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THE DACIAN FORTRESS OF GRĂDIȘTEA MUNCELULUI: FROM THE LEGEND OF THE WHITE KING TO ITS IDENTIFICATION WITH SARMIZEGETUSA REGIA

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Abstract. The identification of the site from Grădiștea Muncelului (today Grădiștea de Munte, Hunedoara County) with Sarmizegetusa Regia, the capital of the Dacian Kingdom, has known a long and troubled history. Although the ruins of the fortress from Grădiștea Hill had been known for centuries both by the nearby villagers and by the scholars, its origin remained a mystery until the 19th century. Even after it had been established that the fortress belonged to the Dacians, it took another century to be acknowledged as the very royal capital, which involved several more or less scientific interpretations, confusions and disproof. This article is meant to reconstruct this history.

Key words: *Sarmizegetusa Regia*, Grădiștea Muncelului, historiography, archaeology, 19th century research.

The ruins of the fortress from Grădiștea Muncelului had been known for many centuries by the villagers around Orăștie, which is proved by the name of the place, *Grădiștea*¹. Scholars,

¹ The word comes from old Slavic, where *gradište* derived from *grad* („a settlement surrounded by a remblai or wall”, „town”) and it meant „camp, Roman camp” (F. Miklosich, *Lexicon linguae Slovenicae veteris dialecti*, Vindobonae 1850, p. 33). Today, in Romanian, it is rarely used as a common noun and it refers either to a form of relief of a hillock size, standing out on the bank of a river as a result of erosion, or the site or the ruins of an old fortress or township (see *Dicționarul limbii române literare contemporane*, 4 vol., București, 1955-1957, s.v. *grădiște*). The word is more often used as a place name, both in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, as well as in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, where there is a large number of such place names, all of which refer to an abandoned, ruined place, located most often on a high place (see also Živković et al. 2013, p. 17-18).

too, were aware of its existence, at least since the 16th century². Yet, in time, it put to the test all those who tried to solve its mystery: from the legendary White King, to the Egyptians, Thracians and Greeks, from the Romans to the last Dacians who, together with Decebalus, took refuge in the mountains, the fortress was the object of numberless interpretations, until it came to be identified as the Dacian royal capital. The early confusion between the two Sarmizegetusas, the fanciful or dilettantish interpretations, the questions and doubts – all of those have been wiped out step by step, as archaeological research advanced. The history of this identification has not been reconstructed yet and some confusion still persists to this day, even among professionals. The following is meant to reconstruct the history of these interpretations.

The age of confusions: the two Sarmizegetusas

The history of rediscovering the ruins of the Dacian Kingdom capital from Grădiştea Hill is closely connected to that of the ruins of the Roman capital located close to Haţeg, the two antique capitals being about 50 km away from each other (in a straight line). The research on the Dacian site was also determined by the monetary treasures found by the local people in its area at the end of the 18th century and the

² The word comes from old Slavic, where *gradište* derived from *grad* („a settlement surrounded by a remblai or wall”, „town”) and it meant „camp, Roman camp” (F. Miklosich, *Lexicon linguae Slovenicae veteris dialecti*, Vindobonae 1850, p. 33). Today, in Romanian, it is rarely used as a common noun and it refers either to a form of relief of a hillock size, standing out on the bank of a river as a result of erosion, or the site or the ruins of an old fortress or township (see *Dicţionarul limbii române literare contemporane*, 4 vol., Bucureşti, 1955-1957, s.v. *grădişte*). The word is more often used as a place name, both in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, as well as in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, where there is a large number of such place names, all of which refer to an abandoned, ruined place, located most often on a high place (see also Živković et al. 2013, p. 17-18).

beginning of the 19th³. But, for centuries, nobody suspected that the site in the mountains is the very capital of former Dacia: until the interwar period, the general belief was that the ruins of Dacian Sarmizegetusa were to be found under those of Roman Sarmizegetusa, while the ruins of Grădișteța Muncelului were considered to be those of a mysterious town.

The name of the Dacian capital is known from two antique sources: Ptolemy and Dio Cassius. Both authors wrote after the conquest of Dacia, but they used older sources.

In his famous *Geography*, in chap. III, 8, 4, Ptolemy included, among the places in Dacia, a *Sarmizegethusa to basileion*. Although his sources for Dacia seem to refer to the situation after the conquest, in Trajan times (particularly at the end of the first decade of the 1st century and the beginning of the second⁴), the Roman town was not mentioned, while the Dacian capital was, although destroyed at that time. It was claimed that the epithet *to basileion* was added on purpose, in order to distinguish between the two, for the latter already existed. It was also said that they were not both mentioned because they were too close to each other and the Dacian one was still important, since it was not only the Roman garrison that was located there, but also a Roman shrine, maybe a temple, where sacrifices were being made⁵. In our opinion, it is not certain that the epithet *to basileion* was added by Ptolemy for the sake of disambiguation: it was a usual epithet, often used with names of capitals. Here are some random examples, from the large number of *basileia*, belonging most often to the Hellenistic Orient, some of which were mentioned by Ptolemy himself: *Artaxata to basileion* (Appian, *Mithr.* 15), *Baktra to*

³ In 1575, scholar Gáspár Heltai, speaking about the antique traces from Transylvania, stated: „Not far from Orăștie, up the mountain, there was a beautiful town, whose foundations are still entirely preserved. The enclosure was also carved in stone.” (Gáspár Heltai, *Chronica az magyaroknak dolgairól*, Cluj, 1575). See also Jakó 1966, p. 105, note 5.

⁴ Jakó 1966.

⁵ Nemeti 2006, p. 276-277.

basileion (Ptol. 11, 9), *Ekbatana to basileion* (Strab. 11, 13), *Meroe to basileion* (Strab. 1, 2, 25), *Sousa to basileion* (Diod. Sic. 19, 18, 1) and others. But it may also be true that the old Dacian capital still represented an important place for the Romans at the beginning of the province. Whatever it may be, the mentioning of this name by Ptolemy is particularly important and it is the only certain and undisputed piece of information (except for a sole interpretation made by young C. Daicoviciu, who supposed Ptolemy made a confusion, as it will be shown later on).

It is not the same situation with the text in which Dio Cassius (LXVIII, 9) mentioned a *Sarmizegethusa* in which the Romans had left a military corps after their first war with the Dacians. The researchers are divided when it comes to interpreting this text: some claim that it refers to Dacian Sarmizegetusa, others think that Dio referred to the Roman one, the only that existed in his times (even if it did not exist yet in the year 102) and the only one where a legion (*to stratopedon*) could be hosted at that moment; Decebalus's capital was still free, unconquered and could be surveyed by a garrison at most, that would have stayed there for a short time in order to make sure that the conditions of the peace treaty were met, first of all the dismantling of the fortifications⁶. No matter which is the most credible interpretation, it is beyond any doubt that the name of the Dacian capital was Sarmizegetusa, probably called sometimes by the Greeks and Romans with the completion *to basileion/regia*, after the model of the royal Hellenistic capitals.

