

THE LOCATION OF VICINA REVISITED. IS THERE ANY FINAL SOLUTION?

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Two recent contributions of Virgil Ciocîltan and Denis Căprăroiu revived in the Romanian historiography the long and tortuous controversy on the location of a medieval Danubian harbor and trading center: Vicina. Historians, archaeologists and geographers debated this subject decade after decade, but there is no general accepted final solution for the whereabouts of that city which flourished between the mid 13th century and the early 15th century. In a communication presented at the “Nicolae Iorga” Institute of History, followed by a study published in “Revista istorică”¹, V. Ciocîltan gave new arguments for the location at Măcin (Tulcea County). The first author who made this proposal, on the basis of a vague name similarity, was Wilhelm Tomaschek. It was supported by historians like Alexandru T. Dumitrescu, Nicolae Dobrescu, Vasili Zlatarski, Jacob Bromberg, Mathias Gyóni, Boris Nedkov, Constantin Rezachevici². The most recent opinion, expressed by D. Căprăroiu, is completely new: Axiopolis-Cernavodă³. Other authors favored places like Mahmudia⁴, Isaccea⁵, Hârșova⁶, Nufăru⁷, Somova⁸, or Ismail⁹, but the most popular identification was put forward by Petre Diaconu: the Păcuiul lui Soare¹⁰ island.

The undisputable history of Vicina begins after the reestablishment of a kind of Byzantine domination in the region of the Danube mouths, following the victory of Michael VIII Palaeologos against Bulgaria (1263). Praising the victory, the

¹ Ciocîltan 2011, 411–430.

² Tomaschek 1886, 302–303; Dumitrescu 1904, 15–33; Dobrescu 1906, 45–46; Zlatarski 1934, 183; Bromberg 1938, 20–29; Gyóni 1943–1944, 20, 36; Nedkov 1960, 135; Rezachevici 1999, 63–72.

³ Căprăroiu 2014, 115–125.

⁴ Brătianu 1935, 90–91; Brătianu 1942, 133–175.

⁵ Iorga 1900, 47–48; Grămadă 1924, 437–459; Năsturel 1957, 298–300; Bolșacov-Ghimpu 1967, 547; Cihodaru 1968, 229; Giurescu 1977 a, 143–152; Balard 1981, 36; Cihodaru 1978–1979, 294–295; Cihodaru 1982, 10; Barnea 1987, 117; Vergatti 2003, 90; Mănuclu-Adameșteanu 2009, 621–651; Mănuclu-Adameșteanu 2012, 640–642; Mănuclu-Adameșteanu 2013, 515–516; Vergatti 2013, 429.

⁶ Todorova 1978, 124–138.

⁷ Atanasov 1994, 109–128.

⁸ Lerian 1973, 472–473.

⁹ Kuzev 1977, 117–121.

¹⁰ Diaconu 1970 b, 275–295; Diaconu 1980, 353–361; Diaconu 1981, 2311–2316.

rhetor Michael Holobolos wrote that “many Paristran islands rejoiced because you are their emperor; they gave up on their planned rebellion and realized that they had been subjected and oppressed by rulers without legitimate rights”. These words were seen as an allusion to the return of Byzantine control in northern Dobrudja, a region where the study of monetary circulation indicates a preponderance of Byzantine coin issues from Michael VIII’s time, in contrast to the Bulgarian coins of Constantine Asan and Mičo, which are frequent only south of Silistra and also at Păcuilui Soare (they are, however, not absent from the north, for example in Isaccea). Since the harbors on the western Black Sea shore, up to Mesembria, had been occupied by the Byzantine Empire in 1263, its fleet was able to reach the Danube¹¹.

