

# LIMES IN UPPER MOESIA AND SOUTHWESTERN DACIA: THE CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE MAJOR COMMUNICATION LINE

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The fortifications and civilian settlements of the limes in Upper Moesia were linked by a road that ran along the right bank of the Danube. This strategically important route was part of Roman itineraries and its path bypassed the difficult to cross region of the Iron Gates from *Viminacium* – Stari Kostolac (Drmno) to *Egeta* – Brza Palanka, following the southern slopes of Mountain Miroč. Further on, this road led to *Ratiaria* (Artcher), the easternmost Roman colony of Upper Moesia in nowadays Bulgaria<sup>1</sup>.

Since the fortifications on the limes in Upper Moesia are not all on the route of the main communication axis, we would expose here those toponyms recorded in the Roman itineraries:

– *Tabula Peutingeriana*, *segm.* VII: *Singiduno* XIV *Tricornio* XII *Monte Aureo* XIV *Margum Fl.* X *Viminatio* XIII *Punicum* XI *Vico Cuppe* XII *Ad Novas* X *Ad Scrofulas* XV *Faliatis* VIII *Gerulatis* VI *Unam* VI *Egeta* VIII *Clevora* VIII *Ad Aqvas* XXIV *Dortico* XXV *Ad Malum* XVI *Ratiaria*.

– *Itinerarium Antonini*: *Singiduno castra* XXIV *Aureo Monte* VI *Vincea* VIII *Margo* VIII *Viminacio* XXIV *Cuppe* XXIV *Novas* XII *Talia* XXI *Egeta* XVI *Aquis* X *Dortico* XVII *Bononia* XVIII *Ratiaria*.

– *Rav.*, IV 7, 8–18: *Punicum Vico Cuppae Novas Scrofulas Taliatis Gerbiatis Luna Egeta Clebora Aquas Dorticum*.

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<sup>1</sup> About the Roman roads in Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia: Fodorean 2006; Mitko Madzharov 2009; Petrović 2019.

The section *Singidunum-Viminacium* is listed in the Bordeaux to Jerusalem itinerary:

– *Itinerarium Burdigalense sive Hierosolymitanum: civitas Singiduno VI mutatio Ad Sextum VI mutatio Tricornia Castra VII mutatio Ad Sextum Miliarem VI civitas Aureo Monte VI mutatio Vingeio VIII civitas Margo X civitas Viminacio.*



Map of Roman Roads of the limes in Upper Moesia. / Harta drumurilor romane in limesul din provincia Moesia Superior.

The Roman fortifications along the limes in Upper Moesia were quite different from each other due to their size and role in the common defense system<sup>2</sup>. First of all, we have to mention the largest and most important camps of *IV Flavia* legion, in *Singidunum* (Belgrade)<sup>3</sup> and of *IV Claudia* legion, in *Viminacium*<sup>4</sup>, whose civilian settlements have obtained the rank of colonies during the reign emperor Gordian III. Although it was never a legionary camp, *Ratiaria*, a Trajan's colony, could join this group of fortifications with developed urban settlements, at least because it was the first to obtain the highest administrative status in that northern part of the province. However, the permanent

<sup>2</sup> Petrović, Vasić 1996, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Petrović 2019, 57–62, with previous references.

<sup>4</sup> Petrović 2019, 69–74, with previous references.

military presence in *Ratiaria* was never been archaeologically attested like it was a case in two other Danubian colonies in Upper Moesia, *Viminacium* and *Singidunum*<sup>5</sup>.

There is a second, more substantial group of fortifications planned for the accommodation of auxiliary units, the cohorts, among which we could cite with certainty: Čezava (*Novae*), Donji Milanovac (*Taliata*), Karataš (*Diana*), Kostol (*Pontes*), Brza Palanka (*Egeta*) and Prahovo (*Aquae*). The third group consists of *castella* occupied by small military units, of the *auxilia* or *numeri* type: Saldum, Boljetin, Ravna, Golubinje, Hajdučka Vodenica, Tekija, Sip, Rtkovo, Vajuga, Milutinovac, Glamija, Ušće Slatinske reke, Mihailovac, Bordželj. Watchtowers or signal towers, the fourth set of fortifications, have been identified in the following localities: Livadice near Golubac, Zidinac, Gospodjin Vir, Pesača and Lepenski Vir. A fifth group brings together logistic centers such as Porečka Reka, Konopište and Kurvingrad near Kostol, which played an important role in supplying troops at the border. The sixth group of fortifications is that of dams (*claustra*) on the mouths of streams or small mountain rivers that flow into the Danube such as those of Brnjica, Kožica, Porečka Reka and Kosovica. The seventh group brings together *castella* of a particular shape, such as Bosman which is triangular, entirely built during the later phase of the renovation of the limes, in the time of Justinian<sup>6</sup>.

But it seems very important here to outline one particular group of *castella* as the eighth group, that served as the major crossing points from the right to the left bank of Danube, such as *Lederata* (Ram) or *Pontes* (Kostol) where stood the Trajan's bridge erected by famous Apollodorus of



Photo 1 – Trajan's bridge. / Podul lui Traian.

<sup>5</sup> Luka 2014, 50–64.

<sup>6</sup> Petrović, Vasić 1996, 18–19.

