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В.П. Никоноров

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Valerii P. Nikonorov

CATAPHRACTI, CATAFRACTARII AND CLIBANARII:
ANOTHER LOOK AT THE OLD PROBLEM OF THEIR
IDENTIFICATIONS

Ancient Greek and Latin narrative and documentary sources having to do something with armour-clad cavalrymen of the Hellenistic, Eastern and Roman troops applied to them three terms, viz. Gr. κατάφρακτοι (Lat. *cataphractil catafracti*), Lat. *catafractarii* (Gr. καταφρακτάριοι), and Lat. *clibanarii* (Gr. κλιβανάριοι), these names being used in both the substantive and adjective forms. The first of these, *cataphracti*, goes back to the Greek verb καταφράσσειν (καταφράττειν), „to cover with armour”. But firstly the term κατάφρακτος had appeared to designate large decked warships, and it existed as such in the Greek world at least from Classical to Late Hellenistic times, as this is demonstrated by both literary (the works of Thucydides, Diodorus, Polybius, Appian) and epigraphic (inscriptions from Samos and Rhodes) evidences. As to armoured cavalry, we hear primarily of τὰ κατάφρακτα, a corselet for Ptolemaic mounted (?) warriors, which is present at two papyri dated to the latter half of the 3rd century B. C. and discovered at Magdôla in Egypt (*P. Enteyx.* 32 and 45 ed. Guéraud). The earliest mention in the available sources of the horse consisting of *cataphracti* is met with in Polybius' account of the battle of Panion (200 B. C.), where they fought in the composition of the Seleucid king Antiochus III's army (XVI, 18, 6;8). Their presence in the Seleucid troops for subsequent time is documented as well (Polyb. XXXI, 3, 9; Liv. XXXV, 48, 3; XXXVII, 40, 5;11; 42, 1-2;7; App. Syr. 32-34 [§§ 163; 164; 173] eds Viereck and Roos; Plut. *Mor.* 197C). In addition, *cataphracti* are referred to in the armed forces of the Armenians (Sallust. *Hist.* IV, frs. 64; [65]; 66 ed. Maurenbrecher; Plut. *Lucull.* 26, 7; 27, 7; 28, 2-4; id. *Crass.* 19, 1; id. *Mor.* 203A; Strabo XI, 4, 4;9), of the Parthians (Plut. *Crass.* 18, 3; 21, 7; [24, 1]; 25, 5;6; [25, 7-9; 27, 2]; Dio Cass. XL, 15, 2; XLIX, 20, 2; 26, 2; Propert. III, 12, 12; Herodian. IV, 14, 3; 15, 2; [Iust. XLI, 2, 10; Arr. *Parth.* fr. 20 ed. Roos]; Naz. *Paneg.* 24, 6); of the Caucasian Albanians (Strabo XI, 4, 4;9), of the kings of Edessa (Arr. *Parth.* fr. 47), of the Sasanian Persians (Amm. Marc. XVIII, 8, 7; XIX, 7, 4; XX, 7, 2; XXIV, 6, 8; XXV, [1, 12-13];3, 4;6, 2; XXIX, 1, 1; Eunap. *Hist.* fr. 27, 8 ed. Blockley; Heliod. IX, 14;[15];16-18), and of the Romans (Herodian. VIII, 1, 3; Naz. *Paneg.* 23, 4; Amm. Marc. XVI, 10, 8;12, 38; XXVIII, 5, 6; Veget. *ERM* III, 23; see also *CIL* XI, 5632: *ala I Gallorum et Pannoniorum catafractata*). The surviving literary texts as if do not speak directly of Sarmatian *cataphracti*, although

two passages dealing with the heavily armoured Rhoxolan and Alan cavalrymen may give us an idea that they could be called in reality *cataphracti* too (Tacit. *Hist.* I, 79; Arr. *Ac. c. Al.* 17 ed. Roos).