The first exactly dated record of Vicina comes from several Genoese acts of 1281 (the name was spelled *Vicina* or *Vecina*)¹². In 1296, the portolano entitled *Il compasso da navigare* (based on an original from 1250–1265) called the Danube *flume de Vicina*. The same name *Vicina* / *Vecina* / *Vicena* appears in the documents issued by the Franciscan friars (1314, 1334), and on several portolans and maps dated to the 14th–15th centuries, beginning with 1318 (Pietro Visconti).¹³ The increasing importance of this city at the end of the 13th century is shown by the existence of a Genoese consul in 1361¹⁴, and by the establishment of a mitropoly, first attested in 1285 (Βιτζίνα, in the Greek spelling)¹⁵. The mitropoly was not founded after the new conquest made by Michael VIII as some historians were thinking.¹⁶ In fact, this happened earlier, during the rule of the Nicean Patriarch Germanos II (1222–1240). The establishment of the mitropoly subordinated to Nicaea was the result of the agreement between John III Vatatzes and John Asan II occurred in 1234¹⁷. On its side, the Roman Church has manifested his expansionist policy by founding a Franciscan convent at Vicina, sometimes before 1287. A Tatar chief commanding over 1000 warriors called Argun was baptized by these friars in that year at Vicum, a mistaken form of the name Vicina (the information comes from a report of the *custos* of the Gazaria region of the Franciscan order, concerning the activities among the Tatars)¹⁸. This establishment of a Franciscan convent at Vicina reveals the competition between the two Churches for the control of this borderland city, situated between three civilizations: the Golden Horde, Byzantium and the Westerners.

¹¹ Laurent 1945; Brătianu 1945, 199; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1989, 147–148; Căprăroiu 2014, 124.

¹² Brătianu 1923, 147–148; Brătianu 1935, 47–48; Baraschi 1981, 321.

¹³ Brătianu 1923, 146–147, 158; Andreescu 1932–1933, 155; Brătianu 1935, 13, 46, 61–63; Năsturel 1957, 297–300; Kuzev 1977, 113–114; Cihodaru 1978–1979, 294; Dumitriu-Snagov 1979, 1941–1947; Vagnon 2006, 6–8.

¹⁴ Kuzev 1977, 115; Balard 1978, 144.

¹⁵ Brătianu 1923, 114–115, 155; Brătianu 1935, 36–37; Năsturel 1971, 37–38; Baraschi 1981, 322.

¹⁶ For instance: Brătianu 1923, 139–140; Căprăroiu 2014, 117.

¹⁷ Mărculeț 2004, 264–267; Mureșan 2010, 335; Cățoi 2010, 185–186.

¹⁸ Andreescu 1932–1933, 152–157; Brătianu 1935, 58–59; Vergatti 2003, 91–92; Căprăroiu 2014, 122.

The first source recording a place which was supposed to be identical to this 13th century Vicina is Anna Comnena's *Alexiad*. Two local chiefs called Sesthlav and Satza, mentioned in relation to a certain event dated around 1086, were the masters of Бѣрѣѡ and other fortresses. It is not clear if Vitzina was ruled by them in common or by only one of them. The source gives no clue on the position of this Vitzina, but it has to be noted that this was the single place quoted besides the capital of the province, Dristra, in the relation about the secession of Paradunavon¹⁹. There is instead another name mentioned in the *Alexiad*, the river Бѣрѣѡ "which flows down from the neighboring hills", somewhere north of the Sidera (Riș) gorge, that is south of Pliska. The river was identified with Kamčija, also called Tiča, recorded by Constantine Porphyrogenitus as Διτζίνα (the Bulgarian form was most probable Диџина)²⁰. In this case, it is more suitable to think that the fortress Vicina was too somewhere near that river. A later Turkish source, the chronicle of Mehmed Neşri, has recorded a city called *Venzina*, between Kamčija and Varna (destroyed by the Ottomans in 1388)²¹. These data were known since a long time, but the preconceived idea that the fortress Vitzina must be searched only in the present-day Romanian Dobrudja has prevented the historians to realize that Anna Comnena was speaking only about the same area, near Kamčija, affected too by the secession.

