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### *The Alano-Gothic cavalry charge in the battle of Adrianopole*



The battle of Adrianople between the Roman army of the emperor Valens and Gothic troops in AD 378 was an époque-making event<sup>1</sup>. Despite this, the course of the action and the strength of the armies in the battle itself is a problem to decipher, because of the lack of necessary concrete data in our one de facto source, the *History* of Ammianus Marcellinus. Ammianus was a well educated<sup>2</sup> staff officer and was competent in battle tactics, although he had not had any actual experience on the field<sup>3</sup>. Ammianus presents each battle individually, giving details of the action<sup>4</sup>. He “limits his narrative to the essential, to those factors which bear directly upon the result of each operation”<sup>5</sup>. Therefore he does not provide any secondary details. There are many modern historians, who describe and analyse the battle of Adrianople. Most of them follow the idea that there was only one charge of the Gothic cavalry in this battle and that it was organized from the right wing of the Gothic formation against the left Roman wing<sup>6</sup>. In this article we try to disprove this view<sup>7</sup>.

#### 1. On the Numbers

The number of Goths was of course very big, otherwise there would be no need

<sup>1</sup> E.g. PAVAN 1979; WOLFRAM 1990, p. 137; MONDE BYZANTIN 2004, p. 13; LENSKI 1997.

<sup>2</sup> CRUMP 1975, pp. 70 sqq., 128 sqq.; UDAL'COVA 1984, p. 124 sqq.

<sup>3</sup> AUSTIN 1979, pp. 155-156, 162-163.

<sup>4</sup> CRUMP 1975, pp. 79-80.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. NICASIE 1998, p. 251.

<sup>7</sup> The preliminary results of this work are published in SHCHUKIN 2005, pp. 258-263. Here we are glad to express our gratitude to Dr. Valerij P. Nikonorov (Institute of the History of Material Culture, Russian Academy of Sciences) for help in discussing the problematics and in supplying us with new literature.

to get help from the western empire including the western emperor himself and to call up many reservists and regional troops into the mobile army<sup>8</sup>.

The total number of Goths who crossed Danube may have been up to several hundred thousands (women and children included). Sites of Chernjakhov-Sintana-de-Mures culture, which is supposed to be the culture of the Goths, are more common than the sites of any other archaeological culture on the territory of the Ukraine, Moldavia and Valachia. Only those sites given archaeological dating run to some 5 thousands<sup>9</sup>. They are roughly as common as the sites of the Eneolithic Tripolye-Cucuteni culture (ca. 4000-2500 BC). During our field explorations in Moldavia and Ukraine in practically every field it was possible to find fragments of Chernjakhov pottery. Taking into account the duration of the period of the Chernjakhov culture existed (ca. AD 280-420), we can conclude that in the period of Chernjakhov culture the density of the population was one of the highest in the history of these lands. To claim that there were one or two millions inhabitants in the territory of today's Romania, Moldavia and Ukraine in this period would be not exaggeration. And a considerable part of this population came to the Roman soil while fleeing from the Huns. That is why we are not convinced by traditional<sup>10</sup> modern scepticism which reduces the number of the Goths<sup>11</sup>. In such a context the figure given by Eunapius (200000)<sup>12</sup> would be fitting or even modest. Given that the traditional proportion of warriors to the whole population was 1:5 in primitive society, we can deduce the number of Gothic warriors was as great as 40000. If there were more Goths than the 200000 in the Balkans, the size of the Gothic military force may have been even bigger. In any case not all Gothic menfolk were present on the battlefield on 9th August 378: some were ill, wounded or absent. But there is a big probability that most of the Gothic armed forces were assembled in the camp of Frithigern. There was strategic and tactical necessity for Frithigern to gather all Goths in one camp before the battle of Adrianople: the Roman attacks carried out by Sebastianus were forcing the Gothic forces to come together for self defence<sup>13</sup>. And more: besides the Goths there were also some Alans, Iranian nomads who were already partly Gothicized.

The big armies of modern times could be a good parallel here. The most convenient is the period before the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century, when technical progress changed the role of the cavalry. That is why the battles of World War I are not good example<sup>14</sup>. Well, Napoleon entered Russia on 12<sup>th</sup> (24<sup>th</sup>) June, 1812 with 444000 warriors in 5 columns

<sup>8</sup> Amm. 31, 12, 1; Eunap., fr. 46.

<sup>9</sup> SHCHUKIN 2005, p. 162.

<sup>10</sup> Following GROSSE 1920, p. 254; DELBRÜCK 1994, p. 292.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. NICASIE 1998, p. 245; HEATHER 2006, p. 182.

<sup>12</sup> Eunap., fr. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Amm. 31, 11, 5.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. HEATHER 1991, p. 147 nt. 56.

(32000, 218000, 82000, 78000 and 34000). On the battlefield of Borodino on 26th August (7th September) there were 135000 soldiers under Napoleons command, the main front line being ca. 5 km. Despite enormous logistic difficulties thanks to good organization it was possible to operate with such multitudes assembled in one place.

