

DINOGETIA – ABOUT THE FIRST ARCHAEOLOGICAL DOCUMENTATION OF THE ANCIENT SITE FROM BISERICUȚA, GARVĂN (COM. JIJILA, TULCEA COUNTY)

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Abstract: The contribution presents and analyses recently found documentation from the early research of the ancient site identified as *Dinogetia*, now Bisericuța, Garvăn (com. Jijila, Tulcea county). The author of the documentation is the French architect Ambroise Baudry, a member of the expedition sent in 1865 to study the fortification of *Troesmis* (Iglița, Turcoaia, Tulcea county), which was part of the Ottoman Empire at that time.

Rezumat: Contribuția de față prezintă și analizează materiale documentare din primele cercetări ale sitului antic identificat cu *Dinogetia* (azi Bisericuța, Garvăn, com. Jijila, jud. Tulcea). Autorul acestor materiale este arhitectul francez Ambroise Baudry, membru al expediției trimise în 1865 pentru studierea fortificației de la *Troesmis* (Iglița, Turcoaia, jud. Tulcea), la acea vreme parte a Imperiului Otoman.

The ancient fortification of Bisericuța is strategically located in the north-western part of the Roman province *Scythia minor*, the former *Moesia inferior* (Fig. 1), on a rocky island over the marshes of the Danube River, surrounded by Gârla Lățimea (Figs. 2, 6) on three sides. Today, it is about 15 km¹ far from Galați, on the other side of the Danube, about 4.5 km far from Garvăn village (Jijila commune, Tulcea county) and about 17.5 km far from Măcin (ancient *Arrubium*). In the Roman times, the small fortification was part of the defensive system (Fig. 1), continuing the line from *Troesmis-Arrubium* to *Noviodunum* and the mouths of the Danube. In this area, the river makes a dramatic turn from its north-south course. There is a good place for crossing the river and, therefore, needs both defence and surveillance.² From Bisericuța-Garvăn, the view reaches as far as Galați and Barboși, as well as over the mouths of Siret and Prut Rivers that flow into the Danube and to *Aliobrix* (Orlovka, Ukraine), on the other side of the Danube. Even the Russian troops are known to have crossed the Danube here in the 18th and 19th century.³

Systematic excavations shed light on the complex chronology of the site. Evidence of prehistoric and pre-Roman Getic settlements, as well as scarce remains of an early Roman fortification have been found in several places. The most significant periods in the history of the site are further the Late Roman period (end of the 3rd century – beginning of the 7th century), which is particularly revealed by the fortification walls built in the 4th century, and the Middle Byzantine era, as shown by mud-hut dwellings within the fortress (10th-12th century). Several main buildings inside and outside the fortification (churches, *praetorium*, baths etc.) have been investigated archaeologically. Occasionally, artisanal areas and the necropolises have been excavated as well. The ancient site of Bisericuța was of strategic and commercial importance, due to its position on the right side of the river, near the bend of the Danube, facing Galați-Barboși. Several military units (*Legio V Macedonica*, *Legio I Italica*, *Cohors I Mattiacorum*, *Cohors I Cilicium*, as well as *Classis Flavia Moesica*), and, in the 4th century, *Legio I Iovia* (*Scythica*) were attested through epigraphy as having been in contact with the site, without any certainty on the detachments stationed there in early periods.⁴

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¹ The modern distances refer to the present roads and, therefore, are slightly different from the ancient measurements provided by the itineraries.

² It is worth mentioning the similar plan of a 0.9 ha fort in the same century (4th century AD) at Pağnik Öreni, near Kaşpınar village (Elâzığ Province, TR), about 80 km to the NE of *Melitene*, guarding a crossing of the Euphrates from Armenia and protecting the settlement at Ağın (Harper 1977). One further analogy finds the fortress of Bisericuța in the *Praevalitana* province, at Bushati (Përzhita 1986; Băjenaru 2010, p. 47, Fig. 30), a small area fortification (0.7 ha) with the same chronology (4th-6th century and 10th-11th century AD) as *Dinogetia*; it was part of the fortification system on the Drin River – see also Țentea 2015.

