

THE END OF THE ROMAN HABITATION AT BURIDAVA (STOLNICENI, VÂLCEA COUNTY)

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The End of the Roman Habitation at Buridava (Stolniceni, Vâlcea County) (Abstract)

The five archaeological levels identified in the Roman baths complex area at Stolniceni, dated in the period of the existence of Dacia Province, were chronologically dated as following: the 1st level: Trajan- the first part of Antoninus Pius' rule, the 2nd level: the last part of Antoninus Pius' rule up to Commodus' rule, the 3rd level: the Commodus – Caracalla period, the 4th level: the Caracalla – Philippus Arabs period and the 5th level: the Philippus Arabs-Aurelian period. The end of these five levels mentioned above was brought about by fire and destruction, the most powerful ones were characteristic to the 3rd and 4th levels. Even if the archaeological information is scarce, we believe that we can rely on the supposition that some phenomena that were identified in the thermae area might have had a great impact on the whole settlement. The difference between accidental destructions and intentional destructions can be established due to a vast array of information obtained not only from the site in question but also from a larger area. Thus, we consider that this approach should rely entirely on the historical information obtained as a result of a thorough analysis of the hoards horizon. Every hoards horizons represented in the region are associated with one destruction moment from the Roman baths, with one exception the horizon from the year 260. This situation determine us to reevaluate the chronological situation and to establish that is very possible to place the end of the Roman Buridava not in the time of Aurelian but at the beginning of Gallienus reign as sole emperor.

Mentioned by Tabula Peutingeriana, Buridava is located between *Pons Aluti* and *Castra Traiana*¹ on the Roman road along the Olt Valley stream and identified with the settlement that was near Pârâu Sărat out fall into the Olt River. Unfortunately, there is little information about the role played by *Buridava* in the political, economical and demographic system of *Dacia Inferior* Province, or *Malvensis*, although there are some clues that indicate that it really played a major role².

The archaeological researches undergone in the area are not enough to allow us to have a global perspective on the Roman habitation because they mainly focus on the baths complex that was identified here. However, in the context of the researches made on this baths area, Gh. Bichir was able to identify many moments of destruction followed by reconstructions and alterations – with only one exception, that of the final one³. The latest

buildings in the thermae area were set up during Phillipus Arabs' rule⁴.

There are five archaeological levels identified in the baths complex area at Stolniceni that were chronologically dated as following⁵:

- the 1st level: Trajan – the first part of Antoninus Pius' rule
- the 2nd level: the last part of Antoninus Pius' rule up to Commodus' rule
- the 3rd level: the Commodus – Caracalla period
- the 4th level: the Caracalla – Philippus Arabs period
- the 5th level: the Philippus Arabs – Aurelian period⁶

The end of these five levels mentioned above was brought about by fire and destruction, the most powerful ones were characteristic to the 3rd and 4th levels⁷. The last habitation level, namely the 6th level, belongs to the post-Roman period.

Even if the archaeological information is scarce, we believe that we can rely on the supposition that some phenomena that were identified in the thermae

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¹ *Tabula Peutingeriana, segmentum VII.*

² Tudor 1968, 20, Bichir 1982, 53, Ardevan 1998, 98–99.

³ Bichir 1988, 101–117.

⁴ Bichir-Bardașu 1983, 337.

⁵ Bichir-Bardașu 1983, 336.

⁶ Bichir 1982, 50.

⁷ Bichir 1982, 50.

area might have had a great impact on the whole settlement. We are tempted to believe that all major destructions were caused by some attacks coming from beyond the Roman border when, in fact, they might have been caused by accidental causes. The difference between accidental destructions and intentional destructions can be established due to a vast array of information obtained not only from the site in question but also from a larger area. Thus, we consider that this approach should rely entirely on the historical information obtained as a result of a thorough analysis of the hoards horizon.

