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An unknown stone structure in Sarmizegetusa Regia’s sacred zone recorded in writings of the 19th century

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Abstract. Researches undertaken by authorities and enthusiasts at Grădiştea Muncelului (ancient Sarmizegetusa Regia) in the nineteenth century produced a number of documents still little known today, despite their value. Although the diggings were chaotic and resulted in extensive damage to the site, they are important because sometimes they record a conservation status of the monuments superior to the present one and even monuments that are now lost or have escaped the attention of archaeologists. The present paper aims to reassess the documentary information concerning a novel monument, excavated in the mid 19th century by András Fodor and reported by other some scholars who have visited the ruins of the Dacian Kingdom’s capital.

Keywords: Dacian fortresses, Sarmizegetusa Regia, sacred area, Dacian architecture, 19th century archaeological researches

Researches undertaken by authorities and enthusiasts at Grădiştea Muncelului (ancient Sarmizegetusa Regia) in the nineteenth century have produced a number of documents still little known today despite their value. Although the diggings were chaotic and resulted in extensive damage to the site, they are important because sometimes they record a conservations status of the monuments superior to the present one and even monuments that are now lost.

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or have escaped the attention of archaeologists. The present paper aims to reassess the documentary information concerning a novel monument, excavated in the mid 19th century by András Fodor\(^1\) and reported by other some scholars who have visited the ruins of the Dacian Kingdom’s capital. They recorded what they had seen and drew up plans of the ruins in which is represented a stone structure near the spring in the sacred area.

There are two categories of sources acknowledging this monument: the plans drawn up by A. Fodor, M. Ackner and J.F. Neigebaur and their texts – published or remained in manuscript – written after the diggings at Grădiştea Muncelului.

Fodor’s plan (Fig. 1) is kept in his collection of manuscripts\(^2\) and it was first published only about 150 years after being drawn\(^3\). He drew the fortress as fairly round, in a naive style. The building is depicted as a sequence of blocks in a roughly circular shape, is denoted with the letter N and is located outside the precinct, not far from the eastern gate, south of the path that crosses the fortress and the sacred area. In the same place point a can be seen, designating the position of a bas-relief. Neigebaur’s map (Fig. 2), preserved among the manuscripts of count J. Kemény\(^4\), was published only in the next century as well\(^5\). It is a simple sketch, probably made on-site. The building is denoted here by the letter F and is outlined by radial shadings. It is placed on the lower terrace east to the citadel and south of the spring. Ackner’s plan was drawn based on Neigebaur’s one and “the deep pit” ("die tiefe Grube") is also at the letter f, but without being depicted in any way (Fig. 3)\(^6\).

\(^1\) Lugosi Fodor András (?-1859) was a medical doctor in Hunedoara and an antiques lover. He went twice to Grădiştea Muncelului, in 1844 and 1847, and carried out diggings there both times. After his first visit, he organized a campaign involving 18 people among which were counted his friends M. Ackner and J.F. Neigebaur. He published little, only in local journals, and most of the information he recorded is kept today in manuscript (Fodor mss.).


\(^3\) Wollmann 1982, fig. 54.

\(^4\) Kemény mss, foil 138.

\(^5\) Finály 1916, p. 26, fig. 2.

\(^6\) Ackner 1856, p. 98 and tab. VI.
There is written information from all three\textsuperscript{7}. Neigebaur said that the place is located not far from the eastern gate, 292 steps (about 219 m) away\textsuperscript{8}. Ackner placed it in front of the eastern gate, 290 steps away from it and few steps west of the spring\textsuperscript{9}. Fodor undertook excavations there in 1847 and placed it 50 steps (about 37.50 m) south from the large stone circle and near the spring\textsuperscript{10}. He says that it had the appearance of a circular pit, deep in the ground, whose walls were lined with stone blocks placed side by side. The diameter was 4 fathoms, which means about 7.56 m\textsuperscript{11}. He dug also two feet (about 1.50 m) near the structure, but was unable to continue because of the large flow of the water\textsuperscript{12}, which means that the structure was indeed very close to the spring. Neigebaur argues that in that place there were many stone blocks, basements of buildings, well burnt bricks, thicker than usual, and pipes of burnt clay, having thicker or thinner walls up to 2 1/3 inches (about 5.92 cm)\textsuperscript{13}. Ackner also saw there the remains of a building and a lot of blocks. All of them saw in the pit or near it two stone “altars” and other sculptural monuments. For this reason, and because of the proximity of the water source, Fodor believes that this was a pagan place of worship.