³ There are records on the topographic maps of a monument and a mark for the landing of the Russian troops in 1877 – see *Planul director de tragere Văcăreni*, 1:20000 (published in 1953, documented in 1894); *Harta topografică Brăila*, 1:100000 (1913, documented in 1880-1895). Further on, it is to assume that the Russian troops crossed the Danube here before, during the wars with the Turks (1787-1792).

⁴ For an overview of the rich literature on the site, see Barnea 1986; Barnea 1996; Barnea 1999.



Fig. 1. Map of the *Scythia minor* province (*apud* Barnea 1986, Fig. 1).

Up to now, the history of the research of Bisericuța-Garvăn is known to have started in the second half of the 19th century.⁵ At that time, the scholars were particularly interested in the location of ancient sites mentioned on the ancient maps, such as *Tabula Peutingeriana*.⁶ The discovery of several epigraphic monuments at Iglița starting with 1860 draws the international attention to this upper north-western corner of the Ottoman

⁵ Ștefan *et alii* 1967, p. 16.

⁶ For example the scholars grouped around the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres in Paris and the scholars working with Th. Mommsen since 1853 at *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (Vol. 1 published in 1863); E. Desjardins, *Atlas géographique de l'Italie ancienne, composé de sept cartes et d'un dictionnaire de tous les noms qui y sont contenus*, Paris 1852; E. Desjardins, *Géographie de la Gaule d'après la Table de Peutinger*, Paris, 1869; E. Desjardins, *La table de Peutinger d'après l'original conservé à Vienne*, 14 volumes, Paris, 1869-1874. See also Alexandrescu 2013, p. 58.

Empire, located on the Danube, opposite to the cities of Brăila and Galați.⁷ Based on the study of epigraphic materials and written sources, the ancient site of *Troesmis* could be located at Iglița and further locations were postulated considering the distances mentioned by ancient authors. Thus, *Arrubium* (at Măcin), mentioned on Tabula Peutingeriana at 9 *milia passuum* from *Troesmis* and 26 *milia passuum* from *Noviodunum* (Isaccea) was localised. Further on, *Dinogetia*⁸ was identified, based on the information from other sources, such as Ptolemy (III, 8.2; 10.1; 10.5) and *Itinerarium Antonini* (225,5: 9 *milia passuum* from *Arrubium* and 20 *milia passuum* far from *Noviodunum*), as this ancient site was not depicted on Tabula Peutingeriana.⁹ At that time (and nowadays too), there has been no epigraphic material to confirm this thesis.¹⁰

The French expedition sent by Emperor Napoleon III in 1865¹¹ to investigate and document the fortifications in *Troesmis* played an important role in the history of the research of Bisericuța-Garvăn site as well. V. Duruy¹² released a plan of *Dinogetia* made by A. Baudry¹³ prior to the start of his excavations in *Troesmis* (Fig. 2). This plan – identified in its caption only as a “fortresse danubienne”, but completely clarified in a footnote on the same page – was barely noticed by the scholars¹⁴ and not in the systematic research of the site. After Duruy, Ionescu came to mention that, in 1865, Engelhardt discovered a fortified area of 7,800 m² (probably calculated based on the plan and its scale) and 12 towers lying at 27 m from each other.¹⁵ That plan was used by Archbishop