It is by no means possible to transfer this model directly into the late Roman realities of the barbarian world. The barbarians did not need many integral parts of civilized military life such as a regular food supply, sources of drinking water, medical treatment, sanitary arrangements, good roads, equipped night quarters. That is why the well highly sponsored criticisms by civilized opponents (e.g. Delbrück) of the classical tradition of big barbarian hordes invading the Empire seems odd. In any case it is clear that for Goths it was not difficult to concentrate in one place for a period of time some e.g. 40 000 Gothic families (ca. 200 000 people), who need a camping ground of ca. 1 x 0, 6 km. and a minimum of 4000 wagons for the transportation. The same camp in the form of a circle ca. 750 m. in diameter would have a circumference of around 2,2 km., which would allow these wagons with their oxen to be put in roughly three lines. They would need some more territory for gatherings, keeping the horses, fireplaces and toilets, but it does not extend this circle too much. This human population would need some 700 m<sup>2</sup> of drinking water per day (which is ca. 0, 5 m<sup>2</sup> per minute), which could be supplied by one good well. The animals (oxen, horses) would need some water too. One has to remember that the Gothic and Alanic horses were accustomed to eating grass: these horses had no need to eat «as much grain as a man»<sup>15</sup> as they were animals from the steppes (cf. Mauric. 11, 2).

Roman procuratores saw one Gothic detachment some days before the battle, which they supposed to be 10 000 strong. Ammianus writes (31, 12, 3) that the scouts made an error, but it is very difficult to understand exactly what the error was: cum barbari... stationem peterent Nicen, incertum quo errore procuratoribus omnem illam multitudinis partem, quam viderant, in numero decem milium esse firmantibus, imperator... occurrere festinabat. Did they make a mistake in calculating the barbarians or by not observing other partes multitudinis? If we are to take this text in a literal sense we should conclude, that just one part of the Gothic army was bigger than 10 000. And more: Ammianus is writing about a Gothic group which was supposed to be 10 000 strong, but there is no data about the composition of this group: whether there were only warriors or if their families were included, as is accepted without question by some scholars<sup>16</sup>. In any case it does not signify that the Gothic infantry in the battle only numbered 10 000 or less, as some modern commentators suppose: the Roman scouts only saw what it was possible to see, they did not see all the Gothic forces<sup>17</sup>. As Ammianus writes, it is clear that this figure was wrongly

<sup>15</sup> BURNS 1973, p. 341.

<sup>16</sup> RICHARDOT 2001, p. 280.

<sup>17</sup> AUSTINRANKOV 1995, pp. 242-243.

interpreted as the strength of all Gothic forces present in this region. In any case, there were more than 10 000 Gothic warriors. It is interesting, as Delbrück ascertained, that until the close contact with Gothic forces on the day of the battle, Valens was sure, that he was much stronger than the enemy, otherwise it would be impossible to interpret how the Roman army acted. According to Delbrück, may be only after coming into close contact with the enemy did Valens realize, that the real number of the Goths was bigger than 10 000: his exploratores could not calculate the exact number of the enemy, but the size of Gothic camp on the hills was too big for 10 000 warriors. Having accepted such a hypothesis, one can explain why Ammianus does not give us the real number of the Goths and only says that they numbered more than 10 000. That explanation ruins Delbrück's hypothesis that the main cause of Roman defeat was not Gothic superiority but Valens' hesitation. And more: even in modern times not only is military intelligence incapable of calculating the size of the enemy, but also of locating the enemy as well. A good example here is the fact, that after the battle of Borodino 1812 and the manoeuvre near Tarutino of Russian army led by Kutuzov, Napoleon had no information about the position of enemy for several weeks!

To summarize: there may have been 40 000 Gothic warriors or even more in the battle of Adrianople.

The overall strength of Romans in the battle is also very debated. Magister peditum Sebastianus attacked plundering Goths with *trecentenis militibus per singulos numeros lectis* (Amm. 31, 11, 2) some days before the battle. It is clear, that these Roman forces are the same as the 2000 well trained recruits, picked out from different regiments by Sebastianus according to other source<sup>18</sup>. By dividing this number by the 300 mentioned by Ammianus modern scholars, we get ca. 7 infantry regiments<sup>19</sup>. But from this it is impossible, as correctly noted by Angliviel de la Beaumelle<sup>20</sup> to deduce the strength of the whole infantry under the command of magister *peditum per Orientem*. According to Zosimus, the real goal of Sebastianus' action was not to pick up some good young soldiers from each regiment, but to assemble 2000 men. But what is clear here it is the hypothetical minimal size of each unit, which could not contain more than one third of the recruits and most likely not more than a quarter. In any case there were more than 7 infantry regiments (minimum 700-1200 soldiers in each regiment) under the command of the *magister militum Orientis*.

It is very difficult to define the extent of the Roman losses in the battle. 39 high officers perished as did two thirds of the army and the result was similar to that of the battle of Cannae<sup>21</sup>. There is indirect evidence of these losses in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, where

<sup>18</sup> Eunap. apud Zos. 4, 23, 2-4.

<sup>19</sup> E.g. RICHARDOT 2001, p. 281: "le *comitatus* oriental".

<sup>20</sup> SABBAAH - ANGLIVIEL DE LA BEAUMELLE 2002, p. 276 nt. 499; cf. PASCHOUD 1979, p. 380.

<sup>21</sup> Amm. 31, 13, 18-19.

according to Hoffmann<sup>22</sup> the results of Adrianople are to be ascribed to the absence of 16 *juniores* units in the eastern army: 2 *vexillationes*, 9 *legiones* and 5 *auxilia palatina*: *equites Germaniciani*-*equites armigeri*, *Martenses-Solenses*, *Divitenses-Tungrecani*, *Menapii-Nervii*, *Moesiaci*, *Armigeri defensores*, *Constantini*, *Eruli*, *Britones-Atecotti*, *Defensores Vindices*. If we are to take the size of each unit to be 500-1200 we get 8000-19 200 soldiers. Of course not all the soldiers from these 16 units perished in the battle, but there were also losses in other units.

