

SUBARMACHIUS, BACURIUS, AND THE *SCHOLA*
SCUTARIORUM SAGITTARIORUM

Our sole source for the late Roman officer Subarmachius is a notice in the *Suda* that has been identified as a fragment of the *History* by Eunapius of Sardis.¹ Unfortunately, because of its very nature, this notice has usually been interpreted in isolation, with the result that its potential contribution to our understanding of the history of the imperial bodyguard units of the later Roman empire, the *scholae palatinae*, has passed unnoticed. It is my intention here to attempt to rectify this situation by reexamining this notice within a fuller historical context. The notice runs as follows:

Σουβαρμάχιος. οὗτος τῶν δορυφόρων ἦν ἡγεμών, πιστότατος τῷ εὐνούχῳ Εὐτροπίῳ, εἶπερ τις ἄλλος, ἔπινε δὲ οἶνον πλείονα ἢ ὅσον ἡδύνατο χωρεῖν· ἀλλ' ὅμως τὰ περὶ γαστέρα διὰ συνήθειαν οὕτω καὶ γυμνασίαν ἰσχυράν καὶ νεανικὴν πάντα φέρειν ἐπὶ τὴν φυσικὴν τῶν ὑγρῶν ἔκκρισιν. ἀεὶ γοῦν ἦν, πεπωκώς τε καὶ οὐ πεπωκώς, μεθύων· τὴν δὲ μέθην παρεκάλυπτε σφαλερὸν διαβαίνων τοῖς ποσὶ, καὶ πρὸς τὴν πτῶσιν πολέμων ὦφ' ἡλικίας καὶ [διὰ νεότητα] συνιστάμενος. ἦν δὲ βασιλικοῦ μὲν γένους, Κόλχος ἀκριβῆς τῶν ὑπὲρ Φᾶσιν καὶ Θερμῶδοντα, τοξότης δὲ ἄριστος, εἰ γε μὴ κατετόξευεν αὐτὸν τὸ περιττὸν τῆς τρυφῆς.

Subarmachius. He was a leader of the guards, and most loyal of all to the eunuch Eutropius. He drank more wine than he could hold, but because this was his custom and because he took strong and active exercise, his stomach was able to accept and pass the liquid naturally. He was always intoxicated, whether he had been drinking or not, but his unsteady walk hid his drunkenness, and since his youth he resisted falling and held himself steady. He was of royal blood, a pure Colchian from beyond Phasis and Thermodon, and would have been an excellent archer, if his own decadence had not shot him down.

There is no problem identifying the period to which this short notice relates. The eunuch Eutropius is easily identifiable as the *praepositus sacri cubiculi* who was all-powerful in the East from the murder of the praetorian prefect Rufinus in November 395 until his own downfall in August 399.² However, the interpretation of Subarmachius' position under Eutropius (τῶν δορυφόρων ἦν ἡγεμών) is much more difficult. The standard prosopographical work for this period tentatively identifies Subarmachius as the eastern *comes domesticorum*. This identification has been followed by the only English translation of the fragments of Eunapius.³ Others have been more careful to preserve the vague nature of the original Greek statement, referring to Subarmachius as "le chef des gardes du corps," or "head of the imperial

1. *Suda* Σ 793; frag. 67.8 in *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire 2* [*FCH* 2], ed. R. C. Blockley (Liverpool, 1983), 104–6; frag. 77 in *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* 4, ed. C. Müller (Paris, 1874–85).

2. *PLRE* 2.440–444, s.v. Eutropius 1. A number of important studies of the court politics of Constantinople at this period have appeared recently. See A. Cameron, J. Long, and L. Sherry, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius*, *The Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 19 (Berkeley, 1993); also J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom* (Oxford, 1990).

3. *PLRE* 2.1037, s.v. Subarmachius; Blockley, *FCH* 2, 105.

bodyguard."⁴ However, all seem to understand that he was the senior commander of the whole imperial bodyguard, not just one of a number of officers in command of various individual units within the bodyguard. It is the latter possibility that I wish to highlight here.