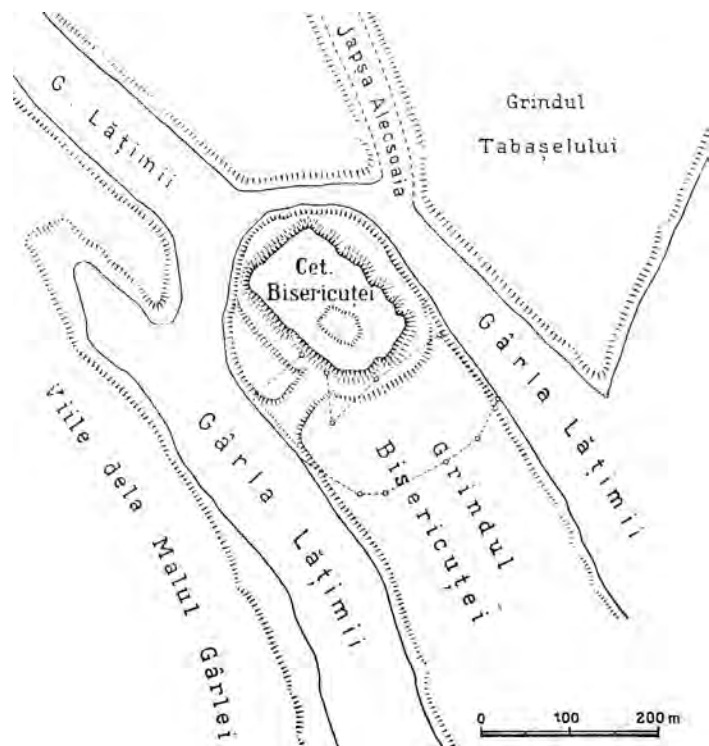


Fig. 2. Sketch of the area surrounding the site of Bisericuța-Garvăn in 1939 (apud Ștefan 1937-1940, Fig. 1).

⁷ Alexandrescu 2013, with further literature.

⁸ Ștefan 1937-1940, p. 401, note 1; Ștefan *et alii* 1967, p. 15.

⁹ Several authors make, however, this confusion and list *Dinogetia* among other ancient sites mentioned on Tabula Peutingeriana: Tocilescu 1908, p. 639; Netzhammer 1996, p. 1016; even A. Baudry (see below). The fact that *Dinogetia* is missing from this map, but is mentioned in *Itinerarium Antonini* is a possible argument in the debate on dating the map and the *Itinerarium* as well as the fortification.

¹⁰ On the discussion of this location, see Ștefan 1958; Barnea 1999.

¹¹ Alexandrescu 2013; Desjardins 1868.

¹² Duruy 1883, p. 29.

¹³ About A. Baudry see Crosnier-Leconte, Volait 1998; Alexandrescu 2013.

¹⁴ Ionescu 1904, pp. 529-530, Fig. 4; Vulpe 1938, p. 336; Barnea 2014, Fig. 2. There is no mention of the fortification in the monumental dictionary released in 1898: G.I. Lahovari, C.I. Brătianu, Gr.G. Tocilescu, *Marele dicționar geografic al României alcătuit și prelucrat după dicționarele parțiale pe județe*, Vol. 1, p. 411, s.v. Bisericuța.

¹⁵ Ionescu 1904, p. 530, note 2. There are, however, several inconsistencies to be pointed out. The confusion Ionescu makes between Engelhardt and Baudry can eventually be explained by the text of L. Renier (Renier 1865, 304), the beneficiary of the first documentation made by E. Engelhardt in Troesmis and Măcin, to whom Engelhardt also sent a plan of the fortification (referring to the fortification in Măcin). Ionescu seems to overlook the accurate information of Duruy 1883, p. 29, note 3 (taken most probably from the reports of Engelhardt to the French authorities). The area referred to has 7,500 m² and the illustrated plan was made by Baudry.

