

**„ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” UNIVERSITY OF IAȘI**

**Faculty of History**

**Doctoral School**

# **THESIS ABSTRACT**

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**- 2015 –**

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**The lower Mureș Basin and the south-western Apuseni  
Mountains during the classical period of Ancient Dacia (sec.  
II î.Hr. – I d.Hr.) (abstract)**

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**Keywords:** Archaeology, Second Iron Age, Dacian Kingdom, Lower Mures, Southwestern Apuseni Mountains

## CHAPTER I. Introductory aspects

The Carpathian-Danube during 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and 1<sup>st</sup> century AD is marked by the emergence and consolidation of Dacian kingdom, achieved by integrating, more or less peacefully, the various socio-political entities that preceded it. Although marked by a unified cultural atmosphere, a fact noted by all who research the period, the different habitats of Dacia contain, however, a significant number of specific elements, resulting from divergent cultural and historical evolution. A correct understanding of the complex phenomena which affected Dacia in the mentioned timeframe cannot be achieved without the existence of a information base and of studies which focus on these areas individually – general history cannot be written without an understanding of the local one. That being said, a first and necessary step, in our opinion, is the realisation of studies focusing on these micro-zones.

The inferior Mureş River basin and the south-western area of the Apuseni Mountains are insufficiently known areas. Archaeological studies, usually carried out on a small scale, have not been followed up with the proper publication of the material found.

It becomes clear that it is necessary to start work on completing, as far as possible, the work, and to contribute to the sketching of an overview of this area, starting both with the fieldwork, and the archaeological material already existing in museums.

We didn't wish to create a simple analytical exercise, thus we have added to our approach an anthropological as well as historical approach. In the last chapter, which discusses the political and military history, we have tried to reconstruct, as far as possible, the historical evolution of this area between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. We hope that this work will represent a step forward in understanding the archaeological and historical realities on the western borders of pre-Roman Dacia.

As far as **ways and means** are concerned, the identification of the archaeological sites present in this work happened in three stages: first was the office stage, in which we have tried to localize known places based on information existent in specialized literature; the second stage, fieldwork, in which biographical information was confronted with the realities of the ground, and, finally, a third office stage, where the information gathered on the ground and from the literature was confronted in order to create a precise image of the subject matter being investigated.

We have analyzed a relatively consistent set of pottery. The majority of the pieces come from Pecica 1 (“Şanţul Mare”), from the old excavation done by M. Roska and L. Domotor. Another fairly consistent set comes from Vărădia de Mureş 1, from the excavation work done by M. Barbu and M. Zdroba. We have also used a selection of materials from Arad County, from smaller archaeological excavations.

The lack, in the case of nearly all materials, of data regarding the archaeological context of the discoveries, as well as the rare full piece, limited the range of possible interpretations and forced us to tackle the pottery problem in a *simplified* manner.

We have also found it necessary to discuss, briefly, issues which pertain the ancient history of the entire south-eastern European space, and the entire area occupied by the Geto-Dacians, in order to understand the context of the historical phenomena which affected this area of Dacia, as results from the written and archaeological sources.

Our approach could be construed as having a historicist character. However, we believe that the finality of any archaeological work should be narrative, since the isolation in an ivory tower of pretend objectivity and wilful ignorance or avoidance of attested (or even supposed) historical phenomena is, as far as we are concerned, counterproductive from a historiographical point of view.

## **CHAPTER II. History of research**

For the longest part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one cannot talk of a serious interest in researching the archaeological remains of the second Bronze Age where this particular area is concerned. In this time, due to some “scavenging” done while trying to hunt for treasure, quite a number of isolated artefacts or even treasures have been discovered, however, the majority have been lost in suspicious circumstances. In the last decades of this time period, Arad County was the intense focus of researchers from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, such as Floris Romer, Bodrog Milleker, or Marton Roska, as well as passionate amateurs like Laszlo (Ladislau) Domotor. Even if these were not interested in the discoveries from the second Bronze Age, their activities mark the start of superior stage of understanding and research when it comes to antique remains. The most important part was played, without a doubt, but Sandor Marki, a historian with an encyclopaedic spirit, professor and member of the Hungarian Academy, author of a successful two volumed historical monograph concerning the county and city of Arad.

