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**ROMAN INFLUENCES IN THE LOWER MUREȘ VALLEY**  
**(2<sup>ND</sup>- 4<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES A.D.)**

-dissertation abstract-

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**Keywords:** barbarians, Mureş valley, coin, romans, Marcomanic wars, trade.

The present paper aims at identifying certain political and economical realities in the lower valley of river Mureş during the 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. on the basis of discovered artifacts analysis.

River Mureş is the biggest effluent left of the Tisa that flows into the latter on the territory of Hungary, near the city of Szeged. The area taken here into consideration, i.e. the lower valley of river Mureş, stretches between the settlements of Săvârşin and Szeged.

As it is well known, the geographic framework of an area goes through continuous changes. Associating present day geographical factors to those of the Antiquity would thus constitute an interpretative error.

István Ferenczi presents a possible image of the area: “A large pond stretched for months from the present-day city of Mukacevo (in Sub-Carpathian Ukraine) until the actual capital of Yugoslavia, not only along the Tisa, but on the lower course of all its Carpathian effluents. The waters only retreated in midsummer, on dry weather, leaving vast marshes behind.”

The territory under analysis extends between the Roman castrum at Micia (Veţel) to the east and the antique settlement of Partiscum (Szeged) to the west. This was a buffer area between Pannonia and Dacia, an area controlled by the barbarian population of the Izygian Sarmathians who determined the pro or against Roman Empire attitude there according to their own interests. Over different periods of time, the Empire controlled the area and used it as the shortest communication route between the provinces of Dacia and Pannonia Inferior after the first was created in 106 A.D.

There is an ongoing academic debate on the location of the western borders of Roman Dacia; I do not intended to revisit that discussion here, but only to mention that our area of interest (the lower valley of River Mureş) was outside the Roman province. Dacians and Izygian Sarmathians continued to inhabit the area.

Discovered artifacts support the statement that the western area remained an interference territory between the provinces of Pannonia and Dacia. Archaeological discoveries testify to the fact that these western barbarians took over certain elements from the Romans, especially their material culture.

Romans exerted control over the Valley of the Lower Mureş because it contained the road connecting Apulum with Micia and Partiscum.

The dissertation is structured according to four main parts and includes over 70 plates that illustrate the new material that I used as basis for the elaboration of the text. The main parts of the dissertation can be thus abstracted:

*I. Introduction.* Taking into consideration the fact that the dissertation places great accent on working with archaeological materials, the presentation of the main archaeological excavations in the area is given ample space. The introduction also discusses the chronological and geographical limits of the research, according to its goals, and includes an ethnical presentation on the basis of historical written sources.

*The Dacians.* On the basis of mentions in the writings of antique authors, one can state the fact that free Dacians continued to inhabit settlements in Crişana and Arad Plain dated by their specific material culture to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D.

After the **Iazyges** settled between the Danube and the Tisa, and then east of the Danube, the two ethnical groups lived side by side. The cemetery in Şiman supports this theory. I believe that Dacians and Iazyges did live together during that period, therefore, during this dissertation I avoid attributing any settlement to a single ethnical group.

**Sarmathians** were a population of Iranian origin, related to the Scythians, who occupied wide territories such as the piedmonts of the Southern Ural Mountains, the river basins of the Ural and Volga (its lower course) and the Volga-D interfluvium. Early Greek sources mention them as *Sauromatai*, later on as *Sarmatai*, while Latin authors use the name of *Sarmatae*.

*II. History of the Lower Mureş Valley during the 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.* This chapter is dedicated to a **presentation** of the valley of Lower Mureş **from a military perspective**, but also brings into discussion the hypotheses related to the **strategic role** of the area both during the Roman province of Dacia and after it was abandoned. The chapter starts with a presentation of conflicts on the borders of Roman Dacia, as reflected by existing historical sources; it then follows the development of Mureş valley from access way towards the Barbaricum to provincial road, during different historical moments, in reference to the opinions of specialists in the field.

In 106 A.D. the conflicts between Dacians and Romans ended with the victory of the latter and most of the conquered territories were organized into a province. The strategic role of the new province of Dacia consisted in separating the barbarian masses north of the Danube. This measure proved to be insufficient. In order to be able to ensure the security of the inner Carpathian area (Dacia's core) and to maintain the division of the barbarian world,

the Empire had to accept a number of sacrifices. These included giving up certain territories and reorganizing the remaining ones under Roman rule.

Numerous conflicts occurred on the western border of Dacia, mainly started by the Iazygian Sarmathians, that reached a peak during the Marcomanic Wars that deeply shook the Roman world and especially the Danubian provinces.

The Marcomanic Wars brought major changes in the relations between Iazyges and Romans, including a drastic limitation of border commerce. The previously unrestricted right of making commerce at all times and frontier points was afterwards only allowed in certain places and days. Commercial limitations decided by the Empire triggered a strong decrease in the quantity of Roman goods reaching the Iazygian territories in the following period.

The retreat of Roman administration and army from Dacia equaled a drastic decrease in the authority of the Empire over the Iazyges. The abandon of Dacia brought other migratory peoples to the former province and renewed pressure on the Sarmathians in the Tisa Plain. The new peoples entered the Sarmathian territories, dislocating them and initiating a continuous degradation process that ended with the gradual disappearance of the Sarmathians over the two subsequent centuries.

Another issue raised in this chapter relates to the status of the Mureş valley and the existence or absence of Roman control points erected on the southern bank of the river. Such points were identified through stamped bricks, especially those bearing the mark of the Thirteenth Gemina Legion. An entire debate arose and continues to this day on the hypothesis that such tegulae were brought there during the Middle Ages and re-used in stone structures.

Despite the fact that the mapping of sites with Roman discoveries along the Mureş supports the hypothesis of Roman control in that area, at the present state of research this road remains a theoretical construct. Still, the overwhelming importance of the Lower Mureş must have triggered a military control without which the Roman road from and towards the inner Dacian territory could not have safely functioned.

*III. Repertory of topographical sites where artifacts of Roman influence have been noted.* The third chapter is the working tool. It includes two large sub-chapters referring to a **repertory of settlements** along the Lower Mureş where Roman artifacts or those showing Roman influence have been identified; **catalogues** of the main categories of items (coins, pottery items, glass objects, fibulae) were then created and included in the dissertation. Each category of items is followed by sub-chapters dealing with related issues such as the state of

research, research method, interpretation, analogies and preliminary conclusions for each category.

The catalogues were designed as to be easily used during the processing of the material. They contain the following fields: 1. Place of discovery, 2. Site type, 3. Issuer, 4. Place of preservation, 5. Bibliography, 6. Notes.

IV. *The conclusions* were elaborated strictly on the basis of the analyzed material. I also aimed at corroborating the resulting data with the known military situation in order to recreate a complete picture of the area. Data would be incomplete without the annexed plates that reproduce the items and allow readers to verify my statements on their **origin, shape, dating, and functions**.

Through the present dissertation I aimed, first of all, at gathering the Roman material or that sowing Roman influences on the valley of the Lower Mureş, and then at producing an image of the area during the 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. The catalogue includes and illustrates artifacts preserved in the collection of the Arad Museum Complex. On the basis of the two categories of artifacts one can note an economical connection between the western provinces of the Empire and settlements along the Lower Valley of River Mureş.

From the point of view of the political and military status of the area, this topic remains open to discussion. Nevertheless, the analysis of the archaeological material allows me to state the fact that the Roman Empire also exerted its influence on the barbarian populations living beyond the territorial borders enforced by the presence of the army.

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