

**Ioana A. Oltean, *Dacia: Landscape, Colonisation, Romanisation*. Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies, London-New York, Routledge 2007, 264 pages, 79 figures.**

Over the last decade, auxiliary methods of historical and archaeological research have become increasingly popular. These non-destructive methods, based on aerial photographs, archaeometry, LiDAR scanning, geophysical studies led to spectacular and valuable results, which support and pick up the research pace. Ioana Oltean's book, whose pioneering research in the field leads the way to other interested researchers, joins such trend. Ioana Oltean is a Lecturer in archaeology at the University of Exeter, Great Britain. While writing the book, she was a post-doctoral fellow researcher of the British Academy at the University of Glasgow. She had defended her PhD thesis at the same University, study for which she benefited of a doctoral scholarship from the University and British Government. This book is based on her doctoral thesis titled "*Later prehistoric and Roman rural settlement pattern in Western Transylvania*" and contributed to her appointment with the University of Exeter. The landscape of Roman Dacia is well known to the author, who studied history at the "Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj. As early as the first year as a student, her focus was Roman archaeology. She was involved as student in the archaeological excavations at Colonia Dacica Sarmizegetusa, capital of Roman Dacia. After graduating, she was employed by the National History Museum of Transylvania, where she participated in several archaeological excavations and archaeological aerial reconnaissance programmes.

The analysed book tackles the impact of the Roman conquest and Romanisation on the Dacian natives, both socially and on their settlements, from the broad view of the archaeological landscape. Analysis is made on the territory from central Dacia for the pre- and Roman periods - respectively Dacia Superior.

The first chapter comprises the introduction, where the author presents the state of research of Roman Dacia and methodology and method issues. Archaeological sources on which Roman archaeology in Romania is based are dependent on the performed research, which mainly consisted in excavations carried out in Roman forts and towns. Villas and rural settlements were less investigated. Under the communism, two large, political themes affected archaeological research and led to distorted historical interpretation. One was that of the Marxism-Leninism, historians being forced to think and write history accordingly. The other theme was that of the Daco-Roman continuity, construed in order to counterpart the Hungarian historiography which claimed the antecedence of the Hungarian population in Transylvania. The author notes the lack in the past of a national system for the record and collection of data on the sites' location, as well as the lack of databases that would make them accessible on the internet, CIMEC being the only site of the sort. Past excavation methodology

is also criticised, which often paid no importance to timber-an-earth phases and failed to record various construction or repair phases of stone buildings. Thus, the chronology of some of the investigated sites is not always accurate. Archaeology was for a long time confused with excavations. Only non-systematic field research which resulted in the collection of material removed from tillage and the approximate delimitation of the site were carried out. Geophysical research performed in some of the sites was limited to them, and did not expand to their hinterland.

In a history of aerial investigations of the sites until the publishing date of the book, the author underlines existent burdens in the communist and post-communist period. The programme of aerial photography of the University of Glasgow in cooperation with the National Museum of Transylvanian History was the first programme of the kind in Romania. Having as investigation area the SW Transylvania with the mid valley of Mureş river and Țara Hațegului, the results of the programme underlay this book. The work attempts to answer the following questions: in what way did the Roman conquest affect the native landscape; which were the factors that determined the choice for a settlement and which were the decisive factors in the choice of a certain settlement type; whether one may detect any arguments in the support of the settlements' establishment following a directed policy or whether the impact of the Roman colonists was the product of multiple individual strategies; whether the conquest generated a perceptible resistance from the natives; how did the Romanisation process develop in Dacia. The book wishes thus to be an alternate interpretation of the Romanisation process in Dacia.

Chapter two deals with the natural environment from west Transylvania, topographical, climatic, resources and landscape changes from Late Antiquity to Modern times. Natural conditions in the area under analysis present all advantages to attract human settling, so no wonder that it became Dacia's heart.

Chapter three tackles the historical circumstances and historical sources on the Dacians and their conquest by the Romans.