Set up by Emperor Trajan, probably in 108 A.D., the first *colonia*-town of the province was called *Ulpia Traiana Augusta Dacica*. It seems that, at the beginning of Emperor Hadrian's reign, the Roman township was given an extra name, that of the capital of the defeated Dacian kingdom, *Sarmizegetusa*⁷. The presence of this Dacian place name in the name of both

⁶ Bogdan-Cătăniciu 1987-1988, p. 149.

⁷ See particularly Daicoviciu 1974; Glodariu 1994; Diaconescu 1997; Protase 1997; Opreanu 1999-2000; Piso 2000.

capitals, but also the fact that in the old Dacian capital there are no inscriptions or other written items mentioning the name *Sarmizegetusa*, while in the new, Roman capital this was frequently identified in inscriptions as early as the Middle Age, quickly lead to the idea that both Sarmizegetusas are there, the Roman town being founded on the ruins of the Dacian one.

Being located down a valley and therefore accessible, close to the ways of communication, numerous architectural pieces, sculptural elements and inscriptions were identified and often removed from the ruins of the former Roman capital since earlier times. The first documented information related to this dates back to the 15th century, from the times of Mathias Corvinus, and the first collection of epigraphic texts originating from this site belongs to clergyman Johannes Mezersius (the beginning of the 16th century), archdeacon at Cojocna and canon priest at Alba Iulia. He is the one who, for the first time, indicates the location of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa at Grădiștea Hațegului. His collection was widespread among the Western scholars during the 16th century, particularly due to Stephanus Taurinus (Stieröchsel), archdeacon of Hunedoara between 1516 and 1519. Taurinus, in the Appendix to his work *Stauromachia* (1519, Vienna), listed several inscriptions originating from the Roman sites, including Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, which he mistakenly took for the capital of pre-Roman Dacia⁸.

The confusion was to last for over four centuries. In 1906, when there were 1800 years since Dacia's conquest, historian Teohari Antonescu reconstructed Decebalus' Sarmizegetusa and built an impressive model, corroborating the images from Trajan's Column and the information given by the (Roman!) ruins close to Hațeg⁹.

⁸ IDR III/2, p. 24.

⁹ „Zarmis urbs ingens et quondam Decebali Dacorum Regis sede clara, tandem ipso devicto Colonia Traiana Dacica fuit, modo Varhel ab Accolis dicitur, hoc est locus castris.” (Monumenta Ungrica, ed. J.C. Engel, Vienna, 1809, p. 469). For the first information from Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, see IDR III/2, p. 10 and the following.

The conviction that Decebalus' residence had been in Hațeg had a logical consequence: the fortress in the mountains was left nameless and without a clear destination. Nobody would suspect until the interwar period that the ruins from Grădiștea Muncelului were those of Decebalus' real capital. After a series of even more fanciful interpretations, it came to be considered just a refuge Dacian fortress, a second residence of the Dacian king.

Although archaeologists have cleared things up, confusions are still being made. On the one hand, by lack of information and appropriate advertising, many tourists, and also a part of the local press, mistake the two Sarmizegetusas or simply do not know that there are two sites with the same name. On the other hand, confusions are being made when interpreting the written sources from the past centuries, because of a new place name coincidence: the two villages on whose territory are the ruins of the two Sarmizegetusas, had, in the past, the same name, *Grădiște*, for the very reason that this word, having become a place name, designates a place with fortress ruins. In order to differentiate them, they were also called *Grădiștea Muncelului* (or *Grădiștea Orăștiei*), respectively *Grădiștea Hațegului*, the latter being also known under a Hungarian name, *Várhely* (meaning „the fortress place”). *Grădiștea Hațegului*, mentioned very early in documents (the first time in 1514, while in 1398 it was mentioned by its Hungarian name of *Varhel*)¹⁰ was renamed *Sarmizegetusa* in 1932¹¹, but its inhabitants keep on calling themselves, even in recent times „grădișteni” [„grădisters”].

The double name coincidence – between the two Sarmizegetusas and the two Grădișteas on whose territory lie the ruins of the two Sarmizegetusas – keep on generating confusions even nowadays, and even among specialists¹².

¹⁰ Antonescu 1906.

¹¹ Băeștean, Albulescu 2012, p. 127.

¹² Băeștean, Albulescu 2012, p. 156-158.

Up to the moment of a correct identification, the ruins of Grădiştea Muncelului were subject to a long line of interpretations, which evolved from legend to more and more scientific approaches, passing through a series of more and less fanciful episodes, according to the level of knowledge of the respective epochs.

The time of legends: the fortress of the White King

It would have been expected that the first information and interpretations related to this fortress should come from the local tales and legends. The still visible walls and the carefully polished stone blocks must have sparked the imagination of the locals who would sometimes reach the Muncel forests. Yet, few legends were born around the ruins on Grădiştea Hill, which is explicable. The area remained uninhabited after the Romans left, and it was only the shepherds who would pass by the ruins, herding their sheep towards Muncel and Godeanu on the old Dacian roads and paths. The inhabitants of the villages located down the valley knew about the ruined town in the forest, as proved by the name they gave to it. And then of course, the gold hidden under the ground, which stirred for centuries so many passions, would show up from time to time to the gold seekers or to those who accidentally came across it.

Still, there is a legend related to Grădiştea Muncelului, taken down by Téglás István during a trip to the fortress, in 1884, when he accompanied his brother, Téglás Gábor. An old Romanian serf told them the following story:

The Black King wanted to kill the White King, but the White King hid himself here, together with all the treasures, cattle and 30.000 servants. But, when he took refuge, he forgot to take a sieve for sifting the corn flour and he sent a messenger to his sister, Maria Theresia, to borrow one. The king did not return the sieve and Maria Theresia

got angry with him, for she had just one sieve. She went to the Black King and told him where the White King was hiding. The Black King made for the hiding place with a huge army. On hearing that, the White King and his 30.000 servants cut their own throats.¹³

It is a strange story, mixing up elements from recent history (empress Maria Theresia¹⁴) with bookish interpretations of antique events, circulating as early as the beginning of the 19th century (the last Dacian king taking refuge up in the mountain, the existence of a sister, betrayal, suicide), but also with unexpected ethnographic elements (the reason of betrayal is a trivial flour sieve¹⁵ – in fact, an unkept promise, not returning a borrowed object). The names of the two kings are symbolic: the Black King is the negative character, who wants to kill the White King. Nevertheless, there is a possible connection between the name of the latter and the local place names in the fortress neighborhood: the two water streams neighboring Grădiștii Hill were named the White Brook (*Pârâul Alb*) and the White River (*Râul Alb*), today, the White Valley