Damascus. The one that corresponds to the westernmost part of Dacia, *Lederata* (Ram) in nowadays Serbia, seems largely neglected during the past decades in the scientific literature due to the lack of modern systematic archaeological excavation. *Lederata* is situated at a suitable crossing point over the Danube, and it is assumed that Trajan, maybe led by *exemplum Alexandri*, started his conquest of Dacia using the very appropriate communication line: *Lederata* (Ram)–Banatska Palanka (*Zeugma*)<sup>7</sup>. It seems suitable here to add to the list of



Photo 2 – Stamped brick with the inscription of *coh(ors) I Cr(etum)* from Lederata. / Cărămidă șampilată cu inscripția aparținând *coh(ors) I Cr(etum)* de la Lederata.

epigraphic testimonies from *Lederata* one stamped brick with the inscription which is recently published<sup>8</sup>. The stamped inscription mentions the *cohors I Cretum* and it reads: *coh(ors) I Cr(etum)*. The brick is unfortunately damaged and its right part is missing. The letters of the inscription within a *tabula ansata* are beautifully carved and its palaeographical elements do not oppose to the early dating of the inscription in the eve of Trajan's Dacian campaign. The *cohors I Cretum*, was transferred first to Upper Moesia in *Naissus* (Niš) and *Timacum Maius* (Niševac), which is epigraphically attested, in the last decades of I century AD<sup>9</sup>. This military unit took part in Trajan's Second Dacian War, according to the epigraphic evidences from Dacia: *Apulum*, *Sucidava*, Banatska Palanka, *Drobeta*<sup>10</sup> and military diplomas<sup>11</sup>. It is worth adding that one other brick with the stamped inscription of *cohors I Cretum* originates from Banatska Palanka, just across *Lederata* in Dacia<sup>12</sup>. It could be concluded that *cohors I Cretum* had an important role in protection of the one of major crossing points over the Danube.

<sup>7</sup> Jovanović 2007, 89–90.

<sup>8</sup> Petrović, Filipović 2020, 153–154.

<sup>9</sup> Naissus: *IMS* IV, 34 = *AE* 1964, 262; Timacum Maius: Petrović, Filipović 2015, 33–39. About *cohors I Cretum* as a part of *Moesian Army*, *AE* 1977, 722; *AE* 2011, 1118 = *AE* 2012, 1256; Matei-Popescu 2013, 223–224.

<sup>10</sup> Apulum: *CIL* III 1163; Sucidava: *AE* 1975, 726, 2; Banatska Palanka: *AE* 1912, 78; Drobeta: *CIL* III 1703, 2; Marcu 2004, 13–14.

<sup>11</sup> From AD 110: *CIL* XVI 163 and 114 AD: *RMD* IV 226.

<sup>12</sup> *AE* 1912, 78





Photos 3 and 4 – Archaeological remains of the fortification in *Lederata*. / Vestigii arheologice ale fortificației de la *Lederata*.

In this area it was very easy to cross the river, not only because of the proximity of the left Dacian bank, but also because of the existence of one natural fact, the river island of Sapaja, that obviously facilitated the movement of the army to the other river side. This natural island does not exist anymore, as it was flooded in modern times by the construction of the hydro-electrical power plant Iron Gate I. Maybe the well-known representations of the pontoon bridge from Trajan's column in Rome originates from this point, that immediately later became a part of the itinerary road that connected *Viminacium* (Kostolac–Drmino) and *Tibiscum* (Jupa), as it is noticed in *Tabula Peutingeriana*: *Viminacio X Lederata XII Apo fl(uvio) XII Arcidava XII Centum Putea XII Berzovis XII Aizis III Caput Bubali X Tivisco*<sup>13</sup>. This road bifurcated from the section *Viminacium–Pincum* of the major communication axis of the limes in Upper Moesia and went directly to the left bank of Danube, to *Lederata*. The crossing point *Lederata*–Banatska Palanka was the shortest path that connected the Danube and Sarmizegetusa. It started at *Lederata* and then across the Danube it entered in Dacia. Then it firstly went up the valley of the Caraș River towards *Tibiscum* (Jupa), through *Arcidava* (Varadia). Following Trajan's campaigns against the Dacians, the power of Decebalus collapsed, giving way to the new Roman provinces of the Dacia. The advance of the troops north of the Danube benefited on the one hand from feedback in the field of information due to the previous campaigns led by Domitian and on the other hand by the parallel reinforcement of infrastructures, in particular those which made it possible to connect the most important points of passage over the river<sup>14</sup>.

The strategic importance of *Lederata* (Ram) is further supported with the erection of medieval fortress in the vicinity of Roman military camp. This fortress is considered as the one of the most preserved till the modern times. It was recently reconstructed and archaeologically investigated. The new findings as well as the Roman layer with architectural remains of the circular building and the preserved section of the Roman road greatly add to the significance of this point, both in its defensive and offensive sense. The presence of the very well preserved ottoman caravanserai in Ram, as the reminiscence of Roman *mansio*, points to the particular importance of this place and the communication line that passed through it. The archaeological excavations in Romania at *Arciadava* and *Tibiscum* would certainly shed more light on the significance of this Roman road. We hope as well that systematic archaeological work in Roman *Lederata* would support our thesis on the particular strategic position of this fort as the

<sup>13</sup> Fodorean 2006, 227–232.

<sup>14</sup> Petrović, Popescu, in print.

major crossing point over Danube between Upper Moesia and southwestern Dacia and the shortest way to reach Sarmizegetusa.

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## LIMESUL ÎN PROVINCIA MOESIA SUPERIOR ȘI SUD-VESTUL DACIEI: CONSIDERAȚII PRIVIND PRINCIPALA CALE DE COMUNICAȚIE

### *Rezumat*

Fortificațiile și așezările civile aparținând limes-ului din provincia Moesia Superior erau legate printr-un drum care se desfășura pe malul drept al Dunării. Acestea erau complet diferite una de cealaltă, datorită dimensiunilor și rolului jucat în sistemul comun de apărare și nu toate erau conectate la axa majoră de comunicație. Este important să conturăm aici un grup particular de *castella*, puncte majore de traversare de pe malul drept pe cel stâng al Dunării, așa cum este *Lederata* (Ram).