

The building activity of the 4-th Legion *Flavia Felix*
North of the Danube, between and 101-117

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- abstract -

The author deals with the building activity of the 4th legion *Flavia Felix* in Banat region during the Trajan's Dacian War (AD 101-106), as well as with its missions in the province of Dacia between AD 106-117, when the legion was retreated to its former base, at *Singidunum*, in Upper Moesia.

As shown on the reliefs of Trajan's Column in Rome the main duty of the legions during the Dacian War was to built roads and forts. The main road built and used by the Roman army to the North of the Dabube starting with AD 101 is known from the preserved fragment of Trajan's Commentaries: inde Berzobim, deinde Aizi processimus. The road is also recorded by Tabula Peutingeriana. Along this military road the 4th legion *Flavia Felix* built its own fortress at *Berzobis* (AD 101-117).

The building activity of the legion is registered by the tile stamps and by inscriptions. There are known more than 20 points in Banat with tile stamps finds, many being inside the forts. The three places having significant quantities of tile stamps and building inscriptions mentioning the legion are: *Berzobis*, *Sarmizegetusa* regia (former Dacian king residence) and veteran colony *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*. In the fortress at *Berzobis*, recent excavations have identified the headquarters building, having a first timber phase and a stone one. There were found 112 tile stamps, having three types of stamps which are recorded only at *Berzobis*. Most of the Romanian specialists agree that Banat region was conquered by the Roman army starting with AD 102, after Trajan's first expedition in Dacia. At *Sarmizegetusa* regia, the former Dacian royal residence, there are known three building inscription mentioning the name of the 4-th legion *Flavia Felix*, found in the precinct wall of the Roman fort built there by the Romans in AD 102, as Cassius Dio mentions. It is interesting that the name of the legion is written identically as on the tile stamps from the fortress at *Berzobis*, especially the figure IIII. The conclusion is that they are partially contemporary. It is author's hypothesis that after the finish of the first expedition in AD 102 and after the legion helped at the building of the stone defense wall at *Sarmizegetusa* regia it went in its fort at *Berzobis* and soon started building its own headquarters building. The early chronology of this monument is based on the same type of tile stamps found in the forts at Pojejena and in the main base at *Singidunum*. It is possible that this period starts after AD 106, taking into consideration the timber early construction phase.

The third important place where the soldiers of the legion carried on works was the veteran colony at *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*. A big quantity of tile stamps is known, grouped in 5 types. The first type was used for building two stone granaries, being considered the earliest type. The 5-th type was found mostly in the forum building being dated in the last years of Trajan's reign.

The author is challenging the last hypothesis concerning the setting up of veteran colony at *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*, concluding that the recently discovered inscription, which has been placed on the front of the monumental entrance of the forum, cannot be the foundation inscription of the town. The town was set up under the second governor of Dacia, Decimus Terentius Scaurianus, around AD 108/ 109 as an old inscription mentions. To establish the beginning of the building of the important constructions of the colony, the author is making comparison with another Trajan's veteran colony, *Poetovio*, in Pannonia.

Here the big building programme started at a few years after the foundation. The same must have been the situation at *Sarmizegetusa*, the first stone buildings starting, probably, around AD 112/ 114. The first ones were the two granaries, maybe finished in AD 114. Then continued with the forum, the tile stamps used being, probably, the most recent, AD 116/ 117. The third big monument of the colony, having tile stamps of the 4-th legion was the amphitheatre, built at the beginning in timber.

More complicated to establish is the dating and the destination of the timber building under the stone forum. The hypothesis of the authors of the excavations is that it was a first timber forum of the colony, so it was built only after AD 108/ 109. The new hypothesis of the author of this study is that it was the headquarters building of a legion camped there before the foundation of the colony. The best analogy for a timber legionary headquarters building is inside the fortress at Inchtuthil, in Britain. There are many known situations of former legionary bases used later for the sites of the veteran colonies, for practical reasons, being places already prepared for living. It is very probable that the legion stationed at *Ulpia Traiana*, before the town was the 13th legion *Gemina*, later camped at *Apulum* (Alba Iulia).

One of the keys of the correct interpretation is the meaning of a burnt layer having a lot of military equipment items and 50 coins, considered by the excavators as taken from another part (an unidentified fort) and used as a levelling stratum inside the yard and the lateral galleries of the stone forum. As it is unusual for a levelling layer to contain burnt material and coins, the author considered it a normal layer resulted after some light shelters of the military group, who was still working at the building, when these shelters were burnt down. The most suitable historical event that fitted to the chronology of the building was the attack of the neighbour barbarians, the Iazyges, who severely damaged Dacia in AD 117. Some weapons of the same type as in the burnt layer from the forum were recently recorded by the German excavations at the defence wall of the colony *Sarmizegetusa*, proving a fight close to the walls. The chronology proposed is also based on some coins dated AD 103-111, but probably minted after Trajan's tenth imperial anniversary in AD 107.

In conclusion, the timber building was the headquarters of a legion, but it was not built by the 4th legion *Flavia Felix*. Perhaps, it was the 13-th legion *Gemina* camped at *Ulpia Traiana* between AD 102-108/ 109 and then pushed forward at *Apulum*. One of the author's evidence is also based on the missing in the timber building of a monument dedicated to Trajan. The monument of Trajan was a trophy raised only in AD 116-117. It is thus impossible to believe that Trajan offered, as founder of the town, two forums and waited ten years for a thanksgiving monument. In the author's opinion the last building activity of the 4-th legion in Dacia ended in a disaster: while some units were still working to finish the forum at *Sarmizegetusa*, they were defeated, very probable, by a surprising attack of the barbarians coming from the Western Plain. Fire traces are also recorded in the headquarters building from the legionary fortress at *Bersobis* and two inscriptions, from *Sarmizegetusa* and *Tibiscum* thank to Q. Marcius Turbo, Hadrian's *praefectus praetorium*, after defeating the barbarians and secure the peace and security of the town and of Dacia.