Because Eunapius' *History* survives only in fragments, it is impossible to recover the full variety of terms he undoubtedly used to describe the office of *comes domesticorum*. We do know, however, that the sixth-century historian Zosimus depended very much upon the *History* of Eunapius for his own work, so much so that Photius claimed that one could not really say that Zosimus wrote a history, just that he copied that of Eunapius.⁵ Thus, the best indication of the variety of language with which Eunapius described the office of *comes domesticorum* is the language of Zosimus, until that point at least where Zosimus ceased to use the history of Eunapius as his main source.⁶ Fortunately, there already exists a short survey of the terms that Zosimus used to denote various senior officers, including the *comes domesticorum*.⁷ Hence, the manner in which Zosimus describes the father of the emperor Jovian, Varronianus (*HN* 3.30.1: τοῦ τῶν δομεστίκων ἡγουμένου τάγματος) suffices to show that had Eunapius wished to describe the *comes domesticorum* or some other officer of the *domestici*, he would have referred to the δομεστίκοι exactly as such rather than as δορυφόροι.⁸ Not only does our notice fail to describe Subarmachius as κόμης, but it also fails to describe the δομεστίκοι as such. The identification of Subarmachius as the eastern *comes domesticorum* is accordingly weakened.

The answer to the identification of Subarmachius' office lies in Eunapius' statement that he would have been an excellent archer if he had not drunk so much. Not all Roman troops were so trained and equipped, and the description of Subarmachius' skill is a clear indication that he commanded a specialist unit of *sagittarii*. Furthermore, his description as a most loyal aide to Eutropius suggests that he enjoyed relatively easy access to Eutropius, probably as an officer within the imperial bodyguard. We are fortunate, therefore, that the *Notitia Dignitatum*, which records the military forces of the eastern empire as they existed ca. 395, lists the titles of the seven *scholae palatinae* that served as the imperial bodyguard in the East.⁹ Most important in the present context is the existence of a *schola scutariorum sagittari-*

4. See F. Paschoud, "Ebria sobrietas: De quelques généraux amateurs de femmes et de vin," *Bonner Historia-Augusta-Colloquium 1984–85* (Bonn, 1987), 185–96, 187; D. Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity: A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia 550 BC–AD 562* (Oxford, 1994), 267.

5. Photius, *Bibl. Cod.* 98; Blockley, *FCH* 2, Test. 2, 4–5.

6. It has been argued that Eunapius was Zosimus' main source for Books 2–5.47. See R. T. Ridley, "Eunapius and Zosimus," *Helikon* 9/10 (1969/70): 574–92.

7. See R. T. Ridley, "The Fourth- and Fifth-Century Civil and Military Hierarchy in Zosimus," *Byzantion* 40 (1970): 91–104.

8. The other three instances where Zosimus refers to the *comes domesticorum* as such, in the cases of Salvius (*HN* 5.32.4), Vigilantius (*HN* 5.36.3) and Allobichus (*HN* 5.47.1), all fall within that section of his history where he seems to have used the work of Olympiodorus of Thebes as his main source. The continued use of the Greek δομεστίκοι, however, highlights the fact that the use of this term was found either acceptable or unavoidable by the classicizing Greek historians of late antiquity. There seems no obvious reason, then, why Eunapius would not have used this term had he wished to describe Subarmachius as the *comes domesticorum*.

9. On the original dates of composition of the two halves of the *Notitia Dignitatum* see, most recently, J. C. Mann, "The *Notitia Dignitatum*—Dating and Survival," *Britannia* 22 (1991): 215–19. The seven eastern *scholae palatinae* occur at *Not. Dig.*, *Or.* 11.4–10. The best treatment of the subject of the *scholae palatinae* remains that by D. Hoffmann, *Das spätromische Bewegungsheer und die Notitia Dignitatum* I, *Epigraphische Studien* 7 (Düsseldorf, 1969), 279–308.

orum marshalled among their number.¹⁰ It is my suggestion that Subarmachius is identifiable as the tribune of the *schola scutariorum sagittariorum* rather than as the eastern *comes domesticorum*.

