

INTER MOESOS ET THRACES

THE RURAL HINTERLAND OF NOVAE
IN LOWER MOESIA
(1ST – 6TH CENTURIES AD)

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ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

Gordon House
276 Banbury Road
Oxford OX2 7ED

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978 1 78491 369 4
ISBN 978 1 78491 370 0 (e-Pdf)

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This book has been prepared with the financial support of the following institutions:

The State Committee of Scientific Research (Komitet Badań Naukowych) of the Polish Ministry of Scientific Research and Information Technology (tutorial grants no. 1 H011 011 28)

Foundation for Polish Science (KWERENDA programme)

Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw

De Brzezie Lanckoronski Foundation

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Printed in England by Oxuniprint, Oxford

This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website www.archaeopress.com

To my parents

Acknowledgements

The following persons and institutions were kind to help me in preparation of the dissertation and publication:

Prof. Dr. hab. Tadeusz Sarnowski, Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw [PL]

Petur Bănov, PhD, Pleven Regional Historical Museum [BG]

Peti Donevski, Historical Museum, Aleko Konstantinov, Svištov [BG]

Plamen Dragančev †, Historical Museum, Aleko Konstantinov, Svištov [BG]

Prof. Dr. hab. Piotr Dyczek, Antiquity for Southeastern Europe Research Centre, University of Warsaw [PL]

Prof. Dr. hab. Jerzy Kolendo †, Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw [PL]

Prof. Dr. hab. Leszek Mrozewicz, University of Adam Mickiewicz, Poznań [PL]

Evgeni Paunov, PhD, Independent researcher [BG / AUT]

with special acknowledgments for the translation to Sylwia Twardo, University of Warsaw and Miłoslawa Stępień, PhD [PL]

Transcription of the Cyrillic script	
<i>Bg</i>	=> <i>En</i>
А	A
Б	B
В	V
Г	G
Д	D
Е	E
Ж	Ž
З	Z
И	I
Й	J
К	K
Л	L
М	M
Н	N
О	O
П	P
Р	R
С	S
Т	T
У	U
Ф	F
Х	H
Ц	C
Ч	Č
Ш	Š
Щ	št (<i>Bg</i>)/ šč (<i>Ru</i>)
ъ	u
ь	y (<i>Ru</i>)
Ю	ju
Я	ja

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Introduction

The area which is the subject of this study is exceptional and fascinating for the historian and archaeologist. It is located at the borderland between the Roman and Barbarian world and, on the other hand, in the borderland of Moesia, earlier under the influence of the Celtic world and Thracians neighbouring Greek colonies. The expression *inter Moesos et Thracas*, found on a series of boundary stones found at that area best describes this location. This geopolitical situation must have caused considerable difficulties in administering the area by the Romans and at present is a challenge for the scholars. Also, due to its unique character it may provide answers to many questions concerning the universal solutions applied by the Romans in various borderlands for many centuries.

The main points on the map of the region were the legionary camp in Novae, located in the Roman Moesia, and the Graeco-Roman town of Nicopolis ad Istrum, which almost up till the end of the 2nd century was administratively affiliated to the neighbouring Thrace.¹ The relations between these two centres and their rural hinterlands provide answers to many questions connected with the organisation of the hinterland, army logistic, and also the gradual development of mutual interdependencies which produced a specific military-civilian community with diverse ethnic roots. Such phenomena have many parallels in history and may be also useful in understanding the modern geopolitical and social phenomena.

The area under investigation is enclosed by the middle and lower basins of the Osăm and Jantra rivers (**Fig. 1**). The southern border of the analysed region was determined rather arbitrarily by the lower Rosica river, which is a left tributary of the Jantra. The aim of choosing this area was, among others, to detect the size of the land controlled by the legion, the development of settlement and relation between the boundary stones and ethnic structures and administrative units. I chose the Danube as the northern border, but when analysing the military bases I also included the structures located on the islands and on the other bank of the river which was used as an important transport and food supply route.

