

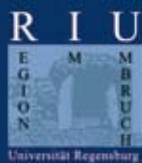
REGION IM UMBRUCH



## Zwischen Region und Reich

Das Gebiet der oberen Donau  
im Imperium Romanum

Peter Herz / Peter Schmid / Oliver Stoll (Hg.)



**T** Frank & Timme

Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur

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## Einleitung

Jeder Wissenschaftler, der sich möglichst intensiv mit seinem Spezialgebiet auseinandersetzt, schwebt in der Gefahr, über der intensiven Auseinandersetzung mit den dort aufgeworfenen Fragen zu vergessen, daß er mit seinen Studien natürlich in einen wesentlich größeren wissenschaftlichen Kontext eingebettet ist, den er möglichst nicht ignorieren sollte.

Wenn wir diese Aussage auf unsere konkrete Situation übertragen, so bedeutet dies, daß zwar die Erforschung des geographischen Raumes an der oberen Donau in Fokus unserer Forschungen steht, wir uns aber gleichzeitig der Tatsache sehr bewußt sind, daß diese Region fester Bestandteil eines größeren geographischen und historischen Kontextes ist. Wenn wir uns nur die zeitlichen Dimensionen unseres Forschungsvorhabens von der frühen römischen Kaiserzeit bis zur Regierungszeit Kaiser Karls des Großen konzentrieren würden, dann wäre es eine fatale Selbstbeschränkung, wenn wir dabei weder die vorangehende Epoche berücksichtigen noch gelegentlich einen Blick in die historische Zukunft wagen würden.

Ebenso fatal wäre diese wissenschaftliche ‚Bunker-Mentalität‘, wenn wir bei unseren Untersuchungen geflissentlich die Tatsache ausblenden würden, daß unser geographischer Raum natürlich fester Bestandteil einer wesentlich größeren politischen, wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Einheit, nämlich des Imperium Romanum, war, mit dem die Regionen an der oberen Donau auf vielfältige Art verknüpft waren. Diese Verbindungen hörten natürlich nicht auf zu existieren, selbst als sich die politischen Strukturen in Europa durch den Untergang des Weströmischen Reiches völlig neu formiert hatten. Daher ist eine wirklich weiterführende Arbeit nur möglich, wenn neben der Konzentration auf die lokalen Probleme zu allen Zeiten auch die Gesamtentwicklung innerhalb des Imperium Romanum und seiner Nachfolgestaaten im Auge behalten wird.

Um die Relevanz einer solchen Feststellung, die zunächst sehr theoretisch anmuten mag, an einem ersten Beispiel zu verdeutlichen: ein Beitrag wie der von Patrick Sängier zu den römischen Veteranen in Ägypten könnte auf den



Wir haben bisher keinen konkreten Nachweis von der Organisation der Erbschaftssteuer in unserem Raum, doch da sowohl in Ägypten als auch in unseren beiden Regionen ständig römische Bürger verstarben und dann auch etwas an ihre Nachkommen vererbten, können wir sicher davon ausgehen, daß in der Tat auch hier eine vergleichbare Organisation existiert haben muß. Wir konnten sie lediglich bisher noch nicht nachweisen.

Dies ist natürlich nur ein kleiner überschaubarer Problemkreis, doch er sollte bereits deutlich gemacht haben, daß sich Wissenschaft stets auf zwei Ebenen vollzieht und ein guter Wissenschaftler sowohl Spezialist als auch Generalist sein muß. Damit ist auch das Auswahlprinzip für die Kolleginnen und Kollegen deutlich geworden, die die Organisatoren zu einer Vorstellung ihrer Forschungen eingeladen hatten. Regionale Forschung wird erst vor dem Hintergrund des Ganzen sinnvoll.

Ich bedanke mich bei Frau Julia Böttcher für die redaktionelle Betreuung dieses Bandes und bei Herrn Dr. Josef Löffl, M.A., für die Organisation der Tagung.