The second term in question, *catafractarii*, is applied by the available sources to the Roman heavy horse solely. Going back in its basis, of course, to the word *cataphracti*, it seems to have come into existence in the former half of the 3rd century A. D. (*CIL* III, 99: *ala nova firma miliaria catafractaria Philippiana*) and been in use until the 5th century. Various mentions of *catafractarii* are known in literary works (Amm. Marc. XVI, 2, 5; 12, 7; 63; *SHA* Claud. 16, 2; Aurel. 11, 4; 33, 4; *ND* Or. V, 34; VI, 35; 36; VII, 25; VIII, 29; XXXI, 52; XXXIX, 16; Oc. VII, 200; XL, 21), as well as on papyri from Egypt (*P. Beatty. Panop.* II, 28; *BGU* 1, 316, 5-7; *CPR* V 13 and *P. Rainer Cent.* 165) and on funeral stelae (see Eadie 1967: 168-169; Hoffmann 1969 – 1970: I, 69-70, II, 24-25; Schleiermacher 1984: nos. 40, 49, 88, 90, 93; Speidel 1984). True, the stelae inscriptions often give abbreviated forms of the word under review, and one may only assume, although with a larger degree of certainty, the persons memorized to have served in units of just *catafractarii*, not of *catafracti* (I am not inclined to identify both these appellations, see below).

Now let us go on to the last term, *clibanarii*. It originates from the Lat. masculine noun *clibanus* or *cliuanus*, however, not in the sense „oven” as originally, being derived from the Gr. κλίβανος (*ThLgLat* III: 1342), but as something like a „fuller armour suit” in comparison with the usual Latin term to designate a corselet, *lorica*. Just in this sense the word *clibanus* is attested in extant Latin texts dating from the 4th century A. D. (*DRB* XV, 2 ed. Ireland; Migne. *PL* XIII: 637), and under the equivalent, but neuter forms κλίβανον, κηλίβανον and κλιβάνιον it went into Greek (Migne. *PG* XXXIV: 628; *Lyd. De magistr.* I, 46; *Leo imp. Tact.* V, 3[4]; VI, 4; etc.), just as its derivative *clibanarius* did in the form κλιβανάριος. To be sure, the word *clibanus* – „armour” had to come into being earlier than the surviving sources fix it, as both the term *clibanarii* and its bearers must have appeared at least by the end of the 3rd century A. D. , when the emperor Diocletian could have been responsible for their introduction into the Roman army. The fact is that it was he who built several factories (*fabricae*) for producing weaponry in the eastern part of the empire, including ones in Daphne (Antioch) and Nicomedia (Malal. XII, pp. 307, 20-308, 1 ed. Bonn; *Lact. De mort. pers.* VII, 9). Meanwhile, the *Notitia Dignitatum*, compiled between 396 and c. 425, but containing some information that goes back to the Tetrarchic period, places *fabricae clibanariae* (workshops for heavy-cavalry armour) in those cities (Or. XI, 22; 28). And so one may suppose that they were probably established by Diocletian himself to fit out his units of *clibanarii*.

True, there is one passage from the biography of Alexander Severus in the *SHA*, where the emperor asserts that in the course of his war against the Sasanian king Artashir I in 234 the Romans had killed ten thousand of *catafractarii*, whom the Persians call themselves *clibanarii*, and their equipage was then used to arm the conquerors (56, 5). However, on many reasons this phrase should not be interpreted as an indication to so early an appearance of *clibanarii* in the Roman troops. First of all, one should take into consideration the nature of such a source as the *SHA* which, although being a collection of document-based imperial biographies, contains a lot of errors and even misrepresentations of the facts. With respect to the *Life of Alexander Severus*, it is needful to say that the history of his Persian campaign, told there (55-57), is basically incorrect and much distorted by official propaganda (Jardé, 1925; Rösger, 1978). Besides that, the *SHA* as probably drawing on a number of data from the works of Ammianus Marcellinus and Vegetius (Syme, 1968; Chastagnol, 1974) must be dated rather within the 5th century (Birley, 1985; Kolb, 1987), i. e. when the *clibanarii* were a common feature of the Late Roman army.