Even more unclear is the connection between the early history of Vicina and some data recorded by the Geography of Al-Idrisi, written in 1154. Disina was a city located four days east from Barisklafa. The new French translation is wrong translating Disina by Măcin, following that obsolete attempt to identify Vicina. Considering that *Barisklafa* was the same with Preslav put by them at Victoria (that is, Nufăru), the two translators did not realized that Măcin is not located at for days east from that point Al-Idrisi²². No data about this northern part of Dobrudja were transmitted by Al-Idrisi²³. Many historians believed that al-Idrisi provided an early testimony for Vicina²⁴. Actually, the Disina of al-Idrisi is that one from Kamčija. This fact results from the location of Barisklafa (four days distance toward east from Dristra, going through deserted areas). Barisklafa was near a river and a swamp. The editor of Al-Idrisi, Konrad Miller, proposed the itinerary Daristar-

¹⁹ Anna Comnena 2003, 212 (VI, 14.1); Brătianu 1923, 120; Brătianu 1935, 16; Gyóni 1943–1944, 87–100; Diaconu 1970 a, 112–115; Barnea, Ștefănescu 1971, 137–146; Cihodaru 1978–1979, 285.

²⁰ Constantine Porphyrogenitus 1967, 62/63 (IX, 101); Anna Comnena, 222 (VII, 3.1); Tomaschek 1886, 311–312; Brătianu 1923, 118–123; Brătianu 1935, 12–18; Brătianu 1942, 146–147; Cihodaru 1978–1979, 283; Beševliev 1985, 21–22.

²¹ Brătianu 1935, 83–84; Cihodaru 1978–1979, 284–285.

²² Al-Idrisi (ed. Jaubert, 386, 397; ed. Miller, 123, 129, 132; trad. Bresc. Nef, 446).

²³ The identifications of some names recorded by Al-Idrisi with places from northern Dobrudja like Halmyris and Argamum (Brătescu 1920, 23–31; Cihodaru 1968, 223; Barnea, Ștefănescu 1971, 163–166; Cihodaru 1978–1979, 289) are erroneous. Halmyris (Murighiol) and Argamum (Jurilovca) were no more inhabited in the 12th century.

²⁴ For instance: Brătianu 1935, 27–28; Bromberg 1937, 177; Brătianu 1942, 147; Cihodaru 1968, 228–230; Stănescu 1970, 124; Barnea 1971, 362; Barnea, Ștefănescu 1971, 164; Kuzev 1981, 272; Cihodaru 1978–1979, 284–289; Todorova 1984, 431; Atanasov 1994, 112–113.

Barisklafa-Disina-Akli, which followed the Danube up to the Delta. He considered that Akli was Chilia, but it is known that this harbor did not exist then. The most probable identification of Akli is Anchialos (Petre Diaconu has demonstrated that the road direction after Dristra did not follow the Danube, being an internal way, toward south-east). *Barisklafa* was an unknown place near Preslav, called Migali Barisklafa by Al-Idrisi, the same with the Little Preslav²⁵.

Another uncertain testimony is the epigram celebrating the deeds of general Ioannes Dukas in the war of 1167 against Hungary. The manuscript *Marcianus Graecus* 524 mentions that he crossed the Danube by Vidin, in contradiction with the detailed relation provided by Ioannes Kinnamos, according to whom the army corps entered Hungary by present-day Moldavia. By this reason some historians proposed that *Vidin* was a mistaken form of *Vicin* (Vicina)²⁶. These are mere speculations. The comprehensive account of Kinnamos could not be contradicted by a poetical writing, and, on the other hand, there is no proof that the name was indeed misspelled.

Therefore, no certain information about Vicina exists before 1281. Of course, the city emerged some time before that year, most probable as a new foundation made after 1263. The commercial relations attested since 1281 suggest an evolution of at least several decades (the presence of the coins issued by Michael VIII in the area is related to this revival of city life). The name *Vicina* or *Vecina* comes from the Romanian or Italian word *vecin* / *vicino*. This means that the city has developed near and older one. Any attempt to locate it must take this into account. An older city was near Vicina.