Additional support for this identification can be found in the origin and background of Subarmachius. His description as a pure Colchian from beyond Phasis raises the possibility that he was an Iberian. Indeed, one is immediately reminded of Bacurius, an Iberian whose role as *tribunus sagittariorum* during the battle of Adrianople in 378 is specifically recorded by Ammianus Marcellinus.¹¹ It seems clear from the context, in the presence of the emperor Valens himself, and from Ammianus' normal habit of description, that Bacurius is identifiable as the tribune of the *schola scutariorum sagittariorum*.¹² The appointment of an Iberian, Subarmachius, to the command of the *schola scutariorum sagittariorum* has a precedent in the command by Bacurius of the exact same unit less than twenty years before. Indeed, the similarities do not stop here. According to the ecclesiastical historian Rufinus of Aquileia, Bacurius was of royal stock.¹³ Thus, two different persons, who both happened to be Iberians of royal stock, also both commanded the same unit within a space of approximately twenty years. One possibility is that they were close relatives.

The situation becomes still more interesting when we take into account what little we know of the careers of two other Iberians of royal stock who also happened to serve within the Roman army at the eastern court. The monophysite bishop and monk Peter the Iberian began his career as a royal hostage sent to Constantinople ca. 424 at the age of twelve. It was not until ca. 437 that he fled to Jerusalem to become a monk.¹⁴ According to the Syriac historian Zachariah the Rhetor, Peter, or rather Nabarnugius as he was known before his subsequent baptism in Jerusalem, received a military commission while still a hostage at Constantinople.¹⁵ In the words of a modern Latin translation, he served as *equis regiis praepositus*.¹⁶ According to the most recent commentator, Peter "held an honorific title, perhaps tribune of a *schola* of the *domestici equites*."¹⁷ There seems no clear reason, however, why this should have been so, certainly not if we accept the identification of his maternal grandfather, Bacurius, as the aforementioned Bacurius who served as *tribunus sagittariorum*.¹⁸ The *scholae palatinae* were all cavalry units. The description of Peter as *equis regiis praepositus*, therefore, could refer equally well to his command of any of these units, including the *schola scutariorum sagittariorum* that his grandfather had commanded earlier. There seems to be no good reason why Peter's title

10. *Not. Dig., Or.* 11.7.

11. Amm. Marc. 31.12.16.

12. See R. I. Frank, *Scholae Palatinae: The Palace Guards of the Later Roman Empire*, Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome 23 (Rome, 1969), 71.

13. See Rufinus, *HE* 1.11, where he refers to the *fidelissimus vir Bacurius, gentis ipsius rex et apud nos domesticorum comes*; also Socrates, *HE* 1.20, where (quoting Rufinus as his source) he refers to Bacurius as βασιλίσκος Ἰβήρων.

14. *PLRE* 2.867, s.v. Petrus 13.

15. Zachariah, *HE* 3.4.

16. See E. W. Brooks, *Historia Ecclesiastica Zachariae Rhetori Vulgo Adscripta*, CSCO 87 (= *Scriptores Syri* 41) (Louvain, 1924), 108.

17. Braund, *Georgia*, 285, simply following the entry at *PLRE* 2.867.

18. See Stemma 49 at *PLRE* 2.1338 where Peter's mother, Bacurduktia, is identified as the daughter of Bacurius. His father was Bosmarius, a nephew of Pharasmanes who also served in the Roman army. Does it not seem probable, therefore, that Bosmarius himself also served time within the Roman forces?

ought to be considered any more honorific than that of either his grandfather or Subarmachius. One must be careful not to interpret the status of hostages in an entirely negative manner.¹⁹