¹³ The homonymy of the two Grădișteas mislead Daniel Spânu, who stated that the first identification of Sarmizegetusa Regia dated back to the 16th century and belonged to Wolfgang Lazius who, speaking about the great treasure of 1543, claimed that it was found at the place called Varhel or Grădiștea, where lie the ruins of Decebalus' Sarmizegetusa Regia (Spânu 2006, p. 81, 82, 84, 89). But Lazius clearly said that emperor Trajan turned the Dacian capital into a Roman one, changing its name to Ulpia Traiana (see Makkay 1995, p. 342, n. 10), indicating beyond any doubt that he meant the ruins in Hațeg county, not the ones in the mountains. Archaeologist Răzvan Mateescu claimed that doctor Fodor Andras from Hunedoara, would have identified, as early as 1844, the ruins from Grădiștea Muncelului with those of Dacian Sarmizegetusa (Mateescu 2012, p. 34, n. 62). He did not find anything anachronic in this identification, ignoring probably the fact that, not before a century later, would it be stated for the first time that Sarmizegetusa Regia is located at Grădiștea Muncelului (see e.g. RE IIA, 3 (1921) col. 25-27 or Pârvan 1926, 263, where this identification is still unknown). In fact, Fodor never thought about such identification, but his writing, referring to Roman Sarmizegetusa and not the Dacian one, was mistranslated and misinterpreted by Mateescu.

¹⁴ Bajusz 2005, I/1, p. 161.

¹⁵ In other local stories from the Hațeg area, Maria Theresia is considered the mother of Emperor Trajan (Boda, Varga 2014, p. 750-751).

(*Valea Albă*), respectively Godeanu Valley (*Valea Godeanului*)¹⁶, and the mountain slopes bordering the White Valley to the North are called the White Slopes (*Fețele Albe*) and they include the most important and luxurious Dacian civil township in the neighborhood of the kingdom's capital.

The idea of a refuge fortress was widespread among the scholars of the 19th century. But, at that time, it was inconceivable that Decebalus' capital could be in that very hard to reach place. Moreover, it was a well-established fact that the ruins of Sarmizegetusa Regia were to be found under those of the Roman Sarmizegetusa. Therefore, the story of the king taking refuge in the mountains has all the chances to be a mere transposition of this cultivated interpretation. As to the betrayal of some leaders of Decebalus' army, it was already known from the interpretation of some scenes on Trajan's Column. Traitor Bicilis, the one who revealed the place where Decebalus had hidden his treasure, was also known from antique writings. It was also known from antique writings that Decebalus had a sister. Decebalus' suicide and that of other leaders could also be deciphered from Trajan's Column, as well as from antique writings. So that all these notorious elements¹⁷, turned into a story, could represent a recent tradition.

Imola Boda and Rada Varga consider that the information from this story has been apparently preserved into the collective consciousness along the time¹⁸. In our opinion, there is little chance for it to have happened like that, firstly because of the severe depopulation of the area after Dacia's conquest, which lasted until the 18th century¹⁹, and secondly, as shown

¹⁶ For the motif of the flour sieve in folklore, see Boda, Varga 2014, p. 752, note 12.

¹⁷ See Finály 1916, p. 32.

¹⁸ Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, LXVIII, 14, 5 (the episode with Bicilis); LXVIII, 9,4 (the seizing of Decebalus' sister); LXVIII, 14, 3 (Decebalus' suicide).

¹⁹ „It is, certainly, of utmost interest how the historical epic line was preserved how some events and particularly the denouement of the Trajanic wars survived in the collective memory.” Boda, Varga 2014, p. 751-752.

before, because all the elements of the story were known at that time from antique literary sources and transposed into a cultivated interpretation that could easily penetrate the folklore.

There are no other known stories related to these ruins²⁰.

The time of dabblers: from the Egyptians to the Agathyrsi, Greeks and Thracians

In vain did they seek for inscriptions or other signs that could reveal the oldness of the fortress: the mysterious ruins refused to betray their origin to the still unprepared and ignorant ones. For a long time, they put to test the skill and imagination of passionate people who looked for indices related to the epoch when the fortress was built, its name and the ethnic and cultural belonging of its inhabitants.

Leaving aside the isolated and fanciful references to the treasure of Darius, king of Persia, which seems to have been sought for (even) in the area of this fortress²¹, or the legendary Assyrian kings Ninus and Semiramis, whose faces would have been identified on two medals from the big treasure of 1543²², there were, nevertheless, interpretations that imagined a history of these ruins way older than it really was. A stone slate bearing signs, which actually constituted the only inscription discovered in the 19th century in the area of the fortress, gave a lot of trouble to the antiquity fans. It is the so called "weapon-shaped-letters

²⁰ The mountainous area was depopulated until recently, the only ones to roam it were the shepherds, on their way to the alpine pastures. But the villages located along the valley were documented quite early (Beriu – the 14th century, Costești, Orăștioara de Sus, Orăștioara de Jos – the 15th century and others, see Coriolan Suciu, *Dicționar istoric al localităților din Transilvania*, vol. 1-2, București, 1966-1967).

²¹ In exchange, there appeared a series of pseudo-legends, created in the last two decades by some uneducated local "guides" who aim at satisfying the need for legends of the tourists, and take advantage of them.

²² Téglás 1905, p. 102.

inscription", which was correctly interpreted only at the beginning of the 20th century by Finály Gabor, who identified the weapon-shaped signs as letters making up the name of the Legio IV Flavia Felix²³. But, until then, the strange representations of knives, curved daggers or bows were given the most fanciful interpretations. Fodor Andras²⁴ named them „hieroglyphs” and imagined, among other things, that the ruins might date back to the times of the Egyptians²⁵. But he quickly gave up this interpretation and focused on the idea of a Greek fortress, considering these signs hint at goddess Cybele and the Muses, but not before fancying the idea of an Agathyrsi origin²⁶.

The coins bearing Lysimachos's name, found in large quantities and quite early near the ruins of Grădiștea Muncelului, represented an element used in “dating” the fortress for those who had little knowledge of numismatics.

