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The Problem of Mark Antony's *speculatores*

In 32/31 BC, in the mobile mint of Mark Antony was issued a series of coins to pay his army. Among them was a type of denarius containing on the obverse a legend ANT·AVG III·VIR·R·P·C and on the reverse C(O)HORTIS SPECVLATORVM¹. It is the earliest preserved source containing information about *speculatores* as a separate formation (in this case a cohort without a number). During the Imperial period, legionary units of *speculatores* always have been integral parts of their legions². The legend posted on the reverse suggests that in Antony's army were different customs. A singular form C(O)HORTIS demonstrates that there was only one cohort of *speculatores* while on the reverse of the another type of the same series we can see a plural form C(O)HORTIVM PRAETORIARVM³. If the cohorts of *speculatores* had been more than one, minters surely would have used the form C(O)HORTIVM.

Antony's coins are not the first source in which using the term *speculatores* was testified. According to *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, *speculator* in the military sense is a *scout* or a *spy*⁴. But in the military context *specula* has exactly the same meaning as *exploratio*: *scouting* or *recognition*⁵. In the literary sources relating to the Republican period except *speculatores* we can also find the term *exploratores* which means *soldiers/warriors who make exploratio*. The efforts of Friedrich Lammert⁶, N.J.E. Austin, N.B. Rankov⁷ and Rose Mary Sheldon⁸

¹ RRC 544/12. The series includes *aurei* and *denarii* but we know only *denarii* with this type of legend.

² Eg. *legio III Augusta*: CIL V 2832, 7164, VI 2453, 2528, 2607, 2743, 2755; *legio VII Gemina*: CIL II 4122, 4143, 4145; *legio X Gemina*: CIL III 3021, 3524, 4317, 4452, 4843, 5223.

³ RRC 544/8.

⁴ OLD, 1802.

⁵ OLD, 651, 1802.

⁶ Lammert 1929, 1583–1584.

⁷ Austin, Rankov 1995, 42–60.

⁸ Sheldon 2005, 165–171.

to find differences between Republican *speculatores* and *exploratores* have not reached a satisfactory solution. Contrary to the claim of Austin and Rankov⁹ the truth is that we do not know any example of using *speculatores* as spies because all examples cited by them have been typical for scouting actions. Naming Republican *speculatores* ‘spies’ is not correct although in other contexts *speculator* could mean a spy, indeed¹⁰. Being a spy was not the difference between *speculatores* and *exploratores*. What is more, Austin, Rankov and Sheldon came to the conclusion that these terms are often used interchangeably¹¹.

The best example is Livy. He often used the terms: *speculator*¹², *speculatores*¹³ and *exploratores*¹⁴ (what is interesting, he did not use the form *explorator*) but he has not made any clear distinction between them. Caesar, who was much more competent in military matters than Livy, has used the word *explorator/exploratores* with no indication to the type of unit¹⁵. But when he has written about soldiers making *exploratio* they were usually being a cavalry¹⁶. Less frequently he has used the term *speculator/speculatores*¹⁷ and the action called *specula* was mentioned by him only once in the sense of ‘to see’¹⁸. In one passage *speculatores* even make an *exploratio*:

*Interim speculatoribus in omnes partes dimissis explorat quo commodissime itinere vallem transire possit*¹⁹.

It confirms that Austin, Rankov and Sheldon were right when they had written about using these terms interchangeably.

Caesar’s lack of precision suggests *speculatores* had the same duties as *exploratores*. It is possible that the difference between these two categories of soldiers was their origin: *exploratores* might have been recruited from allied tribes while

⁹ Austin, Rankov 1995, 9, 54–60. The similar mistake was made by: Gichon 1989, 157–168; Sheldon 2005, 166.

¹⁰ OLD, 1802.

¹¹ Austin, Rankov, 1995, 42; Sheldon 2005, 164. Cf. Harmand, 1967, 140.

¹² Liv., 22.33.1, 27.27.3, 31.24.4, 40.7.4, 42.13.1, 45.19.8.

¹³ Liv., 3.40.13, 4.32.10, 4.46.9, 9.23.3, 27.15.1, 28.2.2, 30.4.6, 30.23.5, 30.29.2, 42.26.3.

