

DROBETA TURNU SEVERIN: A GEO-HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

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Abstract: *Drobeta Turnu Severin: A Geo-Historical Evolution.* The remote times since the history of the town lasts transformed its territory into a huge outdoor museum. On these lands, the country's first Romanian rulers stepped and fulfilled their interests. From here Mircea the Eldest prepared the crushing of the enemy armies. Early glorious reigns of Michael the Brave and Carol I happened in this holy place of Romanian origin. Here was the original territory of permanent and original synthesis of culture and civilization, which were imposed by the diligence and the skill of the people, by the beauty and richness of the places. Between the city and the Danube there was always a very close link because the river gave specific character and brought economic prosperity to the city. When we visit the Roman castrum we feel special emotions because we know that through this castrum felt stepped emperors like Septimius Severus and Trajan or Domitian. Mircea the Eldest, Mihail Kogălniceanu and I. Brătianu felt as we feel pride and a sense of belonging to this earth.

Rezumat: *Drobeta Turnu Severin: o evoluție geo-istorică.* Din timpuri îndepărtate, de când datează istoria acestui oraș, i-a transformat teritoriul într-un muzeu în aer liber. Pe aceste meleaguri, primii conducători ai României și-au urmărit treptat interesele. De aici, Mircea cel Bătrân a pregătit zdrobirea armatelor inamice. Glorioasa domnie a lui Mihai Viteazul și Carol I a avut loc în acest loc sfânt al României. Aici a fost teritoriul original al culturii și civilizației impuse de diligență și de calificarea oamenilor, de frumusețea și bogăția locurilor. Între oraș și Dunăre a fost întotdeauna o strânsă legătură deoarece fluviul i-a atribuit un caracter specific și a adus prosperitate economică orașului. Când vizităm castrul roman simțim emoții deosebite deoarece știm că urmele sale fac referire la împărați precum Septimius Severus și Traian sau Domițian. Mircea cel Bătrân, Mihail Kogălniceanu și I. Brătianu ne măresc sentimentul de mândrie al apartenenței acestui ținut.

Key words: *geo-historical evolution, Drobeta Turnu Severin.*

Cuvinte cheie: *evoluție geo-istorică, Drobeta Turnu Severin.*



1. INTRODUCTION

Severin city has a historic rise which loses its inception in the mists of time. Its destiny is a direct result of its geographical position in the western part of Oltenia with the center placed on the coordinates 22° 33' east longitude and 44° 38' north latitude, on the left bank of the Danube River at the leaving of the narrow strait in the Carpathian basin of the Topolnița on the European Road 70. The remote times since the history of the town lasts transformed its territory into a huge outdoor museum.

A history philosopher says that a city becomes a community in itself, with self-awareness, primarily through its history, because history enhances its personality. The Roman encampment or the foot bridge of Traian remind us of our forefathers of this nation and we are overwhelmed by special feelings because we know that through this encampment stepped Emperor Trajan, Septimius Severus and Domitian.

2. A GEO-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS SINCE THE ANCIENT TIMES

This land has provided favorable conditions for people's basic needs starting from goods and defense against enemies. In the city's history we find objects used as tools and weapons since Paleolithic period. *In the Middle Paleolithic there were further improved and refined the bifacial pecks. Such objects have been discovered at Cladova.*¹ Neolithic which is Polished Stone Age, has been a giant leap in human development in this region. It is the period when it is generalized the grinding of the stone, crop cultivation, animal domestication, the invention and widespread use of clay vessels, which continued the wood and stone ones from the previous era. During the Bronze Age the agriculture developed the cattle-drawn plow through, but also because the breeding of cattle in herds. Metal replaced stone in the tools and weapons field. During the Early Bronze Age the society in this area divides and there appears an aristocracy that gathers the excess of products from the community. Increasing wealth will lead to a grow of the state of uncertainty and therefore begin to appear strong and fortified centers, which assumed a significant constructive effort. During the middle Bronze the matriarch in the area disappears. This is the time when Great Gârla culture, characterized by distinctive pottery, imposes itself. The vessels have bell-shaped lip, bulging body, high neck, decorated with geometric figures. This is the period when the Geto-Dacian ethnos crystallizes, as a northern branch of the Thracians. The Geto-Dacians have a remarkable spiritual and material culture in this area. During the Late Bronze Age the Gârla Great culture remains continues and from this period we have the great complex of "funeral urns". In the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age dates the famous treasure from Hinova with 887 pieces of gold and a bronze one. In the first part of the Iron Age the social stratification process becomes relevant. There appear fortresses reinforced with earth walls. The tools and the weapons are more sophisticated being produced by refining the iron. Locals believe in gods and immortality of the soul. The Second Iron Age is characterized by widespread of metallurgy, the first issuing and use of local currencies, the crystallization of social classes and the use of writing. This is the