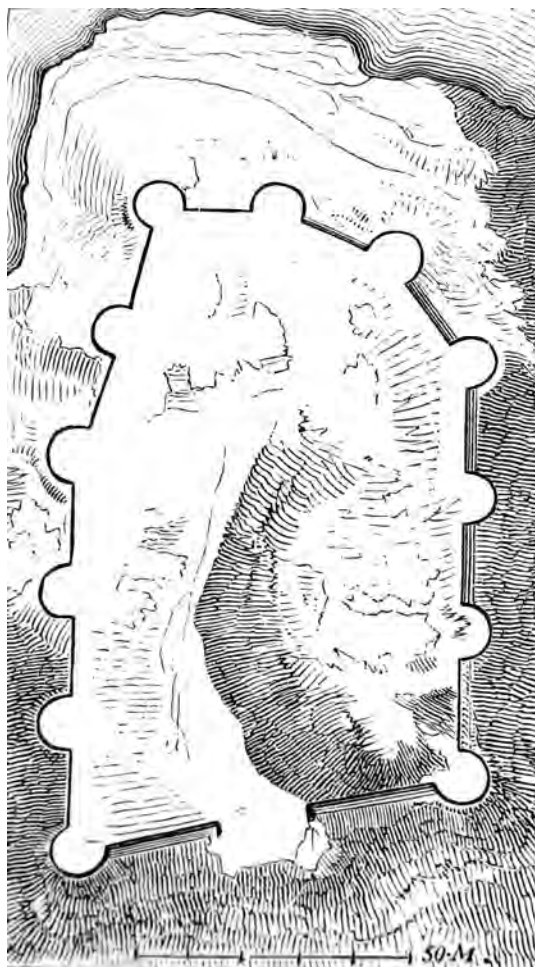


Fig. 3. Plan of the ruins by A. Baudry, 1865 (*apud* Duruy 1883, p. 29).

manuscript notes and reports are consistent with the plan, as drawn after a discussion with Tocilescu and other scholars (as indicated by the mention of the probable ancient name of the site on the plan). More important for

R. Netzhammer in June 1921,¹⁶ during his visit in *Dinogetia*.

The second French expedition in the region, already arrived in 1867, was led by E. Desjardins. His reports mentioned the visit of A. Baudry and also his plan and his conclusions regarding the identification of the site with *Dinogetia*,¹⁷ based on *Itinerarium Antonini*. Desjardins arrived at the fortification coming from Iglîța and Măcin, through Jijila and Garvăn. The plan drafted by Desjardins was not published and, thus, remained unidentified. The additional information he gave on the site was quite scarce, considering the details noted on the plan: he noticed 12 towers and that the Roman fortification was rebuilt by Justinian.¹⁸ For this reasons, he thought it plausible that *Dinogetia* could be Δινίσκαρτα mentioned by Procopius (*de aedif.* 4,11, p. 92).¹⁹

The third important moment in the research of *Dinogetia* occurred after 1877, as Gr. G. Tocilescu and P. Polonic visited the site and made further observations.²⁰ In their opinion, the fortification had a long rectangular shape with round corner towers; the short sides were 45 m long, the long sides of the fortification were 145 m long. Further data included: the position of the plateau at about 30 m above the level of the surrounding lake (*baltă*), the height of the towers over the native rock (about 20 m), and the gates on the short sides. Additionally, they mentioned that the fortress was surrounded by a 20 m wide ditch, despite the natural defence provided by its location. Together with a possible fortification on the other side of the Danube, at Gherghina (today Tirighina-Barboși near Galați), *Dinogetia* is recognized to have played a significant strategic role in the defence of the Lower Danube and the surveillance of the crossing point of the river. For the sake of completion, we present the plan of the Bisericuța fortification drawn by Polonic (Fig. 4). His

¹⁶ Netzhammer 1996, p. 1033-1035. Netzhammer shows once more the serious preparations he used to make for his travels: he is aware of the single available plan, which he brings along for orientation, and also of the recently published data, as he mentions the same surface and tower details as Ionescu. Further, he includes his own data on the Christian martyrs attested at *Dinogetia* by written sources and hopes for future archaeological excavations that will reveal the Christian basilica. The same as Desjardins (Desjardins 1868, p.265), Netzhammer is aware of the significance of the name given by the locals to the small ancient fortification, Bisericuța, and also mentions the other Bisericuța, the ruins on the island facing Cape Dolojman, in the eastern part of the county.