¹⁴ Liv., 7.36.11, 8.17.7, 8.30.3, 9.45.17, 10.10.3, 10.17.1, 22.3.1, 22.15.3, 25.15.11.

¹⁵ Caes., *BG*, 1.12.2, 1.21.1, 1.22.4, 1.41.5, 2.5.4, 2.11.3, 2.17.1, 3.2.1, 4.4.6, 4.19.2, 5.49.1, 5.49.8, 6.7.9, 6.10.3, 6.29.1, 7.11.8, 7.18.3, 7.35.1, 7.44.3, 7.61.1, 7.83.4; *BC*, 1.62.1, 3.41.4, 3.79.6–7.

¹⁶ Caes., *BG*, 1.21.4; *BC*, 1.66.3, 2.24.2, 3.38.2. About scouting and reconnaissance in Caesar’s army see: Cancik 1986; Austin, Rankov 1995, 95–102; Ezov 1996; Sheldon 2005, 100–140.

¹⁷ Caes., *BG*, 2.11.2, 4.26.4, 5.49.8; *BC*, 3.66.1, 3.67.1.

¹⁸ Caes., *BG*, 2.5.3.

¹⁹ Caes., *BG*, 5.49.8.

speculatores might have been legionaries²⁰. It is also possible that both types of units were organized spontaneously according to different rules of different commanders.

Searching analogies with the Imperial army may be useful in solving the problem. In the first and second century AD, legionary *speculatores* were typical scouts²¹. It is quite incomprehensible why some historians assumed that in this period all *speculatores* changed into members of provincial governors' staff²². In such cases they served as messengers, secret agents or executioners²³. However, the number of inscriptions of 'ordinary' *speculatores* is too large to accept the theory of general change in the conditions of their service. Funerary inscription of Tiberius Nasidius Messor in which he was called *equus speculator*²⁴ proves that *speculatores* could perform their duties as a cavalry.

There is no doubt that also *exploratores* used horses²⁵. Michael P. Speidel pointed out that in the first century AD in some provinces they became elite mounted troops²⁶. Tiberius Claudius Maximus from *legio VII Claudia* who in AD 106 captured famous Dacian king Decebalus was mentioned in his funerary inscription as *explorator alae*²⁷. He was the Roman citizen so the difference between *speculatores* and *exploratores* could not always rely on a different legal status. One of the papyri found in Dura Europos is a list of soldiers who had belonged to the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* among whom were two *pedites*²⁸. It dates to the third century AD so it could not be evidence of the existence of infantry *exploratores* in the earlier centuries. Name *pedites* might be also referring to soldiers who lost their horses.

The difference between Imperial *speculatores* and *exploratores* was based on something else. We know many examples of *speculatores* who were le-

²⁰ I agree with Amiram Ezov (1996, 75, 79) about *exploratores* but I completely disagree with him about the role of *speculatores* who were, in his opinion (1996, 83), spies or individual scouts. The similar suggestion was made earlier by H.O. Fiebiger (1909, 1690). He made the same mistake as authors mentioned in n. 9. The important part of gathering information is also to look after enemy's camp. When Caesar or any other author called a spy *speculator* it is not the same as calling a group of scouting soldiers *speculatores*. Similarly, *equites* could be both a cavalry and social group. The context is crucial. Cf. Lammert 1929, 1584; Austin, Rankov 1995, 189–190.

²¹ See n. 2.

²² Eg. CIL II 4122, III 4425; RIB 19.

²³ Lammert 1929, 1584–1586; Watson 1982, 85; Webster 1998, 270 n. 6; Le Bohec 2001, 51, 56; Sheldon 2005, 166–167. Goldsworthy 1996, 126, also mentioned *exploratores* as an only type of units which have made recognition.

²⁴ AE, 1954, 162.

²⁵ Speidel 1994, 102; Austin, Rankov 1995, 43–53; Dixon, Southern 1997, 31–32; Sheldon 2005, 168–169.

²⁶ Speidel 1970.

²⁷ AE, 1967/70, 583; Speidel 1983.

