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Was C. Rubellius Blandus Involved in the Exploitation of the Silver Mines of Carthago Nova?*

ABSTRACT: The mention of three members of the *gens* Rubellia in two funerary inscriptions recovered from an important mining complex located near Carthago Nova allows us to consider the possibility that the Rubellii Blandi from Tibur might be involved in the mining activity. Consequently, the wedding of Tiberius' niece, Julia, to C. Rubellius Blandus could be related to the princeps' interests in controlling the silver mines of the south-east of Spain.

Keywords: Rubellii Blandi – Silver Mines – Carthago Nova – Roman Spain.

1.

In the year 33 Tiberius' niece, Julia, married C. Rubellius Blandus. Tacitus relates this event in his *Annales* with astonishment¹. Julia had been married to Nero Julius Caesar, the son of Germanicus, and was about 30 years old². Blandus, on the contrary, was in his sixties. His grandfather had been a mere *eques* and he was the first in his family to become a consul³. R. Syme considered the fact so intriguing that he wrote in 1982 a detailed study in which he tried to reveal the keys of the ascent of this little-known family and the motives which led Tiberius to arrange such a strange marriage⁴.

The Rubellii Blandi were from Tibur⁵. The father of C. Rubellius Blandus was praetor and governor of Crete and Cyrenaica⁶. His full name was probably C. Rubellius L. f. Blandus, if it is correct to identify him with the person mentioned on a fragment of inscription

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1 Tac. *Ann.* 6.27.1: “*Tot luctibus funesta civitate, pars maeroris fuit quod Iulia Drusi filia, quondam Neronis uxor, denupsit in domum Rubellii Blandi, cuius avum Tiburtem equitem Romanum plerique meminerant*”, “Among all the griefs of a melancholy realm, it was a contributory regret that Julia, daughter of Drusus and formerly wife of Nero, now married into the family of Rubellius Blandus, whose grandfather was remembered by many as a Roman knight from Tibur” (trans. by J. Jackson); cf. Dio 58.2.1.1.

2 *PIR*² I 636.

3 *PIR*² R 111.

4 Syme 1982.

5 Three inscriptions related to important members of this family are known in Tibur (*CIL* XIV 3555 = *Isclt.* IV.1, 60; *CIL* XIV 3556 = *Isclt.* IV.1, 61; *CIL* XIV 3576 = *Isclt.* IV.1, 76, cf. Andermahr 1998, 414–5), as well as one belonging to one of their freedwomen (*CIL* XIV 3832 = *Isclt.* IV.1, 432).

6 *PIR*² R 109.

which belongs to the architrave of the southern propylaea of the *Caesareum* of Cyrene⁷. Probably he is also mentioned in another inscription from Marruvium, where, in addition to his filiation, his tribe is indicated, the *Camilia*, which is the one of Tibur⁸. His grandfather was an *eques* who achieved fame as teacher of rhetoric⁹. The sources do not mention his *praenomen*, but thanks to the inscriptions of Cyrene and Marruvium, it may be supposed that he was called Lucius. Another C. Rubellius, perhaps his brother, is mentioned in the letters of Cicero together with various *negotiatores* with interests in Africa¹⁰. Before marrying Julia, C. Rubellius Blandus was a *consul suffectus* in the year 18 AD. He might be identified with a *triumvir monetalis* who was active around the year 4 AD¹¹. Tacitus remembers two of his interventions in the Senate¹². Given his age it is very likely that he would have been married already, although we have no information regarding this. After marrying Julia he was a governor of the Roman province of Africa Proconsularis¹³. During his governorship he could have acquired the *saltus Blandianus*, near the river Medjerda¹⁴, although it is also possible that these lands belonged to the family since the time of the C. Rubellius mentioned by Cicero¹⁵. Another L. Rubellius Geminus was a *consul* in the year 29 and a [C. vel L.] Rubellius Blandus, was *consul suffectus* in 21–22 or 40–45. Their relationship to Julia's husband is difficult to determine. They might be younger brothers, cousins or even sons from a first marriage¹⁶. The marriage to Julia gave various children¹⁷, one of which, Rubellius Plautus, would be murdered by the emperor Nero, his half-cousin¹⁸.