Regensburg, 1. Juni 2010



**The Lower Danubian frontier in Late Antiquity:  
evolution and dramatic change in the frontier zone,  
c. 296–600**

From its source in the Black Forest in Germany and for 2,850km, the Danube formed the eastern frontier of the late Roman Balkan provinces. Over such an extensive distance, it would not be surprising if there existed major differences in the form and history, responding to changes in imperial policy, itself partly – but not invariably – dictated by the changing level of threat posed by tribal confederations living beyond the river. By the last years of the 4th century, especially after the death of Theodosius the Great, further differences are to be expected when the lower Danube was administered by the Eastern Empire, leaving the middle and upper reaches of the under the control of Rome. By the early 5th century, whereas Rome's suzerainty over its sector of the Danube weakened and was soon effectively terminated, Constantinople, despite a period of only nominal rule in the second half of the 5th century, otherwise maintained its grip over the lower Danube in the early Byzantine period, only gradually withdrawing south from the river to the Stara Planina (*Haemus Mons*) during the last twenty years of the 6th century and finally abandoning its last outposts in the Dobrudja (Scythia Minor) in the first quarter of the 7th century AD.

Apparently, very little change affected the upper Danube frontier in the late Roman period.<sup>1</sup> On the middle Danube, it has been argued that there had been an offensive policy of occupying transdanubian territory, initiated by Diocletian, and which delayed the reconstruction of defences on the right bank of the river until the reign of Constantine.<sup>2</sup> Lack of large-scale excavation in Noricum and the limited research in Pannonia, excepting Carnuntum and the Hungarian portion of the *limes*, may explain the lack of evidence for major reconstruction. Also, understanding the nature of frontier defence requires an understanding of what was happening within the broader frontier zone and, in

.....  
1 Alföldy, G : Noricum. London 1974. P. 201-205.

2 Mocsy, A : Pannonia and Upper Moesia. London 1974. P. 269-280.

particular, to the interior of the provinces which, despite the need to important commodities such as wine and especially oil in the form of the *annona*, it must always have been essential for the support of the frontier garrisons to have access to the raw materials and agricultural produce which could be obtained locally. Consequently, the existence of a healthy regional economy – or its weakness – must have impacted directly upon the ability of the frontier forces and their ability to sustain an effective defence.

Without epigraphic evidence, differentiating between the activities of Diocletian and Constantine, on archaeological grounds alone is, to say the least, hypothetical. On the Lower Danube comparatively larger scale excavations and the relative abundance of inscriptions provide firmer grounds for reconstructing late imperial strategy. Whereas at the moment the situation on the lower Danube appears very different from Noricum and Pannonia, it remains to be seen whether future epigraphic finds and further excavation on the middle and upper Danube confirm the apparent disparity between the two halves of the Danube line.

## The Antonine frontier and the 3rd century

After the conquest of Dacia in 106, the lower Danube from the valley of the Olt down to the Black sea was still the northern frontier, following a modest retrenchment under Hadrian when territory between the Danube and the Carpathians (east of the river Olt) was evacuated.<sup>3</sup> Legionary fortresses were maintained at Novae and Durostorum, which were occupied respectively by legio I Italica and legio XI Claudia (Fig. 1). A new fortress was built for legio V Macedonica, which moved from its former base at Oescus to Troesmis where it remained until c. 162, when it was transferred temporarily to the East and, on its return to the Balkans, was stationed at Potaissa in Dacia, leaving only two legions to guard the lower Danube. Archaeological exploration of the auxiliary forts of the early Empire has been limited, generally because 2nd century levels are deeply buried beneath the late Roman fortifications which almost invariably occupied the same sites.<sup>4</sup> Still, information is provided

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3 Poulter, A. G. 1986: The Lower Moesian limes and the Dacian Wars of Trajan, *Studien zu den Militärgrenzen Roms*: 13 Internationaler Limeskongress. Aalen 1983 vol. 3, Stuttgart, 519-528.