²⁸ Speidel 1983, 74.

gionaries while *exploratores* always occur as *auxilia* operating as independent parts of legions²⁹. It would explain why *speculatores*, not *exploratores* were mentioned on Antony's coins. He honored only native Roman units (23 legions and *cohortes praetoriae*) and not non-Roman allies (at this time Roman citizens served in a cavalry very rarely, especially on the East³⁰). It suggests that division into *speculatores* as legionnaires and *exploratores* as *auxilia*, known from the Imperial period, might be present in the late Republican armies.

In the collection of the Museo Campano in Capua we can find a damaged inscription dating to the middle of the first century BC:

A(uli) Marei T(iti) f(ili) C(amilla tribu) / ex spe(...) / A(uli) Mari A(uli) f(ili) Maxs(umi) f(ili) / T(iti) Mari T(iti) f(ili) Pol(lia) fra(tris)³¹.

The lost fragment of *ex spe(...)* could be reconstructed as *ex speculator*³². If it is correct, it will be strong evidence that *speculatores* were a permanent type of units in the late Republican forces. But it is impossible to prove it and in my opinion it is not very probable interpretation.

We do not even know the way the units of legionary *speculatores* were formed. Publius Taruttienus Paternus did not mention them in a category of *immunes*³³. It seems that they were just ordinary legionaries with double or triple pay, maybe *principales*, who performed additional duties, as well as *beneficiarii* in commanders' staff³⁴.

But why *speculatores* were honored by Antony in such a specific way? Were scouts as important to him as legions and *cohortes praetoriae*? Perhaps the answer lays again in the analogy to the Imperial period, or, to be more precise, to the praetorians. *Speculatores* were the important part of the Roman emperors' guard and usually were assigned to praetorian cohorts³⁵. However, it retains many inscriptions in which there are no numbers of cohorts which may suggest that in the Roman army were also independent units of praetorian *speculatores*³⁶. *Speculatores Augusti* who were emperors' personal bodyguards could be the good example³⁷. The question is would Antony need another body-

²⁹ About *speculatores* see n. 2, and about *exploratores* see n. 25.

³⁰ See McCall 2002, 100–136.

³¹ AE, 1991, 488.

³² Keppie 2000, 255.

³³ D. 50.6.7.

³⁴ See n. 22.

³⁵ Eg. CIL VI 2528, 2834, 3891, IX 4783, X 684.

³⁶ Eg. CIL III 4843, V 935, 2784, 2832, 5071.

³⁷ Suet., *Cal.*, 45.1; *Claud.*, 35.1; *Galb.*, 18.1; Tac., *Hist.*, 1.31, 2.11; CIL III 5223; AE, 1995, 259. *Speculatores Augusti* were probably disbanded by Trajan (Speidel 1994, 23).

guards? Maybe he would but it is always dangerous to make so strict connections between the Republican and Imperial eras: in fact, we could not be sure of elite status of *speculatores* from 32/31 BC. Of course we cannot exclude the possibility that Antony's *speculatores* were the unit for special tasks rather than usual scouts. Most prominent scholar who believes Antony's *speculatores* were elite troops or even his personal bodyguards is Lawrence Keppie³⁸.

The high importance of scouts in Antony's army could be the result of a lesson given to the Romans by the Parthians. One of the most important causes of Marcus Licinius Crassus' defeat in 53 BC was poor quality of recognition³⁹. Perhaps Antony before the invasion of Parthia in 36 BC has created a strong unit of scouts. Republican scouts are treated by some historians very critical, because the Romans regularly fell into enemies' ambushes⁴⁰. If such a unit had existed in 36 BC, then perhaps it belonged to Antony's army also in 32/31 BC. However, it is nothing more than speculation.

The reverse of Antony's coin includes three images of *speculatores*' signs (*signa*). All of them at the bottom of the shafts have images of warships' rams (*rostra*)⁴¹. It may suggest that Antony's *speculatores* were part of the naval forces but we do not know any other *speculatores navales* from the first century BC⁴². The inscription published in 1740 which have not survived to our times could be the exception. The publisher was Ludovico Antonius Muratorius, the author of *Novus Thesaurus Veterum Inscriptionum In Praecipuis Earumdem Collectionibus Hactenus Praetermissarum*⁴³. He claimed that the inscription was found in Italy in the area of agro Bojano. It was in possession of Marquard Guido and in the catalog of his collection from 1731 we can find information that the inscription was found near via Campana⁴⁴. Its content was as follows:

D(is) M(anibus) / M(arcus) Staberius M(arci) f(ilius) Quir(ina tribu) Lacer / coh(ortis) VI speculat(orum) class(is) misen(ensis) / v(ivos) fecit sibi et Staberiae veri/dianae matri [---] et L(uci) Stabe/rio Procillo filio dulcissimo / vix(it) ann(os) XII. m(enses) VII. d(ies) IIII. h(orae) II.