¹⁷ Desjardins 1868, pp. 265-266; for the complex discussion on the matter, see Ștefan 1957; Barnea 1999.

¹⁸ Desjardins 1868, p. 265.

¹⁹ For the discussion on the identification of some ancient sites mentioned by Procopius, including Δινίσκαρτα, see Zahariade 2011.

²⁰ Tocilescu 1908, pp. 639-640. He mentions a visit in 1898. There is a report of P. Polonic (Polonic 1898, f. 101: *No. 26 Cetatea Bisericuța*). All the information published by Tocilescu comes from this report. The only difference between the report of Polonic and the text of Tocilescu is the discussion of the ancient name of the site and the argumentation for the identification of the Bisericuța fortification with *Dinogetia* mentioned by Ptolemy (III,10,11). Polonic made an annotation to his text referring to a possible identification of the site, in his opinion, with the ancient *Flaviana*. Later, on the plan (Fig. 4 here) and in his systematisation of materials on the Roman fortifications (BAR Archive P. Polonic, I mss. 7, notebook 11, f. 37-40), P. Polonic quotes and uses the opinion of scholars that Bisericuța might have been *Dinogetia*.

the research of the ancient settlement on the Bisericuța hill is the indication by Polonic of remnants of ancient buildings in the area south of the fortification that were covered by vineyards.²¹

The same as *Troesmis*, *Dinogetia* would face a further troubled period, not as much as with locals extracting building materials from the fortification walls, but using the land for agriculture, until 1939, when a consistent financial support from the State allowed the National Museum of Antiquities in Bucharest, headed by Scarlat Lambrino, to start systematic excavations in *Dinogetia* (Gh. Ștefan), *Troesmis* (E. Coliu), *Enisala* (Gh. Avakian), *Arrubium* (Gh. Avakian and Gh. Ștefan) and *Poiana* (R. Vulpe).²²

Recently found archival material belonging to architect Ambroise Baudry²³ includes additional data related to *Dinogetia*, apart from the already mentioned plan of 1865 (Fig. 3), which is, therefore, the first documented archaeological visit of the site.

It is very likely that the chances to find further elements of this documentation in the near future are quite small. Therefore, we decided to publish this information in order to complete the *Dinogetia* dossier and, at the same time, to underline its importance.

Transcript of the manuscript pages of Baudry's journal²⁴ referring to *Dinogetia*

« (page 3) [...] Lorsque j'arrivais à Galatz au mois de juin, l'inondation avait transformé les différents canaux du fleuve en un lac immense sur lequel pouvaient naviguer les barques de peu de tirant d'eau; j'en profitais pour aller explorer dans une chaloupe de la station militaire un plateau situé en face Galatz dont le sol dominait tous les terrains marécageux des environs. J'y reconnus l'existence d'une enceinte fortifiée de construction romaine établie sur la limite de terrains praticables de la frontière turque et sur la ligne des falaises qui indiquent l'ancien lit du fleuve.

Après avoir relevé le plan et mesuré la distance qui sépare ce point de la station de *Troesmis* définitivement placée par les inscriptions retrouvées dans ses murailles, il me fut facile d'en restituer le nom. Ces ruines ne sont autres que celles de *Dinogetia*, ou *Denegutia*, station militaire placée sur l'itinéraire d'Antonin et la carte de Peutinger dans des conditions parfaitement identiques à celles que me donnait l'examen de la carte actuelle.

Voici le plan de ses défenses ou plus exactement celui du plateau qui les soutient, car l'écroulement des murailles et la végétation laissent parfois des incertitudes sur la véritable longueur des entre-axes des tours ainsi que sur la saillie qu'elles possédaient sur le nu de ces mêmes murailles.