It is important to point out that the above phrase from Alexander's speech – „*catafractarios, quos illi (sc. Persae) clibanarios vocant*” – was most likely borrowed by the biographer from Amm. Marc. XVI, 10, 8 („*catafracti equites, quos clibanarios dictitant*”), but with two inaccuracies of principle. The first one consists in the substitution of the term *catafractarii* for *catafracti equites*; the other – the assertion that exactly the Persians call the armoured horsemen *clibanarii*, while Ammianus gives in his passage a neutral formulation: „(they) call”, meaning the Romans themselves first and foremost. By the way, this assertion gave birth to another delusion, viz. a notion that the word *clibanarius* had an Iranian origin, being adapted from Middle Persian (Rundgren, 1958). However, the arguments to ground it look too complicated and, what is more, are purely hypothetical for lack of the main thing – any Persian texts with relevant information for supporting the proposed Iranian etymology.

Therefore, it seems quite reasonable to avoid the use of the quotation in question from the *SHA* as any serious argument when studying the *clibanarii*. This term covered a definite type of the Late Roman heavy cavalry. The earliest known mention of such a unit in Roman service, viz. a *vexillatio eqq(uitum) cat(afractariorum) clib(anariorum)*, is present at the gravestone from Claudiopolis in Bithynia, dated to the late 3rd – early 4th century (Speidel 1984). For the 4th and 5th centuries, Roman *clibanarii* are frequently met with in literary sources (Lact. *De mort. pers.* XL, 5; Naz. *Paneg.* 22, 4; Amm. Marc. XVI, 10, 8; 12, 22; *Cod. Theod.* XIV, 17, 9; *ND. Or.* V, 29;40; VI, 32, 40; VII, 31;32;34; XI, 8; Oc. VI, 24; 67; VII, 185; cf. Lyd. *De magistr.* I, 46; Veget. *ERM* III, 24), to say nothing of numerous references to them, but without using the term, in works of

the emperor Julian, Libanius, Claudian, etc. From then, there are two grave-inscriptions have been preserved recording soldiers-κλιβανάριοι, one from Jerusalem (Thomsen, 1921: no. 129q) and the other from Northern Syria (*SEG XX*, 332). Finally, troopers under the denominations of not only κλιβανάριοι but also λεοντοκλιβανάριοι (to all appearances, bearing the lion-emblem on their armour) figure on several papyri of the 5th and 6th centuries from Egypt (Diethart and Dintsis, 1984).

The term under review was also applied in Latin literary tradition to foreign (Eastern) mounted warriors, whose equipment was in line with the Roman *clibanarii*. So, the historians of the 4th century A. D. employed this word for designating the Armenian heavy cavalry of the 1st century B. C. (Eutrop. VI, 9, 1; *Fest. Brev.* XV) and the Palmyrene armour-clad riders fighting the emperor Aurelian in 272 A. D. (*Fest. Brev.* XXIV) as well. In addition, some of the *clibanarii* units in the *ND* have the ethnic appellations such as „Parthians”, „Persians” and „Palmyrenians” (Or. V, 40; VI, 32;40; VII, 32;34) – they must have been originally recruited from the listed foreigners, who, as it seems, had inspired the Romans to adopt this type of cavalry and been, in fact, its first fighters in the imperial troops (however, by the time of the *ND* the ethnic appellations of these units were already no more than their distinctive nicknames, though perhaps with the exception of the Palmyrene one).