³⁸ Keppie 1984, 127.

³⁹ Sheldon 2005, 86–96. Cf. Austin, Rankov 1995, 53.

⁴⁰ Eg. Adcock 1940, 71; Goldsworthy 2003, 55. Cf. Goldsworthy 1996, 125–131.

⁴¹ I would like to thank Paweł Madejski for bringing my attention to this aspect.

⁴² Cf. Sander 1957; Starr 1960.

⁴³ Muratorius 1740, 855.

⁴⁴ Hessel 1731, 184.

In 1796, the inscription was quoted by Joseph Hilarius Eckhel in his description of Antony's coins⁴⁵. He thought Marcus Staberius Lacer had lived in the first century AD and served as a centurion of *speculatores* in VI cohort of *classis Misenensis*. We know that in the Imperial fleet was a rank called *centurio classicus*⁴⁶. If Eckhel was right, the first part of the inscription would be as follows:

M(arcus) Staberius M(arci) f(ilius) Quir(ina tribu) Lacer / [centurio] coh(ortis) VI speculat(or) class(is) misen(ensis).

It is also possible to read it in a different way:

M(arcus) Staberius M(arci) f(ilius) Quir(ina tribu) Lacer / [centurio] coh(ortis) VI speculat(or) class(is) misen(ensis).

In fact, whether Staberius served as a centurion in the Misenian fleet is of secondary importance. The key conclusion drawn from the inscription is that it may confirm the existence of *speculatores* in the Roman fleet. However, the inscription has not survived to our times so we cannot evaluate its authenticity. We do not even know to what period it can be dated. We should remember Antony's coin was discovered first, so the inscription could be made by a smart counterfeiter. Its content corresponds a bit too well with the legend of Antony's coin but it is not the ultimate argument.

The authors of ancient sources did not mention this type of units so we do not know what duties exactly it could perform. There are two possibilities. The first, which I regard as less likely, is that *speculatores* were Antony's guard during sea battles. However, we have no evidence that *speculatores* from 32/31 BC were any type of guard like Imperial *speculatores Augusti*. The second option is that Antony's *speculatores* were part of scout boats' crews and they perhaps looked like soldiers shown on the relief from Praeneste (now in the collection of the Musei Vaticani). We cannot exclude that on this relief we can see Antony's *speculatores* because the battering ram of the warship has the shape of a crocodile so it seems that it is one of the warships of the Egyptian-Roman fleet from 31 BC.

The similarity between Antony's *speculatores* and Imperial *milites classiarum* is not obvious. From the times of Tiberius, the status of Roman 'marines'

⁴⁵ Eckhel 1796, 53–55.

⁴⁶ Sander 1957, 355–357; Starr 1960, 57; Webster 1998, 166.

was definitely low. They were recruited among *peregrini* who received, after 26 years of service, the Latin rights⁴⁷. In AD 68, among the soldiers of *classis Misensis* there was created *legio I Adiutrix*⁴⁸, and in AD 69/70, among the soldiers of *classis Ravennas* there was created *legio II Adiutrix*⁴⁹. Initially, they were treated as units of inferior quality. But Silvio Panciera proved that during the reign of Augustus in the Roman fleet also served Roman citizens and therefore, the status of *militēs classarii* could be higher⁵⁰. It seems that in the early first century AD the service in the fleet was better evaluated than in the later years and Roman *nomina* of Staberius could accord with the character of his service.

