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ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ



Ovidiu ȚENȚEA

# Modele ale civilizației romane în provinciile dunărene între identități locale și valori universale



Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române



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Ovidiu ȚENȚEA

**MODELE ALE CIVILIZAȚIEI ROMANE  
ÎN PROVINCIIILE DUNĂRENE ÎNTRE IDENTITĂȚI  
LOCALE ȘI VALORI UNIVERSALE**



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ÎN PROVINCIIILE DUNĂRENE ÎNTRE IDENTITĂȚI LOCALE  
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## ADDENDA

### **Abstract**

#### **Models of the Roman Civilisation in the Danubian provinces. Between local identities and universal values**

This paper is the scientific report of the post-doctoral research stage *“Modele ale civilizației romane în provinciile dunărene, între identități locale și valori universale”* (*“Models of the Roman civilization in the Danubian provinces. Between local identities and universal values”*), a project undertaken in the framework of the general theme of the Post-doctoral School *“Valorificarea identităților culturale în procesele globale”* (*“Setting on value cultural identities in global processes”*) – POSDRU ID 59758/2010. Under this title is to be found in fact part of a larger personal research interest, respectively the one focused on the Dacia’s army and frontiers in the first years of the province.

In the framework of this work are synthesized a series of articles published in the framework of the post-doctoral stage, but also certain scientific materials drafted in the same context, all of it reunited as chapters of this book. By bringing together all these papers and research results I’ve tried to set an ensemble perspective, although not exhaustive, upon the above mentioned problems. As a result, this volume represents the stage I’ve reached throughout my post-doctoral studies, its publishing being a condition decided by the project’s management during the development of the research stage.

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By studying the extension of Rome’s authority in the Danube’s space I’ve tried to identify a series of aspects which might provide a nuanced

perspective upon the understanding and interpretation of this phenomenon. Certain key questions set the landmarks of my research, respectively: *Who determined the frontiers' extension in this area, namely the central decision or the economic and social factors from the periphery ?*, *Is it possible to argue the existence or the absence of strategic reasons which determined the frontiers' organization, the deployment of troops or the location of certain settlements ?*, *There have been established strategies adapted to the enemies on certain areas or border sections as part of a coherent policy or there is just a combination of tactic solutions pending on individual cases ?*

The research focused on the Danubian provinces of the Roman Empire derives as well from a series of theoretical aspect, yet having a foundation in my previous scholar interests. Throughout my post-doctoral stage I've deepened and developed different related subjects starting from my *PhD* stage, adding new scientific data provided by my recent field investigations undertaken in the archaeological sites from *Colonia Dacica Sarmizegetusa*, the Galați-Barboși zone or Mălăiești.

This research started from a synthesis analysis concerning the impact of the Roman civilization upon the Danubian region in terms of understanding the reasons for building the defensive system and the related roads, as well as explaining the main moments for setting the urban, economic and demographic structures. The conception encompassed by terms as border line / frontier line / custom line is the natural result of the human tendency to define distinctively certain segments or entities without a thorough observation. The frontier of the Roman Empire was considered as a transition space, and its interpretation as natural or artificial border might be replaced in my opinion with terms as separation zone or connection (contact) zone. The mainstream scholar works regarding the Roman frontier are still outlining the perspective upon the role of the central authority.

The construction policy regarding the road systems, and during certain periods the military intervention against the brigands, indicates the particular importance given by the Romans to the commercial routes. The relationships of the Roman Empire and the Dacian Kingdom, and later the province of Dacia, with barbarian populations living beyond the frontiers



seem to be – at first glance – less important if understood in the ensemble of historic realities of the first centuries of the Christian era in Europe. In order to fully understand the evolution of the Roman Empire one has to study also the centre – periphery relations in the European part and especially the ones around the Middle and Lower Danube. During the Principate, the imperial policy regarding the barbarian world was a constant pursuit of Rome. The army was significantly involved in the commercial relations, namely in protecting the trade routes. At the Empire's borders was documented a very intense commercial activity, employing both the army and representatives of barbarian populations.

In such perspective, the set up of a coherent defensive system, doubled by a well articulated road network, constituted the fundamental structure of the Roman province in the Danubian area. Albeit it might be considered as an easy interpretation of major historic phenomena, I believe that the evolution of these provinces and their complex relations founds a plausible explanation in the geographic features. Such one can understand certain solutions chosen for the trade routes and for their control. Moreover, considering such factors one can understand the danger represented by the penetration of barbarian populations into Roman territory or the menace upon the security of trade routes.

