf, later achieved prominence as a politician.

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von Vincke 1840; von Moltke 1841, 16.

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Tocilescu, *et al.*, 1895.

suggest it was once a *Tropaeum*-type monument akin to the *Tropaeum Traiani*.<sup>8</sup> The other structure is a square masonry base 250 due east of the ‘*tumulus*’ and 250 m north east of the *Tropaeum Traiani*. This once supported an altar-type construction, measuring 12 × 12 × 6 m, an inscription on one face honouring an emperor whose name has not survived and continuing ‘MEMORIAM FORTIS[simorum . . . qui . . .] PRO REP MORTE OCCVBV[erunt]’ – ‘*in memory of the bravest of men who died fighting for the [Roman] Republic*’.<sup>9</sup> In other words, this was a cenotaph. What is more, though, is that enough remains of the facing panels to indicate it carried originally a listing in columnar format of a named 3,800 or so men, some of them Roman citizens, as shown by their *tria nomina*, and so legionaries, others lacking this and so *peregrini*, and thus auxiliaries.<sup>10</sup> Heading the list of deceased combatants was the now-lost name of a Roman citizen who ranked as a *praefectus*, thus either a legionary *praefectus castrorum*, the nominal third in command of a legion, or a *praefectus praetorio*, one of two who shared command of the emperor’s Praetorian Guard. The inscription tells us this *praefectus* was born at Pompeii but was domiciled in Naples at the time of his death, showing he survived the eruption of AD 79, indicating that the cenotaph, and perhaps the ‘*tumulus*’-*Tropaeum* also, mark a battle hereabouts during the late 1<sup>st</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

Given events in the immediate region at the time and the location of the cenotaph and the ‘*tumulus*’-*Tropaeum*, both monuments should be associated with the recorded ‘destruction’ of a legion (probably the *legio XXI Rapax*) and its commander during a reported campaign by Domitian against the Sarmatians.<sup>11</sup> This tribe occupied the area immediately north of the Danube hereabouts and Adamclisi is located on the natural route for any invaders entering lower Moesia from this direction. Indeed, a funerary memorial from *Municipium Traianum Tropaeum* provides vivid testimony of that fact as it records the death in battle in 170 of one of the *decuriones*, L. Fufidius Lucianus, during a raid by the trans Danubian Costoboci,<sup>12</sup> while it was precisely because of its strategic

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Ștefan 2009.

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*CIL* 3.14214 with *ILS* 9107, and Cichorius 1904; cf. also Doruțiu-Boilă 1988, with Gostar 2008, and Turner 2013.

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As many have commented this listing provides clear proof of the meticulous record-keeping by the Roman army.

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Suet *Dom.* 6.1. Although many Romanian and other scholars like to associate the monuments with Domitian’s Dacian ‘War’ of 85-86, the northern part of the Dobruja was undoubtedly Sarmatian territory at the time: cf. Bârcă 2013. For the legion, see Berard 2000, and Rossi 2000.

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AE 1964, 252.

context that our Prussian officers were here to ascertain possible defensive lines in the region. As Richmond explained it: ‘*this part of the Dobrudja provides a natural land bridge, from 25 to 30 miles wide, between Bessarabia and the Balkans, by which it is possible to avoid the numerous flat and marshy valleys which furrow the Wallachian plain ... It is as ... a door which any power desiring mastery of Southern Europe must bolt and bar. In the narrow confines of the gate itself no deployment is at first possible: but at Adamklissi come the cross-roads. Here the invader makes his choice: shall he fare southwards to Turkey and Greece or westwards to Bulgaria or Serbia?*’<sup>13</sup>