The zone to the west of the mouth of the river Osăm was the frontier between the lands with military protection of the First Italic Legion whereas the Jantra was the natural border between the western and eastern part of the

northern Balkan foothills as well as an important cultural border also in other times than the Antiquity. The Jantra river basin was the western limit of the areas occupied by the Slavs after their arrival to northern Bulgaria,² and today the Osăm is a border separating the dialects of the Bulgarian language and many other cultural and ethnic aspects of the Danubian Plain.³

The term ‘Roman and Early Byzantine settlement’ in the title of this dissertation has rather a chronological than cultural meaning, however, it should be borne in mind that some changes were being caused by the progressing Romanisation understood as increased awareness of individuals and social groups of the Roman culture as well as the ethnic changes connected with migrations of people. The term ‘Roman settlement’ from the title of this work is a conventional expression, in fact denoting the settlement of all the ethnic groups at the discussed area between the 1st and 6th century, and the term ‘Roman’ reflects the dominating role the Romans and their culture played in the province. The Roman presence, which in the 1st century should be rather called occupation, underwent a transformation as a result of which the Roman culture became the main element which absorbed consecutive Barbarian elements. Thus the term ‘Roman settlement’ is meant to denote a kind of universal material culture, which was predominant in the 1st – 6th centuries. Although it is assumed that the Late Antiquity ended as late as the mid-7th century, i.e., at the end of Heraclius’ reign (610–641) when the lands of the Roman east were occupied by the Arabs,⁴ I use the term ‘early Byzantine’ to denote the 6th century.⁵ The distinction between the Byzantine period and the 6th century is necessary in order clearly to separate the final period of the Roman emperors’ rule from the preceding one, which is supported by the differences visible in the settlement structures, stratigraphy of the sites and in the archaeological material.

The time span embraces six centuries starting with the deployment of the military units in the early 1st century to the time preceding the arrival of the Slavic and Avar tribes. In the analysis of the settlement structures it is also necessary to refer to the period preceding the Roman rule and the changes occurring in the following period.

The cultural development of the discussed region in the ancient times is divided into three basic stages differing in their material culture and settlement structures. In the first one the military bases and civilian settlements developed

¹ The Roman province of Moesia, created and organized in the first two decades of the 1st cent. AD, was divided into the Lower and Upper part in AD 86. The fortress of Novae fell into the limits of Lower Moesia. Nicopolis ad Istrum founded in northern Thrace at the beginning of the 2nd c. was incorporated into Lower Moesia between AD 187 and 197.

² Beševliev 1954, 352.

³ Mitova-Džonova 1989, 22ff.

⁴ Madgearu 2006, 161.

⁵ Possibly the best term could be ‘proto-Byzantine’, yet the form term has been much more widely used in the literature.

separately, although they had strong economic and social bonds. This period was finished by a series of invasions in the mid-3rd century. At the second stage the military and civilian structures ‘merged’ into one urban organism and entirely new settlement models were formed. This stage was ended by two regionally important events: the disastrous Hun invasions in the 430s and 450s and the arrival and departure of the Goths of Theodoric the Great (488). The third, final stage, basically limited to the 6th century is much shorter but differs considerably from the preceding one.

The archaeological evidence allows to reconstruct the settlement network and tentatively to recognize the relations between the populations of different ethnic and social origins. The cultural transformation in that part of the province reflects its transit character: the junction of the western and eastern culture and the arrival of the Barbarian element from the north and the partial adoption of the Ancient cultural models by the inhabitants of the nearer and farther parts of Barbaricum.

The character of settlement studies requires especially careful choice and analysis of the sources as well as setting some limits. The basic available evidence was collected in the catalogue of settlement remains, but also presented in the list of epigraphic materials (especially important for this study) with comments, sometimes filling in the gaps or correcting errors existing in the literature. Some categories of finds (e.g., votive reliefs and coins) are also important sources of information about the character and development of the settlement. The respective sites may be analysed in a more formal way: as spatial structures and points in the settlement network or as elements of more broadly understood various aspects of life. For example, temples and cemeteries reflect the beliefs and together with inscribed and unscribed votive finds reflect the beliefs better. Following this principle I tried to discuss the respective themes in as broad a context as possible, however, leaving out the categories of finds which are marginal for the archaeology of settlement and represent separate research fields (e.g., amphorae, imported vessels, or jewellery). Sometimes certain categories of sources are helpful in reproducing various spheres of life (and thus also the settlement structures), which may have resulted in repetitions in this text. For example, the archaeobotanical and archaeozoological evidence has been analysed in two aspects: as a basis for reconstructing the natural environment from the past (discussed in **Chapter 1**) and for a tentative reconstruction of farming (Chapter 4.5). For the same reason presentation and discussion of some literary sources occurs in various places of this work (with respect to historical geography, military structures, or administration), each time making use of a different approach, suitable for the discussed problem.