Before the discussion about the two recent opinions expressed about the location of Vicina, it should be emphasized the impossibility of the most popular solution given to the problem. Apparently convincing, the idea of placing Vicina at Păcuilui lui Soare does not match with the prosperity attested by the Genoese and Byzantine sources during the 14th century. The archaeological findings and especially the coin circulation are too few for such an important trading center as it was Vicina. During the period when Vicina was flourishing, this settlement was alive, but deprived of the earlier defence system²⁷. On the other hand, the presence of another mitropoly at a small distance, at Dristra, is another fact which contradicts the theory²⁸. It was believed that the distance of 200 Genoese miles (346 km) between Vicina and the Aspera channel, mentioned in *Il compasso da navigare*, would support the location at Păcuilui lui Soare²⁹, or at Axiopolis³⁰. The

²⁵ Al-Idrisi (ed. Jaubert, 386; ed. Miller, 129; trad. Bresc, Nef, 443, 446); Tomaschek 1886, 301–302, 311; Grămadă 1930, 242; Brătianu 1942, 147–148; Diaconu 1965, 50; Năsturel 1965, 27; Diaconu 1976, 430–431; Baraschi 1981, 317–318.

²⁶ Diaconu 1978, 103; Baraschi 1981, 317; Cădea 1999, 154 (identified with Măcin).

²⁷ Baraschi 1987, 126–128.

²⁸ Kuzev 1977, 123–124; Cihodaru 1978–1979, 292.

²⁹ Diaconu 1981, 2316. The interpretation was endorsed by Iosipescu 2008, 705.

³⁰ Căprăroiu 2014, 124.

discussion on the distance recorded in that portolano was continued by Octavian Iliescu, who first took into account the Genoese miles of 1734 meters (the result being 346 km). Later, he accepted the use of the Venetian miles of 1400 meters, because other distances from this portolano are right if it is applied this measure unit. In consequence, he placed Vicina somewhere between Hârșova and Topalu³¹. The uncertainty of other distance mentioned by *Il compasso da navigare* was however emphasized by other researchers; most of them are round figures, and there are still big differences in comparison with the real distances³². Moreover, it is not sure what was Aspera, a channel or a place, and where exactly was in the present Danube Delta. Therefore the portolano of 1296 is by no means an undisputable source on the location of Vicina.

There is instead one such source, which could fix the point where Vicina was on the Danube stream, to a lesser distance from the sea. It is a document published by Michel Balard in 1979. An act issued at Chilia on 18 October 1360 has recorded that a ship was prepared to go after some days from Chilia to Vicina for a wheat load, and then to return into the Black Sea to sail to Pera. This means that Vicina was somewhere close to Chilia, on the maritime section of the Danube. This document remained unknown to Brătianu (it was discovered by Balard in the same Genoese archives in 1975)³³. The sailing timing upstream and downstream of Danube in the autumn contradicts any far location. Following the study of Valeriu Bulgaru³⁴, P.Ș. Năsturel has demonstrated that a sailing ship needed six weeks to navigate on the Danube up to Galați. That ship would have been surprised by the winter on the Danube if Vicina was upstream of this bend of the river. The significance of this climatic argument was also emphasized by Ștefan Andreescu in a note about the study of P. Ș. Năsturel³⁵. It is known that the Genoese regulations forbid the navigation between 1st December and 15th March³⁶. Therefore, Păcuil lui Soare, Cernavoda and Hârșova are excluded, and Măcin could be admitted only to a certain extent. The same collection of documents provides other significant information: Vicina was also the name of a channel of the Danube. An act issued on 13 August 1360 mentioned that a boat (*lignum*) was stationed in *sumaria Vicine* (another *sumaria* was Chili or Licostomo)³⁷. This means that one of the channels of the Danube Delta, the present-day Sfântu Gheorghe, was preferred for navigation toward Vicina. That was the return way of the boat mentioned in the document dated 18 October.

Continuing the discussion over the proposed location of Vicina at Măcin, I am not able to decide the validity of the linguistic side of the problem (the derivation

³¹ Iliescu 1994, 232–236.

³² Todorova 1978, 132–137; Cihodaru 1979, 8; Năsturel 1987, 155–156; Ciociltan 2011, 412–413.

³³ Balard 1980, 158–159 (Nr. 97); Năsturel 1987, 159–167; Botzan 1992, 65.