### **The Tropaeum Traiani<sup>14</sup>**

Building on the work of G. Tocilescu, the Romanian scholar Florea Florescu, with the advantage of further excavation, and the analysis of what still survives of the *Tropaeum Traiani*, produced what is still the most detailed account of this monument.<sup>15</sup> Built using a fossiliferous limestone quarried from nearby Deleni but which has not weathered well,<sup>16</sup> it took the form of a rotunda almost 30 m diameter with a mixed rubble and mortar core faced in *opus quadratum*, topped by a conical roof and a *tropaion* or ‘battle trophy’, rising to a roughly equal height. This *tropaion* takes the usual Roman form of a sculpture depicting a dressed tree-trunk festooned with the arms of a defeated enemy,<sup>17</sup> and was supported on a base with an inscription invoking the help of *Mars Ultor*, Mars the Avenger, and naming the Emperor Trajan with a reference to his 13<sup>th</sup> assumption of the *tribunicia potestas* (10<sup>th</sup> December 107-9<sup>th</sup> December 108). A series of 26 crenellations at the junction of the rotunda and the roof carried reliefs of male and female barbarian prisoners tied to tree-trunks, the men identifiable as ‘Germanic’ by their dress and hair styles. Around the rotunda was a run of 54 metopes 1.48-1.49 m high, 1.17 m wide and 58 cm deep, of which 49 survive, all now in the nearby Muzeul Tropaeum

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Richmond 1967, 29.

<sup>14</sup> The writer is naturally acutely aware of the vast volume of literature that exists already on this monument in particular and sculptural representations of the Roman army in general. However, as a little noticed piece that is of undoubted international importance, this surely justifies its wider promotion, even if in an abbreviated form focussed on this relief alone, to those interested in the Turkish cultural heritage.

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Florescu, F., 1961 and 1965. Florescu’s analysis resulted in the construction of a protective structure in facsimile form over the original remains in 1974-1977, (cf. Florescu, R. 1961); accessible by a small doorway in the side.

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Florescu, F., 1961, 128-135.

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The origin and nature of such monuments are discussed by Kinnee 2018.

Traiani Adamclisi except for that in Istanbul.<sup>18</sup> These metopes show the Roman army – ‘officers’,<sup>19</sup> infantry, and cavalry – in various settings. For example, in a *decursio* or military parade; in combat with half-naked barbarians; capturing an enemy base with its camp followers; and in a *triumph* with barbarian prisoners. In addition, there are reliefs showing (probably) the prelude to a victory sacrifice, and men recognisable from their dress as ‘officers’, in some cases identifiable as the Emperor Trajan. All of the figured reliefs are carved in what is best termed a naïve fashion, indicating their local manufacture by semi-skilled craftsmen more used to illustrating funerary reliefs than commemorative Imperial-sponsored sculpture.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the several monographs and articles devoted to the *Tropaeum Traiani* it remains – as one scholar remarked – ‘among the most controversial monuments of the Roman world’, not the least because it encapsulates ‘Romania’s diverse views of its Roman past, and [is] alternately prized as a symbol of ancient glory or neglected as a relic of past subjugation’.<sup>21</sup> Debates continue (surprisingly!) as to its date, from the Domitianic to the Constantinian period.<sup>22</sup> There is also much discussion on the organisation and precise meaning of the metopes, and the disparity in terms of the Roman battle panoply as shown here and on Trajan’s Column.<sup>23</sup> For the early scholars the monument was a local equivalent of that monument, the metopes representing a semi-narrative account of the two Dacian wars. Later researchers, especially those of Romanian origin, have preferred often to link them to a specific battle that took place in the immediate vicinity of its location during Trajan’s First or even Second Dacian War, and one in which Trajan was

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According to Tocilescu, *et al.*, 1895, 10-11, this was sent to Constantinople in 1875 under the care of an Asmy Bey, then Imperial Commissioner for the railway line between Cernavodă and Constanța (Köstence).

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The term ‘officers’ is used here to denote men who from their dress are clearly not rank-and-file soldiers.

