

CONF. DR. DAN ISAC (18.07.1946 – 24.07.2013)

Carissimo Amico, Admirabili Collegae, Magistro Optimo



Our late dear friend, wonderful colleague and best teacher, Dan Isac was besides a great schoolmaster, an exquisite excavator and probably the luckiest archaeologist of his times, who made outstanding archaeological discoveries.

Dan Isac was a pioneer in the field archaeology of Roman Dacia. He was the first to identify timber structures of Trajanic and Hadrianic date, which were later covered by stone buildings. Thus he opened a new direction in Romanian archaeology which concerned the complete study of the stratigraphic sequence of Roman structures from Dacia. Dan Isac devoted almost all of his time to excavations in the auxiliary forts of Gilău (between 1973 and 1985) and Cășeiu (between 1980 and 2013), which produced, besides impressive masonry rests, many small finds of exceptional value. Here he introduced into archaeology and trained many generations of students, including myself. For 43 years he served the University of Cluj-Napoca, where from he retired in 2011. His main fields of expertise were: Roman military history, structures and artifacts, Roman pottery, Roman provincial art and religion, and theoretical archaeology. He wrote 5 books and not less than 64 studies, articles and archaeological reports.

Dan Isac was born in Cluj-Napoca (by then just Cluj) and was educated in the same town of Cluj. He belonged to one of the oldest Romanian families in the town. His grandfather, Emil Isac, was one of the most brilliant intellectuals and an inspired poet of the first half of the 20th century in Cluj. The interest for Roman history and for ancient objects was for Dan Isac a family heritage. In 1969 he graduated the Babeș-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca. In the same year he was appointed assistant at the Chair of Ancient History and Archaeology. In 1976 he became lecturer and in 1985 he obtained the title of doctor in history with a paper on Roman Samian ware. In 1992 he became senior lecturer at the same department, where from he retired in 2011. During his teaching activity Dan Isac was in charge with the introductory course on archaeology, and the one on modern techniques in archaeology. He also held special lectures and seminars on Roman provincial archaeology, on the history of the Danube provinces, on Roman military history and archaeology (structures and artifacts), religion and provincial art. Besides that he held courses at all levels on Roman pottery, including Samian ware, which was his top domain of expertise.

Dan Isac started directing his first excavations in 1973 in the civilian settlement of the auxiliary fort at Gilău, near Cluj. He returned in 1976 and continued to excavate till 1985 the cavalry fort of *ala Siliana* at Gilău, discovering under it the fort of *cohors I Pannoniorum*. In the first years the main results were the excavation of *porta principalis dextra* and of the *principia*, where two timber phases and at least two other stone phases were identified (see the studies published with Al. Diaconescu and C. Opreanu in ActaMN, 18, 1981 and 20, 1983). Other subsequent notable achievements were the discovery of an earlier, smaller fort, dating under Trajan, the timber *porta decumana* of this ensemble, and the excavation of barrack-blocks and stables. The main results were published in the monograph of the auxiliary fort at Gilău from 1997. Starting as early as 1980 and till the end of his life he excavated the auxiliary fort at Cășeu (which belonged successively to a *cohors II Britannorum milliaria* and to a *cohors I Britannica milliaria equitata*). The most important decision of the last years was to initiate excavations in the adjacent *vicus Samum*, thus opening new ways in the provincial archaeology of Dacia.

He also made excavations together with Adriana Isac in the auxiliary fort at Cincșor (see EN, 4, 1994) and conducted extensive rescue excavations in the center of the town of Dej.

During all these years he made several spectacular discoveries such as a beautiful bronze statuette of Venus, an exquisite bronze vessel, decorated in relief with *palestra* scenes, a perfectly preserved bronze cavalry mask and other parade armor pieces (see the studies in ActaMN, 14, 1977; 37/I, 2000 and 43-44/I, 2006-2007 (2008), together with M. Bărbulescu, and in EN, 19, 2009), all from Gilău. The list is completed by an outstanding bronze votive plate from the auxiliary fort at Gherla, found during field walking (ActaMP, 18, 1994), the military diploma of AD 151 from Cășeu (in ActaMN, 38/I, 2001), and many others.

Dan Isac honored his favorable fate by a sustained and a solid scientific activity. He published the monographs of the two forts he excavated: *Castrele de cohortă și ală de la Gilău. Die Kohorten- und Alenkastelle von Gilău*, Zalău 1997 and *Castrul roman*

de la SAMVM-Cășeu. The Roman Auxiliary Fort SAMVM-Cășeu, Cluj-Napoca 2003. He did not deal only with history and architectonic structures, but also with small finds which illustrate the day to day life (*Viață cotidiană în castrele Daciei Porolissensis*, Cluj-Napoca 2001 and *Coins from Roman sites and collections of Roman coins from Romania. The auxiliary forts from Samum (Cășeu) and Gilău*, Cluj-Napoca 2007, together with Cristian Găzdac). Dan Isac fulfilled also the duty of coordinating the publishing of the rescue excavations from Dej, despite the fact that the material belonged to other time periods than the Roman one (*Contribuții arheologice la istoria orașului Dej*, Cluj 2008).

Dan Isac did not benefit enough of his retreat. He died suddenly in the summer of 2013, while preparing for the next excavations at Cășeu. He had still so many ongoing projects. The news shocked his friends, colleagues and his many former pupils. Together with his friends from the old town and county of Cluj, and from the whole country and abroad, we will all miss his high spirit, his tonifying energy and his distinguished presence. Above all we will be from now on deprived of his deep knowledge of Roman provincial archaeology and excavation techniques.

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