³⁴ Bulgaru 1977, 97.

³⁵ Andreescu 1988, 586–587.

³⁶ Atanasiu 2008, 206–207.

³⁷ Balard 1980, 53; Eskenazy 1983 a, 89, 92.

of Măcin or Mecin, from Vecina), but I will insist on what the sources about Vicina could tell us. The obvious conclusion drawn from the study of the Genoese testimonies is that Vicina was an outstanding trading center. The amplitude of the commercial exchanges required field connections with markets and with regions that supplied the city with the stuff exported by it. Many data about the transit through Vicina and Chilia, gathered from the Genoese archives by Gheorghe I. Brătianu and then by Michel Balard, are showing on the one hand the great value of the transactions, and on the other hand, what kind of exports and imports were transited. The exports consisted mainly in luxury textiles, namely silk and Italian tissues. The imports were especially: corn, ox leather, salt, bee wax. A document mentioned the higher quality of the corn from *Vezina* in comparison with that imported from the Bulgarian harbors Varna and Sozopolis.³⁸ Even V. Ciocîltan recognized the “exceptional condition of the city as economic and spiritual center” evidenced by its position in the portolanos, while Michel Balard was writing “d’un commerce céréaliier de grande ampleur, auquel participe un nombre élevé de bâtiments moyens”.³⁹

The transportation to and from Vicina required roads connecting the harbor to the territories where the luxury products could be sold, and with those which could provide a great amount of good corn and other products. Genoa exported luxury goods in Hungary, Poland, and in the Golden Horde. As for the imports, the corn and the wax could come especially from Moldavia, but also from Transylvania and the regions of Wallachia which were then cultivated. One of the roads connecting the Black and the Baltic seas reached the maritime sector of the Danube⁴⁰. The Hungarian King Louis of Anjou granted a privilege for the traders of Braşov on 28 June 1358. The act specified that they have the right to go free from the mouth of Ialomiţa (*Iloncha*) up to the mouth of Siret (*Zereth*)⁴¹. In another document from 22 June 1368 it was specified that the destination of the traders was the land ruled by *Demetrius princeps Tartarorum*, whose residence was at Enisala⁴². This means that the connections between the Danubian trading centers and Transylvania were made on the valleys of these rivers (and on the intermediary valley of Buzău). If Ialomiţa is considered, the connection was to the city of Hârşova, but it is not possible that Vicina was there, in a fortress which, according to the archaeological researchers, was not a great economic center (it was strictly military). If the valleys of Buzău and Siret are considered, then the connection concerned the fortresses between Dinogetia and Măcin. From that north-western part of Dobrudja, the Roman road to Enisala passed through Isaccea.

Taking into account the necessary condition of the field connection, Căprăroiu’s supposition⁴³ could be categorically excluded, because it is unthinkable the

³⁸ Brătianu 1923. 147–150; Brătianu 1935. 49–50; Giurescu 1977 b, 49–57; Josanu 2010–2012. 26–27.

³⁹ Balard 1983, 42.

⁴⁰ Giurescu 1977 b. 52; Josanu 2010–2012. 19–20.

⁴¹ DRH D I, 71–72 (doc. 39).

⁴² DRH D I, 89–90 (doc. 49); Iliescu 1997, 169.

⁴³ Căprăroiu 2014. 124–125.

existence of a trading road across the wilderness of the Bărăgan and next through Balta Borcea (that would be the way to Cernavoda, but also to Păcuilui lui Soare). Likewise Păcuilui lui Soare, Cernavodă was not too far from Dristra, and it would be improbable the existence of another mitropoly in that place. Considering the same condition, the idea advanced by V. Ciocîltan – the pair of harbors Măcin-Brăila – seems suitable. After the decline and the vanishing of Vicina, its function was taken by Brăila, a city which remained until the 20th century the most important transit center for cereals. On the other hand, the position of Măcin is quite close to the mouth of Siret mentioned in the document issued in 1368. Yet, there is a problem indicated by me since the presentation made by the author at the “Nicolae Iorga” Institute of History: it is impossible that no significant number of coins dated during the 13th–14th centuries would be collected as stray finds or by excavations, on the spot of a former well-developed city like it was Vicina, even after a full destruction and long time abandonment. This is not the case for Măcin, where the Byzantine occupation of the site is attested by few ceramic finds dated in the 10th–11th centuries and by only 25 bronze coins issued between the end of the 10th century and 1081, with the exception of one silver piece issued by Alexios I Comnenos in 1092–1118⁴⁴. This is in strong contrast with the situation of Isaccea, where the 13th–14th coins are thousands, not to speak about the rest of the findings. This is the reason why one of the excavators of that site, Gheorghe Mănușu-Adameșteanu, is convinced that Vicina was there⁴⁵.