¹ Parvan Basil, Dacia, *Ancient Civilizations of the Carpatho-Danubian Countries*, Bucharest, 1974, p.14.

prosperity period of the Dacian state. The traces of permanent living show that Simian Island inhabitants passed easily on both sides to exchange products and tools with people here.

The Dacian people from north of the Danube will reach its climax during the reign of Burebista king which Strabo says that "he became the leader of his people which were exhausted by frequent wars, which means that the unification was preceded by a period of cruel war.

In the first century BC. AD the Roman dominion firmly establishes the right of the Danube, the actual occupation of the territory and pacifies the various Celtic tribes Illyro-Thracian. This proximity has led, among other things, to the development of relations between the Dacians and Romans. After the emperor Tiberius transformed on the right side of the Danube into Roman province, in 15 AD, it began the building of the military road from Danube Basins. The presence of the Roman Empire on the other side of the river, combined with the incursions with robbery purpose of the Dacians, leads to an inevitable conflict between Dacians and Romans. Due to failures occurring on other battle fields, Domitian begins negotiations with Decebal and gets a compromise peace in 89.

Vasile Parvan argues that Drobeta existed long before the Roman conquest, and when the Romans got here, the city had reached its peak. "Drubeta" in Dacian language would mean "The Split" or bifurcation because in the east of the camp, the Danube "is split" into two arms which embrace Simian Island.

After strengthening their border on the Danube, the Romans will organize several expeditions against the Dacians in the north of the Danube, which will culminate with the two wars during the reign of Traian. Drobeta gets into history along with the beginning of these campaigns led by Traian Emperor. Decebal, the greatest king of the Dacians, was described by Cassius as "clever, skilful in the trap, brave in battle, knowing to skillfully use a victory and get out well from a defeat, things for which he had been, for a long time, a feared hostile". Traian is considered the greatest emperor of Rome. He was elected as a consul for six times and was the first to receive from the people and the Senate the title of "Optimus Principis" - the best of princes. The Dacian-Roman War became inevitable and on 25 th March 101, it is solemnly declared in Rome. Emperor Traian starts moving towards the Danube and leads an army of about 150,000 soldiers against an army of about 40,000 Dacian fighters. At Drobeta Traian embarks on ships a numerous group of cavalry, which is carried downstream up to Şistov. After the Battle of Adamclisi, the Roman troops moved upstream on the Danube, arriving back at Drobeta. Not accepting the failure of the conquest of Dacia, Traian starts again the military preparations. In this context the famous bridge over the Danube was built by Apollodorus of Damascus. Emperor Traian thought to be inappropriate and too detouring the access through depression of Caransebes-Haţeg to send troops in Dacia, he thought it was easier to build a bridge. He ordered the construction of the bridge also because that there "*was what he was missing, a bridge on Drobeta left bank, which of course was founded by the Romans in earlier times, probably under Flavi*".²

Because Decebal troops tried several times to set fire to wooden bridges built across the Danube by the Romans, but also because of the danger of the ice banks during the winter, which would have prevented the supply of the Roman troops on the left bank of

² Nicolae Iorga, *History of the Romanian people*, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1985, p.37.

the Danube, Traian decided to build a stone bridge that would facilitate the access to the bridgehead at Drobeta. With this purpose he brought Apollodorus of Damascus to build the bridge over the Danube. The Roman bridge construction demonstrated their desire to achieve a lasting conquest, enabling them a long term exploitation of wealth Dacian. The construction of the bridge took place between 103-105, and it was the longest stone bridge in the Roman Empire.