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We will not discuss the art-historical aspects of the metopes, etc., reviewed in full elsewhere, e.g., Bianchi 2011. But we should note in passing Del Mori 1989/1990, 303-304, with Tufi 1997, for an unprovenanced work of ‘provincial’ quality at Rome, possibly from Romania, showing three soldiers in ‘field-service kit’: many details compare favourably with the Adamclisi metopes, e.g., nos. 39, 44, and 45, and similar representations of Roman soldiers in the Trajanic period, except for the medieval-type shields two men carry.

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Emmerson 2017, 313.

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Cf. Rossi 1997.

<sup>23</sup> For a useful discussion of the armour and weaponry of the legionaries in the relevant period, with particular reference to Trajan’s Column and the *Tropaeum Traiani*, see Charles 2002.

possibly, but Decebalus, the king of Dacia, almost certainly involved.<sup>24</sup> This is not the place to enter these often-heated disputes, never mind make a judgement one way or another on them. Suffice to say that the epigraphic evidence and the imagery has convinced a majority of interested scholars that the monument is of Trajanic date. As for the event it depicts and its purpose, this writer favours the interpretation offered nearly 50 years ago by Sir Ian Richmond, that it records punitive operations not so much against the Dacians as the tribes facing the borders of Moesia Inferior at the conclusion of the Second Dacian War, high-lighting the inevitable revenge of Rome on those who transgress the *Pax Romana*. Hence its invocation of Mars Ultor, the god in his avenging form, and its location next to the Domitianic altar: ‘*it was vengeance achieved which prompted, first, the choice of site for the monument ... [and] ... which inspired the subject of the reliefs*’.<sup>25</sup>

### The Rotunda Reliefs

As already indicated, the reliefs that decorate the rotunda are of especial value for students of Roman weaponry and combat styles at the time it was built, and also, indeed, of their barbarian opponents. For example, many of the trousered and often half-naked barbarian combatants wield the one- or two-handled *falx*. This scythe-like weapon was favoured by the Dacians and their Eastern Germanic neighbours, in particular the Suebi,

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E.g., most recently, Popescu 2018, 18: ‘... *chiar dacă aici a avut loc o bătălie între romani și daci prezența monumentului este justificată doar de dorința de a-l glorifica pe Traian ca fiind mai mare sau cel puțin egal cu Augustus cât mai aproape de locul care i-a adus gloria militară. Nu avem nici o dovadă că împăratul Traian a fost sau nu prezent la Adamclisi atunci când a avut loc atacul organizat de Decebal dar avem un motiv destul de întemeiat să credem că Decebal ar fi participat personal la acesta*’. – in free translation, ‘...even though a battle took place here between Romans and Dacians, the existence of the monument is justified by the desire to glorify it, making Trajan seem as greater or at least equal to Augustus as close as possible to the place that brought him military glory. We have no evidence that the Emperor Trajan or Decebalus was or was not present at Adamclisi when the organized attack took place: but we have a good reason to believe that Decebalus would have personally participated in it.’”

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Richmond 1967, 39, with Lepper and Frere 1988, 299-304. The suggestion of Carbó García and Rodríguez San Juan 2012, that Trajan ordered the erection of similar monument at Caracena at the head of the Persian Gulf during his Parthian War as a southern equivalent as it were, of the *Tropaeum Traiani* thus building visible symbols of Roman power at different ends of the Roman Empire, does not stand scrutiny.

and notorious for its slashing wounds to an enemy's arms, legs and heads,<sup>26</sup> helping us place the scenes into context - combat operations in the Lower Danube theatre. The reliefs show four distinct types of *falx* as opposed to the short single-handled version repeatedly depicted on Trajan's Column, and experiments with modern replicas have revealed it to be a particularly vicious one when used against unarmoured flesh, and even capable of penetrating the mild steel used in the Roman legionary's hooped body armour, the *lorica segmentata*.<sup>27</sup>