We think the historians are right who propose that the Roman army at Adrianople numbered 30 000-60 000 men and the losses up to one seventh of the whole *comitatus*<sup>23</sup>. The schemes accepting the size of the Roman army at Adrianople as 10 000-18 000<sup>24</sup> have more methodological significance: indeed, there is no danger of "gonfler" the Gothic forces too much as Angliviel de la Beaumelle fears<sup>25</sup>. As a result we can conclude that there were some 40 000-60 000 (or even more) Gothic warriors and some 30 000-60 000 Roman soldiers at the battle of Adrianople, the Roman losses amounting to some 20 000-40 000 souls.

## 2. On the Distance to the Battlefield

The battlefield is located by all modern commentators 8-12 Roman miles (= 12-18 km) to the north, north-east or east of Edirne/Odrin/Adrianopolis.

Indeed, Goths were moving from Yambol/Cabyle, located to the north<sup>26</sup> to the Adrianople, but then, after coming 15 miles (= 22,5 km.) on the way to Adrianople and being frightened by a possible Roman attack, they turned to Nike (*metuentes eruptionem per devia ... stationem peterent Nicen*: Amm. 31, 12, 3). This fortress is not far from Adrianople near the road from Melanthias and Constantinople<sup>27</sup>. There is no agreement among modern scholars as to the location of Nike<sup>28</sup>. The majority of modern commentators place this town 25 km. from the modern town of Havsa, which was also known as Ostudizum in Roman times<sup>29</sup>, some distance to the north of the main Constantinopolis-Hadrianopolis

<sup>22</sup> HOFFMANN 1969, pp. 449-457.

<sup>23</sup> STEIN 1928, p. 292 nt. 4; JONES 1964, p. 1425; HOFFMANN 1969, p. 444; WANKE 1988, p. 344; WOLFRAM 1990, p. 131.

<sup>24</sup> GROSSE 1920, p. 254; AUSTIN 1979, p. 78; HEATHER 1991, pp.146-147; NICASIE 1998, p. 247; DELBRÜCK 1994, pp. 291-294; RICHARDOT 2001, p. 282.

<sup>25</sup> SABBAAH-ANGLIVIEL DE LA BEAUMELLE 2002, p. 277 nt. 506 cf. nt. 508.

<sup>26</sup> Amm. 31, 11, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Amm. 31, 11, 1-2.

<sup>28</sup> OBERHUMMER 1956, c. 284; SABBAAH-ANGLIVIEL DE LA BEAUMELLE 2002, p. 275 nt. 497.

<sup>29</sup> JUDEICH 1891, p. 9; WANKE 1988, pp. 41-42; TALBERT 2000, map 51.

road. Another location is some 10-15 km. to the east of Adrianople which is not proven by any feasible analyses. Nike is also given a third location to the north of Adrianople<sup>30</sup>, but this hypothesis is extremely weak. It is clear from the text of Ammianus, that the Goths did not reach Nike, because they only *peterent*, 'made their way towards' Nike. It is not clear why the Goths were frightened or what this supposed Roman attack, *eruptio per devia* was, 'une attaque surprise par des voies de traverse'<sup>31</sup>, 'ein Ausfall über das unwegsame Gelände'<sup>32</sup>, 'a sally'<sup>33</sup>, 'napadenie v tesninax'<sup>34</sup>. In any case Goths went off the direct route from Cabyle to Adrianople. How this manoeuvre could allow them to avoid Roman attack is not clear. Maybe they wanted to escape from big roads and from the area under the Roman scouts control. Maybe they also wanted to threaten the Roman rear communications with all their forces<sup>35</sup> as they already tried some days ago<sup>36</sup>. *Eruptio per devia* could be 'charge by the terrain without ways': *devius* 'ausserhalb der Strasse liegend, wohin keine Strasse führt' (GEORGES c.2118). Maybe being on the open terrain the Goths were frightened of possible Roman attacks from any side not protected by the high ground. In any case it is clear that the words *metuentes eruptionem per devia* are only Ammianus' explanation of the Goths' movement. And what is obvious here is the fact that the Goths went off the direct way from Cabyle to Adrianople in the direction of Nike.

In the meantime the main Roman army came to Nike from Constantinople on 11<sup>th</sup> June via Melanthias<sup>37</sup>. From Nike a detachment of 2000 was sent under the command of Sebastianus. Sebastianus won a battle. Then, according to the hypothesis of Judeich the main army with the emperor himself went from Nike (not from Melanthias, as in the text of Ammianus 31, 12, 1) to reach Adrianople. At that moment Goths were reported by *exploratores* as trying to bar the Romans' supply route. That is why a detachment of Roman cavalry and some infantry bowmen were sent to the nearest pass to place it under Roman control. Having come to Adrianople the main army left their transport and emperor's high *comitatus* there<sup>38</sup> and then (maybe after a movement in the wrong direction, as Delbrück supposed) travelled 8 miles or hours in the early morning- midday until they had their first contact with the enemy<sup>39</sup>: in the MSS and early editions<sup>40</sup> there is only the reading

<sup>30</sup> SEECK 1923, pp. 115, 471-474, nt. 472; WOLFRAM 1990, p. 131.

<sup>31</sup> SABBAAH-ANGLIVIEL DE LA BEAUMELLE 2002, p. 139.