The second objection against Măcin (and also against Cernavoda), but favorable to Isaccea, is the position of Vicina as contact place between the Byzantine Empire or Bulgaria, and the Golden Horde, an usual crossing point between the banks of the Danube. It is known that 16.000 Alans (half of them warriors) begged to be received in the Byzantine Empire in 1302, after the death of the emir Nogai. They asked the metropolite Lucas of Vicina (Βιτζίνα) to intercede to the emperor Andronikos II. From the history of Georgios Pachymeres it could be deduced that these Alans crossed the Danube by Vicina.⁴⁶ The customs regulations of Pera (1333 and 1343) mentioned *flumen Vicine* as the border of the Golden Horde during the reign of the Khan Özbek (1313–1341), while the map of Angelino Dulcert (dated to 1339) displays the *tamga* as symbol of the Tatar rule over Vicina⁴⁷. Much more clear are the data provided by the map of the Venetian brothers Domenico and Francesco Pizzigano, dated to 1367, and copied by other maps: *Item in ista provincia manet imperator Usbeck, scilicet in civitate de Seray. Imperium suum est valde magnum et incipit in provincia de Burgaria sed in civitate de Vecina et finit*

⁴⁴ Mănușu-Adameșteanu 2010, 237–250.

⁴⁵ Mănușu-Adameșteanu 2009, 621–651; Mănușu-Adameșteanu 2012, 640–642; Mănușu-Adameșteanu 2013, 515–516.

⁴⁶ Georges Pachymeres 1999, 338/339 (X. 16); Brătianu 1923, 141; Brătianu 1935, 38; Năsturel 1971, 35–36.

⁴⁷ Belgrano 1877, 304, 696; Brătianu 1935, 61, 63, 66, 73; Vagnon 2006, 8. The Tatar occupation was clearly dated to 1337 by Laurent 1946, 229–231.

in civitate de Cerchangi versus levante.⁴⁸ This text was reproduced with a small but decisive error by Nicolae Grămadă⁴⁹: *et in civitate* instead of *sed in civitate*. This mistake which changed the meaning of the text was perpetuated in the subsequent contributions. An almost identical information was transmitted by the later Genoese manuscript *Itinerarium Antonii Ususmaris* (1455), probably copied from that map: *In ista provincia manet imperator Usbech, scilicet in civitate Serai. Imperium suum incipit in provincia de Burgaria scilicet in civitate de Vecina et finit in civitate de Cerchangi versus levantem*.⁵⁰ This *provincia Burgaria*, included in the Golden Horde, was the tributary Bulgarian state.⁵¹ The map puts Vicina on the border of this province. Michel Balard has remarked that the Genoese established again the residence at Vicina only after the offensive against the Tartars led in 1345 by the comes of the Transylvanian Szeklers Andrew Lákfi, which means that Vicina was inside the borders of the Golden Horde between 1337 and 1345. In 1349 Louis of Anjou granted a privilege to Genoa, which could have had an impact over the trade with Vicina⁵².