4 An exception is probably Iatrus where no archaeological sign of any early fort has been found. However, a fort must have existed at this strategic location at the mouth of the river Yantra. Per-

by inscriptions, supplemented by an ever-increasing number of auxiliary *diplomata*. Part of the legionary fortress of Durostorum has been investigated,<sup>5</sup> but the most productive excavations have been on the site of the legionary fortress of Novae, where long-term research by the Bulgarian/Polish team has uncovered substantial areas of the late Roman period, and parts of the central and northern half of the underlying Roman fortress, including its bath-building, *principia*, barracks and hospital.<sup>6</sup>

During the 2nd century there was no threat to the province of Moesia Inferior until AD 170 when an incursion by the Costoboci inflicted widespread destruction south of the Danube. The emergency was soon over and the only consequence of this invasion was the decision to provide fortifications for the cities of Moesia Inferior and Thrace, a prudent action carried out during the succeeding decade. The fortifications follow a common design, and the work was probably planned and perhaps even carried out with the help of the army.<sup>7</sup>

The 3rd century invasions must have caused severe disruption and certainly resulted in the destruction of several cities. These included Philippopolis, the provincial capital of Thrace, and probably Nicopolis in Moesia Inferior.<sup>8</sup> The region features intermittently in the highly unreliable *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* and other fragmentary historical sources. This information, though confusing and often inaccurate in detail, does at least prove that the frontier was breached in a succession of raids and major invasions, starting with the arrival of the Carpi in 238. Attacks by Goths and other transdanubian tribes, whether co-ordinated or not, occurred under Gordian III (238–244) and

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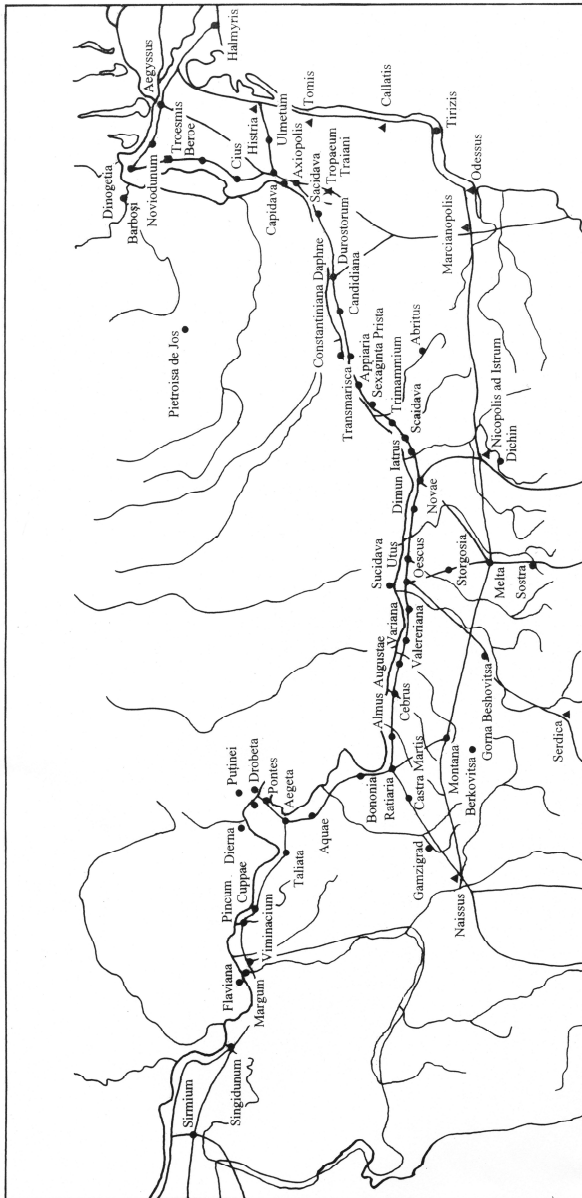
haps to the north of the late Roman site where erosion has now removed the north wall of the 4th century defences; Von Bülow: The fort of Iatrus in Moesia Secunda: observations on the Late Roman defensive system on the Lower Danube (fourth – sixth centuries AD, in: Poulter 2007b. P. 459–478.