<sup>32</sup> SEYFARTH 1983, p. 283.

<sup>33</sup> ROLFE 1982, p. 463.

<sup>34</sup> KULAKOVSKIJSOJNI 1994, p. 513.

<sup>35</sup> SEYFARTH 1983, p. 365 nt. 125.

<sup>36</sup> Amm. 31, 12, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Amm. 31, 11, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Amm. 31, 12, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Amm. 31, 12, 11.

<sup>40</sup> Fuldensis Vat.1873, Accursius, Gelenius<sup>2</sup>.

*octavo* 'at the eighth (stone)', but many modern editors make conjectures by adding *hora* and changing the masculine to feminine to get the meaning of 'at the eighth hour'<sup>41</sup>. The reading *octava hora* is rejected by Blomgren.

According to Hydatius the battlefield is located 12 m.p.<sup>42</sup> (18 km.) from Adrianople: *Valente VI et Valentiniano II. <...> Et ipso anno profectus est Valens Aug. ex urbe ad fossatum die III idus Junias: et pugna magna fuit cum Romanis et Gothicis a milliario XII ab Hadrianopoli, die V idus Augusti* (Hydat., *fasti* ad a. 378). By taking this into account we can conclude, that either *octavo* in Ammianus text means 'at the eighth hour', or the battle took place between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> stones. The situation would be more clear if we could suppose, that the Romans were at the 8<sup>th</sup> stone, when they saw the Gothic camp, but the battle itself took place (and the camp was) at the 12<sup>th</sup> stone<sup>43</sup>. But there are the words of Ammianus, that after having been seen by the Romans the barbarians sang their traditional song and then were scared by Romans rattling their weapons. Therefore it is clear: the Romans were relatively close to the Gothic camp at that moment and not at the distance of 6 km. To conclude: either one of the figures is wrong, or we would have to understand them in another way, - e.g. the first contact was at circa 12-13 km., but then the fighting sides moved some 4-5 km. Further to the north, but there is no word about this in the text of Ammianus. The problem does not yet seem to have been solved<sup>44</sup>.

### 3. On the Roman Army's Approach to the Gothic Camp

The Romans of course knew the way to the Gothic camp<sup>45</sup> because at Adrianople there was an embassy to Valens from Fritigern led by a priest. But maybe they did not know the exact distance to and the position of the Gothic camp: the Gothic mounted patrols made it impossible to carry out reconnaissance at a close distance. First, what the Roman army saw upon their first contact, were the wagons of the Goths. The scouts (*exploratores*) reported that the wagons formed a circle (Amm. 31, 12, 11). And it was at a short distance away, because the Romans heard Gothic the song right away. Thus, the Romans saw the Gothic wagons suddenly and it was not possible for the main Roman forces to see the whole Gothic camp, but only the *exploratores* could determine its form. From this we can suppose, that the Roman army went up a hill on the way, where they suddenly saw the wagons from, but at this moment the Romans found themselves at a

<sup>41</sup> Cf. WANKE 1988, pp. 216-217.

<sup>42</sup> Wrongly by F. Runkel: 11 m.p. (RUNKEL 1903, p. 37 nt. 2).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. WANKE 1988, pp. 215-217.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. WANKE 1988, pp. 216-217.

<sup>45</sup> The same idea: NICASIE 1998, p. 244.



lower point than the Gothic wagons. That is that the Gothic emplacement was on a hill or some high point. This is supported by one of our sources (Sozom. 6, 40, 2). The words ἐν ὄσφραλει χωρίῳ mean that the Goths were on a hill. That is why the Romans could not see the whole camp and therefore could not calculate the whole number of the enemy. The march order of the Roman army was traditional, as far as we can see it from Ammianus. The *exploratores* went first, then the right wing cavalry followed by the guards, the emperor himself and his general staff, then went the infantry and at the end of the column the left wing cavalry. The Romans attacked the enemy without having prepared their own laager and also without full battle formation<sup>46</sup>.

When the generals began to form the line, the right wing cavalry was put ahead (*anteposito dextro cornu equitum primo*: Amm. 31, 12, 11), certainly to protect the infantry line, which was retarding (*subsidebat*). While protecting the forming centre and the left wing, the right wing cavalry must have slowly moved to its own position on the right wing, if it was not being from the very beginning. The correct translation of this phrase is very significant: *et anteposito dextro cornu equitum primo peditatus pars maxima subsidebat*. There are different translations: 'l'aile droite de la cavalerie fut placée devant en première ligne, la plus grande partie des fantassins étaient disposés en soutien'<sup>47</sup>, 'Auf dem rechten Flügel standen die Reiter im ersten Treffen, hinter ihnen machte ein Teil des Fußvolkes halt'<sup>48</sup>, 'the cavalry on the right wing were first pushed forward, while the greater part of the infantry waited in reserve'<sup>49</sup>, 'pravoe krylo konnicy bylo vydvnuto vperéd, a ból'shaja čast' pexoty byla postavlena pozadi v rezerve'<sup>50</sup>. The translation of the word *subsidebat* as 'in reserve' is disputable. There are two words: *subsidiari* 'to be in reserve (*in subsidis locari*)' and *subsidere* 'to settle, sink, subside, retard'<sup>51</sup>. Of course here we have the form of the second verb: *subsidebat* 'was remaining behind'.