The literary and rarely also epigraphic texts referring mainly to the ancient geography are presented in **Chapter 1**, including the discussion of the physical geography and the environment. **Chapter 2** outlines the history of the region and the periodization of the settlement which I use in the text and in the Catalogue. The typology of the finds, the problems of identifying their functions, and other methodological issues are discussed in **Chapter 3**.

Chapter 4 consists of seven sub-chapters which discuss the issues connected with various forms of settlement structures. First, however, the location of the settlements and building materials, very important elements for every trace of Roman settlement, are discussed (4.1), next I summarize the current knowledge about the pre-Roman settlement and the problems connected with the so-called ‘deportation actions’ undertaken by the Romans soon after their conquest (4.2). The following sub-chapters deal with the respective kinds of structures: places where the army troops were stationed (4.3), civilian settlements (4.4), places connected with craftsmanship and trade with a brief description of the local economy (4.5), religion (4.6) and infrastructure (4.7). The respective chapters present the literary sources and epigraphic evidence concerning the discussed area compared with the archaeological remains with comments on the problems of their interpretation.

Chapter 5 analyses the administrative structures, the issues connected with the functioning of the custom districts of *Illyricum* and *ripa Thraciae*, and the possible functions of the boundary stones set up *inter Moesos et Thracas*.

Chapter 6 presents the issues connected with the local languages as well as the ethnic and social structures. It is mostly based on the epigraphic sources and its aim is to present local cultural mosaic resulting, i.a., from the specific geopolitical position of the discussed region and its history. A detailed discussion of these issues makes it easier to understand the phenomenon of Romanisation and its specific, local character.

Chapter 7 is a recapitulation in the form of an analysis of the relations between the military and civilian structures and their mutual influences. It also provides a tentative answer to the question about the reasons of the changes in the settlement structures and thus some aspects of life in that sector of the Roman borderland.

Being aware of the large amount of the material and the complex character of settlement studies which concern almost every field of the human life, I tried, on the one hand, to take into account as many publications on the discussed issues as possible, and on the other one, to introduce certain limitations resulting from the character of the settlement studies and the scope of this work. Selected categories of the artefacts are presented in five

The **Catalogue** presents mostly the published sites and features, which have been collected and ordered. The Appendices present the epigraphic texts found at the sites listed in the Catalogue, except for those from Novae. The list of the epigraphic finds may, however, contain texts brought into the discussed area from elsewhere. During the Turkish reign the Catholic priests working in northern Bulgaria began to collect monuments with Latin inscriptions and other antiquities,⁶ which were, according to them, testimonies of the Christian roots of the Bulgarian lands. Some inscribed and unscribed stones were reused in Orthodox churches,⁷ as well as in Turkish forts as building material. Finally, many stones with inscriptions were transported in the 19th c. from the area of Novae to Bucharest by the Austrian consul and antiquities' collector, general Nichoals Mavros.⁸

Appendices in which each item has, besides the number, a letter symbol referring to the name of the category. The epigraphic texts are collected in **Appendix 1** and **2**. The former is a list of boundary stones marked with the symbol **MTh**, and the latter, of the other epigraphic finds, denoted with letter **E**. The stamps on building materials included in **Appendix 3** are marked with letter **S** whereas the coin hoards in **Appendix 4** are labelled with letter **M**. **Appendix 5** presents the list of published stray finds of coins, although it should be treated rather as an outline.

Some information and drawings presenting the ancient remains were collected by the European travellers who visited the Ottoman Empire. One of them was an Austrian traveller, Friedrich Kanitz, who visited, i.a., Nicopolis ad Istrum, Dimum and Novae.⁹ Important observations were recorded after the liberation of Bulgaria by the researchers helping to rebuild the potential of the Balkan countries, the Czech scholars, Karel and Hermenegild Škorpil,¹⁰ as well as by Vaclav Dobruski.¹¹ Also the French historian, George Seure, focused his interest on Bulgaria, and published a series of articles about Nicopolis and its rural hinterland, paying special attention to the boundary stones with the expression *inter Moesos et Thracas*.¹² Some categories of finds were catalogued and published in separate volumes,¹³ articles,¹⁴ or short notes