²³ It refers to two medals representing a male, respectively a female face, which would have belonged to the great Dacian treasure discovered in 1543 in the water of the Strei river, identified at the time with the portraits of legendary kings Ninus and Semiramis. They are mentioned as gifts offered to Charles V, after having been confiscated from Cardinal George Martinuzzi, who had got them alongside with most of the treasure (Ascanio Centorio degli Ortensi, *Comentarii della guerra di Transilvania*, Ferrari, 1566, p. 198). It is certainly a fanciful interpretation of the two images. Daniel Spânu thinks it may be the case of two phalerae (the type of those discovered in the treasures of București-Herăstrău, Surcea, Lupu, Galice or Jakimovo), but he justly notices that there are not enough arguments for the two pieces to have been found alongside with the coins: it is likely that the set of golden pieces sent over to Vienna might have been the result of a random selection from Martinuzzi's fortune or recovered from the natives, their origin being unclear (Spânu 2006, p. 87).

²⁴ IDR III/3, 269a.

²⁵ Little is known about the life of this interesting personage. His birth year is not known. He was head surgeon of Hunedoara County, specialized in obstetrics, epidemiology and balneology. He was passionate about archaeology and travelled all over Hunedoara County in order to find and draw antique relics. He was the friend of most Transylvanian scholars of the time. He died in 1859, leaving behind a few publications and a bulky manuscript in which he collected information and drawings of antique items from Transylvania.

²⁶ Fodor 1847, p. 363.

Metallurgical inspector Anton Bögözi de Oszdola, who had been charged with synthesizing the results of the diggings done by the Austrian tax authority at the beginning of the 19th century thought, in 1805, that the ruins were, at that time, 2089 year old, counted from year 286 BC, in the time of Lysimachos²⁷. He supposed that the fortress was destroyed by a violent earthquake, which would explain the way in which the stones are dispersed in all directions, but also the way the coins were found, spread all over and not together. It was supposed that all those who knew something about the treasures were wiped out alongside with the fortress.

Fodor András, after having briefly mentioned a possible Egyptian or Agathyrsi origin of the ruins, raised the question if the fortress had been built by the Greeks, Dacians or Romans, stressing that it was a hard answer to give. He still believed that it had belonged to the Greeks and to Lysimachos, after which it was conquered by the Dacian king Dromichaites, his supposition being based on the golden coins engraved with the figure of the Macedonian and which were found at Grădiște. Fodor claimed that, by a hasty order of Lysimachos, the fortress was set fire to, which would result in the large quantity of burned grain, visible in many places; that is why, there are still treasures that never got to be recovered. He tried to identify it with antique *Utidava* from Ptolemy's *Geography* and excluded the Roman origin of the vestiges. In a later report, he resumed the idea that the fortress might have belonged to Thracia and would have been conquered from Lysimachos, but by Cotizo's Dacians (not by Dromichaites, as he had said in the previous text), who later set fire to it, as it could not be inhabited because of the inaccessible location. This time, Fodor proposed the identification with *Acmonia* from Tabula Peutingeriana. Therefore, in both variants he proposed, the fortress would have been initially Thracian or Greek and it would have been conquered by the Dacians.

²⁷ Mentioned by Bardocz Elek in his letter to Count Kemény József, v. Ferenczi 1913, p. 43, n. 63.

The error of interpretation surely stems from the interpretation of the coins bearing Lysimachos's figure, which were found in the site, and which were not issued in the time of the Macedonian king, but much later. These were in fact pseudo-Lysimachos or lysimachoi postumi-type coins, issued in the western-pontic cities mostly in the first quarter of the 1st century BC²⁸. But the 19th century scholars could not know this at that time.

The time of scholars: some traveling Romans

Charged with inquiring the treasure discoveries of 1803, Paul Török, procurator fiscal for Hunedoara, went up the mountains at the beginning of July of the same year and was amazed to discover the grandiose ruins. He found no stone inscriptions allowing him to establish the oldness of the vestiges, or the kin they belonged to, but he discovered in the civilian settlement the fragment of a ceramic pot carrying the inscription PER SCORILO²⁹ and, for this reason, he supposed there was a Roman residence there. But, since the coins they found were Greek ones, he imagined a compromise solution: the Romans inhabiting that place possessed treasures of Greek coins, too. In his second report, written a month later, he changed his interpretation: there existed a Roman colony, which was abandoned alongside with all its gold³⁰. A few years later, Török acknowledged that the vestiges of Grădișteța Muncelului are Dacian³¹. The change of opinion was natural, as in the meantime, two important campaigns of official

²⁸ Jakó 1971, p. 451.

²⁹ Preda 1998, p. 113-114.

³⁰ One hundred and fifty years later, archaeologists were to find the rest of the pot, with the complete inscription DECEBALVS PER SCORILO, consisting of a pair of stamps imprinted four times (Daicoviciu et al. 1955, p. 201-202; Daicoviciu et al. 1957, p. 259). 7 of the 8 stamps were found, the only missing fragment being discovered in 1803, and which Daicoviciu was not aware of.

³¹ Jakó 1971, p. 442.

diggings had been organized and they had revealed enough archaeological material to prove the non-Roman origin of the ruins.

The engineering major Péchy Mihály³² was most convinced that the ruins were of Roman origin. Dispatched by his superiors in 1805 to inspect the ruins, he drew up a report that had echoes in the epoch. Having an architecture background education, he was influenced by what he knew from Greek-Roman architecture and looked for analogies. Thus, he considered that at Grădişte there was a *monopteros*-type temple, similar to the one at Pozzuoli (speaking, in fact, of the large, circular temple) and a Roman bath (the group of buildings located south of the fortification). According to him, that was a Roman township, and not a city proper, for it was located in such an unfavorable, barren area, surrounded by mountains and with no strategic value. Moreover, the area surrounded by walls was too small for a real city, said he, so it could only be a rural settlement, used by the Romans for relaxation in the summer time. The presence of some ceramic pipelines and of a “bath” made him identify the place with antique *Aquae*, whose coordinates, given by Ptolemy, roughly corresponded with those of Grădişte³³.

Kövári László³⁴, who wrote in 1866 about the architectural monuments of Transylvania, listed the “Roman city” of Grădiştea Muncelului among the 4 largest Roman cities he knew, alongside *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*, *Apulum* and *Salinae* (Turda), maybe under the influence of Péchy’s opinion³⁵.

³² Well known Hungarian neoclassic architect (1755-1819). Born in Álmosd, he studied military engineering at the *Theresianum* of Vienna, and also the fine arts. He took part in the battles against the Turks and Napoleon and was a war prisoner in Constantinople for two years. He climbed the military ladder up to the rank of a general (1813). He is to be credited for edifices as the Reform Church of Debrecen or the Reform College from the same town.

³³ Jakó 1973, p. 634-635; Péchy 1805.

³⁴ Hungarian historian and statistician (1819 Turda - 1907 Cluj-Napoca), member of the Hungarian Academy of Science, he was a prolific author, also interested by the antique period of Transylvania.

³⁵ Kövári 1866, p. 19-20.