It is very complicated indeed to understand how the Rubellii evolved in scarcely two generations from being simple *domi nobiles* to forming part of the nucleus of the reigning dynasty, since, moreover, apart from the grandfather, [L.] Rubellius Blandus, none of its members had stood out in anything. The marriage of Julia and Blandus is a difficult event to explain, even when taking into account the implication of the bride's mother, Livia Julia, in the conspiracy of Sejanus¹⁹. Syme himself affirms that "[the] rise of the Rubellii is one of those casual facts that dispel conventional notions about Roman political life", and adds: "What obligation [Tiberius] honoured in promoting the Rubellii and in finally introducing this municipal strain into alliance with the dynasty, that cannot be known"²⁰.

7 AE 1960, 266, corrected by Gasperini 1971, 7–8, cf. Syme 1982, 66. The southern propylaea underwent important works of restoration due to the damage caused during the Jewish revolt of 115. These works probably included also the restoration of the inscription made by Blandus, Luni 1991, 132–40.

8 AE 1975 305 = AE 1996, 305; cf. Letta and D'Amato 1975, 84–92.

9 PIR² R 108.

10 Cic. *Fam.* 12.26.1; Syme 1982, 65–6.

11 PIR² R 110; RIC I² 467.

12 Tac. *Ann.* 3.23.2; 3.51.1.

13 Thomasson 1996, 31–2.

14 CIL VIII 25943, 26416; Flach 1978, 484–9. Cf. Carcopino 1906, 436; Kolendo 1991, 11; Andermahr 1998, 35.

15 Syme 1982, 65.

16 PIR² R 107 and 113.

17 PIR² R 106, 112, 115 and 116.

18 Tac. *Ann.* 14.22; 14.57–59; cf. Syme 1982, 79–81; Cogitore 2002, 228–34.

19 PIR² L 303; cf. Bellemore 1995; Birley 2007.

20 Syme 1982, 77.

2.

However, overlooked evidence from Spain suggests a likely explanation for the rise of the Rubellii. In one of the most important mining complexes of the south-east of Spain, the Coto Fortuna²¹, two funerary inscriptions were discovered in the 19th Century. They were made by an individual called L. Rubellius Philodamus for his parents Alexandra and L. Rubellius Philostratus²². Both belonged to the same funerary monument and probably were made in the local workshops of the nearby Carthago Nova²³. Their characteristics allow them to be dated in the first half of the 1st century AD. At this time mining activity in the Coto Fortuna was managed by a big mining company: the *societas argentifodinarum Ilucronensium*, which also had interests in other mines of the region²⁴. The finding of these two inscriptions in the heart of the Coto Fortuna indicates that the persons mentioned on them actually lived there. It is highly likely, therefore, that they were involved in the activity of that mining company. The fact that the Rubellii had their own funerary monument at Coto Fortuna also indicates that they were an important family there.

Rubellius is a very rare *nomen*. Only a few examples are known in Italy²⁵. Outside Italy they are even rarer²⁶. In Spain we only know those from Coto Fortuna. The striking scarcity of Rubellii leads R. Syme to consider that most of them may have belonged to the same family, bearing in mind also that the most frequent *praenomina* among them were Lucius and Caius, both used by the Rubellii Blandi²⁷. So, it is not illogical to think that the Rubellii from Coto Fortuna could be related to the Tiburtine Rubellii Blandi. The chronology of their epitaphs indicates that they lived between the end of the 1st century BC and the beginnings of the following. The father, L. Rubellius Philodamus, was contemporary with the *eques* [L.] Rubellius Blandus. Given the rarity of the *nomen* and the coincidence of the *praenomina*, it is even possible that he was one of his freedman.