Big difficulties were experienced in assembling the left wing of the cavalry (*summa difficultate conductum*: Amm. 31, 12, 12), because it was approaching in a hurry (*properabat passibus citis*) in many groups by the roads (*disiectis adhuc per itinera plurimis*). Thus the left wing cavalry did not go by the same road as the infantry did, but by many other roads. It is clear, that whereas the infantry used the main road, the left wing cavalry went by other roads on the left side of the infantry column. Here the difficulty consisted of the fact that these roads were secondary and therefore not direct and that the cavalry had to fulfil this movement synchronously with the infantry.

<sup>46</sup> Amm. 31, 12, 16-17; Sozom. 6, 40, 2.

<sup>47</sup> SABBAAH-ANGLIVIEL DE LA BEAUMELLE 2002, p. 140.

<sup>48</sup> SEYFARTH 1983, p. 285.

<sup>49</sup> ROLFE 1982, p. 469.

<sup>50</sup> KULAKOVSKIJ-SONNI 1994, p. 514.

<sup>51</sup> 'Zurückbleiben' - KLOTZ, Handwörterbuch, p. 1465 s.v. subsidio, B 1; 'sitzenbleiben, zurückbleiben, halten' - GEORGES, c. 2879 s.v. subsidio, II 1; 'ostavat'sja, ostanavlivat'sja, zaderživat'sja' - DVORECKIJ 1986, s. 738 s. v. sub-sido, 5.

#### 4. On the modern maps

The battlefield is given two main locations. One is that of F.Runkel (1903) who placed the battlefield 13-14 km. to the north-east-east of Edirne/Adrianopolis near the village of Demiranli/Demeranlia/Demeranliga/Demirhanli. Another localization is that of S. MacDowall<sup>52</sup> who accepts as the battlefield the terrain to the north of Edirne near the village of Muratçali .

There is good reason to place the battlefield between the river of Tundzha and the Constantinople-Adrianople road, because as they had moved from Yambol/Cabyle, the Goths were to the north of the Adrianople turning to Nike: crossing a river as like the Tundzha within sights of the Roman army would have been suicide. If we take into consideration the data from our sources reporting the distance from Adrianopolis to the place where the Romans first saw the Gothic camp<sup>53</sup> or the distance to the battlefield itself according to Hydatius<sup>54</sup>, one could theoretically choose any place located at this distance to the north, north-east and east of Edirne. The only methodological limits here would be the data of our sources about the course of the action and the geographical situation in the chosen region. Scholars can use contemporary topographical maps and the results of *de visu* surface exploration. Another method is to use the old maps and descriptions of the region, showing the topographical situation there before modern building activity and new soil erosion. We have chosen some maps of the 19<sup>th</sup> century showing the roads and terrain in the territory discussed. We have marked the distance up to 12 km from Edirne with a circle, and 18 km with squares.

The first group of the maps<sup>55</sup> is that of the Balkan peninsula containing our region and showing the main roads. On these maps there are at least four roads going north-east from Edirne/Edreneh:

(road 1) to Jambol following the east bank of Tundzha (only on the maps from 1847 and 1853, but lacking on the map from 1870),

(roads 2a-b) to Böjüük Derbend via Karatja/Karadscha, Karabair and Chauli Ienedjé/Chanlü Jenidscheh/Chanly Jenidsche/Chanly Jenidshe on the watershed between the Tundzha river and the Provada creek (on the map from 1847 there is also another way there via Akbuunar - to the west of and parallel to the described one),

(roads 3a-b) to Vakeššal/Vakesal via Ortakeui/Ortaktschi/Ortaktscha, Karniou-souf/Karn Jussuf, Kaiba, Takhi Mouselim/Taschly Müsselim - Utaktschi, Saritalachmen, following the west bank of the Iskender Dere (on the map from 1853 there is

<sup>52</sup> MACDOWALL 2001, pp. 68 sqq.

<sup>53</sup> Amm. 31, 12, 11.

<sup>54</sup> Hydat., *fasti* ad a. 378.

<sup>55</sup> LAPIE 1847; KIEPERT 1853; ID. 1870 - maps 1, 2, 3 here and HANDTKE 1877.

another parallel way to west of the described following the uninhabited areas in the watershed of the Provada creek and the Iskender Dere),

(road 4) to Kirk-Kilisseh via Slonderkeui, Geibeler/Geiseler, Hachkeui/Hafheui/Chaššköi, Ienidje/Jenidschek/Jeniasche, which crosses all the creeks (dere) there.

What is interesting here, is the fact that there is one west-east road from Fikeli to Kirk-Kilisseh via Prawady, Arpatsch/Apatch, Akardschi/Akardji, which is parallel to the Edirne-Istambul route. This road crosses the first three roads we have discussed some 15-20 km from Edirne. We think it may have been used by the Goths to make movements to the rear of the Roman army the last being on the Constantinople-Adrianople road.

The second group of maps are Russian<sup>56</sup> military maps made de visu by captain Orlov and staff-captain Tučkov in the year 1827. The maps are now in the Library of Russian Academy of Sciences<sup>57</sup>. There are the following interesting folios showing some roads:

(road 2b) Map 15 of the «Rushchuk - Saman Stefano» series by Orlov showing the way to Bojuk Derbend via Akbunar and Čiflik: they portray the big hills to the east of the road at a distance some 1.5 km.; - they may have been used by the Gothic cavalry to attack the Romans at the beginning of the battle; on the western side of the road there are no such hills.