The period of the First World War and the extensive restructuring that took place at an institutional level due to the Great Union from 1918 haven't been conducive to ample archaeological investigation. Only in 1923 does M. Roska resume digging at “Șanțul Mare”. However, neither of the two campaigns, one in 1923 and the second in 1924, brings concrete information with regard to habitation in the area during the Second Bronze age.

The situation will start changing during the 60's and 70's, when there is interest in showcasing the material remains found in the Arad county dating from the time of the Second Bronze age. Of note is the work of I. H. Crisan at “Șanțul Mare”, that of S. Dumitrașcu in Zarand Country, of M. Barbu, M. Zdroba and V. Boroneanț along the Mureș River Valley, and other smaller excavation sites. As far as research goes, this period is marked by real progress on all levels. The numerous excavations and archaeological surveys conducted at sites all over the county have allowed, for the first time, the coming together of a coherent picture of the realities of the second Bronze Age. On the other hand, quite often, the publication of the results has left much to be demanded, the majority of the material gathered during the fieldwork

being still deposited, without having been thoroughly examined, in museums from Arad, Oradea, or Cluj-Napoca. The great summary volumes published in this period that discuss the material and spiritual culture of pre-Roman Dacia contain few references to the archaeological realities from the territory of Arad county, and even what has appeared is only an overview, the authors preferring to focus on better known and researched regions such as Orăștie Mountains, Transylvania, the Romanian plain, or southern Moldova. In spite of these real gains, the years between 1947 and 1989, and in particular the last decade of 1980-1989, were marked by certain political requirements which have left their mark on the quality of the research done and of the historical discourse accompanying it.

The profound political changes that have taken place at the end of 1989 have created some difficulties in the archaeological research field, especially early on. Thus the continuation of archaeological work in Cladova and Săvarșin has been postponed until 1991, and 1994 respectively. The Cladova dig, conducted by V. Boroneant, continued until 2002, and those at Săvarșin were run by Peter Hugel, initially with Mircea Barbu and Pascu Hurezan. After M. Barbu passed away in 2003, the research has been restarted under Victor Sava from the Arad Museum Complex, Valeriu Sarbu from the Braila Museum, and Cristina Bodo from the Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilization from Deva. In the following years a monograph of this important site will be published.

Even though, from a historical perspective, the years following 1989 have brought new achievements, they also came with new challenges. Incoherent legislation with regard to the protection of national treasures, as well as the severe identity crisis that today's Romania is still confronted with, have come, unfortunately, with a complete disregard for the past, which is being seen by more and more social categories with a complete indifference, or, worse, as a potential source of income.

### **CHAPTER III. Directory of archaeological finds**

The majority of archaeological finds are located in the inferior part of the Mureș river, being concentrated in particular in the area of the city of Arad, specifically, the borough of Vladimirescu. This might be due to the extensive urban construction work being carried out in the area, which has brought about accidental discoveries. The discovered sites were localized, in particular, around the higher river beds, which offered protection in the time of seasonal flooding.

Another consistent group of sites can be found around the town of Pecica, also along the inferior Mureș River. This concentration can be tied, of course, to the existence of the economic, political, and perhaps even religious centre from “Șanțul Mare” (Pecica 1).

A coherent group of fortifications and possible fortifications, doubled by a number of finds which indicate civilian settlements, are to be found at the entrance of the Mureș into the plain of Arad. It is quite possible that we are dealing with a defence micro-system here, meant to control the access towards Transylvania, as well

as the potentially valuable land from the meadows and terraces along the Mureş. North of the fortification at Cladova, the interior of the Zarand Mountains have copper which might have been easily exploited even in Antiquity.

