

A historical map of the Roman province of Dacia, showing various cities and regions. The map is overlaid with a large orange rectangle containing the text 'Colonia Dacica' and a green rectangle containing the text 'Sarmizegetusa'. Two men in Roman attire are standing on the right side of the map.

# Colonia Dacica

## *Sarmizegetusa*



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Herein were used pictures from:  
Gică Băeștean, Eugen Pescaru,  
Photo archive of MCDR Deva

The following volumes were used for reconstitution:

Dorin Alicu, Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa. Amfiteatrul I, Cluj-Napoca, 1997

Dorin Alicu, Adriana Pescaru, Templele romane din Dacia I, Cluj-Napoca, 2000

Robert Etienne, Ioan Piso, Alexandru Diaconescu, Les fouilles du forum vetus de Sarmizegetusa.

Rapport general, in Acta Musei Napocensis, 39-40/I, 2002-2003 (2004)

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**Brief History.** Sarmizegetusa is situated in the west part of the Land of Hațeg, about 8 km from the "Iron Gates of Transylvania", through which was access to Banat.

The ancient Romans built here the provincial capital of Dacia *Dacia Sarmizegetusa Colonia Ulpia Traiana Augusta*. The city walls had a length of 500 x 600 m and inside a closed area of about 33 ha. On an area of 60-80 ha, outside the city walls, the Romans built many public monuments, private houses, tombs, etc.

Besides the actual inhabited area, the city also had a *territorium* where those who could afford withdrew in summer, there were *villa rustica*, Roman farms, such as those from Hobîța or Sântămărie Orlea or there were inferior rank settlements such as *Aquae* (Călan Băi) or *Germisara* (Geoagiu Băi), which were thermal baths since ancient times. But this *territorium* extends eastward to the Apuseni Mountains. *Ampelum* (Zlatna) broke and developed from within Sarmizegetusa territory and westward *Dierna* (Orșova) has divided from the territory of the capital. Trajan founded one city in the province and that was *Colonia Dacica*, the successive kings founded the other 10 or 11 urban communities, of which Sarmizegetusa became the parent for other four cities.

After the withdrawal of Roman army and administration south of the Danube, 271-275, the auditorium here will be blocked by a Romanian population sometime in the fourth century. Somewhere in the northeast corner of the city was discovered a building dating from late fourth century and early fifth century, being a chronological limit to the inhabited city in antiquity.

A line of penetration of Slavs from Banat is known by the name of localities Teregoва, Voislova, Bucova Grădiște (village will be called again Sarmizegetusa only beginning from the contemporary era).

The village is first mentioned in 1315 under the name Britonia village and then these certifications multiply. In medieval and later periods Sarmizegetusa surroundings and not only benefited from a rich building material provided by Roman ruins. Many churches in the Land of Hațeg contain Roman parts such as Densuș, Ostrov, Peșteana, Hățăgel, Tuștea, Sântămărie Orlea, etc., and also museums in the country such as Lugoj, Deva, Cluj, Bucharest, or even those of Budapest and Vienna.





The interest for these ruins was manifested by many humanists of the time, such as the priest Johannes Mezerzius identifying Roman city sometime at the end of 15<sup>th</sup> century. An Italian native of Bologna, L.F. Marigli, gave us a map of the amphitheatre and several other visible monuments, drawing also epigraphic parts or statues. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the ruins were visible on the surface of the ground, an Austrian officer, S.J. Hohenhausen, publishing several sketches in 1775 in Vienna. M. Ackner saw and drew about 1832 two of the most beautiful mosaics of Dacia, which are multicoloured and show famous mythological scenes. T. Mommsen gathered inscriptions from Dacia and from Sarmizegetusa, some of which no longer exist.

Beginning with the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Hungarian archaeologists from Deva will begin systematic excavation, continued later by C. and H. Daicoviciu, then by the Cluj School of Archaeology.

**Previous research.** In 1880 was created in Deva the "History and Archaeology Society." Hungarian Archaeologists Kiraly and Teglas researched in the west, outside the city walls, the Temple of the Syrians Gods, and still extra muros, in the southwest corner of the Temple of Mithras. They also began work on the amphitheatre and baths in the immediate vicinity, and north of the city walls and the amphitheatre northeast part, the temples dedicated to Malagbel and Aesculapius and Hygia etc.