La forme générale est celle d'un polygone irrégulier, armé à chacun de ces angles d'une tour saillante terminée

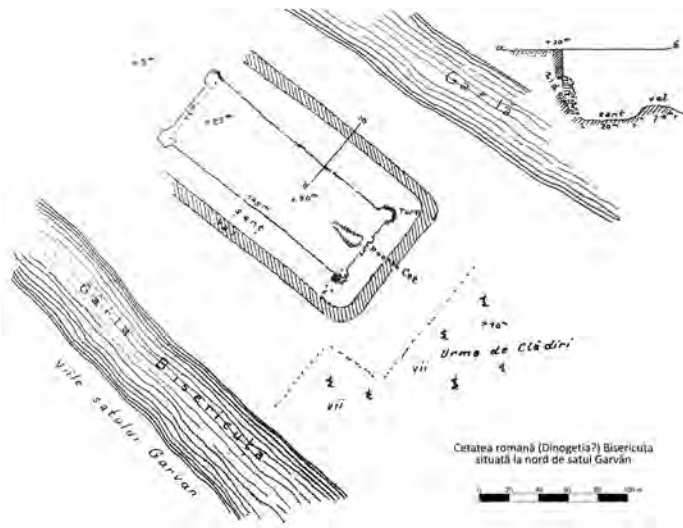


Fig. 4. Plan of the ruins by P. Polonic (*apud* BAR Archive P. Polonic, I Varia plan 202).

²¹ See, for instance, for the Late Roman baths: Barnea 1967 and Fig. 5 here.

²² Lambrino 1939; Lambrino 1940; Alexandrescu, Nicolae 2014, p. 417. On the research history for *Dinogetia*, see Ștefan *et alii* 1967, pp. 16–23.

²³ Alexandrescu, forthcoming. The archive was documented in 2011 in the property of relatives of A. Baudry in France, near Paris. For the time being, it is uncertain where the documents are kept.

²⁴ The manuscript is a fragment of a report prepared by A. Baudry for Emperor Napoleon III. It is a transcript put together from the notes in the field and can be considered a draft on 22 sheets of paper of about 21.5x32 cm. The sheets are neither signed nor dated and it is impossible to identify the handwriting (at least three styles can be differentiated). The actual journal of the expedition had a different format judging after the (only) publication available: Crosnier-Leconte 2000.

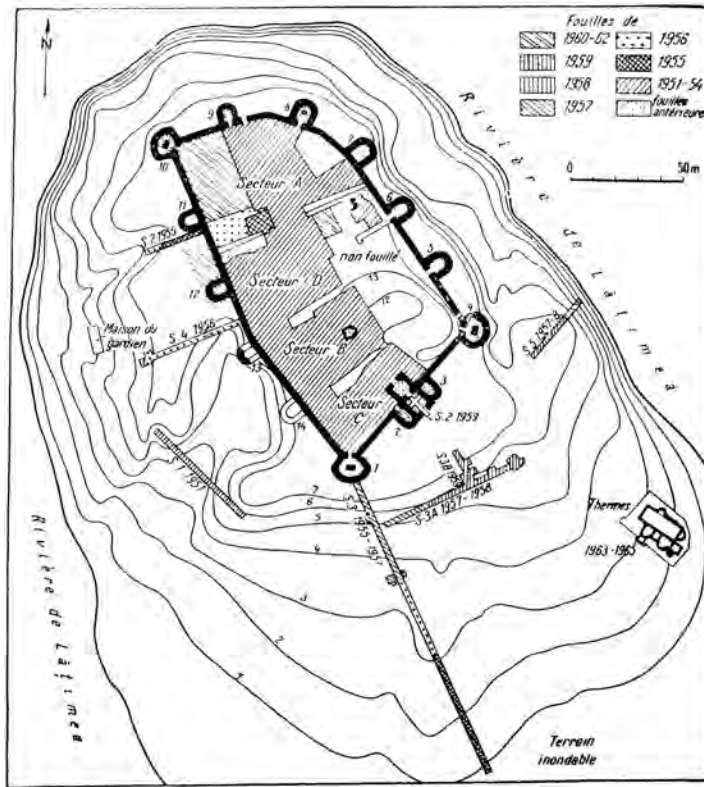


Fig. 5. Bisericuța-Garvăn - plan of the excavated areas up to 1965 (apud Barnea 1967, Fig. 1).

coupes sans se briser; résiste très bien aux charges énormes que les besoins de la défense peuvent rassembler en un même point et se répare enfin très facilement.