Chapter four approaches the settlements and society in the late pre-Roman Iron Age. Methodologically, the author rejects the classification of settlements according to I. Glodariu's<sup>1</sup> and G. Gheorghiu's<sup>2</sup> typologies. The classification proposed by I. Glodariu was especially based on architectonical criteria, which makes that settlements of high status be best known. Though these typologies admitted the importance of surveying, existent resources are deemed secondary, priority in the choice of a settlement being the possibility for defence. However, the manner of awarding hillforts a purpose exclusively military is, in the author's view as well, an approach outdated by most recent research, as they turn into the centres of a more spread settlement, while the distinction between hillforts and fortified settlements is most often insufficient on the basis of the current level of information. The exclusion of the hillforts and lowland settlements makes this typology incomplete. The author criticises also J. G. Nandriş's<sup>3</sup> and K. Lockear's<sup>4</sup> typolo-

<sup>1</sup> Glodariu 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Gheorghiu 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Nandriş 1976.

<sup>4</sup> Lockear 2004.

gies (as incomplete and unsatisfying). Nandriș's typology excludes low and mid altitude settlements and is suitable only to archaeological remains in Orăștiei Mountains. Lockyear's typology extends the typology of the settlements in Orăștiei Mountains to the rest of the territory, which leads to a distorted image of the type. Or, the area from Orăștiei Mountains is an exception, for it developed in response to exceptional activities. These typologies fail to use an accurate terminology, since the term "settlement" is used by Glodariu, while Nandriș prefers that of "site", though the terms are not synonymous. The author believes distinction based on the community size that each site type accommodates must be made, between aggregate settlements and individual settlements. However, the sites' micro and macro-structures must be connected, at the landscape scale of the space that functioned as a settlement.

Chapter four discusses the landscape inhabiting. Previous research tended to establish sites' chronologies according to the artifacts, yet without stratigraphic reference. Thus, simply "Dacian" or "La Tène" were deemed sufficient indications. For the La Tène period, based on analogies with other such settlements in Britannia, Gallia and Pannonia, the author established the existence of 20 aggregate settlements and 80 individual settlements. In the studied area, aggregate settlements were divided by previous authors depending on the presence or absence of the fortification, into fortified and open settlements. Still as such, fortified settlements were differentiated from hillforts by the fact they were larger, while hillforts were designed for the chieftain and his garrison. The author rejects such distinction which she finds problematic as long as in only a few cases, the inner settlements were investigated and such definitions are based on the presence or absence of *murus dacicus*, though it is restricted to the area of Orăștiei Mountains. On the other hand, many of the hillforts were centres of much larger settlements. In what individual homesteads are concerned, insofar only six settlements were recognized as such. To these, the author adds an additional of 13-15, to which, although the settlement type has not yet been identified, a small inhabitancy area was noted. Another category of settlements, intermediary, whose significance escaped previous studies, is represented by tower-houses. Until present, they were considered part of the defensive system<sup>5</sup>. The author believes that one of the strong arguments against their purely defensive role is they are provided with a large number of adjacent buildings, which would account for a more extended auxiliary settlement. Based on analogies with other such structures, for instance the Sardinian nuraghes<sup>6</sup>, the author assigns these towers a role rather residential than defensive and may be related to the emergence among the elites of a category of warriors more likely directly associated to the political leadership. They are a type of settlement of higher significance than villages and homesteads, being exceeded from this standpoint only by hillforts. Fortified sites, hillforts or fortified settlements were approached insofar exclusively from a political-strategic view to the detriment of the analysis of political-administrative or economic functions<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the author believes that the presence of *murus dacicus* is indicative of the social status and not the permanent or temporary

<sup>5</sup> Glodariu et alii 1996; Gheorghiu 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Trump 1991, 163-168.

<sup>7</sup> Glodariu 1983; Gheorghiu 2001.