It is interesting to observe, however, that up-river along the Mureş Valley, between Şoimoş and Vărădia de Mureş, Dacian finds are almost altogether missing. The situation is difficult to explain as being simply due to the stages where research is at. In Vărădia Valley, however, we find another well protected area, with two, perhaps even three fortifications, at Vărădia de Mureş, and Săvârşin, respectively. The area has a rich soil, and at Baia (part of the village of Vărădia de Mureş), iron ore can be found in surface soil.

In the north-western part of the Zarand Mountains, discoveries such as the Moroda Treasure, fortifications like the Şiria one, settlements from Agrişu Mare, Măderat and Ineu prove the existence of a new micro-zone with an extraordinary archaeology potential.

The Codru-Moma Mountains represent, in their turn, an area with important discoveries, no less than four fortifications having been found here: Botfei 1, Groseni 1, Clit 1 and Dezna 1. At the same time this area is defended by Troian of the Zarand the linear fortification (dyke) which closes the gulf of Zarand Country and which we have, hypothetically, attributed to the Dacian period.

The norther Black Cris area, in particular the areas around Zerindu Mic and Micsa are host to a new group. The archaeological research done at Zerindu Mic (points 1 and 2) has brought about the discoveries of sites which seem to have been rural settlements.

As far as monetary finds are concerned, these tend to be grouped relatively in a uniform manner, but with a larger concentration in the White Cris basin. This stands in contrast with the small number of settlements found in the area. We are convinced that, following further field research, this overview will change. In areas where numerous large treasures have been found (Gurahonţ valley), it is safe to assume that important settlements, yet undiscovered, might have existed. The necropolises are altogether missing, although this is not surprising considering the time period in discussion is that of pre-Roman Dacia.

## **CHAPTER IV. Habitat and housing**

The peoples living 2000 years in the areas of the lower Mures Basin and south-western Apuseni mountains have left little trace of their passing on the surrounding environment. Even though some of the fortifications in the hill and mountain areas bear traces of terrace work, these have had a lesser impact than those undertaken in Transylvania. The terraces were few and occupied small surfaces.

The fortification elements utilised in this area are the usual ones, the ditch with rampart, which closed off the only accessible edge. In the case of many sites, due to the lack of fieldwork, or its quality, one can only guess at what the fortification elements might have been. It is curious to note the lack of stone in the military

architecture of the area, even though 20km east up the Mures valley this is used. It is possible that some economical factors might have determined the local nobility to use simpler means of construction. Even Troian of Zarand represents a fairly modest effort.

The lack of published material makes it difficult to discuss dwelling places and their aspect. At Pecica 1 (“Santul Mare”) we can note, however, the existence of both surface dwellings as well as those burrowed. The burrowed ones are to be found outside the acropolis and belonged, most likely, to the general population. The surface ones, some of them having two rooms, with fireplace and interior holes for supplies, are grouped on the acropolis and have belonged to the members of the upper classes.

It is difficult to create a hierarchy of settlements. There is a consensus in the published literature that the most important area centre was Pecica 1. The term “proto-urban” is sometimes used to describe such a settlement, is not in our opinion an adequate one. Of course Pecica 1 was most likely an important settlement, a political, economic, and religious centre, but it cannot be compared, as aspect and finds, with the large settlements found in other parts of Dacia (south-western Transilvania, Siretul Inferior). Rather, we are dealing with the equivalent of a market-town, an important settlement in the economic and social life of a region, but not quite a town.

Among the fortified settlements we can also place the sites that were, without doubt, used at least in part as military outposts, but with a larger enclosed area. Sites such as Paulis 1, Cladova 1, Varadia de Mures 1, Berindia 1 and Savarsin 1 could be counted in this category. There are, however, fortified settlements of reduced size (Clit 1, Boftei 1), where the strategic role seems to have prevailed. We are using the term strategic role, because, in themselves, the military value of these fortifications was quite reduced; they had been built mainly to impress the local population, signal the existence of an authority. From a military standpoint, they could be efficiently used as defence only in the case of inter-tribal conflicts, which involved a small number of participants, or on raids against brigands. Where more thorough digging has been carried out the existence of “civilian” and even satellite settlements has been confirmed.