There is even another fact suggesting the location of Vicina in the maritime sector of the Danube (downstream of Galați). In 1318, the mitropolite of Vicina was asked by the Patriarch of Constantinople to resolve a conflict appeared between two bishops from Crimea, together with his colleagues from Zichia, Alania and Matracha, because all four of them were most close to that place.⁵³

Taking all these into account, the most probable location of Vicina was near Isaccea. That ford was one of the most used during history, and the abundance of the coin findings dated to the 13th and 14th centuries is a solid proof. The aerial photos studied by Mihai Rada in 1988 evidenced at Isaccea an urban site with street network at circa 1 km south of the ancient Noviodunum, and 2.5 km east from the present city. It is supposed that Vicina was in that place (see fig. 1 and 2)⁵⁴. In this case, the name would be easy to explain, the vicinity concerning the older city, the Roman Noviodunum, whose ruins were partial visible. It might be even admitted that Vicina was just Isaccea, because, as C. C. Giurescu has observed, the existence of two names for the same city was not impossible (later one appeared the name of Slavic origin, Oblucița, from *oblutak*, “round stone”)⁵⁵. The coexistence of the names Isaccea and Vicina in the 14th century sources is a clear hindrance for this identification⁵⁶. The name Isaccea has no relation with the

⁴⁸ Fischer 1886, 217; Brătianu 1923, 157; Brătianu 1935, 64–65; Kuzev 1977, 114. The map is available at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3APizigani_1367_Chart_IOMB.jpg.

⁴⁹ Grămadă 1924, 447.

⁵⁰ Brătianu 1923, 157; Brătianu 1935, 65; Ciociltan 2012, 265.

⁵¹ Iosipescu 2013, 112.

⁵² Balard 1978, 144.

⁵³ Brătianu 1923, 155–156; Brătianu 1935, 57; Rămureanu 1979, 157.

⁵⁴ Rada, Cochină. Corcodel, Iuga 1988, 203–204.

⁵⁵ Giurescu 1977 a, 152.

⁵⁶ Atanasov 1994, 110.

chief Satza mentioned by Anna Comnena. It evolved from the Tartar name *Sakdji*, attested in the *History* of Baybars al-Mansuri (*Zubdat al-fikra*) and in the *Geography* of Abulfida from 1325⁵⁷. The contemporary form *Isaccea* appeared by a confusion with the name *Isac*.

There is another location proposal suitable to the conditions of road access and contact place with the Golden Horde: the hydrologist Marcu Botzan has demonstrated the existence of a drowned island near the mouth of Prut, in the zone called Cotul Pisicii. The mudding and sinking occurred during a certain period after the middle of the 14th century (see fig. 3).⁵⁸

Some sources are locating Vicina near an island: a map from 1318, another map from the 13th century copied in the next century, another one from the 14th century kept in Biblioteca Marciana, and, finally, several 15th century maps. *El Libro del Conoscimento*, the work of a Spanish Franciscan (around 1350), has transmitted the contents of some disappeared maps. The Danube is presented flowing in the Black Sea at the city called *Vecina*, where a great island is placed. The text is full of errors (the author believed that in the same place are flowing eight more rivers, some of them being in fact in Hungary). Therefore, this work could not be trusted. N. Grămadă has considered that the island was that one existing near the present town Isaccea⁵⁹. If we agree with the supposition of M. Botzan, then Vicina should be placed just into an island. In conclusion, Vicina was either a city developed near Isaccea, either a drowned island placed in the bend of the Danube at Galați-Garvăn. Nicolae Iorga suggested too that Vicina was “at the bending corner to the east of the Danube”⁶⁰. If this was true, the decline of Vicina had mainly a natural reason. Brăila, Chilia and Cetatea Albă benefitted from this decline, becoming the new trading centers on the Danube. Like the transfer of the mitropoly from Vicina to Curtea de Argeș (1359), the problem of the replacement of Vicina as the main trading center surpass the matter dealt here.

The best end for this study is the brilliant conclusion of Petre Ș. Năsturel: “By this reason we believe that this strategic point – the crossroad of Danube, Dobrudja and Bugeac, in relation to the Black Sea – was the most suitable place for the rich Vicina, which was so able to achieve in the easiest way its mission of merciless and greedy intermediary for the merchandise exchanges between the Western and the Asiatic worlds”⁶¹. He was speaking about Isaccea, but the same would be true for the supposed drowned island.