With regard to the Roman soldiers shown on the reliefs what is especially noteworthy is how these men are shown armoured and armed in styles at odds completely with Trajan's army in the Dacian wars as depicted on the eponymous Column in Rome.<sup>28</sup> In fact, they provide us with the clearest example of the Roman army adopting specialised equipment for battle against a specific enemy. For example, while some infantrymen carry the legionary's rectangular *scutum*, instead of wearing the legionary's hooped *lorica segmentata* as body protection, they are dressed in the *lorica hamata* ('chain' or 'ring-mail') or the *lorica squamata* (scale armour) associated with auxiliary soldiers. This was presumably because these types of flexible armour, discarded by the legions in the early Augustan period, allowed greater agility in combating enemies armed with the *falx*,<sup>29</sup> and provided better cushioning against a body blow from that weapon. What is more, many of the soldiers wear greaves on their legs and a *manica* on their right arms as additional protection against slashes from the *falx*, such guard devices being absent from Trajan's Column. On the other hand, the Adamclisi soldiers, as with most of those on the Column, do wear the reinforced version of the 'Imperial Italic' helmet, with its cross-braced strengthening on the crown for better protection against a downward slash from a *falx*. These specific points of detail apart, we need to note how one group of metopes also

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For the *falx* see Borangic 2009. Certain of the Roman enemies shown on the Adamclisi metopes have the side-knotted hair style described by Tacitus as unique to the Suebi (*Germ.* 38), but which is found on bog-bodies from all over North-West Europe, e.g., the Osterby Man and Dätgen Man.

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Cf. Fronto, *Princ.Hist.* 9, for the 'gaping wounds' caused by the *falx*. For the experiments with a modern replica, see Sim 2000, who reported that when used in a slashing blow against a block of plastina, an oil based clay with properties similar to human flesh, it opened a cut 16.5 cm long, 1.13 cm deep and almost 1 cm wide, and that when used against a sheet of mild steel, it penetrated to a depth of almost 0.4 cm, buckling the surrounding area.

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This was observed more than a century ago: Furtwängler 1897, 273-276.

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It is noticeable that some of the *Tropaeum Traiani* metopes show the Roman infantry using their swords for a slashing blow or chest-high downward thrust against their opponents instead of the traditional disembowelling stab (e.g., Vegetius 1.12), the first two actions made easier by wearing the less constrictive *lorica hamata* and *squamata*.

show Roman soldiers parading prisoners in a triumph or standing-by observing the process, all clad in what Richmond termed their ‘field service kit’, imagery again absent from the Column.<sup>30</sup>

The Adamclisi relief in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum (Fig. 1), number 28 in Florescu’s sequence of metopes,<sup>31</sup> belongs to this last category, showing two standing soldiers wearing Richmond’s ‘field service kit’. They are dressed identically, wearing *caligae*, a knee-length ‘kilt’ pleated at the back, and a short-sleeved tunic which may have an integral high choker-type collar, unless this is a scarf of some kind tied around the neck. This tunic is perhaps a *subarmalis* or doublet, worn beneath the armour to help absorb sweat and body blows, the integral collar or separate scarf there to prevent the armour chafing the neck.<sup>32</sup> Over this garment each man wears a *paenula*, a poncho-like garment that slipped over the head.<sup>33</sup> Made usually of a half-circle or three-quarter-circle of felt or woollen fabric, sewn at the upper front, and normally provided with a hood, the lower front parts could be thrown back over the shoulders to leave one or other or both arms free when needed. In the case of the Istanbul relief the ridged lines over the chest area represent the ends of the men’s *paenulae* drawn together at the front so that they can hold a *pilum* in the left hand, and use the right to grip the rim of their shields, which rest on the ground. The *pila* are shown in proportionate size to the men, the weapon itself being almost 2 m long,<sup>34</sup> with a wooden shaft and a square socketed but circular iron shank tipped with a pyramidal point, shown here projecting into the border of the relief. Both men also wear a *gladius* with a ridged grip and a heavy ball-like pommel suspended in a scabbard decorated with a tendril pattern, suspended over the left side by a baldric, or over-the-shoulder sword-belt. Their shields, which reach waist high from where they rest on the ground, are shown as semi-cylindrical and sub-rectangular, as usual with legionary shields, but with rounded rather than squared upper edges. Each has a flattened *umbo*, or shield boss, the shield fronts being decorated with almost identical patterns matching closely those found on many reliefs of the Roman legions at war. That is, with a central vertical height-wise reinforcement bar in the form of Zeus’ thunderbolt, with angled shapes rather like a modern engine’s cam-shaft that end in barbs, these being stylised lightning bolts, and wavy lines, representing torrential rainfall, projecting diagonally from the *umbo*. These diagonal motifs flare out above and below a horizontal *tabula ansata* label, which in reality, according to Vegetius, would have the soldier’s name and