G.A.T. Davies³⁶, too, seemed to be influenced by Péchy and wrote in 1913 that, after the conquest, this place became, for the outstanding figures of the Roman province, a recreational, *villegiatura* spot, or a place for hunting trips, after they went for treatment at Germisara or Aquae³⁷. So, he did not identify its vestiges with those of antique Aquae, whose location on the territory of the actual town of Călan had already been established³⁸. The Roman presence is demonstrated, according to Davies, by the stone pool, destroyed, in his opinion, by the „vandals” of Orăștie who used to come to Muncel to spend „a Roman vacation”.

The time of professionals: Decebalus’ second residence

The Saxon historian Joseph Karl Eder³⁹ is, most probably, the first to suggest the Dacian origin of this fortress, in a text about the golden coins discovered by the treasure hunters at Grădiștea Muncelului, published in August 1803 in *Zeitschrift von und für Ungarn*. He had the intuition that those vestiges were of Dacian origin and he assigned them to Decebalus who, in his opinion, would have taken refuge there after the first war with Trajan and would have built the fortress with a defensive purpose. Eder started from the idea expressed by historian Konrad Mannert, who claimed that these mountains

³⁶ British historian, professor of Roman history at the University of Aberdeen. Interested mainly in the reconstitution of the routes of the Roman army in Dacia during the two Dacian wars, based on the bas-reliefs of Trajan’s Column and the field data, he looked for information related to the mountainous area where the Dacian fortresses were located (and the Roman march camps) and he even went to the place in 1913. His trip was enabled by a research grant offered by Carnegie Trust.

³⁷ Davies 1917, p. 77.

³⁸ See for eg. Neigebauer 1851, p. 91-92, RE II (1895), col. 294.

³⁹ Saxon historian, philologist and pedagogue (1760-1810). Born in Brașov, he was a Ph.D. and headmaster of the Teacher Training School of Sibiu. He had a rich activity in publishing and science. Emperor Francis I awarded him the gold medal for arts and science.

were a refuge place for Decebalus, chased away from his own residence; yet, Konrad Mannert ignored the existence of the ruins of Grădiştea Muncelului, still little known to the educated public in the 18th century, when he was writing⁴⁰. Mannert's supposition was correct, and when Eder found out about the treasure-hiding ruins, he correlated the information coming from antique sources with the new discoveries and came up with the idea that this fortress belonged to Decebalus.

Eder's idea related to Decebalus' refuge fortress was going to take roots in the meantime and even to be included in popular tradition. As shown before, the legend of the White King, who had taken refuge in that fortress, seems to be the very popular transposition of this early interpretation of the role played by the fortress on Grădiştea Hill.

When, in 1838, priest Michael Ackner⁴¹ was visiting, for the first time, the ruins from Grădiştea Muncelului, his main documentary source was Major Péchy's report, which influenced him in interpreting some monuments, but not in interpreting the entire site. Thus, he, too, spoke about a circular temple and a "bath", but, as a connoisseur of Greek and Roman antiquities, he was convinced from the very beginning that the ruins of Grădişte could not be Roman. In the report drawn up after his 1838 visit, he said that they probably belong to the second residence of the Dacian king⁴². Another important

⁴⁰ Eder 1803, p. 117; Finály 1916, p. 13-14.

⁴¹ Saxon by origin, Michael Ackner (1782-1862) was born in Sighişoara and attended middle school in Sibiu. His higher education was acquired in Wittenberg and Göttingen, specializing in philosophy and theology, but he also studied history, philology, natural science, the history of medicine and other subjects. For a few years he studied philology and archaeology at the Middle school of Sibiu, and starting 1821 he was a priest in Guşteriţa (Sibiu). Between 1832 and 1847 he traveled a lot in search of Dacian and Roman vestiges, collected antiquities and minerals and wrote several works on archaeology and natural history. He took two trips to the ruins of Grădiştea Muncelului, in 1838 and 1847, and he published his observations in 1844 and 1856. For further information on his life and activity, see Wollmann 1982.

⁴² Ackner 1844, p. 17.

contribution of his is the fact that he noticed the Greek influence in the technique of wall construction. His visits at the ruins of Fețele Albe and Piatra Roșie, where he saw constructions that are similar in style to those of Grădișteța Muncelului, deepened his conviction that they are pre-Roman vestiges that make up a system with a strategic role.

J.F. Neigebaur⁴³, another good connoisseur of Roman civilization, claimed in his 1851 book that the ruins of Grădișteța Muncelului, which he had visited a few years before, are obviously non-Roman⁴⁴. He avoided saying whom that fortress belonged to, but he knew the diggings at the break of the century aimed Decebalus' treasures, which shows that he was familiar with the version of a Dacian origin.

For the Saxon historian Karl Gooss⁴⁵ it was obvious that he was dealing with a pre-Roman fortress where Romans may have also lived after having conquered Dacia. Just like Ackner, he noted the similitude between its construction technique and that of other nearby fortresses (Costești, Piatra Roșie, the settlement of Fețele Albe – considered to be a fortress at that time). Moreover, he justly noticed that the considerable

⁴³ Johann Ferdinand Neigebaur was born in 1783 in Silesia, in Dittmannsdorf, as son of a Lutheran preacher. He studied theology and law at Königsberg. He was prefect of Luxemburg, legal counselor by several higher court rooms, director of the regional law Court of Fraustadt and of the criminal section of the regional Higher Court of Bromberg. After he retired, he was sent to Iași, as general consul of Prussia for Țările Române. He was revoked in the autumn of 1845. A tireless researcher of classic antiquity, passionate archaeologist and collector, after dismissal, Neigebaur focused upon scientific research mainly. In the period 1846-1850 he took several trips to Transylvania, in order to investigate the Roman and Dacian vestiges. He reached Grădișteța Muncelului in 1847. The result of his research was a work published in 1851. He died in 1866. See also Docea 2000, p. 84-85.

⁴⁴ Neigebaur 1851, p. 104.

⁴⁵ Saxon historian from Sighișoara (1844-1891). He studied in Heidelberg, Jena and Berlin and was a middle school teacher in Sighișoara. His main preoccupation was the history and archaeology of Roman Dacia. Gooss has drawn up a compendium of the archaeological discoveries from Transylvania for an international congress held in Budapest, which he published in 1876.

number of gold coins discovered around the fortress is a proof of its importance in the pre-Roman period⁴⁶.