5 Ivanov, R. / Atanasov, G. and Donevski, P. (editors): *Istoriya na Silistra I. Antichniyat Durostorum*. Sofia 2006.

6 Biernacki, A. and Pawlak, P.: Late Roman and early Byzantine cities on the lower Danube, International Conference. Pozan 1997. Dyczek, P.: *Valetudinarium – Western Sector, 200–2001*, in: *Archeologia* (Poland), 1999, vol. 53. P. 141–152. Sarnowski, T.: Die Anfänge der spätromischen Militärorganisation des unteren Donaumaums, in: *Akten des 14. internationalen Limeskongresses 1986 in Carnuntum*. Ed. H. Vetter and M. Kandler, Vienna 1990. P. 855–861. Sarnowski, T.: 1999: Die *Principia* von Novae im späterem 4. und frühen 5. Jh. in *Der Limes an der unteren Donau von Diokletian bis Heraklios*, internationale Konferenz, Svishtov (1–5. September 1998). Ed. A. von Schnürbein, 257–58.

7 It seems that, within a decade, fears of any further attacks had disappeared, otherwise the extramural development of substantial town houses would not have taken place in the early 3rd century; Poulter, A.: *Nicopolis ad Istrum: a Roman, late Roman and early Byzantine city*. London 1995. P. 25–27).

8 Poulter, *Nicopolis*, 13–14.



**Fig. 1: The lower Danubian frontier.**

Philip (244–9), and reached a peak in 250 in the most dangerous (or at least the best recorded) of Gothic invasions: it culminated in the defeat of the Roman army and the death of the emperor Decius in battle near Abritus in 251. Thereafter, the frontier forces seem to have been helpless in the face of further attacks, until the Goths were finally defeated in the Battle of Naissus in 269. Even then, there was yet one further incursion in the following year when Anchialus on the Black Sea and Nicopolis in the interior were both besieged, and perhaps sacked.<sup>9</sup> Destruction levels at Dinogetia, Sacidava and Noviodunum have been attributed, perhaps correctly, to this period. But the most vivid evidence comes from an official building, immediately outside the legionary fortress at Novae. Here, amongst the burnt remains of substantial extramural house, were parts of bronze statues with their stone bases still *in situ*, referring to the garrison (*legio I Italica*) with the title *gordiana*. Probably, this important and official building was destroyed by fire and abandoned c. 250. A defaced head of Gordian III, from the river Yantra, may have been looted from Nicopolis or perhaps Novae around the same date.

This period of invasions and extreme insecurity lasted for thirty years. The effect on the countryside behind the frontier is difficult to assess. In the interior, some measures were taken to protect at least the major centres of communication. Auxiliary units were based at Gorna Beshovitsa, 58 km south of the Danube, at Sostra on the main road from Oescus on the Danube south to Philippopolis, and at Kabyle in Thrace. A *numerus* and a *cohors equitata*, were dispatched, probably in succession, to Montana, close to the border with Moesia Superior. Somewhat surprisingly, after the defeat of the Roman army at Abritus and the death of Decius in 251, Montana held out against the enemy or perhaps was reoccupied soon after the catastrophe (Fig. 1). In 256, a *burgus* was built there for the protection of both soldiers and civilians: *propter tutelam castrensium et civium Montanensium* (CIL III 12376). In sum, this evidence suggests that there had been a shift in deployment of forces, resulting in the establishment of garrisons well south of the frontier to offer some protection to civilian communities. This measure was presumably intended to counter small scale raiding which, while too insignificant to be mentioned in our written sources, was probably causing serious disruption to the estates and villages well behind the Danube.