From 1924, together with C. Daicoviciu, O. Floca started digging inside the city, discovering what they interpreted as a "Palace of Augustals" later proved to be the forum of *Colonia Dacica*. He dug in the cemetery east of town, where he discovered a mausoleum dedicated to Aurelia family, and at amphitheatre, two *villa suburban*, etc.

After a break, the excavations were resumed in 1973, about 100-500 m east of the city walls were discovered several kilns for burning bricks. A glass workshop (EM 21) was discovered north of the city walls, still in this area were discovered several religious edifices (EM 2, EM 14-20, EM 22, EM 24). In the east and west side of the Imperial road, were lined the two cemeteries. In the north and the south have been unearthed funerary stelae and tombs.

In the west part of the city, in the kindergarten area, were investigated the buildings EM 5 and EM 6, one of them enjoying the *hypocaust system* (central heating installation).







Immediately upon entering the city, in the 80s, was investigated without being finished, Domus Procuratoris, the Palace of the financial procurator of the Province Dacia Apulensis. Only partially excavated, the building can be seen continuing in neighbouring gardens.

In the 90s continued excavations in the forum colony area, the centre of the older city.

At Hobîța, in the area called "Dealul Hobenilor" or "Hobeni Hill", on the Hobîța stream left bank, was investigated in 1948 a *villa rustica*. There were identified the main building, one tower, annexes and inner wall. The archaeological material collected was very rich. At 200 m from the village on the right bank of Hobîța, was discovered in 1978 another *villa rustica*. There were brought to light walls, pottery, bricks and tiles. The village name is attested by medieval documents.

At Breazova were observed in several locations within the village area traces of Roman stone buildings, bricks and tiles. Here were identified a kiln for burning pottery, coins and Roman tombs. The village name is mentioned in medieval documents in various forms: Brazua, Brazowa.





Even though most of the time the Governor of Dacia had the headquarters in *Apulum*, although there was a great competition for supremacy in the province, Colonia Ulpia Traiana Augusta Dacica Sarmizegetusa could not be dethroned from a won place before all its competitors be born. Any Roman urban community had to complete a career to achieve the coveted status of a *colonia*. Or, Sarmizegetusa was founded as such. It later received the *ius italicum*, which meant getting some additional privileges. Some were honorary, few were those who went to Rome to vote, but it was the tax exemption was the desire of any urban communities in the Empire. It was the only city in the Province of Dacia who received the epithet of *metropolis*.

Former hustle and bustle ceased long ago and on the place of the big city is a small village today, which by its name keeps alive the memory of the past. The foundation inscription of the city was discovered, but the lack of some significant parts of it has taken away the possibility of an accurate dating. We know that Governor Decimus Terentius Scaurianus laid the foundation stone of the city on behalf of the emperor Trajan, but this important civil magistrate deployed his activity sometime between 108-110, not knowing exactly when he started and when he finished.

On one of the first coins minted in the province, on a bronze sestertium is presented the religious ritual regarding the colony founding. On the obverse is rendered the image of Trajan and on the reverse probably the Governor, on behalf of the emperor, wearing *cinctus gabinus* (toga with roost over head), with an ox and a cow of white colour will draw a *pomerium* (a clod of earth) on or within which the enclosure walls will rise. It's the same ritual Romulus made at Rome after he killed his brother Remus.

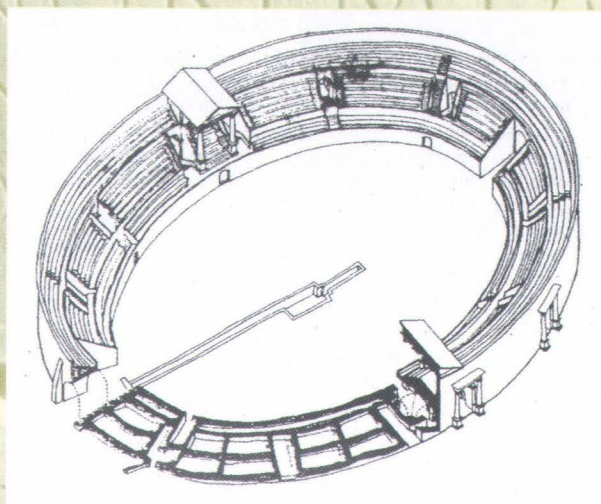
With nearly 33 ha of walls and other 60-80 ha outside, the settlement ranges among medium sized cities at Empire scale. In this area lived a population of around 20-30,000 people. Today the community, with all belonging villages, has about 2,000 inhabitants.

