

# ROMAN FINDS AT SCHELA CLADOVEI, MEHEDINȚI COUNTY

Vasile Boroneanț (București)

Adina Boroneanț (București)

Identifying the archaeological site at Schela Cladovei (Davidescu 1996, 547-549) proved to be indeed an extremely important event for the prehistory and history of the Iron Gates region.

The excavations starting in 1965 brought to light archaeological facts basically unknown prior to 1964, when work at the Iron Gates I power plant had commenced.

Among the most important questions posed from the very beginning to the team led by C.S. Nicolăescu Plopșor and M. Davidescu, was the location of the Dacian and Roman habitation. Historical information suggested that once the Romans reached the Danube, a series of contacts between the newcomers and the local Dacian population emerged, be they conflicts, trade, negotiations, treaties, reaching their peak with the two Roman-Dacian wars from 101-102 AD, respectively 105-106 AD (*IstRom.* 1960, 285-341; Pippidi 1967, 187-326; Daicoviciu 1972, 104; Cizek 1980; IIR 1964; Davidescu 1980). All the above mentioned contacts would lead us to believe in the existence of an intense Dacian and Roman habitation of the area.

Field work led under the co-ordination of D. Tudor (Tudor 1965, 395-406) and C.S. Nicolăescu Plopșor (Nicolăescu Plopșor 1968) prior to the development of the Iron Gates I project, brought some new elements in the existing information on the area, but did not exhaust it. The thread started to unravel once excavations started in 1965 (Boroneanț 1973, 5-39) (fig.1).

On the perimeter of the Schela Cladovei site were identified traces of Roman habitation. Of course, the most frequently mentioned is the earthen Roman fortress, first published by Luigi Fernando Marsigli (Marsigli 1774, 69). Unfortunately it can no longer be precisely located in the area, as the configuration of the land has much changed since Marsigli first planned it in 1689. Turnu Severin has expanded, and so did Schela Cladovei.

Many other took interest in it, all historians and archaeologists that were dealing with the preparations of the Roman-Dacian wars or the fate of Dacia after the Roman conquest: C. Bolliac (Bolliac 1956), G. Tocilescu (Tocilescu 1898, mss 5159), V. Cristescu (Cristescu 1929), Al. Bărcăcilă (Bărcăcilă 1938), D. Tudor (Tudor 1968), M. Davidescu (Davidescu 1980) and many others.

The information offered by Marsigli is still extremely important. Marsigli was designated by Eugene of Savoy to elaborate a project for a bridge made of ships over the Danube. Marsigli chose the same area as Apollodor of Damascus had. The feet of Apollodor's bridge were still visible appearing out of the water. For a better documentation of his bridge, Marsigli topographically located the Roman fortresses from Pontes and Drobeta, but also a *castramento*, an earthen fortress, of rectangular shape, oriented with the long sides parallel to the Danube (fig. 2). It had five gates of access, two on the side parallel to the Danube, two on the northern side towards the higher terrace of the Danube, and one on the western side. In our view, it must have been close to the area where the bridge was built. Between 1985 -1987 M. Davidescu si M. Garašanin organised with the help of the specialists from the water power plan an exact study of the legs of the bridge, using a submersible. The results are ready and available, it is a pity they have not been published yet (fig. 3) It might have been the place where the military units working at the bridge were stationed (until the building of a proper castrum), and probably also where the guards in charge with the protection of the constructions. It must have been

connected to the road Trajan built in the Cazane area, on the southern bank of the Danube, across the village of Ogradena, where the famous *Tabula Traiana* (fig.4) is also located (signaled by Marsigli too).

The castrum must have had means to protect the riverbank. A possible location is the area of the shipyard, east of the Dacian settlement from Schela Cladovei (a possible threat to the construction of the bridge) and where the riverbank is higher. D. Tudor affirms that around this castrum a civilian habitation must have existed, probably marked through bricks and pottery (he quoted from M Davidescu, who made personal field observations). According to G. Tocilescu and Pamfil Polonic there were ruins of Roman walls, an underground *aqueduct* leading to a water tank (still existing in 1880) with a brick domed ceiling. Anyway, there must have existed a connection between the Dacian settlement at Schela Cladovei and the Roman one at Drobeta (where archaeological excavations showed that the ruins of the Roman fortress overlapped Dacian remains). So, Marsigli's castrum was separating the two Dacian settlements.

Among the many surprises provided by the site of Schela Cladovei was the 1965 one, when among the Neolithic remains, in the upper part of the cultural layer, appeared a Roman cup and a bone hair pin. The problem was cleared during the following years.