21 Antolinos, Díaz and Guillén 2013.

22 CIL II 3530 = HEp online 9604: L. Rubellius / Philostratus / hic situs est / L. Rubellius / Philodamus / filius de suo f. c.; AE 1974, 378 = HEp online 4597: Alexandra / hic sita est / L. Rubellius / Philodamus / filius de suo f. c.; cf. Antolinos, Díaz and Guillén 2013, 101–3.

23 Cf. Abascal and Ramallo 1997, 27–30.

24 Antolinos and Díaz 2012.

25 Excluding the inscriptions which surely refer to the members of the Rubellii Blandi family, this *nomen* is only mentioned in three funerary inscriptions from Northern Italy (Ateste, CIL V 2676 + 2660 = Sup.It. 15, 162: C. Rubellius Horionus, L. Rubellius C. f. and C. Rubellius C. f.; Padova, CIL V 3024: T. Rubellius L. f. Pudens; Milano, CIL V 5994: Rubellia Tyranni[s]), in another from Etruria (Lucca, CIL XI 1539: Rubellia Proc(u)la), as well as in a *titulus pictus* from Pompei (CIL IV 842: Rubellius). In the city of Rome, it is documented in four funerary inscriptions, probably belonging to freedmen of Rubellii Blandi or their descendants (CIL VI 21979: L. Rubellius L. l. Felix; 25502: Sergio Rubellio Antho and Rubellia Laudice; 25503: L. Rubellius T. f. Geminus Caesianus; 25504, Rubellia Ampliata and L. Rubellius Beryllus).

26 The name is attested in two inscriptions from the Africa Proconsularis (CIL VIII 11715: C. Rubellius Niger; ILaig I 1867: Rubellia Blanda), in one from Sardinia (CIL X 7697: C. Rubellius Clytius) and, with doubts, in one from Gallia Belgica (CIL XIII 11457: [R]ubellius) and another from Nîmes (Fiches and Veyrac 1996, 509: Paula Rubelli f.). From Sicily, we have a *sigillum* of bronze belonging perhaps to a freedman of the Rubellii Blandi (CIL X 8059, 343: C. Rubellius Evemerus; cf. Manganaro 2006, 23).

27 Syme 1982, 78.

He may also have been a freedman of other members of the family, such as the consul of the year 29 AD. The presence of freedmen of the Rubellii Blandi in Coto Fortuna could be taken to indicate the participation of this family in the mining activity which was carried out there.

We are aware of various families whose political rise seems to be related to their involvement in the exploitation of the Carthago Nova silver mines. A clear case is that of the Nonii Asprenates²⁸. The same could be said of the Turullii²⁹, the Roscii from Lanuvium³⁰ and perhaps the Favonii from Tarracina³¹. It is also probable that various members of the Caesar's entourage such as M. Aquinius, L. Aurrunculeius Cotta or C. Messius were involved in the mining activity³². If we accept the connection of the Rubellii Blandi with the Rubellii of Coto Fortuna their meteoric rise no longer seems an anomaly. On the contrary, it would be the latest example, and perhaps the most spectacular, of those families of *domi nobiles*, some of them from the local aristocracies of the Lazio, which progressed in the context of the Civil Wars of the 1st Century BC thanks to the profits obtained in the Spanish mines. The reasons for the marriage between the niece of Tiberius and C. Rubellius Blandus would also be evident: the marriage have allowed the *princeps* a greater control over the silver mines of Carthago Nova.

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28 Wiseman 1971, 244–245; Barreda 1996.

29 Wiseman 1971, 199 and 268; Koch 1984, 240–1.

30 Wiseman 1971, 199 y 256; González and Olivares 2010, 113.

31 Díaz and Antolinos 2011.

32 Wiseman 1971, 214 and 240–41; Domergue 1990, 327–8.

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