The town founded by Emperor Trajan also had a *territorium* around, a huge area that stretched from *Ampelum* (Zlatna), in the Apuseni Mountains, to *Dierna* (port on the Danube).

This huge expanse of land meant that the metropolis and its business people owned and controlled the trade on the Danube, the agriculture in the fertile valley of Mureș river and not least the profits made from gold mines in the Apuseni Mountains. Here are some reasons why any other city of Roman Dacia hardly could overthrow Sarmizegetusa from the position held.





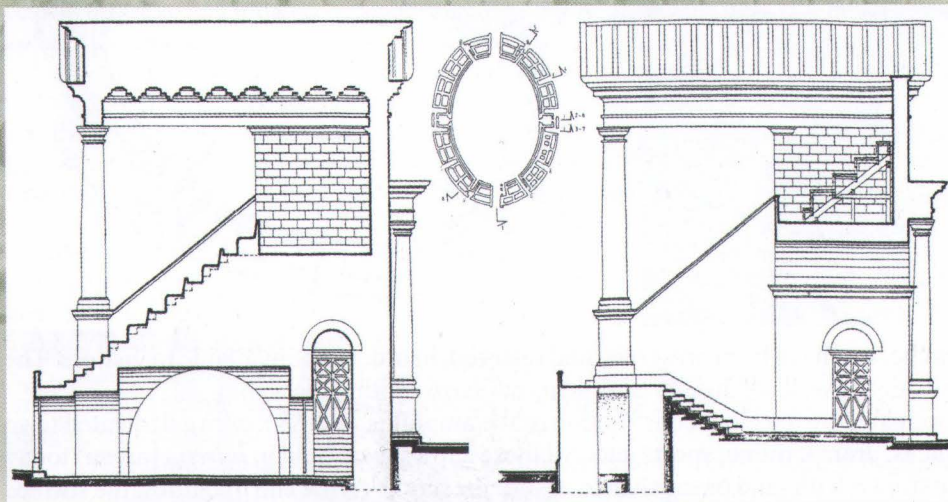


Some of the objectives checked have been preserved and restored, in order to be available to visitors. The monuments are located both outside the walls of the city site and *intra muros* (within the walls).

The outdoor area is dominated by the giant construction of the amphitheatre (88 x 69m), dedicated to so beloved gladiatorial performances, drama, mime, sports, etc. All these shows were held in *harena* (arena) today covered with grass, at that time strewn with sand or sawdust to absorb the blood. At the end of battles, the surface is washed with water, which was drained through the great canal that cut the arena from west to east. In the central part the channel goes across a room which housed perhaps a machinery (*pegma*) to achieve special effects during performances. We do not know how this system looked like instead what we have the inscription attesting its existence. We can think of a wooden platform, like an elevator that could provide in the arena a cage with animals or gladiators.



The approximately 5,000 spectators, as many as could fit into the stands, took their seats in a strict order. In the first row, on stone benches, some reserved with inscriptions that can be seen on the back, were sitting those belonging to *ordo decurionum*, the city aristocracy. They were followed in rank by a few rows by those belonging to *equestru*, the knights (they were businessmen, sometimes wealthier than those in the front rows, but they did not have their social position). Last rows were for *plebs* (plebeians, people) and women.



In a certain period after the withdrawal of the Roman administration and military (271), the amphitheatre from Sarmizegetusa seems to have played a different role. Near its doors were found several fragments of the tomb covers or funerary stelae.



They were brought from the city cemeteries to lock the doors and turn the amphitheatre into a fortress, much more defensible than the city walls. A thesaurus containing some small bronze coins discovered in the stands, says that this lock was held sometime in the fourth century, when the city, although it had no sufficient population to defend the walls, could still resist.





In front of the amphitheatre, on the east, lies an *area sacra* (sacred area), incompletely investigated. Among others, there were here temples dedicated to Aesculapius and Hygia, the protecting Gods of medicine, represented by the ears (they were among the "Gods listeners" to whom were whispered the sufferers' troubles). It could play the role of a hospital where first aid was necessary.

To the south, near the city walls were the Great Temple, in which it seems that prayers were brought to several deities. Immediately next to it can be seen what was kept in the Temple of Silvanus, God of the forest, and protector of vegetation that occurs accompanied by several Silvane. Right at the entrance to the amphitheatre is the temple of the Goddess Nemesis, who among other things protected also the luck (it appears together with the balance representing justice, however, was worshiped in the military because embodied the revenge), as gladiators needed much luck to escape alive.