The amplest debates of the time on the origin of the ruins are to be found in the report made by Friedrich and Heinrich Müller⁴⁷, who visited the fortress in 1880. They analyzed the archaeological material they found on the site and discovered a series of non-Roman characteristics. Thus, the bricks, which were a building material most widely used by the Romans, are very rare here, the roof tiles are thinner than the Roman ones, the coins that were discovered belonged to a period that preceded Trajan's conquest of Dacia. Moreover, the immense quantity of polished stone, transported from far away, with huge efforts and at high costs, could not represent the work of the Roman soldiers. According to the two authors, they had much more important tasks in the province. They carried on their argumentation mentioning that the place was of no interest from the military point of view, an idea that had already been expressed by Major Péchy, at the beginning of the century. Finally, in their opinion, the stronghold does not observe the building rules of Roman military camps or cities. Starting from the studies on Pompeii, made by German professor Heinrich Nissen, published a few years before, they showed that the fortifications of Grădiștea Muncelului cannot be Roman. Friedrich and Heinrich Müller stated that there could not be a Roman military camp and neither a fortified town, after having analyzed the shape of the enclosure, the

⁴⁶ Gooss 1876, p. 39-40.

⁴⁷ Friedrich Müller (1828-1915) was born in Sighișoara, and Heinrich Müller (1856-1928) in Sibiu. Friedrich, the more famous of the two, was a historian, Doctor of Philosophy and Theology, former Lutheran pastor and bishop. Heinrich was a middle school teacher and later on, custodian of the Bruckenthal museum. Members of the Association *Verein für siebenbürgische Landeskunde* and contributors to the *Archiv des Vereins für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, the two decided to take a longer trip through Hațeg county and in the neighborhood of Orăștie, in order to see as many sites and historical monuments as possible and to write about them in the journal. On this occasion, they also reached, in 1880, the ruins of Grădiștea Muncelului.

structure of the walls, the positioning of the gates, the materials used, the location and, of course, the enormous amount of work needed for the walls to be built. They agreed with Ackner and Gooss about the building of the walls by Greek and Roman craftsmen who were in the service of the last Dacian king⁴⁸. Still, they added, the situation is confusing and archaeologists must start serious researches in order to clear up the origin of these ruins.

The one who insisted most upon the idea that the fortress of Grădiştea Muncelului belonged to Decebalus was Téglás Gábor⁴⁹, who visited the fortress in 1884. He did some diggings at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, being convinced (just as everybody in that time) that below its ruins lie those of the Dacian capital, and he tried to understand the development of the last war with Trajan. Analyzing the images on Trajan's Column, he noticed that the Dacian fortresses represented there lie in mountainous zones, and the finale of the last war cannot be placed in Haţeg lowlands. Studying the terrain and visiting almost all the fortresses in the area (Grădiştea Muncelului, Costeşti-Cetăţuie, Costeşti-Blidaru, Piatra Roşie, Băniţa, Cugir, Ardeu, Troianul from Ponorici, Tilişca) he concluded that they represent a large and complex defensive system, having in its

⁴⁸ Müller, Müller 1880, p. 295 and the following.

⁴⁹ Born in Braşov, Téglás Gábor (1848-1916) studied at the Bethlen College of Aiud and his higher education was completed at the Faculty of Letters and Arts of Budapest. From 1871 he was a teacher at the Science High School of Deva, which he also headed between 1883-1903, developing an outstanding career of pedagogue. Keenly interested in the history and natural conditions of the county, he did research in the field of archaeology and natural science. He contributed in 1880, to the foundation of the Society of History and Archaeology of Hunedoara county, whose member he was until his death and whose museum he headed for 23 years. He had a prolific activity within the Society, having numberless initiatives, researches and scientific publications in the field of pre-history, the history of Roman Dacia, but also pre-Roman Dacia, as well as several widespread science texts. He was a member of the Hungarian Academy of Science. After he was pensioned, he retired to Budapest. For his life and activity, see Bajusz *online* and Gáll 2014.

center the large fortress from Grădiște, where Decebalus took refuge after his capital was conquered⁵⁰.

The report written in 1916 by the Hungarian scholar Finály Gabor⁵¹, who visited the fortress together with two colleagues, brought no information related to an eventual role of the vestiges. Finály said from the very beginning that it is a Dacian fortress and he was impressed by the outstanding power and richness of its builders, alongside with the entire system of fortresses that surround it. He avoided any speculation as to their destination and the way these “unknown fortresses, veiled in mystery” disappeared, but he admitted that the fortress of Grădiștea Muncelului is the center of a zone, an urban area, a real town⁵².

Iulian Marțian⁵³ also claimed in 1921, that the ruins of Grădiștea Muncelului belong to Decebalus’ second capital, a most important town, whose name we ignore⁵⁴.

The time of experts: the identification with Sarmizegetusa Regia

The debut of systematic archaeological diggings brought a new interpretation of the mysterious ruins in the mountains

⁵⁰ Particularly Téglás 1905.

⁵¹ Archaeologist, linguist and pedagogue, Finály Gábor (1871-1951) was born and lived in Cluj until 1893. Between 1893 and 1913 he was a teacher at Barcsay High School (today Madách Imre) of Budapest, then he was appointed headmaster of Kölcsey Ferenc Middle School, position held until 1933. He was interested in the history of the Roman provinces Pannonia and Dacia and he drew up a map of Roman Hungary. He was a corresponding member of the German Archaeological Institute and a member of the Hungarian Academy of Science. He died in Budapest.

⁵² Finály 1916, p. 42 and the following.

⁵³ Romanian historian (1867-1937), born at Mintiu (Bistrița-Năsăud County). He joined the army and climbed the hierarchical ladder up to the rank of major. He withdrew from the army in order to deal with science. He was interested in the antique history of Transylvania and published an archaeological repertoire. He was an honor member of the Romanian Academy.

⁵⁴ Marțian 1921, p. 38-39.

and that made for a revision of the idea according to which Decebalus' residence would be in Hațeg lowlands. Archaeologist D.M. Teodorescu from Cluj was the one who dared to come up with a new vision, stating two things. Firstly, he convincingly pointed out that the Dacian capital could not be at Grădiștea Hațegului, below the ruins of the Roman one. Secondly, as a result of the diggings he did together with Al. Ferenczi at the site of Grădiștea Muncelului, he came to suppose, as early as 1923 that, in reality, there was Decebalus' capital. Such a display of forces, said Teodorescu, such a complex defensive system could not represent just a final solution, a refuge place after the defeat of the supposed capital. It was the capital itself, in all its splendor, he added, and it just started to reveal itself to the archaeologists. It is true that Teodorescu was somewhat doubtful about it, hoping that the future diggings would clear things up.⁵⁵

A few years later, after the diggings at the Dacian fortress from Costești, speaking about the defensive system around the fortress of Grădiștea Muncelului, Teodorescu stated again that Roman Sarmizegetusa from Hațeg lowlands has nothing to do with the capital of the Dacian kings⁵⁶.