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Richmond 1967, 36.

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Florescu 1961 and 1965.

<sup>32</sup> We do not know the name for the military version of this neck scarf, referred to in civil contexts as a *focale* (e.g., Quint. Or. 11.3.144) or *sudarium* (e.g., Suet. Nero. 51)

<sup>33</sup> E.g., Suet. Galba 6.

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Veg. 2.15.

that of his unit marked on it,<sup>35</sup> but whereas the right hand soldier's shield has two five-pointed stars in the top right hand corner and one below the *tabula ansata*, that of the left-hand soldier has one above and one below.

When we compare the Istanbul relief with the others on the *Tropaeum Traiani* showing men in 'field service kit' there are some slight but noticeable differences. Most obvious is that the men on the Istanbul relief wear their *gladii* on their left side by means of a baldric. This is quite at odds with how Roman infantrymen are shown elsewhere on the *Tropaeum*, or, for that matter, on many other relief carvings of the Roman military of the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century, such as Trajan's Column. Countless reliefs, especially funerary monuments, indicate that the wearing of the *gladius* on the right side, suspended from a waist belt, was *de rigeur* for a legionary and an auxiliary infantryman. The only other cases of men in 'field-service kit' on the *Tropaeum Traiani* wearing an edged weapon on the left are in metopes numbers 22 and 25, but those in metope number 22 are assuredly 'officers', as they wear a short *paludamentum* fastened at the right shoulder using a *fibula*, while those in metope number 25, who do wear *paenula*, as normal for the 'ordinary soldier', wear the standard *pugiones*, short daggers, on this side, not a *gladius*. True, the armoured auxiliary cavalymen shown in, for example, metopes numbers 2 and 24, wear their edged weapon on the left suspended from a baldric, and even carry sub-rectangular shields with rounded corners: but the wearing of a sword on the left is – as many reliefs indicate – usual for cavalymen, and their shields are smaller and flat as suited for cavalry use, not the large semi-cylindrical examples shown on the Istanbul relief and intended for the infantry.

It seems clear from these slight but eye-catching divergences in equipment and mode of dress that the two men shown on the Istanbul relief are something other than regular legionary soldiers, and as such deserving of better notice. When considered against the other reliefs these differences cannot be explained by problems in carving or an aesthetic sensibility in seeking to maintain an 'artistic' balance with the adjoining metopes, nor, assuredly, negligent vigilance on the part of the craftsman responsible. As it is, their stance, in what in the British army is known as the 'at ease' position, and their wearing of 'field-service' kit while fully armed, suggests they might be on some form of special duty. In which case they might be two Praetorian Guardsmen, members of the emperor's bodyguard, on hand for protection and other duties.