Between the sacred area and the city walls winds a road coming from the west and heading east. It is an excerpt from the imperial road, which locals still use in some portions. Like all Roman roads it was built at high standards and its route is fully known. It was the most important traffic route between the south and north of the Province, but also a connection between a remote area north of the Danube and the rest of the Roman Empire. It came from *Drobeta* (Drobeta Turnu Severin), passing through *Tibiscum* and *Sarmizegetusa*, then veered north toward *Apulum*, *Potaissa* (Turda), *Napoca* (Cluj) and stopped at *Porolissum* (Moigrad), the northernmost point of the Province. Today what is preserved is only the foundation of the road, made up of successive layers of gravel, sand and boulders, which were designed to support large stone slabs. Unfortunately, such stones no longer exist as they were later reused by the locals as construction material. One may also see *Porolissum* where can be observed the traces of chariot wheels dug into the rock.

In front of this road there is a bulwark that comes from the east and heading west. Under it, still not put out, lies the north wall of the city. The eastern and south walls can also be noticed, less preserved is the western part, covered by the village. The walls have been investigated in only a few points, even unearthed two corner towers, those of southeast and northeast.



Immediately upon entering the city is one of the most important buildings, *domus procuratoris*, the palace of the financial procurator of the province. This magistrate was a prominent figure in the provincial hierarchy practically second to the governor in charge of the collection of taxes, with a significant task in military pay.



Sarmizegetusa was playing a major strategic role. Located in the western corner of the Land of Hațeg, it enabled quick access to Banat, through the Iron Gates of Transylvania, from where was accessible the way to other Roman provinces to the south of the Danube, *Moesia Superior* (in former Yugoslavia) or *Pannonia Inferior* (in today Hungary). In case of an attack from the east or the rebellion act of some troops, the magistrate took his money and could move into one of the two provinces. Through the road network well organized, the emperor was quickly informed and with the help of the six legions south of the Danube and four in the two *Pannonia* he was able to intervene immediately.



Procurator's palace was fragmentally excavated, being unearthed two thermal compounds, a temple, offices, etc. To the north, the building was flanked by a huge wall, actually a foot of a horreum (grain barn). In the adjacent gardens, not yet dug, lies the second leg, both playing the role of a support of the wood rafters of the barn. It looked like the constructions of this type today, but the Roman one being a gigantic one. Both in cities and in camps (military camps), these barns were found at the entrance, near the gates, to avoid disturbing important movement in the central area where were the forum or *principia*.

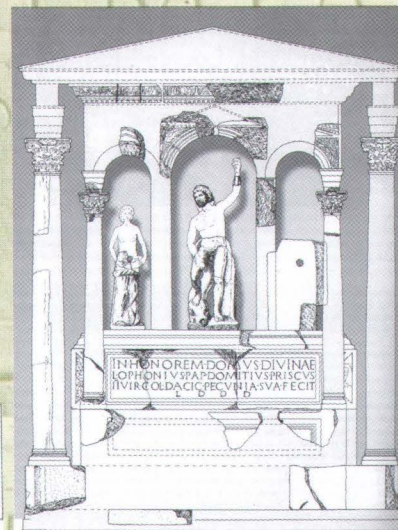
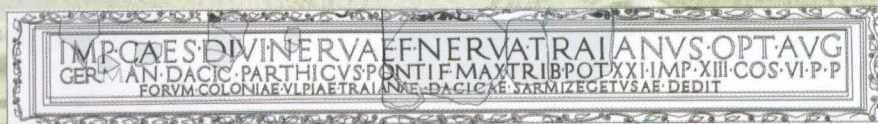
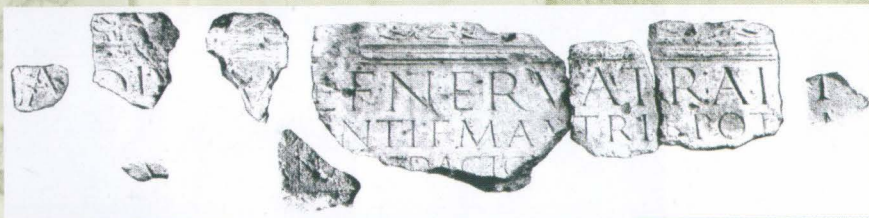
One of the walls of buildings here is over 1 m wide. It's hard to say which must have been the height of this building, but it is quite clear that it had held a huge load probably the weight of more floors. The building in Rome could reach 20 m high. The intervention of kings set this maximum height because buildings which exceeded such size became unreliable and they were also unsanitary. Probably the constructions at Sarmizegetusa have not reached such a height, but certainly there existed multi-level buildings.