Ce plateau conserve encore malgré tant de siècles écoulés depuis l'abandon de cette station les traces visibles d'un incendie violent. Les parements de la muraille sont calcinés en plusieurs points et des scories et vitrifications se trouvent mêlés sur les pentes à la terre végétale qui recouvre les débris. À l'angle A de l'enceinte, où je fis pratiquer une fouille pour retrouver le mur extérieur de la tour, j'eus à traverser une couche de cendre épaisse de 1,20. Tous ces indices laissent peu présumer des découvertes que pourraient amener en ce point des fouilles entreprises méthodiquement. L'incendie comportant généralement avec la prise d'assaut de la ville, un pillage complet et l'écroulement de toutes les constructions intérieures.

J'ai néanmoins retenu de cette exploration trois avantages sérieux:

- 1. L'existence d'un établissement romain fortifié*
- 2. Des renseignements précieux sur le mode des défenses employées*
- 3. La certitude que s'était la ville antique désignée sous le nom de Dinogetia dans les itinéraires anciens.*

Et ce résultat est d'une véritable importance si l'on considère avec quelle incertitude on place encore maintenant sous les noms modernes des provinces du bas Danube, les noms anciens donnés par les textes. [...].

Comments

The information given by Baudry can be differentiated in

1. data on the identification of the site;
2. the travel conditions to the site;
3. documented plan and fortification;
4. information on the building materials.

en demi-cercle. La face principale, tournée du côté de la plaine, a 75 mètres de longueur. Deux tours aux angles d'environ 10 mètres de diamètre et un bastion rectangulaire au milieu, large de vingt mètres, défendent cette partie de la place, la seule qui soit facilement accessible puisque le reste de l'enceinte a son pied dans les marais.

Ce bastion destiné à recevoir les premiers coups des assaillantes indique maintenant qu'il leur a livré passage; il a été jeté bas dans toute sa longueur et forme encore le chemin le plus facile pour pénétrer sur le plateau.

(page 4)

Douze tours reconnaissables sous les choutes du terrain et espacées d'une distance moyenne de 28 mètres défendant la longueur totale du périmètre. Leur construction est en petit matériaux noyés dans un ciment très dur avec des assises en briques de 4 rangs d'épaisseur. C'est le système employé dans les Thermes de Julien à Paris, système éminemment pratique et excellent puisqu'il permet d'élever vite à peu de frais et par tous les bras de l'armée des murailles presque indestructibles. La bonne préparation du mortier de ciment transforme en effet cet assemblage de cailloux en une masse solide et compact comme le granit qui s'émiette sous les

1. Baudry correctly identifies the fortification of Bisericuța-Garvăn with *Dinogetia*. Apparently, he was not aware of the modern name of the place,²⁵ as he did not mention the place or the way he learned about the fortification. According to one footnote in Duruy's publication of 1883,²⁶ the officials of the European Danube Commission (*i.e.* E. Engelhardt) are assumed to have drawn the attention of the architect to the site.

2. The difficult access to the plateau with the fortification when the Danube is high has been and still is a problem. Gr. G. Tocilescu and P. Polonic²⁷ mentioned it at the end of the 19th century, the same as R. Netzhammer did in 1921. The aerial photograph of 1977 (Fig. 6) shows the situation when the river is at a high level.²⁸

3. The fortification plan (Fig. 3) and the dimensions are closer to the reality as revealed by the information of Tocilescu/Polonic.²⁹ Baudry focused on the about 75 m long southern side of the fortification, with a 20 m wide rectangular bastion in the middle. He described the corner towers to be round in shape and provided an approximate diameter for the corner towers on the southern side (10 m). Compared to the situation after the systematic excavations (Fig. 5), the rectangular bastion, which proved to be the main gate, revealed itself to have two U-shaped towers and a Byzantine rectangular addition between them, while the corner towers of the southern side as well as the north-western tower were fan-shaped.