character of the site occupancy. Her arguments are based on several results of finds thus far, which show there was a symbiotic relationship between hillforts and the additional settlement, by which they proved their status and importance. The more important the hillfort, the more elaborate the settlement. I. Oltean challenges previous analyses<sup>8</sup>, which, tributary to old theories, prior to the introduction of modern surveying and aerial photography of the British Iron age<sup>9</sup>, deny the existence of settlements in lower regions. The discovery of the hillfort at Cigmău via aerial photography amends the theory according to which they were located only in the mountains. 39 of the sites discussed in the chapter - 14 at higher altitudes and 15 in the lowlands - were occupied as early as prehistory. The density of inhabitancy in the Orăştiei Mountains, with settlements at less than 1 km apart, and which is not found anywhere else in Dacia, is due, according to the author, either to the very late chronology of the sites, where their emergence would be due to the political and social factors, or to the fact that most of them are of scattered character. Concerning farming, the author believes less likely the seasonal theory of grain farming and animal breeding, as there should have existed very large settlements in the upper-mid-altitude belt, as well as a very elaborate network of roads. The recently investigated settlement at Vinţu de Jos proved a high potential of grain storage, which makes possible that such capacity of the other settlements be underrepresented. Thus, attentions refocus from altitude settlements to those in the lowlands would lead to rapid statistical changes. In what the social landscape is concerned, social layers are also visible in settlement types by hillforts and stone architecture. The traditional interpretation of the fortified sites is that of local equivalents of tribal centres in the Celtic world, Glodariu often using analogies with Gallia<sup>10</sup>. I. Ferenczi<sup>11</sup> believes that a tribe union must have comprised a few such fortified sites that would have remained important strategically and such circumstances would have perpetuated in the Dacian state. The basis of this information is literary<sup>12</sup>. The author considers that the archaeological picture is yet different from that of the Celtic *oppida*. Thus, the form and size of the defensive sites is variable and mirrors not only the size of the group, but also its social structure. If during the Hallstatt, some of the largest fortified settlements in Europe were in existence in Transylvania, during the La Tène period they become smaller, which may be indicative of social changes and the emergence of aristocratic/royal sites. Their function was until present invariably interpreted as strategic. However, according to the author, who<sup>13</sup>, believes that even though the residential function of the hillforts is recorded only in the area of the tower-houses inside, similarly to Britannia, it is possible that their position had more to do with social psychology, while stone architecture was used as outer display of the social status. Tower-houses may be interpreted as an extension of the elites' houses past the walls. Those inside the hillforts, may be the

<sup>8</sup> Gheorghiu 2001, 88-89.

<sup>9</sup> Fox 1933, 82.

<sup>10</sup> Glodariu 1983, 72.

<sup>11</sup> Ferenczi 1988, 127-159.

<sup>12</sup> Ptol. *Geog.* III 8.1-4.

<sup>13</sup> See Hamilton, Manly 2001, 7-42; Williams 2003, 223-255.

houses of chieftains or kings, satellite tower-houses may house noblemen, those *hetairoi*. Their geographic distribution also points to their clustering around power centres.

Chapter five tackles the Roman social landscape, namely the changes brought by the Roman colonists and their influence in social, economic and communication activities. Alike the case of the La Tène period, research methods used insofar are analysed there. A noted lack is that small urban settlements (small towns) were omitted from urban and rural studies for the simple fact there is no written record of their status<sup>14</sup>. Other omission that Ioana Oltean noticed is that terms *vicus* or *villa* were applied on the basis of very little archaeological evidence, so that previous studies mention no *stationes*, *mansiones* or rural temples. These studies also tackle *villae* and *vici* from a rather architectural than functional view. There are few sites recognized in research as belonging to the Dacians and very few recording inhabitancy continuity from pre-Roman to Roman periods. Moreover, at the date when the author wrote the book, the space division within an administrative territory was unknown. The types of Roman period settlements are treated by the author archaeologically, without emphasis on literary and epigraphic sources at the scale of the Roman Empire. In terms of villas and homesteads, the author mentions that by aerial reconnaissance, field walking accompanied by geophysical survey, via the Apulum Hinterland Project and Aerial Reconnaissance of Western Transylvania villas like those at Oarda (two), Șibot or Vințu de Jos were identified. Subsequent to the preventive excavations on the Simeria-Orăștie highway in the last couple of years, at Șibot was noted the existence of a settlement, most likely of small town type. It is mentioned that the *villae* excavators did not recognize the different building phases, especially in relation to the introduction of heating systems (*hypocaust*) and corridor levels. As a result, their future accurate reinterpretation might produce a reviewed typology of the villas in both Dacia and its neighbouring provinces. The terms "village" and "small town" are used to designate aggregate settlements. Though Ioana Oltean believes that previous scholars dealt only with the legal and administrative status of the settlements, *vicus-pagus*, *civitates*, without yet having delimited the municipal territories and number of settlements, the author makes no literary and epigraphic analysis, but focuses mainly on archaeological evidence. She identifies two main types: villages that follow a pre-Roman architectural model, which are the majority and those of Roman architectural type, which are yet harder to identify owing to methodological deficiencies. In what the location of sites is concerned, the author notes that villas are located around large towns: Sarmizegetusa - 30 *villae* and at Apulum - 28, being favoured in what access to Roman goods by roads and river transports is concerned. Thus, the sites with Roman building material are located at up to 3 km distance from roads, while sites only with shards predominate at more than 3 km. Hence, the relation to the transport system was an important factor in the architectonical Romanisation process, similarly to Pannonia. Romanised architecture mirrors availability rather than ethnicity. It is noteworthy that smaller centres like Aiud, Cigmău and Războieni, important as trade centres per se, should have fulfilled the same administrative role as

<sup>14</sup> Protase 1968, 502-511; Tudor 1969, 319-328.