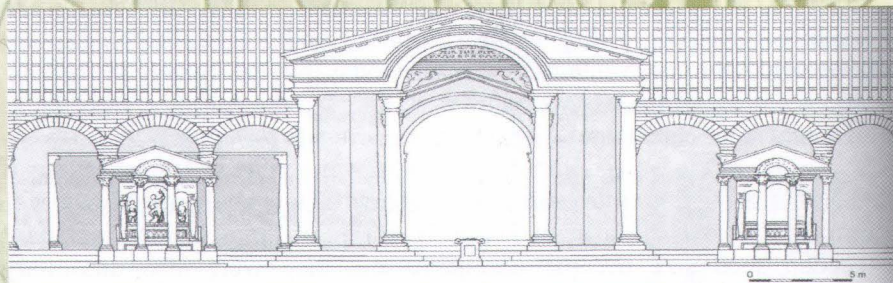


## Colonia Dacica Sarmizegetusa

The Forum was the city centre, where the main roads were crossing. The point of intersection (*locus gromae*) was marked by a marble base which is a small altar. The entrance was flanked by two public fountains decorated with statues representing the Gods of the Roman pantheon.



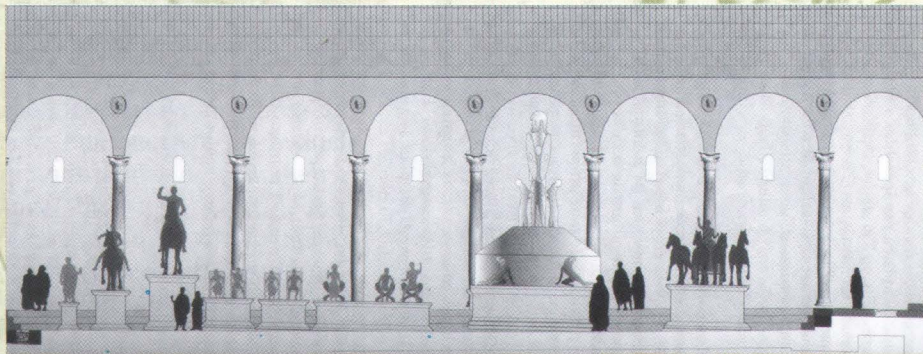
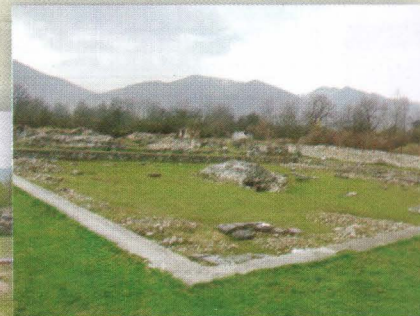
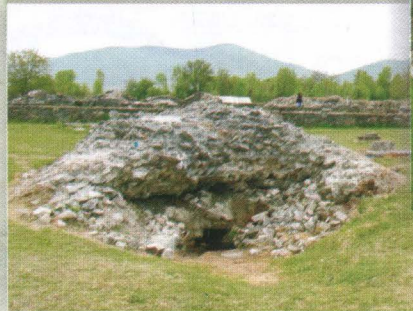
The entrance to the forum yard was via a monumental gate, a *tetrapilum* supported by four pillars (a double triumphal arch), on the gable of which must have been the marking relating the founding of the forum.



