

Limites et ripae. The Roman Army, the Frontiers of the Empire and their Legacy

Summary

I have defended my PhD thesis (written in German language) on February 18th 2002 in front of a committee that comprised prestigious professors and researchers as the late Professor Géza Alföldy from the University of Heidelberg (Germany), Professor Mihai Bărbulescu (thesis supervisor) and Professor Ioan Piso from the Babeş/Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca (Romania). The thesis was awarded the qualification *magna cum laude*. A revised and updated version of this thesis has been published bilingually, in Romanian and German, as a book with the title **Armata în sud-vestul Daciei Romane / Die Armee im Südwesten des römischen Dakien, Timișoara, 2005 (= The Army in the Southwest of Roman Dacia)**. After obtaining the PhD title I was awarded the prestigious research scholarship of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (Bonn, Germany) that enabled me to spend a research year at the Heidelberg University, where I collaborated with Professors Géza Alföldy and Angelos Chaniotis. The result of this research has been the publishing of the book **Politische und militärische Beziehungen zwischen Pannonien und Dakien in der Römerzeit / Relații politice și militare între Pannonia și Dacia în epoca romană, Ed. Tribuna, Cluj-Napoca 2007 (= Political and Military Relations Between Pannonia and Dacia in the Roman Times)**. In this book I examined all the aspects of the political and military interactions between these neighbour provinces (although they were not contingent to each other). The research started from the contacts between Roman Pannonia and the Dacian regions from the 1st century AD and the conquest of Decebalus' Dacian Kingdom by Emperor Trajan at the beginning of 2nd c. AD. In this first part I also underlined Pannonia's contribution to Trajan's Dacian Wars, the Roman military units from Pannonia that took part to these Wars and the ones that remained garrisoned in the new province of Dacia and those who were sent later from Pannonia to Dacia. The high-ranking persons (senators and equestrians) that served in both provinces were a focus of this research as well, in order to establish the possible criteria that these men were appointed in Pannonia and in Dacia

during their careers and whether the experience gained in one province could have been a motive for them to be appointed in the other province. Among these persons there were famous people like Publius Aelius Hadrianus, Quintus Marcius Turbo or Publius Helvius Pertinax. As of the criterium of experience in either Dacia or Pannonia for being appointed in the other province as well, it turned out that it had more weight in times when there were conflicts at the borders (like the Iazyg war of 117-119 or the Marcoman Wars of 166-180) than in the peaceful periods.

Another aspect was the strategic roles of these provinces, which were quite clearly complementary, proven by the fact that they cooperated tactically in some very tense situations at their borders, as in the years 107 and 117-119.

Concerning the army units, there were several legions that came from Pannonia to participate to Trajan's Dacian Wars, but only one of them stayed in Dacia for the long term, namely the XIII Gemina. As of the auxiliary military units transferred between these provinces, the direction was also from Pannonia to Dacia (8 alae and 10 cohorts). Significantly, they were stationed in most cases on the western border of Roman Dacia, where the experience gained in Pannonia with the same neighbouring "barbarian" people of the Sarmatian Iazyges would have been most useful. Even the few units that moved from Dacia to Pannonia (three alae), had come initially from Pannonia and merely returned back to their original province.

Another direction of my research was the archaeological excavation of the Roman auxiliary fort from Vărădia, on the southwestern frontier of Roman Dacia. The first presentation of these excavations has been at the 19th International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies, held in Pécs, Hungary and published in the subsequent Proceedings volume (**Die neuen Ausgrabungen im Auxiliarkastell von Varadia-"Pusta", in Limes XIX. Proceedings of the XIXth Congress of Roman Frontier Studies held in Pécs, Hungary, September 2003 (Ed. Zs. Visy), Pécs, 2005, p. 689-696**). The excavations are still ongoing, but some important conclusions have been already reached. This fort has a precinct and a headquarters building made of stone, whereas all the other internal buildings are of timber. The more precisely datable finds, such as coins and brooches, are pointing to the functioning of this fort only during Trajan's reign, the latest coin found so far, discovered in 1932 by Gr. Florescu, being one of the first coin issue of emperor