Among the horizons of hoards that are characteristic to Oltenia region, there are five of them that belong to the North-Eastern region. Out of these five, four horizons of hoards emerged as a result of important political and military events that took place at the beginning of Commodus' rule, in the context of the events that marked the years 242, 245 and 260⁸. The fifth horizons of hoards that was identified in the North-Eastern part of Oltenia contained coins issued by Elagabalus⁹ and raises some questions related to the possibility that the two great published hoards from Pădurețu¹⁰ and Frâncești¹¹ and the hoard fragment from Slăvitești – Băbeni¹² were part of a single monetary deposit. The rarity in Oltenia of the hoards ended with Elagabalus coins determined us to consider that is very strange to have three monetary deposits ended with the same kind of coins in the neighboring areas of Băbeni town¹³, and to accept this possibility.

If we have to report the chronological dates established for the destructions moments identified at Stolniceni by Gh. Bichir and the emergence of the horizons of hoards we have this situation:

The destructions of the thermae at Buridava	Hoards horizons
The first part of Antoninus Pius' rule	–
Commodus	The beginning of Commodus' rule
Caracalla	–
–	The year 242 (Gordianus III)
Philippus Arabs	The year 245 (Philippus Arabs)
–	The year 260 (Gallienus)
Aurelian	–

⁸ Purece 2008, 91–113.

⁹ Purece 2008, 95–97.

¹⁰ Preda 1996, 109–116.

¹¹ Depuyrot – Moisil 2004.

¹² Purece 2007, 25–32.

¹³ Purece 2008, 95–97.

The only horizon of hoards that must be left out of this chronological analogy is the one that emerged in the year 242. It was probably generated by the hasty retreat of some Barbarian armies along the Roman road between *Drobeta* and *Romula* and later on, along the Olt Valley road to *Pons Aluti*¹⁴, the Roman camp, where they pass through Muntenia. The fact that the retreating Barbarians were not heading North of Ionești Govorii (*Pons Aluti*) can explain why there was no destruction at Stolniceni during Gordianus III's rule. As result, we believe that this horizon of hoards cannot give any chronological elements that can be associated with any level of destruction at *Buridava*, and for this reason it will not be mentioned any more.

As mentioned above, there is a possibility that two of the destructions identified at Stolniceni were caused at the same time with the emergence of two of the horizons of hoards. The first destruction that marks the end of the 2nd level dates back to Commodus' rule and can be chronologically associated with the hiding of the hoard from Râmnicu Vâlcea¹⁵ and possibly, the hiding of the thesaurus from Flămânda-Cremenari¹⁶, considering that the settlement at Râmnicu Vâlcea was set on fire and so was the settlement at Ocnîța – “Downstream the Dam”¹⁷. All these archaeological and coin-related evidence concentrated near the site indicate the fact that the destruction that took place at the end of the 2nd level was not just an isolated phenomenon, in fact, it was caused by external factors that affected a larger area.

The second destruction that can be clearly associated with the emergence of a horizon of hoards took place during Philippus Arabs' rule at the end of the 4th level. The horizon of hoards emerged as a consequence of the attacks of the Carpi in the year 245 and also included the hoard from Ionești Govorii¹⁸. The hoard was hidden in the *Pons Aluti* thermae¹⁹, and soon after the Roman baths were set on fire. The fact that the Carpi crossed the Olt River at *Pons Aluti* and headed North along the Roman road made *Buridava* the next site to have been affected by them, and the destruction that

¹⁴ Purece 2008, 97–100.

¹⁵ Dumitrașcu 1996, 101; Purece 2008, 94.

¹⁶ Purece 2008, 94; Purece 2011, 30.

¹⁷ S. I. Purece, I. Tușulescu, M. Iosifaru, *Roman Coins Discovered at Ocnîța – “Downstream the Dam”*, lecture presented at the XXVII-th National Symposium of Numismatics, Râmnicu Vâlcea, 2010.

¹⁸ Mitrea 1968, 209–222.