In 1967, the workers digging the ditches for the water pipes going to the heavy water factory at Halanga told us that they found bones and fragments of pots similar to the ones we were digging up in our excavations. We determined that the Neolithic settlement was stretching further than we thought, but among the exposed finds there were also artefacts dated to the Hallstatt and the Roman periods. An archaeological layer assigned to the Roman period was never determined. The archaeological team surveyed to the best of their powers the digging of the ditches, but as no supplementary funds were available, and work was advancing fast, a proper recording of the finds was not possible.

Apart from Roman pottery fragments and animal bones, remains of domestic consume, we also identified 3 lime slaking ovens. They were located in rooms especially designed for this purpose, as we were able to determine from the brick remains. The ditches dug by the workers also revealed areas with important traces of burning and fragments of Roman bricks, parts of the kilns. Their shape was probably of bi-truncated cones, but most of the time they had been partly destroyed. One of them preserved only the inferior part, and just a little bit above the walking level of the period. The inferior part of the best preserved oven presented a narrowing, also truncated, slightly deformed through usage. Facing it, on the western side there was the opening for maintaining the fire. This opening had the same truncated cone shape, being located slightly lower than the rest of the room. We were unable to catch it completely because of the soil and the construction materials agglomeration.

Fragments of pottery and bricks and also ruins, were also noticed in the gardens and courtyards of the houses located parallel to the railway. They are west of the above mentioned water pipes. Our observations during the same autumn and the next year showed the presence of walls some 1 m wide, part of a rectangular structure. The longer side, oriented N-S, was perpendicular to the river. As far as we could trace it, the structure was 40 m long and about 20 m wide. North to their walls, in an area where the landlord had built something, next to the foundations other habitation traces were revealed. Afraid that we were going to start excavations that might destroy the vine planted there or the existing constructions, the landlord was reticent and asked us to guarantee that no further damage would occur.

In our opinion, as well as that of the specialists we consulted, we might deal with a *Villa Rustica*, dating to the II-III centuries AD, probably similar to the ones mentioned D. Tudor, surrounded by vine, in the honour of Bacchus, as the inscriptions tell us (Tudor 1968, 177). A more systematic study of these ruins must be undertaken by the specialists of this period. Rarely, pottery fragments or brick pieces appeared in other courtyards in the area.

All these constructions were probably later than Marsigli's *castramento*, being probably erected after the Romans settled in the area. The exposed ovens for the whitewash and brick are

probably linked to the construction of this *villa rustica* and maybe with others that are nowadays lost.

In our field surveys, on the higher bank where today is the fishing station, we came across a structure large in size, of an undetermined shaped. Towards the Danube it had a pavement made of bricks. It was brought to the attention of M. Davidescu, who, started a small scale excavation there. According to his opinion it might have been a small port, whose activity probably continued during the Roman-Byzantine times us (Tudor 1968, 177). Remains from this latter period are also to be found at Drobeta and on the Serbian bank.

The burial - or the burials - in a *cista* exposed east to the railways canton could be connected to that civilian settlement D. Tudor and M. Davidescu (Tudor 1968, 177) were talking about (Davidescu 1980).

The same D. Tudor informed us about a stone quarry existing at Schela Cladovei (Tudor 1968, 71). The stone taken from there was used in constructions. The rocks were calcarous and sedimentary, with an exterior aspect similar to gritstones and had high chopping qualities. The quarry was located to the western part of the village. Our research at Schela Cladovei showed that limestone was also quarried in the area, the traces of the quarrying being still visible, although modifications in the local landscape occurred. Both stone and limestone are still used in modern times.

Schela also provided a sand quarry - still in use, also to the western part of the village, next to the swimming pool area. A good quality sand was extracted from here, probably used in preparing the mortar.

The Iron Gates area sheltered other rock quarries as well: at Bahna, the best known one for the sandy limestone it provides. This type of limestone was used in the castrum at Drobeta (Bărcăcilă 1938; Tudor 1968, 78; Davidescu 1980). Both for this purpose but also for chopping funerary monuments was used the limestone from Gura Văii. Its qualities were well known since Neolithic times (Bărcăcilă 1938; Tudor 1968, 78; Davidescu 1980).

Al. Bărcăcilă, who studied this problem closely, told us that after 150 AD the quarry at Breznița was opened. The limestone there was white with reddish shades. Another quarry was located at Vârciorova, providing limestone for whitewash production and constructions.

As the archaeological surveys proved it, quarrying was common throughout the whole Iron Gates area, especially in the rapids- region. A proof for this are the vertical paved mountain sides leading to Tabula Traiana (Tresors 1976).

The riverbed itself was used as a source for collecting the construction materials of all types, starting with the Schela Cladovei\_Lepenski Vir culture (Boroneanț 2000). Flint, obsidian, quartz and other rocks were used for manufacturing various art objects, hearth building and dwelling protection.