Micia and Călan, since they were located at 15–17 km in-between and/or larger urban centres like Apulum and Sarmizegetusa. In the assessment of the Roman social landscape, the author criticises the fact that interprovincial comparative studies paid not enough attention to chronology. This would explain why villas in Dacia never reached the level of those in Britannia, Pannonia or Moesia, where the most elaborate and sophisticated, attempting to display social status and power, appear by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> – early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. Or, Dacia, whose *villae* exhibit aspects not dissimilar to early *villae* from other provinces, was abandoned after mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century. It is also necessary that both the social status of *villae* owners and their ethnicity by material culture be more accurately defined, compared to what the archaeology of Dacia currently uses. Thus, the *villa* at Mănerău is indicative, by its sizes, of a higher wealth degree than that at Cinciș, however smaller villas like that at Deva may suggest a considerable level of wealth by inventory details or interior design. Settlements of traditional architecture and those which continue to be occupied from the pre-Roman period are indicative of a trend for architectural Romanisation, which accounts for a great predisposition to acculturation. In what *vici militares* are concerned, none was granted municipal status except for Porolissum and Tibiscum, which, according to the author, was due to the fact that body of Roman citizens was not large enough under Septimius Severus in order to justify such status. Noting the resemblance between the houses of the pre-Roman natives from Luncani and Sarmizegetusa Regia to the type of *villae* in this part of Europe, the author hypothesises on a pre-Roman origin of the villas from Dacia, similarly to the West of the Empire, based on their orientation, division of internal space and access means, gradually, to the various rooms of such *villae*. Furthermore, the fine Dacian pottery from Sântămăria de Piatră might account for the fact that the *villa* would have been owned by members of the local native elite. According to the results of the archaeological excavations, the villas at Răhău, Șeușa and Chinteni, the latter in Dacia Porolissensis, were inhabited in the pre-Roman period. Hypocausts without fire prints and mixed hoards, consisting of Roman Republican and Imperial *denarii* together with the Dacian and Greek coins suggest the relation between the continuous wealth growth prior and after the Roman conquest. The absence of the natives from epigraphy should be explained in a different manner than their absence from the higher echelon of society. Dacian pottery in Roman contexts and the building techniques represent, according to Ioana Oltean, a rather temporary cultural reminiscence, a form of cultural conservatism than the deliberate rejection of the Roman culture.

Chapter six deals with the Romanisation of the landscape. The Romans built their settlements mainly in the plains, without completely eliminating those in the mountains, with a single exception – Sarmizegetusa Regia –, which was deliberately avoided. Traditional interpretation is based on classical sources, reporting that the area around Sarmizegetusa was deliberately depopulated and settlements moved to lowlands. The type of monumental architecture in the Orăștiei Mountains is found nowhere in any of the Dacian settlements of Roman period. On the contrary, they look alike lowland pre-Roman Dacian villages, with sunken/semi-sunken houses and storage pits. Once with the Roman conquest, hillforts and tower-houses disappear, yet

only at Sarmizegetusa Regia and Meleia there is clear evidence of their destruction during their use.

In conclusion, Ioana Oltean's book represents a important contribution, necessary and long expected in the interpretation of pre-Roman and Roman Dacia, which radically distances itself from traditional views, accepted insofar as such by the archaeological research. By awarding deserved attention to archaeological survey, aerial, systematic field walking and geophysical research, neglected and often disvalued by scholars, yet also based on the most recent contributions in the field, the author drafts a new typology and hierarchy of the settlements in the Late Iron Age and Roman period, different than the traditional based on elite hillforts and mass villages. The settlements typology and Romanisation pattern of the province of Dacia proposed by the author would remain a reference for the archaeological research in Romania and this part of Europe.

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