There is no unanimity among scholars as to the difference between *cataphracti*, *catafractarii* (they both are always identified in scholarly literature as one and the same kind of heavily armoured cavalry) and *clibanarii*. The opinions expressed are following:

1) a *clibanarius*’ horse was protected by armour, while that of a *catafractarius* was not (Rostovtzeff, 1933: 218; Eadie, 1967: 172; Gamber, 1968: 31; Hoffmann, 1969 – 1970: I, 265 ff);

2) both the *cataphractus* and *clibanarius* could ride an armoured horse, but the latter „was far more heavily armed, being covered from head to foot in a combination of plate and scale armour” (Connolly, 1981: 259);

3) „Perhaps the *clibanarii* were bow and lance armed, with some horse armour, whilst the *catafractarii* not of the oriental type were heavily armoured men, some perhaps on armoured horses, but with the western combination of spear and shield” (Coulston 1986: 63);

4) the *clibanarii* were armed with lances, the *catafractarii* – with bows (Masson M. Ye. 1955: 45; Frye 1963: 188);

5) there seems to have been the real difference between *catafractarii* and *clibanarii*, with the latter „characterized by a more eastern, i. e. fuller type of equipment. . . . all mailed horsemen, including the *clibanarii*, could be called *catafractarii*, but some were further qualified as *clibanarii*” (Speidel, 1984: 153 – 154);

6) there probably was no any clear difference between them (Gabba, 1966: 65 = 1974: 28; Khazanov, 1968: 181 = 1971: 72; cf. Ghirshman, 1962: 350; Michalak, 1987: 77);

7) the real distinction between *cataphracti* and *clibanarii* lay not in their equipment but in their tactics: the former fought against infantry and acted in the close column order with a long lance held in the one hand; the latter, carrying the lance by both the hands, charged cavalry and formed hereat the wedge-like order followed by mounted archers (Mielczarek, 1993).

The last point of view is deserving especial attention because it may be considered as mostly argued by now. None the less, many of its arguments are far from being so indisputable and need to have stricter proofs. The thing is that the study of tactics wants for, above all, written evidences. As regards such to shed light on the tactical employment of the ancient armour-clad troopers on horseback, the best one is Plutarch's detailed account of actions of the Parthian *cataphracti* at the battle of Carrhae in 53 B. C. (*Cras.* 23-27; see Nikonorov, 1995), while none of the other available texts dealing with the later *catafractarii* and *clibanarii* gives information allowing to clear up their tactics to the sufficient degree.

Hereinafter I would like to make my own observations on the problem, relying exclusively upon the data of the extant written sources, especially as relevant pictorial and actual data cannot be so helpful in this matter.

So, the *cataphracti*, under whom I understand warriors of the heavily armed cavalry invented by the nomads of western Central Asia as a result of their struggle against the invasive army of Alexander the Great, are represented in the Classical texts, which touch upon their presence in the Seleucid, Parthian, Armenian, Sasanian, Roman and other troops, as fully encased in armour and fighting with a long heavy lance (Gr. κόντρος, Lat. *contus*) as the main offensive weapon (relevant references are adduced above). Additional important information as to how the *cataphracti* could look come from actual finds of their armament uncovered at Ai Khanum (Bernard *et al.*, 1980) and Dura-Europos (Brown, 1936; James, 1990), as well as from their depictions on the Trajan' Column at Rome, though some contrived (Lepper and Frere, 1988), on the famous realistic graffito from Dura-Europos (Rostovtzeff, 1933: pl. XXII, 2, usually believed to be the picture of a *clibanarius*) and the Late Parthian and Early Sasanian rock reliefs from Iran (von Gall, 1990). An obligatory element of the *cataphractus*' outfit was the entire horse' protector (Polyb. XXXI, 3, 9; Sallust. *Hist.* IV, fr. 65; Plut. *Crass.* 24, 1; Iust. XLI, 2, 10; Propert. III, 12, 12; Arr. *Parth.* frs. 20 and 47; Heliod. IX, 15; Amm. Marc. XXIV, 6, 8; Serv. *Verg. Aen. comm.* XI, 770; Aelian. *Tact.* II, 11 eds Köchly and Rüstow; Arr. *Tact.* 4, 1 ed. Roos; cf. Asclep. *Tact.* I, 3 ed. Poznanski) which was a trapper, either metal-clad or made of thick leather.