The final Iberian whose position we must consider is Pharasmanes, the brother of the paternal grandmother of Peter the Iberian, Osduktia.²⁰ He apparently held the rank of *magister militum* at the time of his flight from the court of Arcadius when he was accused of adultery with the empress Eudoxia. This locates his command during the period from the accession of Arcadius in 395 until the death of Eudoxia in October 404.²¹ It does not strike one as particularly unusual that he should have reached such a senior position. His career can be compared to that of Bacurius. Following the position of *tribunus sagittariorum*, he was *dux Palaestinae*, then *comes domesticorum*. Unfortunately, it is difficult to reconstruct Bacurius' career in full. It is known, for example, that he fought at the battle of Frigidus in 394, but his exact rank at that time remains uncertain. Some have assumed that he fought there as *magister militum vacans*, but others have doubted this.²² Whatever the case, his rise to the position of *comes domesticorum* at least suggests that the position of *magister militum* lay within the reach of men like Pharasmanes. The question that most concerns us, then, is the path by which Pharasmanes reached the rank of *magister militum*. Since the evidence of Ammianus Marcellinus would seem to suggest that many *magistri equitum* or *peditum* had first commanded one of the *scholae palatinae*, one must assume that the same was most likely true also in the case of Pharasmanes.²³ So which *schola palatina* did he most likely command?

It is appropriate at this point to recap our findings. Two Iberians of royal stock seem to have commanded the *schola scutariorum sagittariorum*, Bacurius in 378 and Subarmachius ca. 395/99. Pharasmanes, a relation by marriage to Bacurius, also most probably commanded a *schola palatina* earlier in his career. Peter, the grandson of Bacurius, commanded a *schola palatina* ca. 437. An obvious suggestion is that they were all tribunes of one and the same *schola* at different stages in its history. Pharasmanes, for example, may well have commanded the *schola scutariorum sagittariorum* for several years during the interval between Bacurius and Subarmachius. Certainly, the monopoly of the command of a *schola* in this manner by one ethnic group, or extended family even, would have been unusual.²⁴ The *schola scu-*

19. See D. Braund, *Rome and the Friendly King: The Character of Client Kingship* (London, 1984), 12–16.

20. *PLRE* 2.872, s.v. Pharasmanes 2.

21. On Eudoxia in general, see K. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity*, *The Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 3 (Berkeley, 1982), 48–78.

22. See, most recently, T. S. Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome: A Study of Roman Military Policy and the Barbarians, ca. 374–425 AD* (Bloomington, 1994), 106, where he claims that Bacurius “seems to have become *magister militum vacans* (a special command limited to a specific campaign).” For a contrary view, see G. Zecchini, *Rufino di Concordia e il suo tempo*, *Antichità altoadriatiche* 31 (Udine, 1987), p. 35, n. 24.

23. E.g., Malarichus, a Frank, and a former tribune of the *schola armaturarum* (Amm. Marc. 15.5.6), was appointed *magister equitum* by Jovian in late 363 (Amm. Marc. 25.8.11). Arintheus seems to have replaced Malarichus as tribune of the *schola armaturarum* (Amm. Marc. 15.4.10), and he was *magister peditum* by 367 at the latest (Amm. Marc. 27.5.4).

24. Procopius, *Anec.* 24.16, claims that the *scholae palatinae* had been recruited entirely of Armenians, a misunderstanding that probably relates to a period subsequent to that with which we are concerned. This claim does reveal, however, that as time passed *scholarii* were recruited from an increasingly narrow range of sources, so that the monopoly of the command of a *schola* by a single family became a much stronger possibility than had originally been the case.

tariorum sagittariorum was somewhat unusual, however, in that it was one of two specialist *scholae palatinae* at the eastern court that were not matched by similar units at the western court, the other being the *schola scutariorum clibanariorum*. Furthermore, although its date of origin seems to have been later than that of the *schola scutariorum clibanariorum*, whose existence as early as 330 is proven by some legislation of Constantine I, one may detect some similarities in the origin and purpose of each.²⁵

