

A ROMAN BORDER IN THE MIDDLE OF DOBRUDJA?

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Abstract: On the shortest distance from the Danube to the Black Sea, Dobrudja is crossed by three linear fortifications: the small earthen wall, the large earthen wall and the stone wall.

Discussed as a single complex or as separate structures, the three walls were constantly in the attention of researchers. The dating of the monuments is ranging from prehistory to the eleventh century.

In two recently published papers, the subject of the linear fortifications from Central Dobrudja is again discussed. And, if in the first one, leaving open the possibility of dating, the author inclines rather towards the construction of all of them in the post-Roman era, in the second one, arguments are brought for dating two of them during the Roman era.

It is not our intention here to revisit the entire dossier related to the walls, but just to make some comments concerning their existence in the Roman era and the relationship between them and the configuration of the Roman landscape, based on the available data.

Rezumat: Pe distanța cea mai scurtă de la Dunăre la Marea Neagră, Dobrogea este străbătută de 3 fortificații liniare: valul mic de pământ, valul mare de pământ și valul de piatră.

Analizate ca un complex unitar sau fiecare independent, cele trei valuri au fost constant în atenția cercetătorilor, datarea monumentelor mergând din preistorie până în secolul al XI-lea.

În două lucrări apărute recent, problematica valurilor dobrogene este din nou discutată. Și dacă în prima, lăsând deschisă posibilitatea datării, autoarea înclină spre ridicarea tuturor în epoca post-romană, în cea de-a doua, se aduc argumente pentru datarea în epocă romană a două dintre fortificațiile liniare.

Nu este în intenția noastră să reluăm aici întreaga problematică legată de valuri, ci să încercăm, pe baza datelor disponibile, formularea unor observații privind existența lor în epocă romană și relația dintre acestea și configurarea peisajului roman.

On the shortest distance from the Danube to the Black Sea, Dobrudja is crossed by three linear fortifications: the small earthen wall, the large earthen wall and the stone wall.

Discussed as a single complex or as separate structures, the three walls were constantly in the attention of researchers, their dating ranging from prehistory to the eleventh century.¹

Known as “Trajan’s wall” in the oral tradition, the monuments were dated during the Roman time without any hesitation. Further archaeological research contradicted this viewpoint and provided arguments in favour of their dating back to other historical periods. Currently available information does not allow any conclusions to be drawn concerning neither for their dating nor about the purpose for which they were built.

If the small earthen wall is a simple line of fortification with a ditch on the southern side, the other two have a complex structure, with camps placed along or next to them, on both sides, in distinct phases of development, and also with ditches positioned on both sides. It follows therefore that we are facing with very complex monuments, whose function and chronological evolution turns out to be, in the absence of systematic archaeological research, hardly to define.

This region, characterized by a dry climate with accents of aridity, makes human settlements to concentrate around water sources. The existence of the Axios River, which was probably navigable² as ancient sources suggest, is one possible explanation for which the human presence on this space is attested in different ages. The Roman one makes no exception; the river valley is one of the primary communication routes in Moesia Inferior, and the shortest connection between the limes and the Black Sea coast. Before the arrival of the Romans, along the Carasu valley a series of *Getae* settlements and cemeteries are attested and a Greek *emporion* must have functioned in Axiopolis.³ The Romans will turn this line of communication into a major road, along which a series of villages, *villae rusticae*, and camps are built.⁴ The construction characteristics of the latter, and in

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¹ The bibliography is extremely rich, for a summary of these monuments see: Barnea, Ștefănescu 1971, pp. 97-120. See recently: Damian 2015, pp. 47-91.

² Suceveanu 1998, p. 45.

³ Lazarenko *et alii* 2013, p. 63.

⁴ Suceveanu 1998; Bărbulescu 2001; Băltăc 2011.