Support for interpreting these men as Praetorian Guards can be found in the Domitianic-period Cancellaria Relief A and the Trajanic period Puteoli reliefs which both show

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Cf. Veg. 2.18, where it is claimed of legionary soldiers that '*... every cohort had its shields painted in a manner peculiar to itself. The name of each soldier was also written on his shield, together with the number of the cohort and century to which he belonged.*' We naturally cannot vouch for the veracity of this statement, although a leather shield cover found at Bonn does have a label affixed reading 'LEG I MPF' for the *legio Minerva Pia Fidelis*, the legion stationed there: cf. van Driel-Murray and Gechter, 1983, p. 30-38 and fig 9.

Praetorians carrying a sub-rectangular shield with rounded corners as on the Istanbul relief, as does one of the Praetorians depicted on the Claudian period Louvre-Lens relief,<sup>36</sup> and so this shield type might be associated with these specific units.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, one Praetorian on the Cancellaria relief A and one on the Puteoli Relief carry smaller circular shields instead, although these are perhaps some kind of rank identifier, as the man on the first carries a staff with the spear shaped emblem of a *beneficiaries*, a soldier on special duties, while instead of a *pilum*, the one on the Puteoli relief holds a long spear, for which the name *hasta* seems appropriate.<sup>38</sup> As it is, in a Roman military context small round shields are associated often with standard bearers and musicians, men graded as *principales* or ‘specialists’, and who in their case could not hold a large rectangular shield on account of the particular pieces of equipment they carried as part of their military duties. That apart, further support for seeing the men on the Istanbul relief as Praetorian Guardsmen can be found in the tendril decoration of their scabbards, present on the Louvre-Lens relief, and, perhaps, their shield decorations, similar to those on the shield carried by the probable Praetorian Guardsman on the Cancellaria Relief A.

However, in all the reliefs we have of Praetorian Guardsmen where their sidearm is visible it is worn on the right, and at that apparently suspended always from the regular military belt worn at the waist, what Roman military students today usually refer to as a *cingulum*, but which is more correctly called a *balteus*. As a wide range of Roman sculpture confirms, this was the normal practice for the Roman infantry soldier – Praetorian, legionary or auxiliary – until the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century, when the *gladius* was superseded by the longer *spatha* suspended by a baldric. To be sure, the same source materials do show some soldiers wearing the *gladius* on the left, but other than those men identifiable as auxiliary cavalry, all these are recognisable in one or other way as ‘officers’, as with the men on Adamclisi metope no. 22, who wear a short cloak draped over the shoulders,<sup>39</sup> or as centurions, who on the basis of sculptural evidence, habitually wore their sword on the left.<sup>40</sup> As the two soldiers on the Istanbul relief hold *scuta* and

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<sup>36</sup> Accession number Ma 1079. For an extensive discussion of Roman legionary and Praetorian shields types, see Charles 2002, 667-683

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For the Cancellaria Relief: Magi 1945, with Last 1948; for the Puteoli Relief: Flower 2001. It is possible that the ‘ἀσπίδαζ τὰζ σωληνοειδεῖσ’ or ‘pipe-shaped shields’ carried by Praetorians at the Battle of Antioch in 218 (Dio 79.37.4) are these particular items although they could equally well be the semi-cylindrical shields carried by early Imperial legionaries

<sup>38</sup> For the definition of a ‘hasta’, q.v. Lewis and Short’s *Latin Dictionary*.

<sup>39</sup> While a ‘cloak is a cloak is a cloak’, it is not unreasonable to assume, as this writer does, that there was a distinction in the shape of the cloak worn by a Roman ‘officer’ and those he commanded, most probably through colour, but also through size, given that officers would generally be mounted and so more likely to have a short version of the *paludaementum* fastened at the shoulder rather than a long cloak.