The *clibanarii* were heavily armored cavalry, whose use was associated in Roman minds with their eastern neighbor Persia.²⁶ A Persian prince by the name of Hormisdas defected to the Romans under Constantine I.²⁷ Since he is associated with the person of Constantius II himself during the latter's visit to Rome in 357, when *clibanarii* also were present, it is tempting to identify him as tribune of the *schola scutariorum clibanariorum*.²⁸ The circumstances surrounding the death of the emperor Julian in 363 are equally suggestive. Hormisdas and his men were engaged in this skirmish during which the *magister officiorum* Anatolius was also killed.²⁹ The importance of this lies in the fact that the *magister officiorum* was the senior commander to whom all of the tribunes of the *scholae palatinae* were responsible. Furthermore, there were present two units of *scutarii* that seem identifiable as the *schola scutariorum prima* and the *schola scutariorum secunda*. Thus, the presence of Hormisdas at this same skirmish suggests that he too was commander of a *schola palatina*, probably still the *schola scutariorum clibanariorum*.³⁰ The two specialist *scholae* both served to provide honorable military positions for eastern nobility.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the history of the *schola scutariorum clibanariorum* is that it does not seem to have experienced the division that was the lot of the other *scholae palatinae*, most probably in 364 when the emperors Valentinian and Valens shared their forces.³¹ Why not? *Clibanarii* had been used in the West for many years previously.³² Clearly, there was no sound military reason that prevented the original *schola scutariorum clibanariorum*, divided between the separate bodyguards of Valens and Valentinian, from being stationed in East and West respectively. The answer lies, perhaps, in the very nature of this unit, whose primary purpose was diplomatic rather than military. There was no point in a western emperor, Valentinian, receiving a part of, or further developing, a unit whose

25. See C.Th. 14.17.9–10 on the right to food rations of members of the *scholae scutariorum et scutariorum clibanariorum* at Constantinople.

26. In general, see J. W. Eadie, "The Development of Roman Mailed Cavalry," *JRS* 57 (1967): 161–73; also, more importantly, Hoffman, *Bewegungsheer*, 265–77.

27. Zosimus, *HN* 2.27. See *PLRE* 1.443, s.v. Hormisdas 2.

28. On the *clibanarii*, Amm. Marc. 16.10.8; on Hormisdas, Amm. Marc. 16.10.16.

29. Zosimus, *HN* 3.29.2–3.

30. See D. Woods, "Ammianus and Some *Tribuni Scholarum Palatarinarum* c. AD 354–64," *CQ*, forthcoming, for a fuller attempt to identify the tribunes of the various *scholae palatinae* during this period.

31. On this event see R. Tomlin, "*Seniores-Iuniores* in the Late Roman Army," *AJP* 93 (1972): 253–78. The publication by T. Drew-Bear, "A Fourth-Century Latin Soldier's Epitaph at Nakolea," *HSCP* 81 (1977): 257–84, of an inscription that attests the use of the title *seniores* in 356 proves merely that some units were divided into *seniores-iuniores* pairs before 364, but it remains probable that the majority of such pairs were created in that year. See also R. Scharf, "*Seniores-Iuniores* und die Heeresteilung des Jahres 364," *ZPE* 89 (1991): 265–72.

32. Amm. Marc. 16.12.22; Nazarius, *Pan. Lat.* 4(10).22. On the terms *clibanarii* and *catafractarii*, see M. Speidel, "*Catafractarii Clibanarii* and the Rise of the Later Roman Mailed Cavalry: A Gravestone from Claudopolis in Bithynia," *Epigraphica Anatolica* 4 (1984): 151–56.

primary purpose had always been to receive refugee Persian nobles and keep them easily accessible to the emperor should political developments so require.³³ On the other hand, Valens had every need to maintain such a unit, as there remained problems with Persia throughout and beyond his reign.³⁴