Returning to Grădiștea Muncelului at the beginning of the 30's, Teodorescu published a report of his researches. This time, although admitting again that it is the Dacian capital, and although assigning the grandiose andesite constructions to Decebalus' age, he avoided to mention its antique name⁵⁷.

Yet, the idea had started to make its way in the epoch. Young geographer Ion Conea⁵⁸, writing about king Mihai's 1935 visit to the Dacian fortresses, mentioned the fact that the king was guided to the Costești fortresses by D.M. Teodorescu

⁵⁵ Teodorescu 1923, p. 23-24.

⁵⁶ Teodorescu 1929, p. 291 și n. 1.

⁵⁷ Teodorescu 1932, p. 65.

⁵⁸ Considered to be one of the greatest Romanian geographers (1902-1974), geopolitician, specialist in historical geography and toponymy.

himself. Although the weather did not permit them to visit the large fortress from Grădiștea Hill, Teodorescu pointed out that on the hill slope descending from Muncel lies „Sarmizegetusa the Great”, Burebista’s capital and later Decebalus’⁵⁹.

The sensational piece of news that, finally, Decebalus’ legendary capital was found, had started being released by the press. It was even covered by foreign publications. It was the time of the great discoveries, the great explorers, and such news was meant to satisfy the public thirst for sensational information about unknown places. In this pioneering spirit, in the summer of 1934, a special correspondent of *The New York Times* announced that, finally, the capital of the Dacian kingdom, the legendary town of Decebalus, Trajan’s fierce enemy, had been discovered⁶⁰. Although the ruins had been known for a long time, their identification with the old Dacian capital represented a sensational subject for the press, which presented the information under the form of a breaking news discovery.

So, in the interwar period, the idea of two capitals bearing the same name started shaping up: the Dacian capital - up in the mountains, and the Roman one, close to Hațeg. Nevertheless, quite a lot of time had to elapse until the still uncertain identification of the ruins from Grădiște with antique *Sarmizegethusa to Basileion* was accepted. In fact, the idea was going to be “rediscovered” a couple of decades later, because Teodorescu would never be quoted as author of this interpretation.

Constantin Daicoviciu was not convinced from the beginning by his professor’s interpretation. Yet, even he was aware that it was not near Hațeg that the residence of the Dacian kings had to be looked for. As early as 1924, in his Ulpia Traiana diggings report, he came up with the idea

⁵⁹ Conea 1936, p. 173-174.

⁶⁰ See the newspaper *Adevărul /Hunedoara*, 10 October 2012 and 26 December 2015.

that the Dacian place name *Sarmizegetusa* might have been the name of a small township in the vicinity of the future Roman capital, whose entire name was *Colonia Ulpia Traiana Augusta Dacica Sarmizegetusa*. In his opinion, Dio Cassius referred to the Roman town when he said that the Romans left a garrison at Sarmizegetusa, and Decebalus' capital, simply called *basileion* by the Greek historian⁶¹, could have had any name, left unmentioned by the written sources. He was not at all confused by Ptolemy, who clearly mentioned a *Sarmizegethusa to Basileion*, saying that he could have made a confusion⁶².

A decade and a half later, Daicoviciu acknowledged that the fortress from Grădiștea Muncelului could have been Decebalus' fortress but he said it would be too much to refer to it as a proper capital. Although Teodorescu's diggings had brought up new information, and he had expressed his point of view in his publications, for Daicoviciu there were not enough arguments that there would have existed a Dacian capital in the proper sense of the word. Located at the bottom of a narrow valley, on an insignificant contributor of the Mureș, this fortress, together with the fortifications around it, concurs, said Daicoviciu, with the character of small sovereignty, such as Burebista's and Decebalus' was in the beginning. Later on, when their power extended over a larger territory, this nook, hidden in the mountains, could have been used as a refuge and last resistance center⁶³.

But the extensive diggings started in 1950 were going to change his vision. In a 1951 paper, C. Daicoviciu acknowledged that the political and religious center of the Dacian rule, the

⁶¹ The fact that Dio Cassius did not mention every time the complicated Dacian name of Decebalus' capital, preferring to use the term *basileion*, does not mean that he did not know it. Not even the location of that military unit (*stratopedon*) at Ulpia Traiana is certain, a series of researchers acknowledged that this event happened in the very Dacian capital (see above the bibliography of the problem at note no. 6).

⁶² Daicoviciu 1924, p. 225, n. 1.

⁶³ Daicoviciu 1938, p. 30 and 37.

antique *Sarmizegetusa to basileion*⁶⁴ lay on Grădiştea Hill. At the same time, the first research report, published in the same year, claimed that there could not be a permanent residence of the Dacian kings. Neither the climate, nor the location favored such an interpretation, he said. Until then, Daicoviciu had thought that at Grădiştea Muncelului could have been a (humble) residence of the Dacian kings, but now, he changed his mind. The unveiling a large area of the site, particularly the sacred zone, convinced him that the religious and political center of the Dacians, must have been there, but not the royal capital. On the other hand, the diggings done at Costeşti-Cetăţuie in the previous years, where important palace towers had been revealed, made him agree that that was the permanent, everyday, royal residence⁶⁵. The name *Sarmizegetusa* was avoided in this report, as well as in the following ones, a somewhat natural thing, considering that its epithet (*to basileion*) showed, beyond any doubt, that *Sarmizegetusa* must have been the residence of the Dacian kings. Daicoviciu was at a loss: he acknowledged that there, on Grădiştea Hill, was Dacian *Sarmizegetusa*, but, in his opinion, *Sarmizegetusa* was not a *regia*, a royal residence. In spite of all these, said he, it was the political center of Dacian rule, a contradiction very hard to solve.

The 1951 researches revealed the ampleness of the civilian settlements, the numerous terraces with dwellings and workshops, the conclusion being that, besides being a religious and military center, it was also a political and administrative center, a *polis*, as Ptolemy put it. Nevertheless, insisted Daicoviciu, this center could *not* be considered a real *capital* of a slave kingdom: it might have probably reached this status in time, if the Roman conquest had not intervened⁶⁶.

Again, in the reports made the following years, the archaeologist from Cluj would avoid the identification of the site with the celebrated *Sarmizegetusa Regia*. It was not

⁶⁴ Daicoviciu, Ferenczi 1951, p. 64.

⁶⁵ Daicoviciu et al. 1951, p. 125-126.

⁶⁶ Daicoviciu et al. 1952, p. 307.

until 1955 that this identification was acknowledged for the first time in the diggings reports, yet this acknowledgement appeared only in the part of report signed by I.H. Crişan⁶⁷. Yet, it would remain marginal, the most frequent phrase used to name it being “The Great Fortress”. Actually, the issue of the royal residence would inflame the spirits for a long time: it was said either that this was at Costeşti, or that it was at Grădiştea Muncelului, but only after Burebista’s death, when it was moved there from Costeşti, or that it had the role of a capital only in the time of Duras-Decebalus⁶⁸. The problem could not be given a solution as long as archaeologists did not succeed in identifying in the site from Grădiştea Hill a „palace”, a royal residence, a residential complex or any other construction worth of a royal court.