The extension of the Roman frontiers towards the Danube starts in early Principate period. By studying this process I was able to follow certain directions, namely the location of the Roman military structures and the settlements along the main commercial routes, axed on the Danube, but also the proximity of certain economic and political interest points. The set up and organization of the provinces on the Danubian region lasted a long period and generated profound changes regarding the existent communities or the newly created ones, phenomena which left a very consistent footprint for the Roman world in the Danubian and Carpathian area. These provinces were set up along the most important roads. Pannonia, in the first phase, was developed along the amber route (approximately South – North), and later along the Danube's axis (West – East). Dacia was mainly organized along the road *Drobeta – Sarmizegetusa – Apulum – Potaissa – Napoca – Porolissum*, as a natural extension of the administrative and military structures of Upper Moesia.

The Danubian frontier is known as *ripa Danuvii*, a denomination mentioned by inscriptions from the second half of the first century AD, but also indicated by Tacitus (“... *ripamquem Danuvii legionum duae in Pannonia, duae in Moesia attinebant* ...”). The choice of a river (bank) as location for setting military units was determined in Roman time by the need for supplies and not exactly by the need to reach a natural border. The image of an empire trying to find its natural limits, especially along rivers, is a research hypothesis of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, very much influenced by given European (political) realities of that time. If we understand the *limes* not necessarily as a fortified frontier, but more likely as a demarcation line between the Roman world and the barbarian one, somehow a border not precisely defined at least at ideological level, as long as even *imperium Romanum* itself was infinitely, one can use the term of Danubian *limes* similar to the one of Lower Germania for the Roman frontier along the Rhine river or the *limes* of Upper Germania and Raetia. Such a perspective has to be considered especially given the fact that for about two decades (102–118 AD) the northern border of the Empire was moved north to the Danube up to the Meridional Carpathians and in Southern Moldavia, without defining clearly an eventual demarcation line.

For modern historiography, the first century of the Principate is characterized by the axiom of the consolidation of the Empire within its natural borders. This concept was considered as being inaugurated by the directing lines of Augustus’ foreign policy, the time when the defensive system is outlined along the Rhine and the Danube.

The interpretation of the Roman borders was made for a long time under the influence of the European ideologies which interpreted the ancient writers by following Cicero’s dictum “*Historia magistra vitae est*” (Cicero, *De Oratore*, II, 9). As a consequence the Roman frontiers were seen as a model for the delimitation of the civilized world from the barbarian world; even in a more recent ideological and political construction, the European Union, the Roman civilization was considered as a major predecessor.

Following Luttwak’s conception, the Roman frontiers were clearly defined on the ground following the clear concept of providing security. As

a result the Empire's limits were clearly marked in the field during Hadrian's reign. With only few exceptions, the client kingdoms were absorbed, and the frontiers were established by following natural barriers as rivers or seas. Thus the Roman imperial power was materialized by defensive frontiers.

Somehow against this perspective the Roman frontiers are to be understood as critical zones of interaction since the Empire's economy was depending on the goods produced and traded by the neighboring populations. In time there were involved considerable human and financial resources in order to secure the Empire's control along these frontiers. The existence of an imperial frontier and the neighboring population in its vicinity played a very important role in the political ideology of the Empire. This fact is outlined by the ancient historic sources preserved to contemporary time. These sources testify for various invasions and the aspects related to the political perspective of the Roman emperors, and less about economic aspects or the relations between the communities existing on the borders. But the archaeological finds allow a much more thorough perception, through the multitude of data, concerning the interaction of the Roman world with the barbarians on the frontier zones and not only.

The preference to consider the great rivers as "logical" borders of the Roman Empire is due to the modern perspective built by the historians in assessing and integrating in maps the literary, epigraphic and archaeological data. The great historic atlases and their use as educational and research materials starting with mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and up to nowadays, have influenced essentially the interpretations given by the scholars to such resources. Moreover, the configuration of modern states in Europe left its mark upon the perspective of interpretation of ancient historic phenomena.

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Which are the most significant moments concerning the Danubian provinces identified as a result of my research?