Dio Cassius wrote: "Traian built a bridge of stone across the Isthmus for which can not admire him enough. Also wonderful are the other constructions of Traian, too, but this is above all the others. We need to be amazed by the skillful way in which it was placed each pillar in, the middle of the river in a whirlwind water muddy ground, as long as the water flow could not be turned away (photo 1).

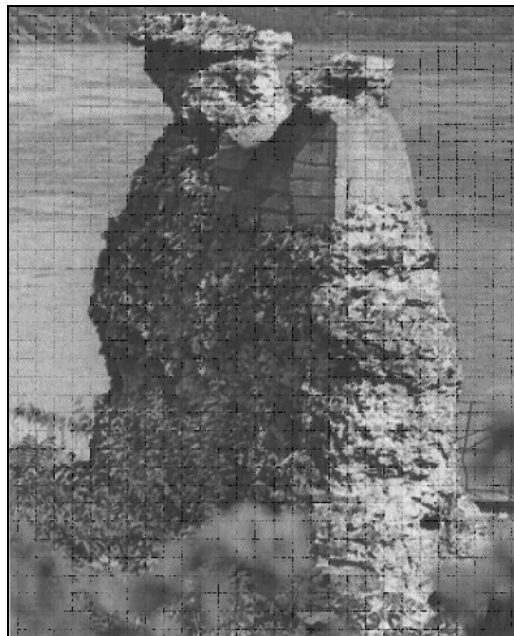


Photo 1: The root of the Traian's bridge

Near the end of the bridge head the Romans built on the Dacian bank a fort called Drobeta, and on the other side another encampment, called Egeta. The corners were rounded of the castrum and reinforced with a tower, and each side had a gate with two towers.

The camp was built by the Romans according to a strategic design and had to accommodate 300 families, who formed the garrison to defend the bridge. The inside of the camp was divided into streets, which crossed at right angles. It was also built a discharge culvert under the public streets and aqueducts were built to supply water. Outside the camp walls there were houses and huts for the soldiers.

As a result of several attacks of Decebal in the southern of the Danube, the Roman Senate declared war again to Dacia in 105. After the defeat of Decebalus, Dacia is proclaimed Roman province and Traian remains here until the beginning of 107, to organize the province. In Drobeta there were mainly colonized, the veterans of two wars, being given appropriation of land and house sites.

Recent research has shown that Drobeta was placed on a piece of land, now located between Smardan and Calarasi streets and in the north near Tudor Vladimirescu Boulevard. The city was ruled by a council called *ordo decurionum* which, besides city leadership, also was dealing with tax collection. Only a few years after the conquest of Dacia, Drobeta becomes known throughout the civilized Roman world, which determines the great geographer Ptolemy (sec.II d.Hr.) to mention it as an important city.

Drobeta was not only an administrative and military residence, but also a production and exchange center, which will make the city to have a civilizing role over a wide area around it, where it irradiated the process of Romanization. In fact, the process of Romanization in Drobeta area started before the Roman conquest, through the economic ties between the two sides of the Danube. The new form of administration and civilization will attract the local residents, and in time, the city's population will increase, building homes outside the perimeter of the castrum, some of which were large and showy and others were small and shabby. The private property does not only generalize over the house and the location of house, over livestock and tools, but also on land. For housing construction, Dacians used wood, stone or clay. *The Drobeta Roman experiences in its evolution three major periods: that of Antonins, of Constantine the Great and of Justinian's*³.

Hadrian (117-138), who succeeded Traian, began to rule the nation forced to fight the Iazyges barbarians who invaded Dacia, where they mainly attacked the urban centers. To prevent their penetration in the south of the Danube, he ordered the dismantling of the bridge at Drobeta construction, only the twenty feet of stone remaining in the water flow. After he drives away the Iazyges Hadrian will be called "Restitutor Dacie", but the bridge at Drobeta will not be rebuilt anymore. If the bridge was neglected, on the other way, the camp will see a further flourishing. This is strengthened and restored so it became one of the main points where the Romans grew firm in Dacia. The flourishing situation of Drobeta will be so obvious that Hadrian, in 121, will rise it to high rank of "city municipium".