A special problem is raised by the discovery of objects made of precious metals. They are probably connected to the sand ores existing on both banks, although historians never accorded them proper attention. It is remarkable the attention given to these ores by the earlier inhabitants of this area. At Schela Cladovei, during the first years of excavations we have noticed a few pieces of Cu 203 in the habitation levels belonging to Cris Starcevo Neolithic. These discoveries were confirmed during the next 30 years of research. Several times before we underlined the fact that this region is one of the richest in both ferrous and non-ferrous minerals (Boroneanț 1980, 36-37; 2000). There are ore or gold sand mines at Vârciorova, Orșova, Ieșelnița, Mraconia, Tisovița, Eibenthal (Macrea 1969, 303; Graf, Zaberca 1990, 297-309), or in their near proximity.

The number of Dacian and Roman discoveries in the area of the Iron Gates is a lot bigger on both banks than we could cover in this paper. Some of them are studied by our colleagues in Drobeta Turnu Severin and shall probably be included in a repertoire of the discoveries in the area, under preparation at the present moment.

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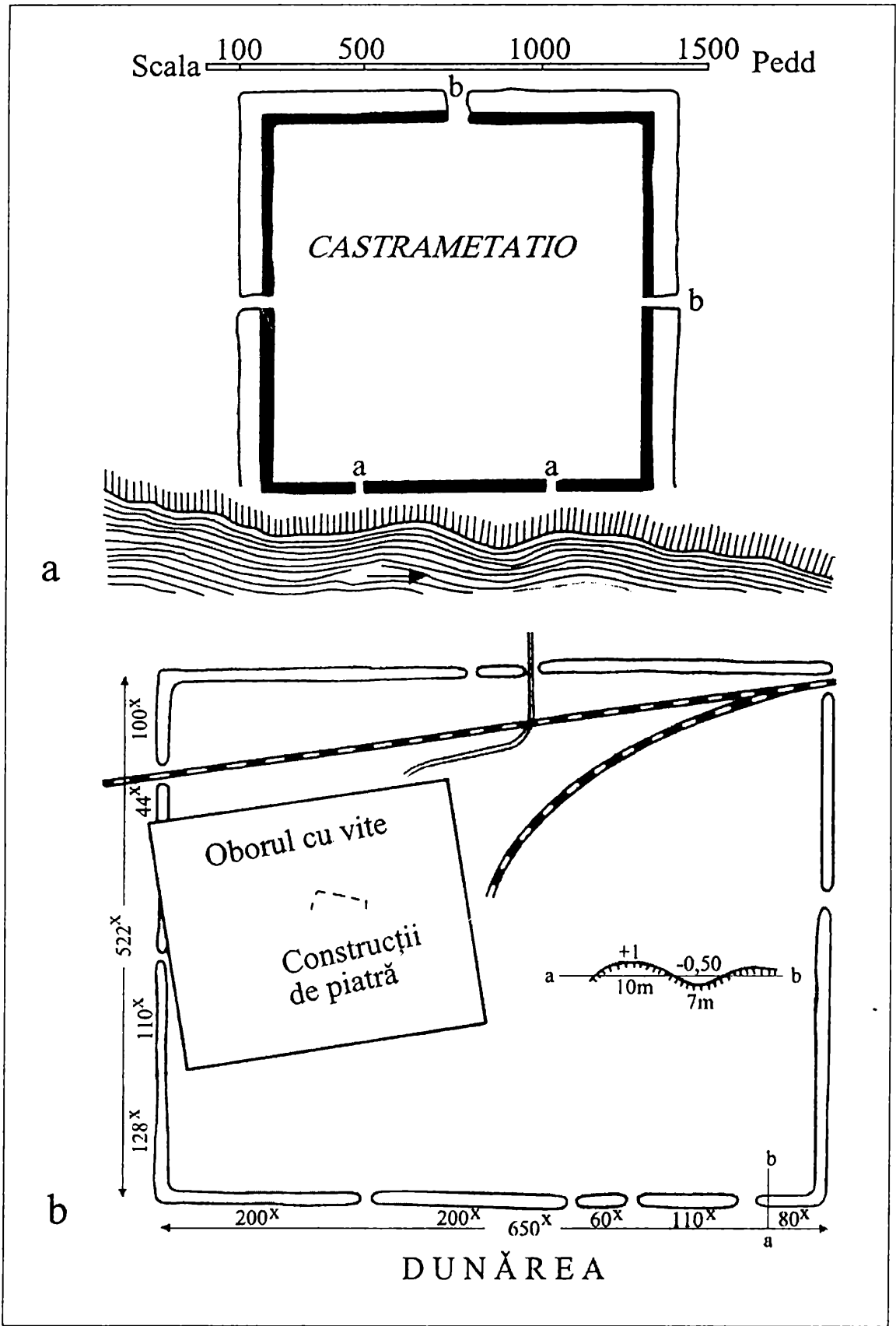


Fig. 2. The turf and timber fort at Schela Cladovei, 1: after F. Marsigli; 2: after P. Polonic.

