

NOTE ȘI DISCUȚII / NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

OBSERVATIONS ON AN UNPUBLISHED ROMAN COIN FOUND IN THE PIETROASELE CASTRUM

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Abstract: These observations concern a coin found in 1977 in the Pietroasele castrum that was not mentioned by the archaeologists who had found it. The coin was a denarius issued under Hadrian, found in section S VI B / 1977. It was the only coin that has not been mentioned in articles or studies on Pietroasele.

Rezumat: Nota de față se referă la o descoperire monetară făcută în anul 1977 în castrul de la Pietroasele și rămasă nemenționată de către descoperitorii săi. Moneda este un denar emis în timpul lui Hadrian descoperit în secțiunea S VI B / 1977, fiind singura descoperire monetară care nu a fost amintită în nici un articol sau studiu despre descoperirile făcute la Pietroasele.

In 1866 Alexandru Odobescu, concerned with finding additional historical information that could help him scientifically valorise the Pietroasa treasure, excavated a few trial trenches in the village centre, in an area where the traces of a stone fortification were still visible. The results of the several trenches excavated in the north-east corner, along the east wall, along the south wall and inside the fortress, approximately in its median area, were briefly presented in volume III of the monograph *Le Trésor de Pétroussa*, published in 1900.¹ More than one century later, in 1973, the archaeological research in the fortress at the foot of the Istrița hill was resumed by a team of archaeologists from the Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest and the County Museum in Buzău, headed by Gheorghe Diaconu. Under his coordination, the research went on with no interruption until 1980. In the 8 campaigns, 18 trenches and pits were opened. They were meant to provide details as regards the fortification construction technique, and the habitation levels within it. For a better organization of research and use of results, it was decided to divide the interior area into four sectors: sector A (south-east area), sector B (south-west area), sector C (north-east area) and sector D (north-west area) (Fig. 1).

The results of the field research in the fortification area, identified by its authors as being a late Roman

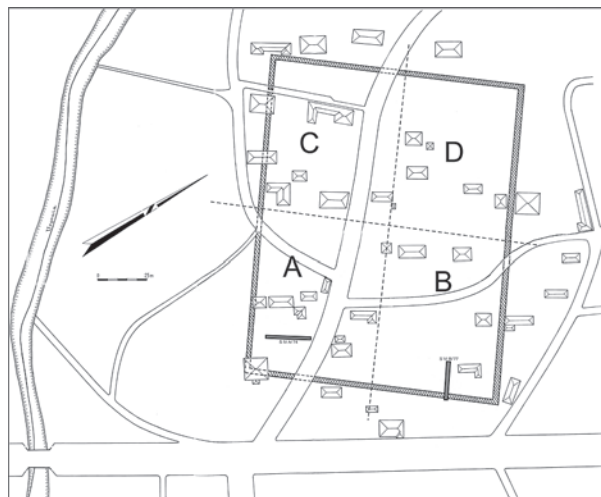


Fig. 1. Plan of the Pietroasele castrum (according to Diaconu 1977) with the two trenches where the coins were found.

castrum, were presented in several studies and reports published between 1976-1983.² As a result of the research, the authors believed that in Pietroasele they were dealing with a 4th century AD castrum, most likely from the time of Constantine the Great, where three habitation levels could be identified.

The first two levels are represented by barracks adjacent to the wall, rectangular in shape (4.00 x 5.00 m), provided with circular fireplaces (diameter of approx. 1.00 m). At a certain moment which is impossible to indicate, the first level barracks were burnt and “rebuilt on the very same place and by the very same technique”.³ Archaeological material was recovered from the barracks, Roman pottery, artefacts and jewels.

The third habitation level comprised dwellings dug into the ground (semi-sunken dwellings), located inside the castrum, approx. 7-8 m far from the wall. Their inventory included archaeological material associated to the Sântana de Mureș culture.

When it came to dating the three habitation levels, the authors relied on two coin findings, mentioned each time in the articles on the castrum research. Thus, a first coin is mentioned in a 1976 study,⁴ as being found in a semi-sunken dwelling in section S IV A (Fig. 1) investigated in 1974. The silver coin was issued during the reign of Valens (364-378) and

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¹ Odobescu 1976, pp. 727-729.