(road 2a) Map 12 of the «Eskistambul through Osmanbazar...» series by Tučkov showing the way to Bojuk Derbend via Xanli-Enedži: the road crosses the big hill partly covered by the wood on the west of the upper Provada creek near Karudžu village; two km. to the north of there another road crosses the same hill from east to west going to Kirkliissi; this is the same hill as on the previous map; - the south-eastern part of this hill and the road may have been used by the Gothic cavalry to attack the right flank of the Romans at the beginning of the battle (whereas their left flank would be separated from the hill by the canyon shown on the map);

(roads 1, 2a-b) A map 9 of the «Eskistambul through Osmanbazar...» series by Tučkov showing the suburbs of Edirne has all three ways: the way to Jambol following the east bank of the Tundzha, the way to Bojuk Derbend via Akbunar and to Bojuk Derbend via Xanli-Enedzhe; it is possible to see the canyon mentioned above that separated the Roman left flank from the hill where the Gothic cavalry could have attacked from.

(road 4) Map 10 of the «Eskistambul through Osmanbazar...» series by Tučkov showing the way to As-Kioj via Mosjubejli kioj, Demiranla and Gejbeler. There are hills on both sides of the road - these hills could have been used by the Gothic cavalry; what is interesting here is another (compared to Runkel's map) direction of the route, which is drawn directly without any bends to the north of Demiranli village.

<sup>56</sup> The Russian characters are transliterated here according to the ISO R9 norms, except the Russian letter 'x', which is shown here using the latin 'x'.

<sup>57</sup> They are called «Sobranie maršrutov po evropejskoj Turcii» and are stored under the code V1931k/335.

There is an other map called «General'aja karta Vostočnoj časti Rumelii, sostavlenaja pri štabe 2oj armii v 1829 godu, list 10», stored in the Russian National Library (former Public Library or Saltykova-Shchedrina) in St.Petersburg<sup>58</sup>. It is a military map, made in the year 1829 by the staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Russian army. There is a network of small roads to the north-east to Adrianople. Some of them are worth looking at:

(road 1) the road following the east bank of the Tundzha via Enikioj, Enisikioj, Atipkioj;

(road 2a) the direct road going to Xanly Énidži via Karadžikioj, the farmer house, the fountain and Taušan Karadžikioj;

(roads 2b<sub>1,2</sub>) two parallel roads between them from Karadžikioj to Čelmekioj;

(road 3) road via Karajsuf.

Between these roads there are many small roads joining these big roads to each other. The road Čelmekioj-Taušan Karadžikioj-Pravodija road is the road which could have been used by the Goths to move the cavalry from one wing to another. This is the same road shown on the map 12 of the «Eskistambul through Osmanbazar...» series by Tučkov showing the way to Bojuk Derbend via Xanli-Enedži.

In any case we can see that it will be necessary in the future to make an the archaeological and palaeogeographical field survey of the areas discussed above. A good example here could be the investigation of the Kalkriese battlefield in the Teutoburger Wald in Germany. At this point in time we can only make preliminary conclusions.

The area near Demiranli (on road 4) seems to be less suited to the course of the action described by Ammianus: we do not know whether there is enough room for the cavalry movements of the Romans and Goths because of the many perpendicular ravines that cross there the main road there. Moreover the only way for Gothic cavalry to have entered the battle unnoticed on that hot day seems to be the way along the Mussalim creek, the theory accepted by Runkel. According to this hypothesis, the battlefield lies on the western hillside of the eastern (i.e. left) bank of the Mussalim creek. But this scheme compels Runkel to suppose that the Gothic cavalry charge was from the Mussalim ravine to the rear of the Romans. All this contradicts the text of Ammianus and the cavalry tactics theory. That is why at the present stage of research, we do not support Runkel's hypothesis.

The areas between the Provada creek and Tundzha river (on the 2a-b 1-2 roads) are more convenient: there is enough room for charges and manoeuvres using many small roads and hills. Thus the hypothesis by MacDowall seems to be more positive. But the idea of MacDowall that the Gothic cavalry charged uphill from the Tundzha river valley seems to be too speculative. It is reasonable to presume that the cavalry charge was not uphill, but downhill. This is precisely what Ammianus points out, having written that the Gothic cavalry came from the hills.

<sup>58</sup> Under the code K 2-Balk/2-24 (old one K 3-Balk/2-64).

The area near Karajusuf (on “road 3”) also seems fitting, but we do not have enough maps for this area. But we have to admit once more that all these are only preliminary reflections while we wait to explore the terrain.

### 5. On the Course of the Action

While the Roman battle line was forming the Goths twice sent different negotiators with some delay. The emperor sent them Richomeres as a hostage in response. But while he was on the way, «*sagittarii et scutarii*» - one or two elite units (*schola scutariorum sagittariorum*, or: *schola [scutariorum] sagittariorum* and *schola scutariorum [prima/secunda]*: ND, Or. 11) under the command of Bacurius and Cassio went to far (*avidius impetu calenti progressi*: Amm. 31, 12, 16) and too early (*inmature proruperant*) and entered the battle (*jamque adversis conexi*). While in contact with the enemy they dishonoured themselves by making a dull retreat (*inerti discessu*). This is of course the interpretation made by somebody who was involved in the events and who was not objective. Maybe it was Richomeres himself. It is clear that some part of the right wing cavalry made a premature attack<sup>59</sup>. Their task was to protect the forming up infantry of the centre and on the left wing by forming the first line and by diverting the enemy's attention from other units to themselves. Maybe they played this role in too straightforward<sup>60</sup>. But there is also another explanation: maybe there was some other reason for entering the battle even at that moment. What could it have been? It may have been some threatening movement of the enemy, that forced these two units to charge. Some minutes (enough for Richomeres to recall from the middle of his transfer) after their retreat, the charge of the Gothic cavalry took place. Maybe it was the approaching Gothic cavalry viewed by the Goths from the height of their camp, that compelled the Goths to make some movement to prepare the charge of their cavalry. The charge of Bacurius and Cassio may have been the answer to that Gothic movement. In the next phrases of Ammianus we read that the Roman infantry was able to hold its positions for a long time during the battle. Therefore we can conclude that at the moment when the Gothic cavalry began its charge, the main infantry was already on its place in the battle line. By taking this into account we can assert that during the charge of the Gothic cavalry the Roman right wing cavalry was already in its place too or already moving there. In any case it is clear, that the charge of Bacurius and Cassio was carried out on the right wing of the Romans against the Gothic left wing.