It may be, therefore, that the primary purpose of the *schola scutariorum sagittariorum* was diplomatic rather than military. Indeed, it is no surprise that there is no evidence to support its existence before the reign of Valens. Since at least two of its tribunes seem to have been Iberian (including its earliest known tribune, Bacurius), it is tempting to date its creation to a period of Roman involvement in the politics of Iberia. Valens' reign witnessed exactly such an involvement. The Persian king Sapor drove the Roman appointee Sauromaces from the throne of Iberia ca. 368, and replaced him with Apsacures.³⁵ Valens responded forcefully and sent twelve legions under the command of the *comes et dux Armeniae* Terentius in order to reinstate Sauromaces.³⁶ Sauromaces and Apsacures were cousins, and Apsacures managed to persuade Sauromaces that they should divide Iberia between them. It is of particular interest to us that Apsacures claimed he could not withdraw or go over to the Roman side because his son Ultra was being held as a hostage by the Persians. It is difficult to believe that Sauromaces was not in a similar position, with the Romans holding his relatives. Thus, it may be that it was relatives of Sauromaces, and perhaps of his chief supporters as well, who constituted the original group from which the *schola scutariorum sagittariorum* was formed. When Sauromaces returned to Iberia ca. 370, they were left behind as hostages for his good conduct, and their martial skills were honorably but effectively employed.

A final point might be made concerning the influence and achievements of Subarmachius. There has been a great deal of emphasis recently upon the Germanic or Gothic infiltration of the late Roman army, and the extent to which this influenced the different histories of the two halves of the empire. In this respect, the strong non-Germanic ethnic identity of two *scholae palatinae*, an Iberian *schola scutariorum sagittariorum* and a Persian *schola scutariorum clibanariorum*, both present at the eastern court only, may have been of decisive influence in shaping the different fortunes of East and West. One thinks, in particular, of the defense by the eastern *scholae palatinae* of the imperial court and Constantinople against the forces of the Goth Gainas in the summer of 400.³⁷ There were undoubtedly Goths present in the *scholae palatinae*, but their numbers may have been exaggerated somewhat for polemical reasons. Whatever the case, I suggest that these two *scholae* had a decisively steadying influence upon the loyalty of the other *scholae*. Even more intrigu-

33. The conduct of Rome's relations with Persia seems to have been unique in that hostages were received only for a short duration, and in exchange for Roman hostages, as temporary guarantees of truce during preliminary negotiations. See A. D. Lee, "The Role of Hostages in Roman Diplomacy with Sasanian Persia," *Historia* 40 (1991): 366–74. Persian hostages as such would not have been available to fill the ranks of the *schola scutariorum clibanariorum*. The leading families, however, of those lands that lay on the borders between the Roman and Persian empires, were required to submit hostages for service at the imperial court (Amm. Marc. 18.6.20). These probably supplied the bulk of the members of the *schola scutariorum clibanariorum*.

34. See, in brief, R. C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy: Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius*, Arca 30 (Leeds, 1992): 33–39.

35. Amm. Marc. 27.12.4.

36. Amm. Marc. 27.12.16.

37. See Cameron, Sherry, and Long, *Barbarians*, 207–17.

ing is the statement by Eunapius that Subarmachius was most loyal to Eutropius. It was precisely Gainas who had engineered the downfall and death of Eutropius during the autumn of 399. Perhaps Subarmachius revenged the death of his patron when he was instrumental in the massacre of Goths within Constantinople and in the closure of the city to Gainas during the summer of 400. Such was the behavior that merited his description in the *History* by Eunapius of Sardis from which the surviving statement appears to have been abstracted.

To conclude, then, the fragment of Eunapius' *History* that is our sole source for Subarmachius makes an important contribution to our knowledge of the involvement by non-Romans in the late Roman army. It would seem that Subarmachius was the tribune of the *schola scutariorum sagittariorum* and that he played an important role in the defense of Constantinople against Gainas in 400. The fact that the only other tribune of this *schola* whom we can identify was also an Iberian royal suggests a special association between the ruling dynasty of Iberia and this unit. This association may provide an important clue concerning both the date when this *schola* was established and its original purpose.

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