² Diaconu 1976, Diaconu 1977, Diaconu *et alii* 1977, Diaconu *et alii* 1979, Diaconu 1980, Diaconu 1981, Diaconu, Tzony 1983.

³ Diaconu, Tzony 1983, p. 72.

⁴ Diaconu 1976, p. 1060.

Notă informativă

Pietroasele, jud. Buzău

În campania de săpături 1974 s-a descoperit în fortificații de la Pietroasele o monedă de AR adusă spre identificare la Institutul de Arheologie de Gh. Diaconu:

Valens.
AR ↓ 2,80 g; 22 mm. *Augustus*
RIC, IX, p. 218, nr. 24b, CONS
anii 367-375
O. Ulrich Bause, Numismatie e antichità classiche, Quaderni Ticinesi, 1973, p. 171-172, anul 375.
S IV, caroul 2; - 0,25 m.
Moneda s-a restituit lui Gh. Diaconu. La Cabinetul Numismatic al Institutului de Arheologie se păstrează mulfje în ghips.

Determinat,
[Signature]
Gh. Poenaru Bordea

10.I 1975

Fig. 2. Identification file for the coin issued under Valens.

made the archaeologists state that the habitation level represented by the semi-sunken dwellings could be dated back to the second part of the 4th century AD, when the castrum loses its military role and is turned into a civil settlement by the people of the Sântana de Mureș culture. This opinion will be reiterated in all subsequent articles and studies on the research in the Pietroasele castrum.

A second coin, referred to in several articles starting with 1980,⁵ is a *siliqua* issued during the reign of Constantius II (337-361), found on “*the south side of the castrum, at military barracks level*”. This coin, together with two side-mounted pin fibulae, identified as being of Roman origin, also discovered at barracks level (with no indication of whether they came from the first or second level of barracks), made the archaeologists state that: “*the oldest level of barracks, built immediately after the surrounding wall, dates back to approximately mid-4th century AD*”⁶

In the documentation remaining from Gheorghe Diaconu, currently kept in the “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest, I studied many excavation logs and plans originating in the research activity on the Pietroasele archaeological site, in 1973-1983. Among them I also found 3 identification files of coins found in Pietroasele. The oldest file, dated January 10th, 1975, recorded a coin issued under Valens, found in the 1974 campaign, in section S IV, pit 2, at a depth of -0.25 m. Its identification was made by Gh. Poenaru Bordea

⁵ Diaconu 1980, p. 1065; Diaconu 1981, p. 39; Diaconu, Tzony 1983, pp. 72, 75.

⁶ Diaconu, Tzony 1983, p. 75.

Pietroasele, Buzău *Maria Chițescu*
1977 Constantius II
A 3,20 g; 21 mm.
L. R. Bc, p. 23, n. 955-968 sau p. 29, n.
1299-1319 - nu se vede monedă;
anul 341-346
S VI B cpl. 3; - 1,48 m D 9 (metrul 17)

Fig. 3. Identification file for the coin issued under Constantius II.

Pietroasele, Buzău
1977
Hadrian
Denar 2,30 g; 19 mm.
RIC, Rome 266, a. 134-138
„S. VI B” □ 4 - 1,45
Cpl. m. 1.

Fig. 4. Identification file for the coin issued under Hadrian.

(Fig. 2). The other two files date from 1977 and concern two coin findings from that year's campaign, in section S VI B. The first identification concerned a silver coin (Fig. 3) issued under Constantius II, discovered in complex 3 of pit 9, at a depth of -1.48 m. The second coin (Fig. 4) was a denarius issued under Hadrian, found in complex 1 of pit 4, at a depth of -1.45 m. Even if only one of the files indicates the name of the person who identified them, the identical handwriting makes us associate both identifications with certainty to Maria Chițescu. The same coin is mentioned and drawn in the 1977 excavation log. When discovered, it was also briefly described (Fig. 5).