The charge of the Gothic cavalry was quick and unexpected by the Romans. Consequently the Gothic cavalry came from the side not covered by Roman scouts, i.e. from the

<sup>59</sup> FERRILL 1988, pp. 62-63.

<sup>60</sup> SHCHUKIN 2005, p. 259.

rear of the Goths, which was hidden from Roman intelligence by some hills or woods<sup>61</sup>. This was not some typical ambush that depended on the specific nature of the terrain: Ammianus «does not describe the battlefield» and that is why the specifics of the terrain «played no [decisive - M.Sh.,P.Sh.] part in the outcome of the conflict»<sup>62</sup>. The reason for the suddenness of the Gothic charge is not to be found in the terrain, but in the action. Moreover it was broiling day<sup>63</sup> and clouds of dust covered the sky during the battle<sup>64</sup>: that is why the approaching Gothic cavalry had to move on the moist soil (in some ravine?) at walking pace and not at a gallop, so that they were not detected by the enemy who could see the clouds of the dust. Ammianus writes<sup>65</sup> the charge of Gothic cavalry happened as quickly (*adcursu veloci*) as lightning from near the high mountains: *equitatus Gothorum ... prope montes celsos excussus*. There is some difficulty in translating the text *prope montes celsos* and there are different variants of translation: ‘près de hautes montagnes’<sup>66</sup>, ‘brach sie in der Nähe der hohen Berge hervor’<sup>67</sup>, ‘near high mountains’<sup>68</sup>, ‘s krutyx gor’<sup>69</sup>. The translation by Kulakovskij of the word *prope* as ‘from’ is disputable. Runkel understands the word *montes* in a literal sense and not as a kind of rethoric<sup>70</sup> and compares it with the *ut turbo montibus celsis*<sup>71</sup> (written about the Huns). In any case this metaphor shows the rapidity of the Gothic charge and its suddenness. Therefore it is obvious that the Gothic cavalry was guided by Alatheus and Saphrax so as to be hidden by something (the hills?) from the eyes of the enemy before the charge. It all means that the commanders of the Gothic cavalry had a good opportunity to plan their charge and to direct it to the place on the Roman line, where such a sudden charge would be more successful. By taking this into account we can say that it was highly tempting for the Gothic cavalry to charge against these Roman units, who were already entering the battle: it is a common in Roman military theory, that ambushes were more successful when the enemy had already entered the combat<sup>72</sup>. As the Gothic camp was ca. 700 metres in diameter, the cavalry needed some 5-10 minutes to go along the camp and to take its stand in the required place while not being detected by the Romans before the charge.

<sup>61</sup> Another but wrong idea is, that Gothic cavalry came from the rear-side of the Romans (RUNKEL 1903, p. 41), but it is wrong.

<sup>62</sup> CRUMP 1975, p. 93.

<sup>63</sup> Amm. 31, 12, 11; 13, 7.

<sup>64</sup> Amm. 31, 13, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Amm. 31, 12, 17.

<sup>66</sup> SABBAN - ANGLIVIEL DE LA BEAUMELLE 2002, p. 143.

<sup>67</sup> SEYFARTH 1983, p. 287.

<sup>68</sup> ROLFE 1982, p. 471.

<sup>69</sup> KULAKOVSKIJ - SONNI 1994, p. 514.

<sup>70</sup> RUNKEL 1903, p. 35.

<sup>71</sup> Amm. 31, 3, 8.

<sup>72</sup> E.g. Mauricius, *strat.*



These 5-10 minutes were the exact time, when Bacurius and Cassio made their charge and when the hostage was called back from his way to the Gothic camp.