in Bulgarian and German periodicals.¹⁵ In the 1930s a programme of registering archaeological sites, AKB (Arheologiĉeska Karta na Bălgarija)¹⁶ was initiated, but it was soon interrupted for the political reasons. The programme was re-activated in the 1970s and has been continued until today. Regardless of that, local museums prepared inventories of the local archaeological remains. One of such catalogues presenting the archaeological remains from the Jantra river basin was compiled by S. Stefanov from the Historical Museum in Svishtov.¹⁷ The author of this volume was kindly granted access to several records about the sites around Novae compiled by P. Donevski and P. Draganĉev from the Historical Museum in Svištov. D. Mitova-Džonova collected data about the sites located in the Pleven district, including the basin of the Osăm river¹⁸ and an analogous compilation was made for the Ruse district.¹⁹

The contemporary studies on the settlement landscape of the past have already been a subject of investigations of the foreign expeditions carrying out excavations in Nicopolis, Novae, Iatrus and Stărmen. In 1965 the archaeologists from the Polish Academy of Sciences under the guidance of W. Hensel conducted research at several early Mediaeval sites near Svištov and in the Jantra basin. Although the expedition concentrated on the Slavic sites, some observations about pre-Roman and Roman remains were made.²⁰ In the 1970s, T. Sarnowski also investigated the area near Novae, paying special attention to the nearby site Ostrite Mogili and the hypothetical villa located to the south-east of the fortress.²¹ In 2000, a field survey in the vicinity of Novae was carried out by P. Dyczek.²² In 1998–2003, the German and Bulgarian archaeologists, S. Conrad and D. Stanĉev, working in the nearby fort of Iatrus, carried out a field and non-invasive survey at a larger area between Iatrus and Novae.²³ The rural hinterland of Nicopolis was investigated by the British team under the guidance of A.G. Poulter.²⁴

The Roman settlement in Lower Moesia was the subject of historical studies made by Bulgarian scholars, i.e., B. Gerov and V. Velkov. Important analyses based on the epigraphic material, i.a., about the questions of settlement and municipalisation of Moesia, were carried out by L. Mrozewicz. Valid contributions to the knowledge about the archaeology and history of the discussed area have

⁶ The Catholic minority in northern Bulgaria is a trace of the activity of the Italian missionaries from the city of Ragusa. In the past Catholics lived in Pavlikeni, Petokladenci, Karamanovo. At present, several towns and villages in the discussed region are inhabited by the Catholics: Nikopol, Oreš and Belene. See Fermendžin 1887; Dujĉev 1937; Kolendo 1995. A Catholic priest from Oreš bought a coin hoard found in Belene (ancient Dimum).

⁷ Cf. the Catalogue, App. 1, MTh.1, 2 and App. 2, E.2–7 (Belene), 84–86 (Malĉika).

⁸ Kolendo 1968.

⁹ Kanitz 1877.

¹⁰ Škorpil 1898; Škorpil 1905.

¹¹ Dobruski 1907a; Dobruski 1907b.

¹² Seure 1908.

¹³ E.g. Todorov 1928.

¹⁴ K. Škorpil in *SbNU* and *AEM*, G. Seure in *RA*.

¹⁵ *IBAD*, *IBAI* (later *IAI*) issued until the 1960s. Finds of coins were regularly published until the 1970s. In the 1930s and 1940s some of these communiqués were also published in the *Archäologischer Anzeiger*. Some finds, such as bronze figurines, inscribed monuments and votive plates were mentioned in *RA*.

¹⁶ See Conĉev 1956.

¹⁷ Stefanov 1956.

¹⁸ Mitova-Džonova 1979.

¹⁹ Dremiszova-Nelĉinova, Ivanov 1983.

²⁰ Hensel *et al.* 1965.

²¹ Sarnowski 1979

²² Tomas 2006

²³ Conrad, Stanĉev 2002.

²⁴ Nicopolis I-III ed. by A. Poulter with further literature.

been also made by V. Beševliev, J. Kolendo, and M. Tačeva. Among the most recent studies it is worth to note the numerous publications by A.G. Poulter and V. Dinčev. The military issues were investigated, i.a., by T. Sarnowski, T. Ivanov, and M. Zahariade.

The geographical names and surnames mentioned in the text are presented in the English transcription. The names of the authors and titles of the journals listed in the bibliography and footnotes are presented in the commonly accepted transliteration.