Although all three coins were discovered in certain archaeological contexts, in the 1974 and 1977 campaigns, only those issued in the 4th century AD were paid attention to by those who had found them, being mentioned several times in the articles published on the Pietroasele castrum as additional proof for a potential dating of the moment in the same century. Even if the coin issued under Hadrian only stood for

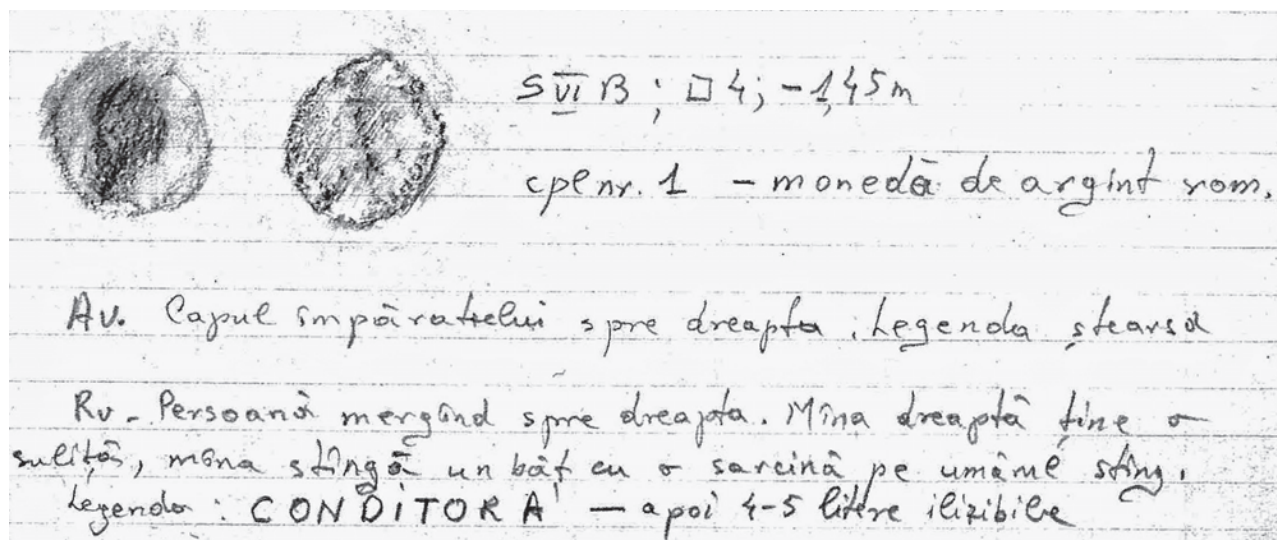


Fig. 5a. Fragment of the 1977 excavation log, with a description of the coin issued under Hadrian.



Fig. 5b. A denarius of Hadrian, of the type found at Pietroasele (RIC 266).

an isolated finding, accidentally occurring in a complex belonging to the mid-4th century AD habitation level (at approximately the same depth where the coin from Constantius II was found), the natural question raised here is why this coin has never been mentioned by those who discovered it. Also, dating the three habitation levels exclusively to the 4th century AD – the first two represented by Roman military barracks, and the third identified by semi-sunken dwellings of the Sântana de Mureș culture – based only on the *selectively presented* archaeological material and *for lack of appropriate graphical documentation*, with no plans or cross-sections that could clearly distinguish the mentioned habitation levels, the information published on the Pietroasele castrum remain open to future interpretation.

The focus on the denarius issued under Hadrian, a coin unpublished since 1977 to date, is correlated to the presence in the nearby Edifice with hypocaust of tegular material that could be dated to the 2nd-3rd centuries AD, which the authors did not rely on when they put up

the hypothesis of its dating, similar to the camp, in the 4th century AD. Consequently, we believe that future approaches of the issues raised by the chronology of the Pietroasele monuments (castrum and Edifice with hypocaust) could only be solved by a comprehensive assessment of the archaeological materials found over time, and not by the perpetuation of past paradigms.

Bibliographical abbreviations:

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- Diaconu 1977 - Gh. Diaconu, *Daco-romanii la curbura Carpaților*, Pontica 10, 1977, pp. 153-157.
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