The Gothic cavalry charge crushed the Roman order. It is clear not only from Ammianus, but also from the text of Orosius (7, 33, 14): *Ubi primo statim impetu Gothorum perturbatae Romanorum equitum turmae nude peditum deseruere praesidia*. Orosius does not mention the action of Bacurius and Cassio. Thus, for Orosius it was the Gothic cavalry, who commenced the battle and led it to disaster for the Romans! After the retreat of Bacurius and Cassio and after the charge of the Gothic cavalry nothing happened on the Roman right wing in the description of Ammianus. According to Orosius (7, 33, 14), the Roman infantry was encircled by the Gothic cavalry (*legiones peditum undique equitatu hostium cinctae*) and covered by a shower of arrows (*primum nubibus sagittarum obrutae*, cf. Ammianus 31, 13, 1: *ictibus jaculorum et sagittarum*). This sort of fight was more typical of the nomads than the Goths. Maybe it was the action of the Alans who were there. While the infantry of the centre was fighting in the close formation and the left wing (infantry with/without cavalry ?) had reached the Gothic camp, the right wing of the Romans was doing nothing. The only words which could be applied to the right wing are very significant: *a reliquo equitatu desertum*. The only explanation here is the following: the right Roman cavalry wing was defeated at the very beginning of the battle! But who defeated it? Who smashed the Roman right wing cavalry to such an extent that it could not come around until the end of the battle? Of course there is only one actor who could play this part: the Gothic cavalry. Thus, we can conclude that Gothic charge of Alatheus and Saphrax took place against the Roman right wing. But trying to outflank the Roman line from its right wing was too perilous for the Gothic cavalry at the very beginning of the battle. In that case the Gothic cavalry could have been cut off from the camp and its infantry. And more: the left outflanking movement is dangerous for the charging side because the soldiers' right sides were not covered by the shields. It is also easier to shoot arrows into the left side. That is why the direction of the Gothic cavalry charge may have been as follows: from the Roman right wing, where the Roman cavalry was somewhat ahead of the centre from the very beginning, and then turning to the right passing along the whole Roman front line and crushing (*quoscumque... inuenire comminus potuit, incitata caede turbauit*: Amm. 31, 12, 17) the first line units (light infantry, patrolling and scouting cavalry groups) to clear room for the infantry assault. This passage along the whole Roman battle line may have been too dangerous for the Goths, as the Roman battle line has been completely finished: the bowmen and artillery from the train of wagons could heavily damage the cavalry galloping along the front. But the Roman line was not yet completely finished and maybe there was no artillery present along the Roman battle line yet! And this was the Goths' chance! The aim of this charge was to crush the weak first line units and to disturb the heavy infantry with a shower of arrows and darts (*rotatis ictibus jaculorum et sagittarum*: Amm. 31, 13, 1). And the infantry was close to disrupt the lines: the Romans began to yield, but they were stopped by the rearguards (*cedentes nostri multis*

*interclamantibus restiterunt*). Then the Gothic cavalry could have struck into the left wing cavalry and finally fall back to the Gothic right wing, where it could be prepared for the next charge in the shelter of the camp.

After this Gothic cavalry charge the infantry battle began<sup>73</sup> and the left wing cavalry went as far as the Gothic camp, but the “remaining” cavalry did not help them. This “remaining” cavalry is of course the cavalry of right wing and the reserve cavalry. How could they have helped the left wing? - Not only by charging the right wing of the Goths of course. The main help would have been to divert the Gothic cavalry from the Roman left wing either by acting on the wings or in the rear. It was not done and the Gothic cavalry was of course free. As a result the Roman left wing was overthrown (*oppressum atque dejectum est*) under the press of plentiful enemy (*multitudine hostili urgente*) and the infantry found itself without flank guards (*steterunt inprotecti pedites*). This was the beginning of the end.

It was Gothic cavalry (Goths of Alatheus and Alans of Saphrax), who brought the victory to the Goths. It is clear, that the infantry alone was incapable of defeating the Roman army. Of course the Romans made tactical and strategical mistakes<sup>74</sup>, but they alone were not enough to lose the battle. Of course there were many battles in the late 4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, where the cavalry was not stronger than the infantry, but the roles slowly began to change. The leading role of the Gothic-Alanic cavalry was attested by Vegetius<sup>75</sup> some 6-9 years<sup>76</sup> after the battle of Adrianople and is already accepted by most modern scholars<sup>77</sup>. But for most modern historians it is not clear how and where Gothic cavalry did it. Our idea, that the Gothic cavalry charge was undertaken against the Roman right wing has already been formulated by some scholars<sup>78</sup>. Our purpose was only to attract attention to some details of the battle interpreted in this manner.

To summarize<sup>79</sup> :

(I) The Roman army was moving uphill on the road called “2a” above. The vanguard reached the top of the hill and saw the Gothic camp on the west side of the next hill. The Roman right wing takes the position ahead and the infantry of the center is in a hurry moving along the road. The cavalry of left wing moves by parallel roads. The Gothic cavalry was secretly moving along the Provada and then turned right over the hill and came to the rear of the Gothic camp. The right wing of the Romans began

<sup>73</sup> Amm. 31, 13, 2.

<sup>74</sup> RICHARDOT 2001, pp. 288-289.

<sup>75</sup> Veg., *mil.* 1, 20, cf. 3, 26.

<sup>76</sup> ZUCKERMAN 1994.

<sup>77</sup> E.g. WOLFRAM 1990, pp. 130, 132, 133, 137 and ntt. 73-99.

<sup>78</sup> E.g. SABBAAH - ANGLIVIEL DE LA BEAUMELLE 2002, pp. 281-282 nt. 527; WOLFRAM 1977, p. 243.

<sup>79</sup> Here we accept the distance of eight m.p. But we don't reject the reconstruction with the distance of 12 m.p. (e.g. WANKE 1988, p. 216-217): the similar course of battle could be reconstructed in the area to the south of Hanli-Yenice.



the battle, but was overthrown by the ambush and charge of the Gothic cavalry. The Gothic cavalry is galloped along the front and the left flank of the Roman infantry and then turned right and withdrew to the right side of the Gothic camp.

(II) The Gothic infantry attacked the Roman infantry in front. The Roman left wing cavalry came up to the Gothic camp, but was overthrown by the enemy (the Gothic cavalry from the right wing?). The Romans fled.

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