¹⁹ Vlădescu 1983, 90.

took place during Philippus Arabs' rule was the most powerful of all²⁰.

The attacks of the Carpi in the year 245 had devastating effects in many regions of Roman Dacia. The Sub-Carpathian region was heavily affected and as the living quality decreased; Philippus Arabs made numerous attempts to re-establish the prosperity that the region once had, but to no result. Gh. Bichir stated that this phenomenon was identified at Buridava, where the 5th level and most of the large thermae were no longer in use between Philippus Arabs' rule and Aurelian's rule, and some rooms were turned into dwellings inhabited by soldiers. Many armament pieces were discovered in these rooms (spear and arrow points)²¹. The archaeological evidence belonging to the 5th level is less dense than the one belonging to the previous ones²², indicating that the rooms from the large thermae were not fully used.

From what has been mentioned before, and according to the chronological periods established by Gh. Bichir in the context of the researches made in the thermae, it can be stated that all the horizon of hoards, except for the last one, are associated to a level of destruction identified at Stolniceni. It is difficult to understand why the horizon emerged from the hoards hidden immediately after Valerian was held captive is not associated with any destructions identified in the thermae area, even if this one is best represented in the North-Eastern region of Oltenia and it is characteristic only to this region of Dacia²³.

The horizon includes three hoards coming from Olteni, Râureni and Sănești. The hoard from Sănești is the largest of all, containing 1127 coins issued between Hadrian's rule and Valerian's rule, the last coin is dated between the years 254–255²⁴. The second hoard in terms of the numbers of coins that were contained comes from Olteni, having 259 pieces issued between Septimus Severus' rule and Valerian's rule. The coins issued by Valerian are dated back in the year 254²⁵. The last hoard comes from Râureni, but only 33% of it was recovered, 26 coins out of those 80 found here²⁶; it is very possible that the last coin of this hoard to been issued in time of Valerian's reign period, although the last piece that was recovered was

minted by Trabonianus Gallus²⁷. Even though there was a small number of coins and only 1/3 of it was recovered, the thesaurus from Râureni has a great importance due to its emergence nearby the Roman settlement at Stolniceni, and the fact that it was hidden indicated a particular anxiety felt here.

In order to understand the causes that led to abandoning the thermae at Stolniceni, we should consider the current situation in the North-Eastern region of Oltenia throughout the chronological periods established by Gh. Bichir, from the beginning of the 5th level to its end, namely the period between the years 245–271. It is hard to believe that the habitation of the thermae by a possible army unit lasted until Aurelian's rule. However, the coins that were discovered here during the researches do not go beyond Gordianus III's rule²⁸.

There are no coins discovered in the military complexes from the North-Eastern part of Oltenia²⁹ in the period after Philippus Arabs' rule. Even if O. Dudău added an Antoninianus issued by Gallienus for Salonina³⁰ in the list of coins made for *Castra Traiana*, this is the result of an error that we will try to explain in this paper. The discovery of an Antoninianus issued during Gallienus' rule in a Roman camp from the North-Eastern part of Oltenia seems to be surprising, and this is the reason why we checked again the bibliography sources. In the work dealing with the monetary circulation in the auxiliary Roman camps from Roman Dacia, O. Dudău has referred to the following coins discovered at *Castra Traiana* (Sâmbotin, Vâlcea County): "2 Denarii issued by Commodus, 1 Denarius issued by Caracalla, 1 Antoninianus issued by Gallienus for Salonina, and coins from Vespasian, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Caracalla, Elagabal, Severus Alexander", indicating the following bibliography: "Tudor – Nubar – Purcărescu 1970³¹, 249; Tudor 1978³², 271; Poenaru – Mitrea 1990³³, 306; Poenaru – Mitrea 1994–1995³⁴, 469; Avram 1983/1992³⁵, 94; Găzdac 2002³⁶, 586". After having done the check-up we managed to re-associate the coins with the bibliographical sources:

²⁰ Bichir 1982, 50.

