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## CONTIRONES AND GETA DOMINUS NOSTER

At a shrine 250 meters south of the legionary camp of Singidunum (Belgrade), Cilician soldiers set up an altar to Juppiter (fig. 1), bearing the following inscription:<sup>1</sup>

*I(ovi) o(ptimo) M(aximo).  
Cilices  
pro salute  
dd[ ]d[ ](ominorum) nn[ ]n[ ](ostrorum)  
pos[u]erun(t),  
[co]ntirones  
[D]exiro et Prisco  
co(n)s(ulibus).*

The year of the consuls is AD 196 when Geta, second son of the emperor Septimius Severus, was no more than seven years old and had no title yet. Before 205 no other inscription calls Geta „Our Lord“, even unofficially<sup>2</sup>. How, then, could he be reckoned here among „Our Lords“ as early as 196?

H. Nesselhauf who first recognized the importance of the inscription, seeing that contirones, recruits of the same year, are meant, explained the „auffallende und zunächst absonderliche“ inclusion of Geta among the „Lords“ with the soldiers caring little for constitutional niceties. The Cilician recruits, he assumed, had come along in 196 with Septimius Severus, Caracalla, and Geta on their way from the Orient to Gaul; seeing every day how both sons of the emperor

<sup>1</sup> M. Mirković and S. Dušanić, *Inscriptions be la Mésie Supérieure I*, Beograd 1976, nr. 3. The reading given here, based on the photograph, differs from the one in IMS I, 3 in assuming that the third N and third D in line four were erased when remembrance of Geta was damned; it further follows H. Nesselhauf, „Zwei Inschriften aus Belgrad“, *Živa Antika* 10, 1960, 190—195, in assuming that the final T in the fifth line is not lost but was never written, and that a trace of the S in that line is still preserved. The text is also published in ILJUG 17.

<sup>2</sup> A. Mastino, „Le titolature di Caracalla e Geta attraverso le iscrizioni (indici), Bologna 1981 (= Studi di storia antica 5, ed. G. Susini) 59 and 171. Mastino rightly declares the Singidunum case „stranamente forse già del 196.“ AE 1903, 282 from Viminacium, also with ddd. nnn., may date from 205, see IMS II, 67.

were treated as future rulers and how in nearby Viminacium Caracalla was given the title of Caesar, they set up their altar to all three Lords.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the phrasing of the inscription gives one pause. The word *contirones* should follow *Cilices*: Cilician recruits. Why, then, does it come at the end of the inscription, next to the date? The likely answer is that it belongs together with the date and is to be understood as „recruits of the year 196“.

In army rosters and on inscriptions, soldiers are often classed by the year of their recruitment, while gravestones as well as dedications of the early third century show that those recruited in the same year kept a sense of group identity throughout their service.<sup>4</sup> Into this pattern fit the Cilician recruits who therefore set up our altar at some time between 205 and 211, the time when other inscriptions include Geta among the *domini nostri*<sup>5</sup>.

If the above is correct, then not only disappears the unheard-of title of *dominus noster* for Geta before 205, but the history of the Cilician recruits also changes, since there is no more need to assume that they hurried along with the elite field battallions in the imperial retinue rushing from the war against Pescennius Niger to the war against Clodius Albinus. While they were indeed recruited at that time to fill the places of legionaries killed or promoted in the civil wars, they will have travelled to Singidunum at their own time and their own speed. There, having joined legio *IIII* Flavia, they kept their identity as a group, setting up an altar some ten to fifteen years after their enrollment<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>. Nesselhauf, 1960. J. Fitz, using the Singidunum altar as palmary evidence, expanded this to see in just about all inscriptions mentioning three Augusti before 209 the result of personal interaction with Septimius Severus: „Augusti Tres avant 209“, *Alba Regia* 17, 1979, 49—58.

<sup>4</sup>. E.g. CIL XIII. 6689 (Mainz) a dedication *pro se et contirones suos* after 17 years of service, as pointed out by Nesselhauf (for the text see M. Speidel, „Rangzeichen für Zenturionen und die grosse Weihinschrift aus dem Mainzer Legionslager“, *Jahrbuch des römisch-germanischen Zentralmuseums* 33, 1986, 312—329. For further *contirones* see M.P. Speidel, „Exploratores, Mobile Elite Units of Roman Germany“, *Epigraphische Studien* 13, 1983, 63—78, esp. p. 68f. At Singidunum itself a new inscription mentioning a *contrunculus* has come to light: IMS I, 28.

<sup>5</sup>. Mastino 1981, 59 and 171.

<sup>6</sup>. For groups of recruits travelling see M.P. Speidel, *Roman Army Studies* I, Amsterdam 1984, 342f. for legionaries from Asia Minor *ibid.* 45—63; for ethnic provincial groupings among the soldiers see the same, *Die Denkmöler der Kaiserreiter*. Bonn 1990.