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wear *paenulae*, a garment usually associated with the ‘rank-and-file’, including what today would be men graded as non-commissioned officers, they are unlikely to be ‘officers’, those men of equestrian rank and above serving for a short time to fulfil the requirements of the *cursus honorum*.<sup>41</sup>

In the writer’s opinion, though, the Istanbul relief, with its subjects wearing *paenulae* and their *gladii* suspended by a baldric on their left sides, shows a pair of centurions, men who – it seems – habitually wore this weapon on the left. The fact is that ordinary legionaries and Praetorians also, it would seem, were trained to fight in a shield wall, in close line formation, shield to shield, with the sword held horizontally outward at waist height for a decisive disembowelling thrust, which meant they had to wear their *gladius* on the right to facilitate its drawing while simultaneously maintaining the shield wall to protect their left side and body. A centurion, however, as the leader of a group of trained soldiers, was expected to show individual bravery in war,<sup>42</sup> and, we might assume, be expected to spearhead a charge by the men he commanded into close combat, as did G.Crastinus at the Battle of Pharsalus,<sup>43</sup> a conjecture that finds support in complex systems analysis.<sup>44</sup> This being the case, a centurion, standing ahead of the shield wall and free from its confines, could wear his *gladius* on the left, the usual side for any right-handed person armed with a sword of any description, making it easier to draw and – we imagine - brandish it aloft as a signal for the advance.<sup>45</sup> This is, of course, pure

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There is no literary evidence for this but the classic example of a relief showing a legionary centurion wearing his sidearm this way is the tombstone of M. Favonius Facilis at Colchester: see, e.g., Philips 1975. There is some evidence, though, this might not have been the case with auxiliary centurions, for as the anonymous reviewer observed, a relief from Offenburg of the auxiliary centurion, L. Valerius Albinus of *cohors I Thracum* shows him wearing his sword on the right: see CIL XIII 6286. It is probably worth pointing out also that as metope number 45 and other sculptures show, ‘officers’ might also wear a long edged-weapon on the right, but suspended from a baldric not a belt.

<sup>41</sup> Note, however, as the anonymous reviewer pointed out, centurions are normally shown with the *paludamentum*, rather than the *paenula*.

<sup>42</sup> Caes. Bello Afr. 54.

<sup>43</sup> Caes. Bello Civ. 3.91.

<sup>44</sup> Rubio-Campillo, Pau, and Ble, 2005.

<sup>45</sup> The anonymous reviewer commented that this would be ‘a practical suicidal tactic for the centurionate, I think the Roman armies could not afford that... I would expect him fighting in the middle of one of the first ranks in the shield wall or at the flank’ This does not chime with ancient or even relatively recent methods of infantry combat, as when, for example, in August 1914 when the later Field Marshal B.L.Montgomery, as a captain with the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, led his company into an attack with his sword held aloft. Such a ‘heroic’ form of leadership by a unit commander, following the practices of classical period combat, fell out of favour after the experiences of the 1916 Battle of the Somme in particular, when many units were left leaderless after their officers were killed at the outset

speculation While there is some evidence for the position of a centurion in the battle line in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC Republican legion, which was organised on quite different lines, namely that they stood at the extreme right and extreme left of the unit's first rank in a line abreast formation, there is simply no evidence regarding the position of a centurion in the battle line of an Imperial legion.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

We freely conclude that the precise identity and status of the two men shown on the relief from Adamclisi now in the National Museum of Archaeology in Istanbul cannot be determined for certain, although we would hold it shows two legionary centurions. Having established that point, though, it is hoped that this article has in a sense given a greater prominence to one of the lesser known but certainly internationally important artefacts on display in that museum. And optimistically, that it has also indicated some of the problems inherent in what is a surprisingly limited amount of literary evidence for rank and other distinctions among the Praetorian and legionary sections of the Imperial Roman army and in particular, the problems of relating sculptural evidence to this, a subject that many might assume to be free from debate given how it has been the focus of countless studies since the Renaissance.

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of the charge, and modern army tactical training emphasises the role of the commander in orchestrating combat from a safe position - but this surely would not be the case in the Roman period with such heroic leadership as that displayed by Crastinus as an example.

<sup>46</sup> Polybius (6.24.8).

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