²¹ Bichir *et alii* 1992, 266.

²² Bichir – Bardașu 1983, 337.

²³ Purece 2008, 106–108.

²⁴ Purece 2005, 142.

²⁵ Mitrea 1971, 140.

²⁶ Nubar – Purcărescu 1972, 161–171.

²⁷ Purece 2008a, 73.

²⁸ Dudău 2007, 135; Purece 2007, 111–130.

²⁹ Dudău 2007, 95–148.

³⁰ Dudău 2007, 131.

³¹ Tudor *et alii* 1970, 245–250.

³² Tudor 1978.

³³ Poenaru Bordea – Mitrea 1990, 303–306.

³⁴ Poenaru Bordea – Mitrea 1994–1995, 459–477.

³⁵ Avram 1992, 92–94.

³⁶ Găzdac 2002.

Tudor – Nubar – Purcărescu 1970, 249	1 Denarius issued by Caracalla
Tudor 1978, 271	–
Poenaru Bordea – Mitrea 1990, 306	“coins issued by Vespasian, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Caracalla, Elagabal, Severus Alexander”
Poenaru Bordea – Mitrea 1994/1995, 469	1 Denarius issued by Commodus
Avram 1983/1992, 94	1 Denarius issued by Commodus
Găzdac 2002, 586	–

None of the above-mentioned bibliographical sources refers to the Antoninianus issued by Gallienus for Salonina. The fact that it was included in the list of the coins found at *Castra Traiana* is maybe the result of a printing error. It seems extremely difficult to find the archaeological arguments which allow an accurate chronological division of the final period of most of the Roman camps from *Limes Alutanus*. Due to the lack of such arguments, in some cases, the use of the Roman fortifications was arbitrary pushed until Aurelian's retreat³⁷. Such a case is the Roman camp from Racovița (*Praetorium*), that was set up in the first half of the 3rd century and used for a very short period of time, its end being chronologically established, with some reserve, during Aurelian's rule³⁸. It is not easy at all to find some archaeological evidence that leads to establishing a chronological superior limit of the levels of habitation belonging to the second half of the 3rd century, therefore the only solution adopted by archaeologists seems to be the association with Aurelian's retreat, even though this chronological limit related to Aurelian's rule also met some reserve as in the case of the Roman camp at Racovița. This chronological hesitation is also expressed by Gh. Bichir in one of his studies focused on the levels of the Roman habitation at Stolniceni, stating that: “five are Roman and date back to Trajan – Aurelian's ruling periods (Gallienus?)”³⁹.

The emergence of the hoard horizons in the context of the events that took place in the year 260 allows us to record a troubled situation which might have had more complex effects. We believe that these events affected the Eastern region of Oltenia at least, and consequently no solid arguments could support the idea that the Roman camps from *Limes Alutanus* were used after the

year 260. Alongside the emergence of this thesaurus collection in the year 260, the last level of the Roman habitation at Stolniceni came to an end.

This seems to be suggested by the fact that this horizon of hoards is the only one that cannot be associated with any destruction levels that took place at Stolniceni, except for the horizon of hoards formed in the year 242⁴⁰ that we agreed to ignore, due to the above-mentioned arguments. Considering that the end of the 5th level was chronologically placed according to the historiographical tradition, with no solid arguments, we believe that it should be dated in the year 260. As a conclusion, we believe that it is necessary to correct the chronological superior limit of the 5th level at Stolniceni proposed by Gh. Bichir, to the year 260 when the Roman habitation came to an end here in the context of the events brought about by Valerian's captivity and the application of Gallienus' new defensive concept in the Danube area⁴¹.

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³⁷ Vlădescu 1983, p. 79.

³⁸ Vlădescu 1982, p. 63.

³⁹ Bichir 1985, p. 94.

⁴⁰ This hoards horizon should not be mentioned due to the particularity of its emergence. See above.

⁴¹ Hügel 2003, p. 167.

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