The first Dacian war of Trajan reached its objectives, providing by a new treaty a significant set back for king Decebalus' authority. An important argument that the result of this war was not a genuine conquest is indicated by the coins issued with the legend *Dacia Victa*, artefacts on

which is represented *Victoria*. The integration of the territories from the south-western part of the Dacian Kingdom to the Upper Moesia was considered as a solution to pacify the area by reducing significantly the Dacians power and their capacity to attack south to the Danube. The bridge built at Drobeta aimed to provide an efficient supply for the troops camped on the northern bank of the Danube and to allow, in case of an attack, bringing additional reinforcement units. In such perspective, the discussion about the presence of the Roman troops in SW Dacia between 102 and 105 AD is still an open issue.

On the same time one can observe a clear process for extending the fortification network along the Lower Danube. Up to the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD there were no indications for Roman fortifications on the right bank of the Danube between the naval bases from *Sexaginta Prisca* (Ruse) and *Noviodunum* (Isaccea), since the responsibility to watch this route belonged to *praefectus classis Flavia Moesice et ripae Danuvii*. According to archaeological and epigraphic sources, during Trajan's reign, most probably between the two Dacian wars (102–105 AD), there were built the forts from *Carsium* (103 AD), *Rasova-Flaviana* (105–108? AD), as well as part of a road, as indicated the *milliarium* discovered at *Sacidava* (Muzait, Dunăreni), set by *cohors IV Gallorum* in 103–105 AD. This activity to fortify the Lower Danube's area represents a clear delimitation of the territories in relation to the Sarmathian populations with whom was set a treaty.

It is unlikely that the largest part of the linear fortifications to represent the consequence of the presence on indefinite term of troops in comparison to future advance strategic movements. Such an interpretation is based on the fact that during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, the governors were keen to gain "the glory of extending the province".

I believe that Trajan's policy concerning certain nomad populations, like the Sarmathians, envisaged to forbid their migration in vital areas for their economy, but with critical consequences as regards the relations with *Iazyges* and, later, with *Roxolani*.

Later, during the pacification process, Hadrian drew off certain legions from these territories and reconsiders the entire defensive system. As a result certain critical points are replaced, new auxiliary troops are

deployed etc. One has to outline the adaptability of the solution to the general situation of the province of Dacia. For example the maintenance costs of such troops were cheaper, since these units had less claims give the existing conditions in a newly established province.

At the end of the first Dacian war fought by Trajan and the transformation of the former kingdom of Decebalus in a Roman province, part of the territory north to the Lower Danube, namely the one which formed the territory of Lower Dacia province and nowadays territory of Wallachia remained under the control of the army in Lower Moesia, since a large part of the auxiliary troops of this province were send north to the Danube. A well known example is cohorts *I Hispanorum veterana*, who's *pridianum* reminds that part of the soldiers of this unit are north to the Danube since September 105 AD.

After the retreat of Roman garrisons from Wallachia, Hadrian will organize a new procuratorial province, covering the eastern part of Oltenia and south-east Transylvania, named Lower Dacia. With only two exceptions (*numerus equitum Illyricorum* și *numerus burgariorum et veredariorum*), the army of this new province is made of the auxiliary troops deployed north to the Danube since the Dacian wars fought by Trajan.

Moreover, the movement of legio V Macedonica in 170 AD set the premises for the invasion of the *costoboci*. This population followed the same route as the barbarians who attacked Lower Moesia in 101–102 AD, since the epigraphic finds indicate that the city of *Tropaeum Traiani* was among the most affected ones. One have to remember that on the same spot but certain decades earlier took place another major battle, as indicated by the discovered monuments, all aimed to commemorate those events. Florian Matei-Popescu considers that the reason for moving legio V Macedonica at Troesmis is to block possible barbarian invasions from that direction.

Another area confronted with major changes at the end of Trajan's reign and the beginning of Hadrian's reign is the western frontier of Dacia. *Tibiscum*, *Micia* and *Porolissum*, located on the western border of Dacia are designed as three military commandments where in case of attacks was possible to concentrate many military units.

As concerns the newest administrative and military creation, namely the province of Dacia Porolissensis, Hadrian brought four cavalry troops: *Ala Siliana, ala Bosporanorum, ala II Pannoniorum, ala Tungrorum Frontoniana*. The strategic importance for placing these mobile troops in the Transylvanian Plain is given by the fact that such units were fit to reach rapidly any part of the Roman frontier in this area. Also they played a very important role in the defense of the auriferous area of Dacia. During the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD this part of the province will suffer significant losses as a result of the marcomannic wars and thus a new administrative reorganization was – once again – needed. But these aspects are to be considered on another occasion.

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