During the emperor Septimius Severus (193-211) there will be shown a special care for the towns of Dacia. Out of the 10 existing cities in the Roman province, four had the title of colony (Drobeta Dierna, Potaisa, Sarmisegetuza) and six of them were proclaimed municipalities. This is the period when the head of the city Drobeta is a Dacian, Aeliu Ariat (a Romanized Dacian). In Sever's time, Drobeta raised to the rank of Septimia Drobeta Colony "was called "Splendidissima Colony" and" the Emperor will be awarded "Recucerito of Dacia and the second founder of it."

Despite the revocation of Roman domination, Drobeta achieved in those years a pronounced development, from here leaving the four main roads to the provinces of Dacia. Caracalla the son of Septimius Severus, was the one who in 212 issued an edict: "Antonina Constitution" that all free citizens became Romans citizens of the empire, and hence those

³ Davidescu M., 1980, *Drobeta I-VII centuries*, Craiova.

in Drobeta. The *Residents from Drobeta will worship Caracalla emperor through a lofty monument, a testimony of the welfare of the city.*

In the years 235-284, a period of military anarchy is known in Drobeta. The Roman power was weakened due to frequent rebellions of the Dacians, and due to more frequent attacks of migratory peoples. Drobeta-starred, together with the other cities, an important role in the process of Romanization. This process will still continue after the departure of the Roman army and administration, through economic and religious ties with the regions on the right bank of the Danube.

Drobeta, which suffered great destruction would be restored only in the time of Constantine the Great (306-337). This will restore the authority on the Danube. The camp at Drobeta, which was found destroyed, was rebuilt after a new plan, using materials recovered from old demolished buildings. Now it is being Built a big wave of land, known as "Brazda lui Novac", with a length of 300 km, which started from the mouth of Topolnita river, it crossed Oltenia and Muntenia beneath the hills, reaching Mizil.

During the reign of Justinian (527-563) is the last period of flourishing for ancient Drobeta. In the second half of the sixth century and the first half of the seventh century, Slavs passed through the area. In the late seventh century, Drobeta suffered from repeated attacks and there are not too many data about local life.

Even if the city is no longer maintained as a military and economic center, the settlement will continue to exist. The Severin County reappears in history in the context of the Hungarian kingdom pressure, which was exerted along the Danube in the Iron Gates area and its interests clash with the Empire of Asanesti in the South of Danube. At the beginning of the tenth century, the attacks of the Hungarian people settled in the Pannonian Plain were from nomadic horsemen gangs eager for prey. After their growth during their first king, Stephen I (997-1038), their attacks will take place on a systematic basis. There is the idea that the origin of the name "Severin" would come from the name of one of the top leaders of the Hungarians who set up here a "Banat".

Most authors agree that, in fact, the city of Severin is earlier than the building of building Romanian Country principality. The existence of the ancient tower upstream the Traian foot, raised strong disputes and controversies among researchers. The assumption that the construction would be a Dacian or a Roman one could not be proven with evidence. Nicolae Iorga considered it built in the reign of Justinian. Subsequent archaeological research found near a tower a church whose walls were built with stone taken from Drobeta Roman camp (in a wall there was found a monument built in 200 AD and dedicated to the Caracalla Emperor).

Eventually it was accepted the idea that Severus tower was built by the Hungarians during the Hungarian expansion. The archaeological excavations in the Severin City led to the discovery of a timber and earth fortifications dating from the twelfth century. After building the Severin city around 1230, the Hungarian organized from here invasion and plundering expeditions in the south of the Danube. The city was also intended to stop the attacks of the Bulgarians. Severin Fortress was formed as a rectangular enclosure with four square towers at the corners and a fifth corner in the middle east side. After 1419 it was added a new external enclosure that embraced the old one, being three-sided and having corners and two semicircular bastions. After the Mongol invasion it is proceeded to stone construction of Severin fortresses. Between 1275-1279 it is certified as a ban of Severin Mikud Stephen, originally from Transylvania.