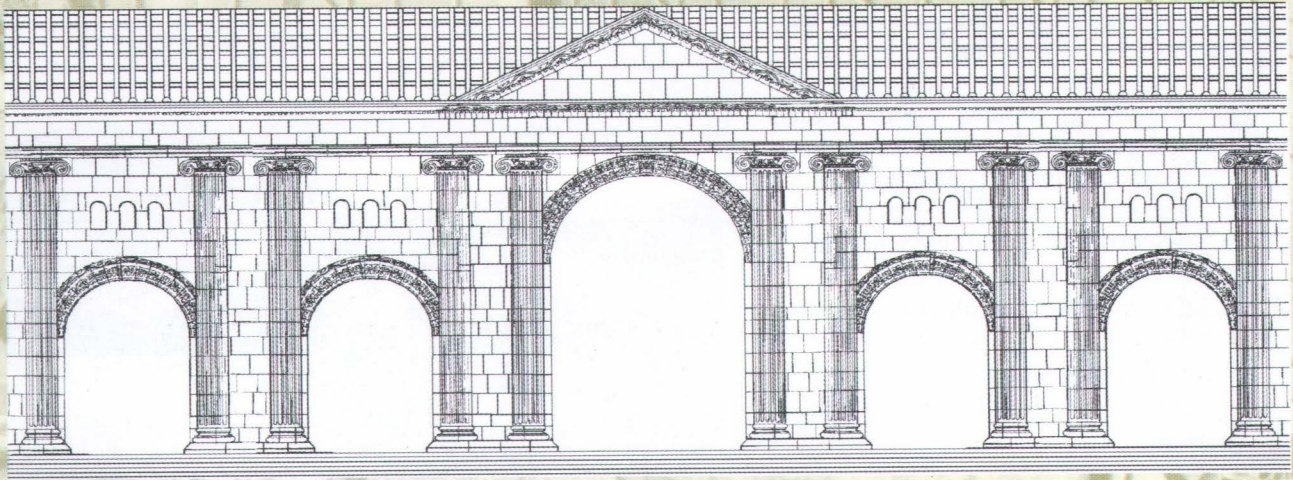


The Forum yard was clad entirely in marble blocks. In its centre and on the edge lied like thrones the mounts for the gilded bronze statues (which have been preserved only fragmentary) or marble of some kings who played a role in the life of the city or province.

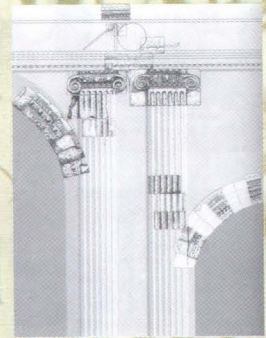
In the east, north and west, the courtyard communicated with the exterior by porticos made of marble colonnades, with a height of about 6 m, which supported tiled roofs.







From the Forum yard was also access to *basilica*, building dominating by its height the entire architectural complex. It was flanked on the east and west by a podium (*tribunalia*) on which the citizens had their speeches and where the two mayors (*duumvirii*) were judging cases. The Eastern Court had in the basement a carcer, which was not even prison, but rather a preventive arrest place.

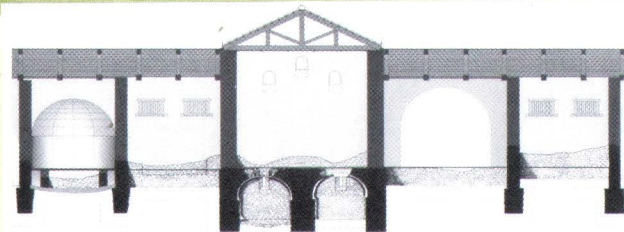
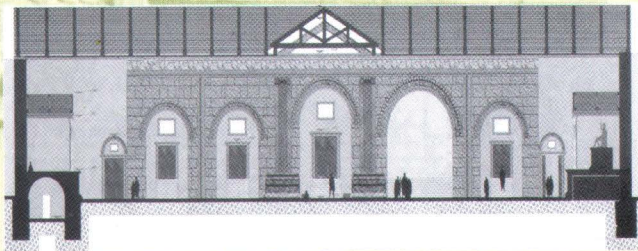




From this space was possible entering the *curia*. In Rome, in this room the senators discussed the important issues of the Republic or Empire chaired by the two consuls; in the provinces, *decurionii* (city council members, grouped in *ordo decurionum*), chaired by the two mayors, the *II viri*, debated the city issues. Underneath were two vaulted rooms, *aeraria*, chambers of the city treasury.

Probably in this area were the offices of the city senior magistrates. In addition to the two mayors would have to recall the aediles (those who were in charge of public buildings, city police, street maintenance, public procurement, organizing celebrations, etc.) and the *questor* that was in charge with the community's money.

Also in the forum area were some *taberna*, shops, because before the forum met political and administrative assignments, it was where the Roman citizen was going to change products. From Rome we have notice about the existence of a *forum boarium* (animal market), *forum piscatorium* (fish market), *forum oleatorium* (oil market), etc.



Over time were also dug other objectives, without being included in the tourist circuit. Since 1924, on the initiative of Constantine Daicoviciu, Sarmizegetusa has the benefit of a museum collecting the pieces found during excavations.

All these ruins still speak. Their story has not come to an end. Even if today's life, customs, culture and spirituality of those who gave them birth are more difficult to decipher, it is our duty to preserve them and if possible to revive them.