It is extremely important for solving the problem under consideration that the historians of the 4th century A. D. , Eutropius and Festus, who were undoubtedly well-informed in up-to-date Roman cavalry warfare, when speaking of the Roman-Armenian war in the year 69 B. C. , term the armoured Armenian horsemen *clibanarii* (see above). As it seems to me, here is a key to reveal the relation between *cataphracti* and *clibanarii*. The fact is that both the 1st-century B. C. Armenians and later Roman *clibanarii* not only were heavily armoured riders but also – it is the main thing! – had their mounts safely protected (for Armenian horses see Sallust. *Hist.* IV, fr. 65; cf. Plut. *Lucull.* 28, 5; for those of Roman *clibanarii*: Naz. *Paneg.* 22, 4; cf. Liban. *Orat.* XVIII, 206; Claud. *In Ruf.* II, 361-362; id. *Paneg. Hon. VI cos.* 571-572, 576-577; etc.), and it was this peculiarity of the former that gave Eutropius and Festus an idea to name them *clibanarii*. It appears, there was no any difference of principle in the character of martial equipment between *cataphracti* and *clibanarii*, and this is well confirmed by so reliable an author as Ammianus Marcellinus who asserts about their identity (XVI, 10, 8). As a matter of fact, the second term, Latin (not Iranian!) by origin, supplanted in Late Roman or Early Byzantine times (at least by the 6th century) the previous Greek-born one, both having the same derivation (κατάφρακτος from κατάφρακτα, *clibanarius* from *clibanus*, i. e. both from „armour”). All the same, some not so significant distinctions took place: in particular, we hear of *scutarii clibanarii* (*Cod. Theod.* XIV, 17, 9; *ND Or.* XI, 8; *SEG* XX, 332), in other words, some of the *clibanarii* were additionally provided with shields, while the *cataphracti* did not have them normally (but cf. *Amm. Marc.* XX, 7, 2). As a whole (not in some details) I share the opinion of M. I. Rostovtzeff that the type of the earlier Parthian *cataphracti* (*cataphractarii*, according to his terminology) was in general repeated by the later *clibanarii*, though some progress was made in the equipment for the latter (1933: 221).

Unfortunately, there are no any representations of *clibanarii* in Roman and Byzantine art for the 4th century onwards, when this term was already in common use. It is to be thought, proceeding from so expressive descriptions in Nazarius, Ammianus Marcellinus, Julian, Libanius and Claudian, that this type of the imperial cavalry developed in accordance with the Early Sasanian style of fully armoured horsemen (going back, in turn, to the Late Parthian one) like pictured on the Dura graffito and described by Ammianus Marcellinus and Heliodorus under the denomination *cataphracti*, not *clibanarii* (! – the latter could be applied to such Persian troopers only by the Romans themselves, at best, whereas nobody knows for sure how they were called in Middle Persian).

Some additional notions about how the Roman and Early Byzantine *clibanarii* would have looked may be also taken from such Late Sasanian works of art as the noted equestrian royal statue at Taq-i Bustan (Fukai and Horiuchi, 1972) and

the depiction of a mounted knight in full armour on a bulla from a private collection in New York (Gignoux, 1991). True, though one can expect here a certain degree of resemblance in the equipments, there is no question of their identity at all.

It is interesting that the term *clibanarii* after the 6th century disappeared at all from Byzantine military nomenclature, although the word κλιβάνιον in the sense „lamellar armour” was in existence at least in the 9th and 10th centuries (Haldon, 1975; Koliass, 1988). But it was otherwise with the κατάφρακτοι. This term, having vanished in the 5th century, was then renewed in Byzantine military treatises of the 10th century (Leo imp. *Tact.* VI, 29-31 ed. Vári; *Syll. Tact.* 28; 31, 1-2; 33; 39, 1; 7; 46, 4; 6; 7; 19; 22; 26-34; 47, 16; 21 ed. Dain; *Praec. mil. : passim* ed. Kulakovskij). In historical writings of that time its synonym must have been another Greek term, unknown before, to designate iron-clad cavalymen, πανσίδηροι ἵππότες (Leo Diac. *Hist.* IV, 3; V, 2; VIII, 9; IX, 7 ed. Bonn). Nevertheless, as it follows from the descriptions, under these names lying in hiding are those who would have been called *clibanarii* in Late Roman military lexicon.