## **CHAPTER V. The crafts**

Agriculture was one of the basic occupations. The presents of scythes, spades, plough blades, attests the practice of crafts and the existence of specialised craftsmen. Paleo-botanic analysis done on a cache of seeds from Zabrani 1 suggests survival-level agriculture, centred mostly on resilient plant species. Animal husbandry played an important part, as the archaeo-zoological analysis from Pecica 1 and Savarsin 1 show, as well as hunting.

Among the crafts, pottery was the one we could analyse most thoroughly, as we had a consistent pottery find. The descriptive cards used were fairly complex, and the result interesting, as we could distinguish a home as well as a workshop

production. In our opinion, a significant number of pots, as well as cups („Dacian cups”) were produced by each household separately. On the other hand, the other pottery seems to be workshop made products, made by specialised craftsmen.

The basic ceramic shapes don't seem to be different from those found elsewhere in pre-Roman Dacia. The technique, visually speaking, seems to be, for the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, of an indubitable quality. It's interesting to note the presence, among the finds, of pottery types considered to be specific to the south-Carpathian area: bird-shaped lids, rectangular fruit bowls. The differences are apparent only when one takes into account imitations, as well as influences. Thus, in the caches analyzed by us, there are a number of pieces which denote clear Celtic influences, more specifically of the Scordisci. The Greek influence is, however, barely noticeable in this area.

Even though no ovens were found that could have been used to melt iron ore, ironmongery seems to have been practiced, since tools were found. The majority of these come from the tool and weapon cache at Chesinț 1, however, it is unclear whether they were produced locally or imported from the Transylvanian area. The number and variety of iron tools and utensils found move the discussed area closer to Transylvania.

Silver working, on the other hand, is present not only through a number of objects, but also through a jeweller's shop, one of the most interesting found in pre-Roman Dacia (Pecica 1).

## **CHAPTER VI. Clothing**

The fact that so few accessories and jewellery has been found reflects more upon the research done than the real state of affairs. This fact has been underlined by the recent apparition, in the last couple of years, in fact, of such pieces, either through accidental discoveries, or through the activity of treasure hunters.

I would like to draw attention toward a few such treasures which contain silver pieces and coins, such as those from Moroda and the one at Gura Văii. The Gura Văii hoard might in fact represent a ritual offering.

## **CHAPTER VII. Trade**

The problem of coins, their circulation and use within the Dacian tribes is a controversial subject. Local coins, from the first issue, present in such large numbers and types, seem to confirm tribal factions. The local coin from the second local issue belongs to one type solely, namely Toc-Chereluș. This fact can be a consequence of convergent political evolution that resulted in a tribal union in this region predating Burebista. The much lower quality of the second issue coins, attested by the very poor quality silver used, is connected to the political and military events which brought about Roman dominance in the Aegean-Mediterranean area, and thus, the

disappearance of trading as a source for the warrior tribes of the north-Balkan tribes. It is possible that in the time of Burebista Illyrian drachmas start to dominate, and, at the same time, the Roman republican denarii appear. It is improbable that the coins were used in day to day trading; however, it might have been used by merchants, nobles, and some of the rank bearing warriors. This fact is proven not only by historical logic, but also by the lack of monetary division. The general population would have mostly used barter.

Commercial exchanges show a rather western approach. The goods brought from the area of Middle Danube could have been gotten in exchange for salt brought from Transylvania. In spite of, at times, conflicts during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, the Celts have represented, or so it seems, the main commercial partner of the tribes from the Lower Mures area. The largest part of the imports is represented by pottery, both with graphite in its paste, as well as painted pottery. The ties with the Germanic tribes of Bastarnae, situated north-east of Dacia, are illustrated by a few ceramic fragments. The presence of a bowl with relief decoration at Berindia 1 proves the existence of trade relations with the areas to the South of the Carpathian Mountains.