Hadrian from the year 117 (Cohen II, 259; RIC II, p. 405, type 535a or 535; the finder only published a text description of the coin, without any drawing or photograph). The lack of corner and intermediary towers (at the corners have been found traces of timber structures en lieu of stone towers) and the fact that of all internal buildings only the *principia* was built of stone seem to hint at an unfinished construction (or reconstruction) of a stone fort. My hypothesis is that the construction could not be finished because of the Iazyg War of 117-119, after which the unit has been ordered to abandon the fort and move. The withdrawal of the units from the forts of this frontier sector (Vărădia, Surducul Mare) was conjugated with the relocation of the main pillar of defense on this frontier stretch from the legionary camp of Berzobis (Berzovia) between the years 108-119, namely the legion IV Flavia felix, to Moesia Superior. On the other hand there was a strengthening of other important forts on the western frontier of Roman Dacia, a topic that I tackled in a lecture at the 20th Roman Frontiers Congress in Leon, Spain (2006), published in the respective proceedings volume (**Änderungen und Truppeversetzungen an der Westgrenze Dakiens von Trajan bis Antoninus Pius, in A. Morillos, N. Hanel, E. Martin (Eds.), Limes XX. XX Congreso Internacional de Estudios Sobre la Frontera Romana, Madrid, 2009, 879-888**). The reinforcing of the defense on the western Dacian frontier under Hadrian has been done by stationing several units simultaneously in forts like Tibiscum, Micia, Bologna and Porolissum. Among regular auxiliary units, Hadrian brought for the war against the Iazygs of 117-119 also irregular Palmyrene cavalry troops from Syria (*Palmyreni sagittarii ex Syria*), that have been set, after the war, as *numeri Palmyrenorum* in Tibiscum and Porolissum. The abandonment of a frontier sector in southwestern Dacia has been thus compensated through reinforcing key positions on its western frontier, which is consistent with Hadrian's defensive policies in general.

Another focus of my research has been the concrete interactions between the Romans and their neighbours at the frontiers. This endeavour was meant to go beyond the "big picture" and try to put together and interpret the concrete cases of contacts, in order to establish whether these contacts were generally conflicts or rather mostly peaceful. I presented the results of my research at the 23rd International Roman Frontier Congress in Ingolstadt (Germany) in 2015, which was published in the Proceedings of this Congress

(Close Encounters at the Roman Frontiers during the Principate. In: C. S. Sommer, S. Matešić (Hrsg.), *Limes XXIII. Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies Ingolstadt 2015, Mainz, 2018, 168-173*). I found out that the interactions between the Romans and their neighbouring peoples could take many shapes. Generally, the Roman authorities looked favourably at the frontier trade and allowed the access of the „barbarians“ to special marketplaces that were set for security reasons in the vicinity of some forts at the borders. Also they could have special arrangements with neighbouring pastoral populations in granting them grazing privileges in the provinces for a certain tax, as we can see in examples from Mauretania Tingitana or Numidia. On the other hand, the Romans reacted strongly and mercilessly to the pressure of some *externae gentes* that asked to be received on Roman soil without on their own initiative.

Other research topics that I have tackled were the quite peculiar roads and fortresses distribution in Roman Dacia, that I see as a consequence of the way Dacia was conquered by emperor Trajan at the beginning of the 2nd century AD, where the invasion roads and most of the forts that have been built during these wars continued to function also after the conquest was finished and the province was established („**Armată și limes în Dacia romană**“ [Army and Limes in Roman Dacia], *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Historia*, 54, 1-2, 2009, 100-110).

Between the years 2008-2011 I lead a research project on the southwestern frontier of Roman Dacia, the main goal of which was the identification and positioning of the Roman military built structures on this frontier stretch. This was the first inventory where the Roman military features in this region have been accurately located on geo-referenced maps according to their GPS coordinates, which allowed new interpretations and conclusions and also the first attempt to observe elements of the ancient landscape (published as E. Nemeth, F. Fodorean, D. Blaga, D. Matei, **Der südwestliche Limes des römischen Dakien. Strukturen und Landschaft** [The Southwestern Limes of Roman Dacia. Structures and Landscape], Cluj-Napoca 2011).

In 2016 I organised a conference sponsored by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (Bonn, Germany) with the topic “Violence in the prehistory and antiquity”. Participants from 8 European countries attended and I also was the editor of the proceedings volume (**Violence in Prehistory and Antiquity/Die Gewalt in der**

Vorgeschichte und im Altertum, Kaiserslautern und Mehlingen 2018). Of course I also published here my contribution **Die Konflikte zwischen Römern und „Barbaren“ an den Grenzen: wieso und warum? [The Conflicts between Romans and „Barbarians“at the Frontiers: how come and why?]** where I examined the possible causes for violent conflicts between peoples from outside of the Roman Empire and the Roman authorities. Most of the times I could establish that draught, demographic growth or conflicts with other tribes put some populations in a desperate situation to try and force their acceptance near or on the Roman territory.