An anonymous chronicle claims that the founders are the Basarabes from Transylvania, who crossed the mountains and settled first at Severin then at Craiova. Between 1357-1364, Severin is ruled by Alexander Basarab, and between 1364-1376 by Prince Vladislav Vlaicu. The first churches in the area were wooden ones and only in the fourteenth century it began the building of stone churches. Mircea the Oldest was often in Severin city, dealing closely to rebuild and strengthen it. Being at the pinnacle of his career, he held talks as an equal partner with Sigismund of Luxembourg, which took place in 1406 in Severin Fortress, solving the problem of common struggle against the Ottomans. In 1493 Bayezid II surrounds Severin Fortress (photo 2) occupied by Hungarians and defended at the time by the Committees of Timisoara.



Photo 2: The challet of Severin

The fortress will be attacked again in 1512 and in 1524 it will be attacked and completely destroyed by the Ottoman troops led by Pasha Balibeg. The fortress will be attacked again in 1512 and in 1524 it will be attacked and completely destroyed by the Ottoman troops led by Pasha Balibeg. After 1524, Severin decreases due to adverse circumstances and the constant Turkish attacks.

In 1616 Severin is mentioned by the chronicler Miron Costin who passed over the lands. Count Marsigli was the first who researched the ruins of Trajan's bridge and the surroundings with the settlements of that time. He describes Severin Tower as follows: "it is situated on the bank of the Danube river between Traian and Severus castrum field."

After the peace of Passarovitz (1718), Severin with the province of Oltenia go under Austrian ruling. The administration of Mehedinti is located in Cerneti where the nobility had their short houses amid high courts. Along with the destruction of the Severin city and of settlement around it, most people took refuge in the nearest town, Cerneti disposed on the left bank of Topolnita a few km from its mouth into the Danube.

Between May 1828 - April 1834, Severin county was again under Russian military occupation. In March 1833, General Kiseleff visits the ruins of Dobrogea and then of Cerneti but which had not been restored after being burned by the Turks on 6 August 1828 and also was hit by floods of Topolnita few springs in a row. The residents who came to greet the governor asked him to displace the City in the Severin Plain around the Roman camp, as most houses in Cerneti had to be restored, anyway.

To build the town it was ceded the profit for "Wallachian Danube River fishery for 3 years"(1833, 1834 and 1835). With the money obtained it was meant to buy the estate Severin"field"and with the proceeds from the sale of home sites it was planned to build a church, a mayor home, a court, a pub, a school and a prison. The city was projected onto the ground in front of Trajan's bridge foot, land which was divided into 500 seats to be sold to residents of Cerneți.

In 1851 it was elected the first mayor (magistrate) of the city Turnu Severin, in the person of Pârvu Vercescu.

On 3 July 1851 The Austrian Sailing company leased for 40 years, from the Municipality of Severin an area on the right bank of the Danube, on the right of Tower Severus that totaled 2,400 fathoms where it would be built the navigation Agency and ShipyardFactory.

In1857 it was negotiated a second contract for 34 years. In 1851 it began the development of the true economic life of Severin. In 1853 the town already included 250 houses and, through the development of the port, Severin becomes the main exporter of cattle and grain to Austria. In 1855, Austrian Agency for navigation installs its first telegraph line with Vienna. Residents of the Severin port were impressed to see the miraculous device.

With all the development of the city, most public institutions were half operating in private houses. Between 1857-1859 it was made up from the funds of the population and with support of the state the first local public school in Turnu Severin. On 25 July 1859 it was visited by the leader of the Romanian United Principalities, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, who remained enchanted by the beauty of the city and pledged support for its further development. Over several years in 1864 the city was visited by Mihail Kogalniceanu who appreciated its economic role for the new Romanian state.

In April 1862 there was established the first post office in Severin. The correspondence was transported by a care 3 times a week. The distance from Craiova to Varciorova was crossed in 15 hours. In the year of grace 1866 on May 8-th , the Prince Carol of Hohenzollern was to walk for the first time here on Romanian earth in Severin. After 1867 all merchants from Cerneți moved to Severin. Residents of the city have become all those who were able to buy seats to build homes (cheaper than in other places). *In this way especially foreigners installedthere (Austrians, Germans, Hungarians, Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, Hebrew, Italian, Armenian, etc.) and Romanian peasants, too. In 1867 King Charles, while visiting Oltenia reaches Severin and sees the construction of the hospital, started on which occasion Grecescu is introduced to him*⁴.