We have no information about the bottom of this structure – whether it was of stone or not – but if Fodor had identified its setup, he probably would have mentioned it.

The pit was not recorded by the Austrian fiscal reports from 1803-1804 and is missing from the first plan of the ruins drawn up in 1804\textsuperscript{14}. It may have been deranged by treasure hunters at the beginning of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, but only Fodor undertook diggings

\textsuperscript{7} I am very indebted to Conf. dr. Bajusz István (“Babeș-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca) and to Bajusz Máté for their efforts in transcripting and translating the Hungarian textes. I also thank to Mr. Alexandru Müller (Stuhr, Germany) for helping me translate the documents from German.

\textsuperscript{8} Neigebaur 1851, p. 100, no. 5.

\textsuperscript{9} Ackner 1856, p. 98.

\textsuperscript{10} Fodor 1847, p. 362.

\textsuperscript{11} Fodor \textit{mss}, I, 32; Al. Ferenczi wrongly amounts it to 5.68 m (Daicoviciu, Ferenczi 1951, p. 85).

\textsuperscript{12} Fodor 1847, p. 362.

\textsuperscript{13} Neigebaur 1815, p. 100, no. 5, p. 101, no. 18, p. 102, no. 23.

\textsuperscript{14} For this map, see Pețan 2013.
there when the sculptural monuments stored in it earned his attention. Neigebaur and Ackner saw it in 1847 as well, but after this year, all information is missing. For a hundred years, it has been clogged and covered by abundant vegetation that grows around.

In the first decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, when systematic research had begun, the “deep pit” was still visible. It was mentioned by Al. Ferenczi, who described it as “a pit with a depth of several meters”, situated outside the fortress, between the eastern gate and the spring, on the right of the path\textsuperscript{15}. Daicoviciu’s plan records a section drawn near this area in 1950, but there is no information on possible structures detected on that occasion\textsuperscript{16}.

In this “stone pit” Fodor saw two “altars”, one larger and another smaller, and “two stones with hieroglyphics” (the inscription “with weapons” of Legio IV Flavia Felix, broken in two parts\textsuperscript{17}), and he marked on the plan the place of a bas-relief. Neigebaur and Ackner also saw the bas-relief, on which was represented a character standing with a spear in hand, trampling another character\textsuperscript{18}, and a half of the inscription “with weapons”. The two “altars” were located a few steps away from the hollow.

The “altars” have never been published, but the bas-relief and the inscription entered the literature with this place of discovery, excepting C.H. Opreanu which claims that the inscription came out from the fortification wall\textsuperscript{19}. Based on the association between these artefacts it was postulated that there was a Roman triumphal monument after AD 106 in that place\textsuperscript{20}. In fact, all four pieces were discovered during the diggings undertaken by Austrian tax authorities, in 1804: the bas-relief inside the precinct, and the inscription and one of the “altars” in the ruins of the building south of the precinct, today regarded as Roman bath\textsuperscript{21}. After 1804, the four

