

The strengthening of the Lower Danube limes in Dobrudja on the eve of the Dacian-Roman wars of emperor Trajan

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- abstract -

The author reviews all the data available in the current state of research regarding the intensive strategic building activities along the Lower Danube limes during or shortly after the famous *bellum Dacicum* in AD 101-106.

Several significant data regarding this topic are due to the archaeological excavations carried out in *Capidava* (commune of Topalu, Constanța county). One brick stamp belonging to the *cohors Ubiorum*, the first auxiliary unit garrisoned in *Capidava*, a funerary epigraph of a veteran from the Ubii cohorts, as well as several early constructive elements noticed at the curtain-wall A and at the (main) gate-tower no. 7 confirm the erection of the Roman fort in *Capidava* on the eve of the Dacian wars, during late Ist – early IInd c. AD. Regarding the construction of the Roman fortification at *Capidava*, it has been commonly accepted that one *vexillatio* formed by militaries from the legions V Macedonica and XI Claudia accomplished this activity. The bricks and tiles bearing stamps of the two legions, largely found in the military *thermae* of the site (assumed to date back to the same early period), cannot constitute at present a relevant witness for our topic. First of all, any typology of the *legio V Macedonica* stamps during its residence at Troesmis has been until now achieved. As to the *legio XI Claudia* stamps, the ones found out at *Capidava* do not belong to the LEG•XI•C•P•F types (inscription in *tabula ansata*), known for the early IInd c. AD in Moesia Inferior.

Nevertheless, a couple of important epigraphs come from two more sites of this limes section. Both of them are inaugural inscriptions. The inscription from Rasova (Constanța county), discovered during rescue excavations (1980), that have never been continued or thoroughly published, is largely dated under the authority of L. Fabius Iustus, *legatus Augusti pro praetore Moesiae Inferioris* in AD 105-108 (?), i.e. during the second *expeditio Dacica* of Trajan and for two more years after the conflict ended. As for the second one, coming from the strategic fortress in *Carsium*, it has been precisely dated in AD. 103, under the office of Q. Fabius Postuminus. An interesting perspective can be offered by the scarce milestone cases recognized in this part of Moesia Inferior for the early decades of the 2nd c. AD. The earliest *milliarium* known in Dobrudja is dated during the reign of Trajan (once more in AD 103) and has been discovered at Sacidava. It pleads, beyond doubt, for a simultaneous making of the limes strategic road and the erection of a dense line of fortified camps along the Danube, in specific connection to the Dacian wars.

Both fresh and interesting archaeological data could be added to the ones already cited above, due to the recent rescue excavations (2004) in Galați – Dunărea neighbourhood. Not far from the camp in Barboși (dated with inscription in AD 112), an early Roman fortlet and a necropolis (the end of the Ist – middle IIIrd c. AD) have been known for several decades, positioned 1.5 km East from Barboși, on the Danube's left bank. The analysis of the ceramics found in the ditches of the fortification, i.e. narrow-necked light-clay amphorae (Zeest 64 and Zeest 94 types), entitled the authors of this research to infer a largely functioning of the fortlet in the first half of the IInd c. AD. Moreover, this temporary structure, commissioned to garrison a *vexillatio* for a short period of time, might have functioned – according to the authors of the latest research – rather in the first decade of the IInd c. AD (previous to the construction of the Barboși camp), in which case the association of the “Dunărea” district fortlet to the Dacian wars military purposes could be logically conjectured. Due to Second World War aerial photographs, one should mention

three further temporary forlets north of Barboși, within the area occupied at present by the Sidex-Ispa metallurgical company.

In conclusion, an imperious strategic need of strengthening the eastern flank, at the back of the Roman advance north of the Danube expeditiously came to life, following to the harsh lesson of the surprise attack of the Dacians and their allies in Moesia Inferior, during the winter AD 101-102. Thus, Trajan decided the *mise en oeuvre* of an extensive constructive program, by building reliable fortifications in Dobrudja, and installing legions along with auxiliary units in the dense line of garrisons on this final section of the Lower Danube limes. A comparable dimension of this huge military program will be later on resumed by the Tetrarchs and Constantine the Great (during the late IIIrd - early IVth c. AD), as well as by Justinian (VIth c. AD).