⁵⁷ Brătianu 1935, 39, 45, 70; Baraschi 1981, 336.

⁵⁸ Botzan 1992, 68–73.

⁵⁹ Marinescu 1926, 1–8; Grămadă 1924, 441, 452–453, 458; Brătianu 1935, 62–68; Kuzev 1977, 125; Eskenasy 1983 b, 420; Vagnon 2006, 9.

⁶⁰ Iorga 1929, 29.

⁶¹ Năsturel 1957, 298–299.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Figs. 1–2 – Hypothetical location of Vicina near Noviodunum-Iscea.
Google Earth image.

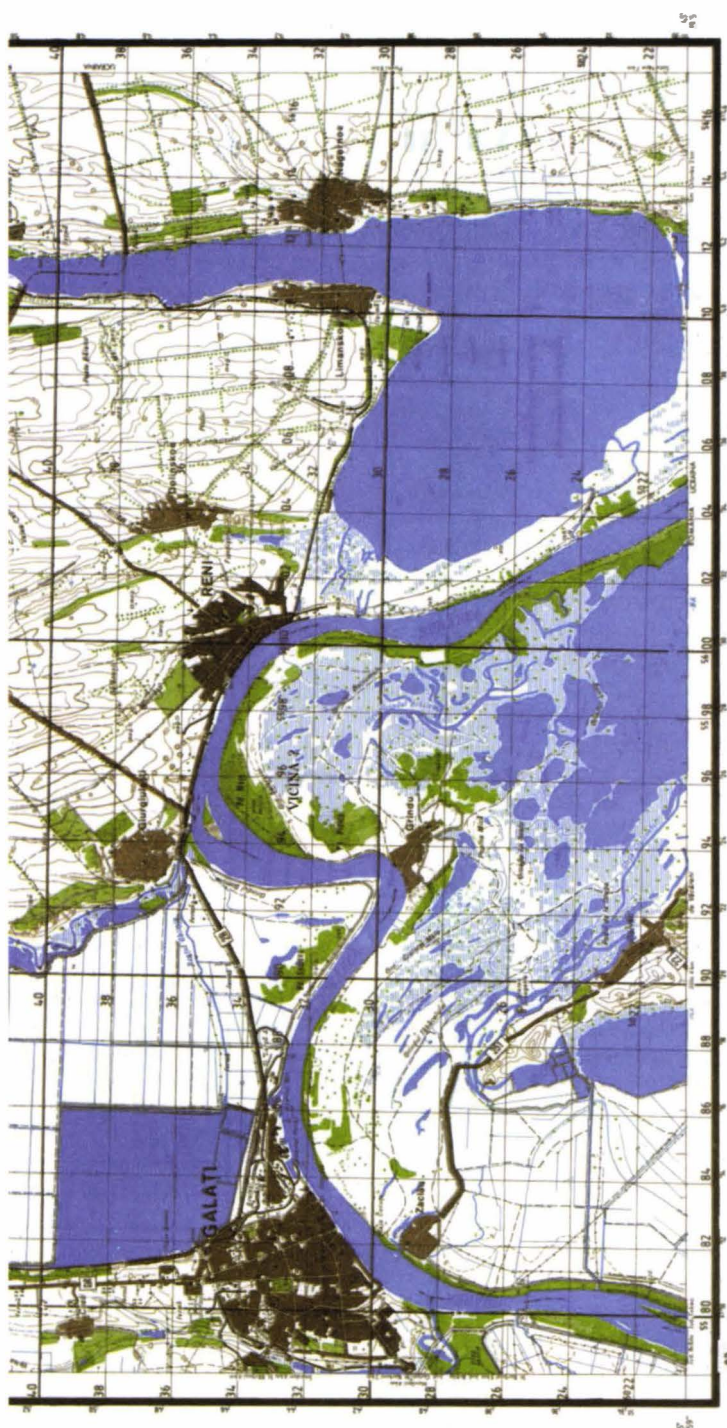


Fig. 3 – Hypothetical location of Vicina near Cotul Piscii. Military map, 1997

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