All these questions show how little we know about the organization of the Republican fleets. Perhaps *speculatores* were present in them for some time. Caesar did not have such units during the sea battle with the Veneti (56 BC) and the siege of Massalia (49 BC), each time temporary changed ordinary soldiers into marines⁵¹. In this period, Rome did not have permanent fleet, so the creation of *speculatores navales* could be dated for the years after the death of Caesar, especially for 40–31 BC⁵². It is also probable that this type of units was present only in Antony's army and the existence of *speculatores navales* have ended with his defeat at Actium in 31 BC.

Scout boats were mentioned by Flavius Vegetius Renatus – the writer from the fourth century AD – but he did not use the term *speculatores* for the description of their crews⁵³. The presence of small, high-speed scout boats is necessary in every fleet but for the Imperial period we have no evidence that either they or soldiers serving on them were called *speculatores*. The sources on which Vegetius based in the fourth book of his *De Re Militari* are not important here⁵⁴. Vegetius applies the term *exploratio* to the activities of these boats:

*Scafae tamen maioribus liburnis exploratoriae sociantur, quae uicinos prope remiges in singulis partibus habeant, quas Britanni picatos uocant*⁵⁵.

⁴⁷ Starr 1960, 89–94; Watson 1982, 101–102; Le Bohec 2001, 101.

⁴⁸ Tac., *Hist.*, 1.6.2, 1.31.2.

⁴⁹ Tac., *Hist.*, 3.50–55; Cass. Dio, 55.24.3.

⁵⁰ Panciera 1964.

⁵¹ Caes., *BG*, 3.14.3–4, 3.15.1–2; *BC*, 1.57.1–2.

⁵² Similar suggestion was made by Austin and Rankov (1995, 189) but for *speculatores* in general, not for *speculatores navales*.

⁵³ See Gauld 1990. About equipment of Vegetius' marines: Veg. 4.44.46.

⁵⁴ See Sander 1956.

⁵⁵ Veg., 4.37.

And:

*Ne tamen exploratae naues candore prodantur, colore Veneto, qui marinis est fluctibus similis, uela tinguntur et funes, cera etiam, qua ungere solent naues, inficitur*⁵⁶.

But is it possible that *speculatores* served on *exploratae naues*? I hardly believe in this, but *speculatores* as scout boats/warships were known to Caesar:

*Quod cum animadvertisset Caesar, scaphas longarum navium, item speculatoria navigia militibus compleri iussit, et quos laborantes conspexerat, his subsidia submittebat*⁵⁷.

So, it was a term that at the end of the Republic has also been used in relation to the fleet! Antony may have taken the idea of creating this type of units from his former commander as well as other Caesarian officers. The identification of Antony's *speculatores* as marines is still not certain but passage taken from the *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* is very significant. The lost inscription mentioned by Muratorius in addition with the presence of scout boats/warships in fleet creates a consistent picture, which perhaps is the key to solving the mystery of Antony's *speculatores*.

In conclusion, we can choose one of the three most probable theories.

According to the first one, *speculatores* mentioned on Antony's coin were simply scouts composed of Roman soldiers which unlike Imperial *speculatores* have acted as a separate unit (cohort). They were so important that Antony decided to honor them by a unique type of coin. It is possible that their strong position in Antony's army was an effect of the Parthian campaign from 36 BC when the recognition was particularly important. Crassus had ignored it and lost. Antony had not made the same mistake but he also was not a triumphant.

According to the second theory, *speculatores* of 32/31 BC were bodyguards similar to *speculatores Augusti*. The sources do not give us any information about this kind of guard despite the fact that the ancient authors have mentioned Antony's praetorians several times⁵⁸. Despite this, we cannot exclude this hypothesis.

These two theories have one weak point: they do not explain the presence of *rostra* on Antony's coin. Such *signa* are known only from this emission. Be-

⁵⁶ Veg., 4.37.

⁵⁷ Caes., *BG*, 4.26.4.

⁵⁸ App., *BC*, 3.5.14; RRC 544/8; Durry 1938, 76–77.

fore 31 BC, Antony's soldiers had not fought at sea so it is impossible that *rostra* were placed there to commemorate a naval victory. It was a symbol clearly associated with the sea that indicates Antony's *speculatores* have had maritime connotations.