In 1883 Severin had 13,000 inhabitants included 1651 houses, there were 12 public buildings, six churches (three Orthodox, one Catholic, one Protestant and one synagogue), a hospital, detention, railway, customs, ships agency, administrative and judicial palace.

In 1892, in the Romanian political world is seriously taken into consideration the construction of a bridge over the Danube, at Severin Tower. After 1900, the construction of the bridge Severin Cladova became the subject of political maneuvers. Before each election, the candidates of the main political parties promised the construction of the bridge,

⁴ Filetti John, Big John Stoian Grecescu philanthropist, in the Archives of Oltenia, nr 3, 1928, p. 25-42.

aiming to win the vote of Severin people. After 1900, the city is experiencing an economic revival in the context of which the entire Romanian economy begins to develop. On October 17, 1910 the Prime Minister John Bratianu arrived in the city, accompanied by Minister Alexandru Constantinescu and V. G. Morțun who attended the inauguration of the work at the city water supply and export slaughterhouse. Being a border town, Turnu-Severin got to know the full horrors of war. On 15 August 1916, when Romania entered the war, the city had the regime Mehedinti 12, 1st Infantry Division commanded by General John Dragalina. The German occupation began in Severin in the days of 8 to 9 November 1916. During the occupation, most factories in the city were evacuated and others were closed. After the war, there was a period of development of the city's industrial capacity.

Beginning in 1941, Severin had the hardest years of its modern history. Due to its strategic placement, on the main route of communication between Oltenia and Banat between Romania and Serbia, Turnu-Severin saw during the war years the largest gatherings of troops, both Romanian and German, with direct effects on economic and commercial life. By the autumn of 1945, the entire city's economic activity was "forced" to serve the needs of war.

Since 1st of January 1951, according to Law No. 5 from 8 September 1950, it is inserted the administrative system copied from the Soviet, and the County of Mehedinti was abolished. Turnu-Severin becomes the residence of the district with the same name, which was part of the region of Gorj, having Targu-Jiu as residence. Because of the Communist obsession to control everything, the economy experienced a damaging fleading, which led to a production that did not take into account market demand and, ultimately, caused serious economic blocks.

In the years of reform that followed after 1989, Severin economy has entered a new crisis because of its, production of goods in stock, without a guaranteed sale.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Drobeta Turnu-Severin city, through its particular strategic issues, has played a big role in local social relations since ancient times. Drobeta-camp was the first urban center that had military power, economic and religious importance from Oltenia and Banat, and the third urban centre in Dacia, after Sarmizegetusa and Apulum. In the main temple in Drobeta, at the beginning of the second Dacian war (105-106 AD), it is mentioned the libation (sacrifice) celebrated by the Traian Emperor, a sacrifice for which today, the historians can not specify its certain religious purposes: to establish the bridge built over the Danube, thanks for repelling Dacian attack against the camp, a boon for the imperial family or a sacrifice in honor of the goddess of Virtue and Honour. The destruction of Ancient Camp Drobeta occurred approximately in the first half of the fifth century and Huns must be responsible for it period when the name of Drobeta was abandoned. The majority of coins discovered during archaeological excavations prove when the camp was destroyed, which was the period of Emperor Arcadius. Despite this fact, a new recovery of Drobeta takes place during Emperor Anastasius - Justinian. Severin Fortress was built up by the Kingdom of Hungary as a strategic military center against Bulgarian Kingdom of Vidin, near the ruins of the Roman camp Drobeta.

Severin Fortress has a particular history compared to other cities in the Carpathian area. Its role and its importance were mainly military, trade welfare being difficult

because of its geographical position and the fact that it was mastered in a continuous sequence, by the Hungarian kings, or the princes of Wallachia. It was the same with the three existing medieval churches which, once the rulers were changed, they changed their religion and became Latin or Orthodox worship according to the time.

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