Baudry mentioned that the rectangular bastion, as the most endangered part of the fortification, was very damaged, almost razed to the ground, and that it offered the best way to visit the plateau.

4. Due to his expertise as an architect, Baudry paid attention to the building types he saw, as well as to the possible reasons behind the choices of the Romans. He considered the mixed construction of the tower walls, using small irregular rubble masonry alternating with levelling brick course (4 bricks high) in a solid mortar bed³⁰ to be a very suitable and economic solution for fortifications, even allowing easy repairs in case of damage under siege. The good quality of the used concrete is also noticed by Baudry. For the alternating



Fig. 6. Aerial view of the fortification at Bisericuța in around 1977 (*apud* Zahariade 2006, Fig. 3).

²⁵ See note 15 above.

²⁶ Duruy 1883, p. 29, note 3.

²⁷ The additional information of Polonic (Polonic 1898, f. 101) is interesting: during some winters, the Danube waters would freeze and, thus, it was possible to walk on ice from Galați and from the mouth of the Prut River to Bisericuța. He even gave the approximate time of such walks: 1.5 and 2 hours respectively.

²⁸ For the situation today and the anthropic landscape changes, especially after 1988, see Barnea 2014, pp. 106-107.

²⁹ Băjenaru 2010, p. 45 (with further literature) – he gives the dimensions of the fortification, *i.e.* 152x80 m.

³⁰ For fortifications in the Late Roman period, see examples at Biernacka-Lubanska 1982, pp. 134-135. The city-wall of *Diocletianopolis*/Hisarja (Plovdiv Province, BG), built at the end of the 3rd-4th century AD (see Băjenaru 2010, p. 20), as well as the fortification wall of the small 3rd to 5th century Burgh Castle, Norfolk, GB (one of the Saxon Shore forts, <http://www.norfolkarchtrust.org.uk/burghcastle>) resemble the fortification walls of *Dinogetia*.

rubble and brick courses, he made an analogy with the walls of the early Roman baths of Julian in Paris, which were under research at that time.³¹

The long-lasting fortification walls in the 4th century (irrespective of repairs and transformations), which were further used in the Middle-Byzantine settlement in Bisericuța,³² confirm his observations.

Baudry proceeded with an excavation trench in order to uncover the foundations of the fortification wall and noticed the thick level of ashes (about 1.2 m deep!). He mentioned traces of fire in several places on the fortification wall as well, as slags and vitrified pieces on the hillsides. In the case of the interior area of the fortification, he only noticed it was destroyed by fire.³³ However, he did not make any observations on the artefacts³⁴ on the surface, presumably due to his particular interest in exploring the site, but also because the ordinary archaeological material was less eloquent or worth mentioning at that time in the Lower Danube region (compared to inscriptions, stamps or sculpture). Baudry insists, nonetheless, on the potential of the site for future research.

Bibliographical abbreviations:

| | |
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³¹ Today part of the building with the Cluny Museum; J.-P. Adam, H. Delhumeau, P.-Y. Le Pogam, *Les thermes antiques de Lutèce*, Paris, 1996.

³² See note 4 above.

³³ See especially Barnea 1966.

³⁴ P. Polonic (BAR Archive P. Polonic, I mss. 7, notebook 11, f. 38-39) mentions traces of stone buildings in the interior area of the fortification, traces of walls and tiles in the vineyards to the south (as illustrated on Fig. 4) and Roman and Byzantine coins from an area outside the plateau, near the Bugeac hill, where he also locates the stone quarry for the fortification of Bisericuța; Netzhammer (1996, 1034) writes only that there are sherds all over the place.

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