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9 This is not the place to review the course of these invasions in detail. For an account of the sources in so far as they relate to Nicopolis see Poulter, Nicopolis, 13–14.

## The restoration of the frontier and the reorganization of the late Roman army

Between the accession of Aurelian (270) and the death of Constantine (337), the Roman army was totally reorganized. This involved both the construction of new defences, and the structure of the army, changes which can be observed, not only in the Balkans, but throughout the Empire. Opinions differ as to precisely when these developments occurred although the presumption has generally been accepted that Diocletian reorganized the provincial system and that it was Constantine who introduced the new military system, creating the elite mobile comitatensian army while reducing the role of the garrisons on the Danube bank to act more as a local police force (*riparienses*) than an effective army able to repel large-scale incursions. The evidence from the lower Danube offers unusual precision and strongly suggests that it was not Constantine but Diocletian who not only introduced the new provincial administration but who also created the new style army.

The first big change was Aurelian's creation of a new Dacia south of the Danube, carved out of the western portion of Moesia Inferior and the eastern part of Moesia Superior. This demonstrated that the abandonment of transdanubian Dacia had been officially acknowledged as an irreversible fact. Then, or probably some years earlier, legio V Macedonica, was moved from Potaissa and returned to its old base of Oescus, on the right bank of the Danube (Fig. 1).

Another important development was the introduction to the Danube area of a new and more advanced type of fortification. There are marked similarities (with a few apparent exceptions) between groups of forts which can be generally assigned to this the late 3rd or early 4th century. Shapes of towers by themselves do not provide an adequate basis for dating forts. However, forts in Moesia II and Scythia display several common characteristics, not only in the shapes of their towers but also in tactical planning, size and building materials. Their walls were built using large limestone facing blocks with a wide rubble and mortared core. Notable excavated examples are Iatrus in Moesia II and Capidava and Dinogetia in Scythia (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Capidava in Scythia Minor, looking north along the eastern curtain wall.

The scale of these fortifications is quite exceptional, even for the late Roman period. The curtain walls, which follow the contours of the land to take tactical advantage of the topography, regularly have a width of 3.0 m. and are provided with u-shaped medial towers and fan-shaped corner towers, which project 7-10m from the curtain. Large rectangular towers were placed at central points along the more exposed sections of the defences and they were invariably flanked by u-shaped towers. This arrangement concentrated firepower on those parts of the defences most likely to face attack by an enemy. Further west, although forts can be dated archaeologically to the same general period, the same methods of construction were not followed in Dacia Ripensis, probably because shipping the enormous stones was impractical so far upstream from the limestone quarries of the Dobrogea, or from the quarries near Hot-nitsa, close to the middle reaches of the river Yantra. Here, the use of locally produced tile and small stone facing blocks impacted upon the design of the defences themselves. These materials were most suitable for building round

towers, as at Oescus on the Danube, and at Koula (Castra Martis ?), an exceptionally well-preserved *burgus* on the road leading south-west towards Naissus (Fig. 3). Further upstream, in the Iron Gates, extensive excavations have provided plans for a large number of fortlets. Some are so similar in design that they are likely to be contemporary, but their exact chronology remains a matter of controversy; suggested dates range from the reign of Constantine to that of Valentinian.<sup>10</sup>



Fig. 3: The burgus at Koula (north-west Bulgaria), its well-preserved south-eastern corner still standing 19m in height.

Of singular importance for the dating of a major reorganization of the defences along the lower Danube has been the discovery of a series of Diocletianic

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10 Archaeology is a singularly blunt tool with which to date fortifications. Even dating Iatrus, one of the best excavated sites, where the coin-series starts unambiguously in the first decades of the 4th century, is still something of an act of faith. In fact, it must have been built in the late 3rd or early 4th century but archaeology on its own is unable to provide further precision. See von Bülow, Iatrus, P. 463-466.