\textsuperscript{15} Ferenczi 1937, p. 111.
\textsuperscript{16} Daicoviciu, Ferenczi 1951, fig. 21.
\textsuperscript{17} See IDR III/3, 269a.
\textsuperscript{18} Ferenczi 1937.
\textsuperscript{19} Opreanu 1999-2000, p. 157, fig. 2.
\textsuperscript{20} Macrea 1941, p. 145; Glodariu 1965, p. 128-129, IDR III/3, p. 266.
\textsuperscript{21} Jakó 1972, p. 600 (the bas-relief); Jakó 1972, p. 601 and 602 (the two halves of the inscription); Jakó 1973, p. 619 (“the altar”).
monuments were left in custody to a forester. M. Ackner still saw one half of the inscription in 1838 in the forester’s hut. At some time thereafter the artefacts were brought and stored in the pit next to the path. A few decades later the bas-relief was transported to Deva to the museum by Téglás. One of the two halves of the inscription has reached, in unknown conditions, the same museum. The other one is lost. The “andesite altar” was seen again in the forester’s hut in 1910, but today nobody knows about the subsequent fate of the two “altars”.

Therefore, because the Austrian reports have not been used by archaeologists of today, it was wrongly considered that these monuments were found together in the stone pit. In reality, there is no connection between the circular building and the four sculptural monuments.

The identification of building’s location is difficult and is a task to be done through future field investigation. Considering all the data above and Ferenczi’s localization, the area in which it was located spans from the Eastern Gate toward South-East, near the spring. The presence of water pipes debris around the pit could suggest a location on terrace XI, in the area of the small limestone temple, where a pipeline and some limestone troughs were already documented (Fig. 4). The most probable place is the northern area of this temple, wherefrom the pipeline seems to come out. The steps number from the eastern gate and from the large circular temple counted towards spring roughly indicates about the same area. The proximity of water and the large amount of shaped stones in the place also pleads for this solution.

The extensive works of consolidation and enhancement of the monuments carried out at the beginning of 80’ resulted in changing the initial configuration of the landscape, and therefore it is difficult
to determine the exact place of this building. We can even question if they will still find anything left of this relic\textsuperscript{27}.

What the functionality of this construction could be, it is virtually impossible to determine solely on the basis of this information. The location very close to the water, the existence of water pipes debris near the building and the subsequent documentation of a well preserved clay pipe and of stone troughs just in the area raise the question whether it had a role in the water management system of the citadel. On the same time, the large amount of stone blocks around the pit suggests that the building may have had a superstructure – without this being however a compulsory feature. Lastly, we should not ignore that the structure was located in the area of temples and therefore may have had a connection with them. Assuredly, no solid answer can be given without a thorough field research – if it is still possible to be done taking into account the previous radical interventions on the area.

As a short conclusion, documentation data from 19\textsuperscript{th} century on Sarmizegetusa Regia are far from being recovered and could still bring out surprises, representing a rich additional source of knowledge about the site that should be linked to the archaeological data.

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\textsuperscript{27} An identification with the poligonal stone encolsure situated in the same area (Daicoviciu et al. 1952, p. 290; Daicoviciu et al. 1980, p. 163) and taken by some as a water tank (Antonescu 1984, p. 162) is not plausible because of its shape, structure and size.
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Fig. 1. The plan of Grăđaţea Muncelului’s ruins according to Fodor. Source: Fodor mss, vol. VI, fol. 48.
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Fig. 2. The plan of Grădiștea Muncelului’s ruins according to Neigebaur. Source: Kemény mss, fol. 138.
Fig. 3. Detail from Ackner’s plan. Source: Ackner 1856, pl. VI.
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Fig. 4. Sarmizegetusa Regia’s plan. In red, the hypothetical area in which could be located the „pit lined with blocks”. In blue, the trace of pipeline. Map source: http://www.romaniadevis.ro/dacia/descopera-romania/romania-virtuala-3d/item/plan-topo-2d-situl-arheologic-sarmizegetusa-regia
Fig. 5. The hypothetical place of the structure. Photo taken by Aurora Pețan, June 2014.

Fig. 6. Hypothetical reconstruction of the relic. Drawing by Marian Coman.