The geographical positioning, far from the Black sea and beyond the arc of the Carpathians meant that the tribes had very little contact with the Hellenistic world. This can be found only in a few ceramic pots and copies. The ties to the Roman world are, however, strong. Evidence seems to show up around the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, and grows exponentially, especially in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. The imports consist mainly of provincial pottery, amphorae, Gallic style *terra sigillata*, fragments of bronze pots, as well as glassware. Among the last we find the *unguentaria* the most interesting.

## **CHAPTER VIII. The Society**

As far as social order goes, things must have been much as they were in the other Dacian regions. The Pecica 1 site speaks eloquently. This site, the most important regional centre, would have been the residence of an influential noble clan, based on the presence of two religious edifices, the jeweller's workshop, and imports. The other smaller fortifications could have been the residences of lesser nobility, of clans or families with less influence.

The nobility, inhabitants of the small fortifications, are trying to distance themselves physically from the mass of common people. Pecica 1 is again referenced, where the massive ditch built between the acropolis and the "civilian settlement" divides two very different worlds. When compared to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC, one can feel an acute sharpening of the social divide. This has happened, mostly likely, due to the dissolution of the military democracy and the creation of new and more authoritarian forms of government.

## **CHAPTER IX. Spirituality**

There is very little information on the religious beliefs of the Dacians living in the lower Mures river basin and the west of the Apuseni Mountains. At Pecica 1 we find two temples, one circular, the other presenting an apse. It is possible to tie the first one to certain Sun-worshipping related cults, and the second, perhaps, to a fertility cult. These temples have analogues all over pre-Roman Dacia. Ritual burials are found at Cladova 1 and Zabrani 1, but the absence of a thoroughly documented excavation interpretation is difficult.

## **CHAPTER X. The political and military history**

The political and military history of the area is of course tied to that of pre-Roman Dacia. The arrival of the Celts in the area, at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, bring late Iron Age civilisation. The Celts and the local population live together, at times within the same settlement, at least they do so along the Mureş river. In Tara Zarandului there are no Celtic remains, which means the local population has retained control, and it is not surprising that the most important first issue coin discoveries have been made in that area.

Around 150 BC the Celts disappear from the intra-Carpathic area, moving towards the Pannonian plains. In the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, as well as the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, a process of tribal unification takes place in the area, which, in time, results in the apparition of a local tribal authority, which issued the Toc-Chereluş type coins. These will be encompassed in the large area ruled by Burebista. Illyrian coins, found in large numbers, could represent spoils from the participation of the Dacians from the Zarand Mountains in the wars of the great king.

The death of Burebista brings about the fragmentation of rule and to a real rebirth of tribalism, all having as background grave internal conflicts. In this confusing political conflict, it is possible that some fortifications disappear altogether (Berindia 1). At the same time, the advancement of Roman forces in Pannonia creates conflicts with the Dacians. Having said that, the hypothesis of a punitive Roman expedition along the lower Mureş valley has no real basis, and is based on an incorrect translation of Strabo's text as well as on a forced historical interpretation. The end of the Daco-Roman wars in 106 AD brings about the dissolution of fortifications in the area, however, the lives of the Dacians will continue even after this date.

## **Final Thoughts**

We believe it is absolutely necessary to continue investigating the analyzed area, which has an amazing archaeological potential. Publishing monographs on the

results of findings from excavations at Cladova and Savârşin should be a priority, as well as the publication of the material on the Berindia excavations.

Future field research will have to focus on the Crişul Alb basin, especially in the Gurahonţ and Hălmaşiu basins. As far as we are concerned, the area has an immense archaeological potential, thus far insufficiently exploited.

The picture represented by this thesis is only a preliminary one. Even if we were not able to answer all proposed questions, we believe that we have managed to contribute to a better understanding of the lives of Dacians who lived in this area. We close this segment of the thesis with a quote from the great poet Kahlil Gibran, a quote that we have assumed as a motto: *“a little knowledge that acts is worth infinitely more than much knowledge that sits idle.”* Thus, a little information that moves and is used is infinitely more valuable than stored away information. This is particularly true in Archaeology.