As for the Roman *catafractarii*, from my point of view, this term, being just a Latinized form of Gr. κατάφρακτοι, did actually mean a different kind of heavy cavalry than *cataphracti* (who were the same as *clibanarii*). Indeed, the *ND* gives two separate lists of *catafractarii* and *clibanarii*. To all appearances, the former consisting of mounted soldiers equipped in properly Roman style were less heavily armoured than the latter who wore chiefly Eastern-type protective outfit (and could also be armed with the bow to fight at a distance if necessary, according to the Eastern practice again). This difference may be caught in the same *ND* which hints in certain cases at the Oriental beginnings for the *clibanarii* units (see above), while it does not do that for the *catafractarii*. Furthermore, there is a passage from Ammianus Marcellinus that Julian, campaigning in Gaul, took with him for a speeded up march just *catafractarii* (XVI, 2, 5), but not *clibanarii* who were at his disposal as well (ibid. XVI, 12, 22; cf. 12, 38: *cataphracti*). The *catafractarii* can be seen on several monuments of Roman imperial art such as the „Tropaeum Traiani” at Adamklissi (Florescu, 1965), the Column of Marcus Aurelius at Rome (Carpino *et al.*, 1955), the Arch of Galerius at Salonika (Laubscher, 1975), the Arch of Constantine at Rome (L’Orange, 1939), as well as some tomb stelae (Schleiermacher, 1984). As a rule, they are represented there wearing a helmet and a mail or scale corselet, and holding a shield and a lance or spear; their horses were not armoured.

We do not know exactly whether there was any serious difference in the tactical use of the *cataphracti/clibanarii*, from the one hand, and of the *catafractarii*, from the other. Apparently, the latter could be employed in actions requiring more mobility, in particular to participate in forced marches and to pursue the

defeated enemy, etc. However, the main task of both on battle-field was the same: to charge frontally the hostile array in order to break it. To be sure, the *clibanarii* were more efficient to be a ram, especially against armoured formations and defence in depth. As the inscription on the gravestone from Claudiopolis must be interpreted, *clibanarii* and *catafractarii* could be sometimes (at least before the time of the compilation of the *ND*) in the composition of one unit, where they were intended each to work on their definite tasks, but acting in a strict co-ordination. Provided that they both fought ever in one and the same charging order, the *clibanarii* as better armoured themselves and sitting astride on fully protected horses had to form its first lines*.

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Marek Olbrycht

PARTHIAN MILITARY STRATEGY AT WARS AGAINST ROME

Introduction. Of much concern to the Parthian kings were their relations with the Roman Empire. The other frontiers of Parthia were important, especially the border with Turkes tan countries and peoples, but we are told very seldom of Parthian policy in the northeast. The classical sources on Parthia deal mostly with the wars between the Roman and Parthian Empires. These western accounts are not unpartially and must be used with care.

Roman policy towards Parthia is the topic of many papers, but Parthian policy towards Rome and the problem of Parthian strategy in wars has not been sufficiently analysed yet. The 1st century BC and the 1st AD saw continued fighting between Parthia and Rome in Mesopotamia, Syria, Armenia and Media Atropatene. In the following paper an attempt will be made to discuss strategic aspects of the Roman-Parthian wars under Phraates IV (ca. 38–3/2 BC), Artabanus II (ca. AD 10/11–40) and Vologases I (AD 50–79). In exploring these events, it is hoped that a greater insight into Parthian military strategy may be achieved.

General Factors of Parthian Strategy. In the theory of warfare, strategy and tactics have been put into separate categories. Tactics are usually understood to be the action on the battlefield itself. Strategy is defined as the art of projecting and directing military campaigns. But military factors