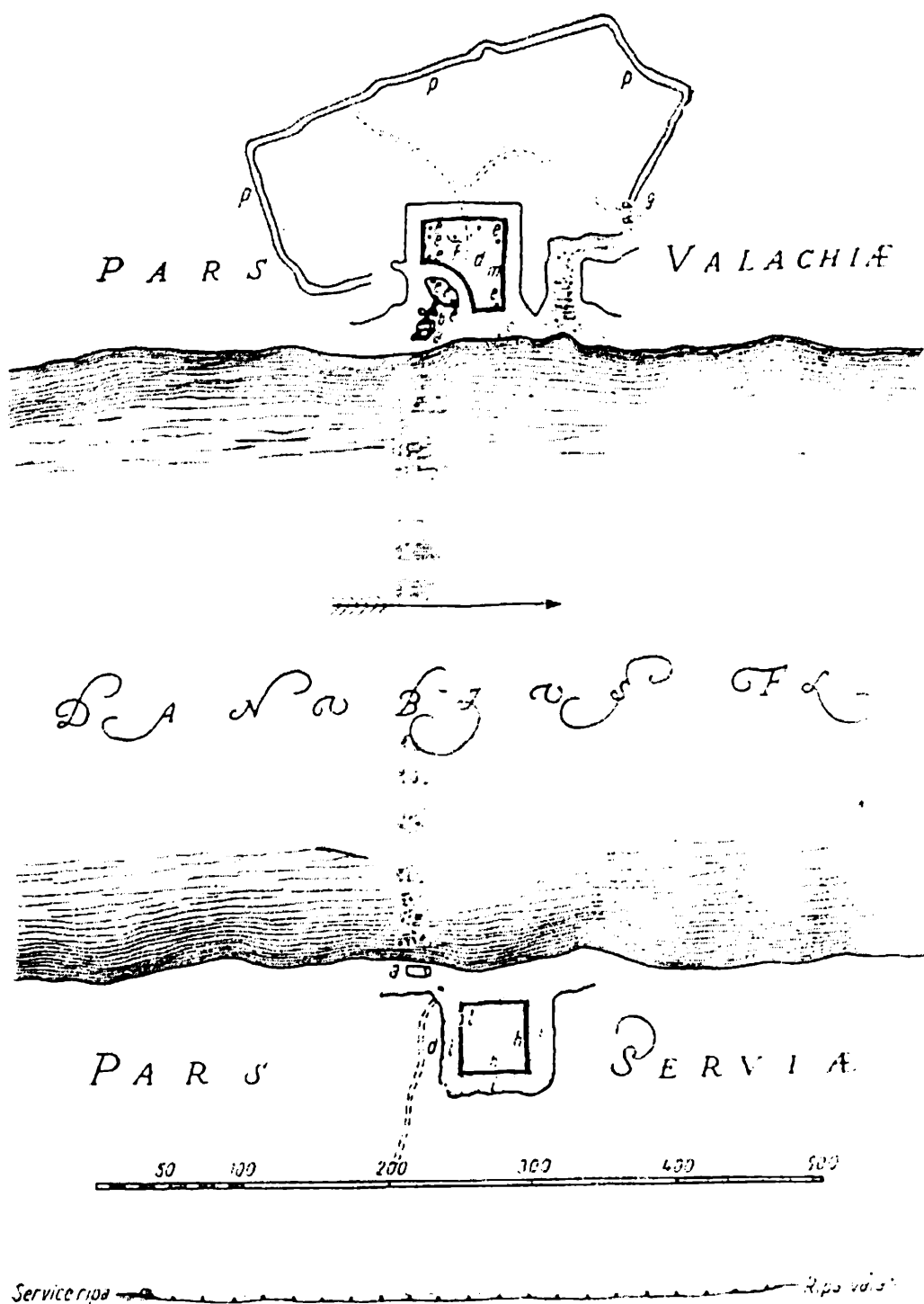


Fig. 3. The Roman *castra* at Drobeta Turnu Severin and Pontes, showing the position of the bridge legs, as seen by F. Marsigli.



IMP CAES DIVI TRAIANI  
PARTHICI FILII DIVI NERVAE  
NEPOTI TRAIANO HADRIANO  
AVGVSTVM GERM DACICO PARTHICO  
P M TRIB POT P P  
MIL PASS  
II

Fig. 4. *Tabula Traiana*, at the entrance in the Cazane area, on the left side (Serbian) of the Danube, upstream Tekija. The *Tabula* was set in the honor of emperor Trajan in 117 AD.