The third theory is closely related to the missing inscription published by Monterius. Antony's *speculatores* served – as Staberius – in the fleet. The possibility of the existence of *speculatores* in the fleet is also provided by the passage taken from the work of Caesar. They could be naval scouts, or they were used for other purposes as marines. *Rostra* on their standards were closely related to the nature of their service. Antony may have distinguished them because they were the only standing force composed of Roman citizens which served in the fleet. During sea battles, Republican commanders usually used ordinary legionaries as marines. Perhaps such *speculatores navales* as Staberius were shown on the relief from the Musei Vaticani.

Although in the light of the preserved information we cannot unambiguously resolve which of these theories is correct, it seems that the third one is the most likely. Antony's *speculatores* would be then the Roman soldiers serving on scout boats or reconnaissance warships. If the inscription of Staberius is authentic, it will show this custom was still present in the time of Augustus. Late Republican *speculatores* could be in Antony's army the elite force like *cohortes pretoriae* but with no doubt they must be so important for their leader to be honored by him with a different type of coins. After all, we may be sure that the roots of Imperial *speculatores* lay in the Republican military institutions which were common to Antony and Augustus.



Fig. 1.

Antony's denarius with the legend C(O)HORTIS SPECVLATORVM on the reverse, 32/31 B.C.

(RRC 544/12; The British Museum, London)



Fig. 2.
The relief from Praeneste (Musei Vaticani, Rome)

Streszczenie

Problem *speculatores* Marka Antoniusza

Na przełomie 32 i 31 roku p.n.e. mobilna mennica Marka Antoniusza wyemitowała serię monet przeznaczonych na opłacenie podległych mu sił zbrojnych. Na rewersach numizmatów umieszczono oznaczenie jednostek, którym wypłacono nimi *stipendium*: 23 legionów, kohort pretorskich i kohorty *speculatores*. W przypadku ostatniej z wymienionych jest to pierwsze uchwytnie źródłowo potwierdzenie istnienia tego typu oddziału jako niezależnej formacji, nieprzyporządkowanej do żadnego legionu. Wcześniejsze źródła, których autorzy stosowali zazwyczaj zamiennie terminy *speculatores* i *exploratores*, nie potwierdzają istnienia takich rozwiązań w uprzednich wiekach, natomiast w okresie cesarstwa *speculatores* bądź to pełnili funkcję zwiadowców w konkretnych legionach, bądź to wchodzili w skład otoczenia namiestników prowincji, bądź to tworzyli część gwardii cesarskiej.

W związku z tym względem *speculatores* Antoniusza nasuwają się trzy możliwe interpretacje.

Według pierwszej byli oni zwykłym oddziałem rozpoznawczym, który został uhonorowany odmiennym typem rewersu z uwagi na ważną rolę spełnianą w armii Antoniusza. Być może było to pochodną kampanii partyjskiej z 36 roku p.n.e., kiedy to rozpoznanie nabierało kluczowego znaczenia.

Druga interpretacja zmierza do uznania wspomnianych *speculatores* za oddział gwardii przybocznej Antoniusza, podobnie jak miało to miejsce w przypadku *speculatores Augusti* w okresie cesarstwa.

Żadna z nich nie wyjaśnia jednak tego, dlaczego w dolnej części ukazanych na rewersie znaków bojowych (*signa*) widnieją przedstawienia *rostra*.

Trzecia, najbardziej prawdopodobna opcja, polega na uznaniu *speculatores* Antoniusza za złożony z rzymskich żołnierzy oddział piechoty morskiej wchodzący w skład załóg łodzi lub okrętów zwiadowczych. Z taką interpretacją koresponduje zarówno treść niezachowanej do naszych czasów inskrypcji opublikowanej w 1740 roku przez Muratoriusa, jak i zastosowanie przez Cezara terminu *speculatores* wobec łodzi zwiadowczych. Pozwala to również wyjaśnić, dlaczego na rewersie opisywanej monety znalazły się *rostra*. Być może *speculatores* Antoniusza zostali nawet ukazani na słynnej płaskorzeźbie z Praeneste, znajdującej się obecnie w zbiorach Musei Vaticani. Faktem natomiast pozostaje, że choć jest to najbardziej spójna teoria dotycząca wyjaśnienia charakteru zagadkowego oddziału Antoniusza, to nie może być ona uznana za w pełni potwierdzoną.