Things seemed to be clear for Daicoviciu as far as Burebista’s epoch was concerned. In the 1960 treatise of Romanian history, he claimed that at Costeşti seems to have been the king’s permanent royal residence, while the fortress on Grădiştea Hill, Sarmizegetusa Regia, was only used as a „refuge fortress in hard times”⁶⁹. But he avoided to say if this situation was preserved during the following epochs, until the Roman conquest.

From this moment on, the name of the Dacian capital appeared in headlines, but in the digging reports it was not used until Hadrian Daicoviciu took over the site management⁷⁰.

Contestations and questions

It is well known nowadays that the entire Grădiştea Hill was covered by a huge city, extended along an axis of about 6 km which, at its climax had several thousand inhabitants⁷¹.

⁶⁷ Daicoviciu et al. 1957, p. 262.

⁶⁸ For the entire analysis related to the royal residence, see Peţan 2014.

⁶⁹ Daicoviciu et al. 1960, p. 283-284.

⁷⁰ See, for instance Daicoviciu, Daicoviciu 1960; Daicoviciu et al. 1979 ş.a.

⁷¹ Glodariu 1994, p. 19.

The civil habitation developed particularly in the 1st century A.D.⁷². In the center of this city there were the fortification and the sacred zone. Yet, a basic element is missing, which made it difficult to accept the identification of this township with Sarmizegetusa Regia: a royal residence. Despite century long researches done on this site, no “palace” or residential complex to be assigned to the king has been discovered. For this reason, many researchers admit that, at least in Burebista’s times, the royal residence was in the fortress from Costești, where two impressive dwelling towers were discovered⁷³.

Still, the question remains: where was the royal residence in the time of Decebalus and the kings preceding him? Even if we are talking about a “barbarian” capital, outside the Greek and Roman world, we would expect it to be organized under the influence of the external models. Actually, the aristocratic dwellings from Piatra Roșie, Costești-Cetățuie, Popești and others show that such “palaces” existed at that time⁷⁴.

Sarmizegetusa Regia represents the Latin form, to be found in the mediaeval Latin translations of Ptolemy’s text, for the Greek *Sarmizegetusa to basileion, regia / to basileion*, meaning „royal residence”, „palace”. It is impossible to logically talk about

⁷² Florea 2011, p. 132.

⁷³ There has been much talk on Burebista’s residence, but very little about Decebalus’. According to Vasile Pârvan, „the capital was where the king was. All the fortresses along the borders and important roads were his capitals” (Pârvan 1926, 81), an idea embraced by I.H. Crișan, in whose conception the capital was nowhere, Burebista being a „conqueror-king”, who moved a lot and had no stable residence (Crișan 1977, p. 121-124). For Constantin and Hadrian Daicoviciu, followed by Ioan Glodariu, Burebista’s residence was at Costești-Cetățuie (Daicoviciu et al. 1951, p. 126; Daicoviciu 1972, p. 53; Glodariu 1995, p. 129). The idea of multiple capitals or of a moving capital was not excluded by Daicoviciu and Glodariu either, even if both subscribed to the identification of Costești with Burebista’s capital (Daicoviciu 1960, p. 284; Glodariu 2010, p. 673). Karl Strobel also contested Sarmizegetusa Regia’s role of royal residence in the time of Burebista, but not in the time of Duras and Decebalus (Strobel 1998, p. 85).

⁷⁴ Nevertheless, we know too little about the tastes, exigencies and township needs of a Dacian royal court, located in the mountains at that time (see also Glodariu 1983, p. 25).

Sarmizegethusa to basileion in the absence of a royal residence. The location of the site in a hard to reach area, the desire to stress the religious role of the place against the political one, the absence of a palace, or a residential complex at royal standards, as well as other reasons, determined some researchers and dabblers to look for the capital of the Dacian Kingdom elsewhere, developing various insufficiently documented theories.

In 1937, Constantin Zagoriț, a colonel and topographer, disputed the location of the Dacian Sarmizegetusa in the Orăștie Mountains and claimed that the Dacian capital was at Subcetate-Hațeg, where he had identified a fortification⁷⁵. According to Nicolae Iorga, this identification is risky, but the rejection of the identification with the fortress near Orăștie is well-founded⁷⁶. In the same year, as a result of Zagoriț's publication, archaeological diggings were done at Subcetate and it was proved that all the materials found there belong to the first Iron Age⁷⁷. The researches were resumed at the beginning of the 80's, when it was reconfirmed that the site is a fortified settlement from the mid and final Hallstatt period. Moreover, it was found that the culture layer is thin, and the archaeological material is poor, which might lead to the idea of a sporadic settlement, being, probably a refuge place⁷⁸. However, recently, publisher Gligor Hașa recalls Zagoriț's idea and insists that Sarmizegetusa Regia was at Subcetate-Hațeg, ignoring that the fortification had been researched by the archaeologists for a long time and it was established beyond any doubt that it belonged to the pre-Dacian epoch⁷⁹.

⁷⁵ Constantin Zagoriț, *Sarmizegethusa, I-III* (I. Unde cred că s-a găsit în adevăr, întemeiat pe considerațiuni militare, geografice, topografice și fortificațiuni găsite pe teren; II. Alte păreri cu răspunsuri cuvenite. Dovada hotărâtoare că Sarmizegethusa s-a găsit acolo unde am afirmat eu; III. Unde cred că s-a găsit Sarmizegethusa Dacică), Ploiești, 1937.

⁷⁶ Iorga 1942, p. 101.

⁷⁷ Moga 1941.

⁷⁸ Vasiliev, Andrițoiu 1985.

⁷⁹ Gligor Hașa, *Hațeg-Adevărată Sarmizegetusa*, prefaced by Vladimir Brilinsky, Deva, 2011.

Another dabbler is film director Timotei Ursu, who claimed that *Regia* was located on the place of the future Roman capital, Ulpia Traiana, in Hațeg county⁸⁰. It is useless to mention that the decade-long archaeological researches never showed any Dacian trace at that spot.

There are also some nowadays specialists who do not agree with the identification of Sarmizegetusa Regia with the fortress of Grădiștea Muncelului. Zoe Petre thinks that the placement of the Dacian capital in the Orăștie Mountains (at least in the times of Burebista) by the archaeologists from Cluj was politically determined and related to the historiographic controversies of the time⁸¹. Coriolan Opreanu pointed out that one cannot speak of a *Regia* when there is no royal residence and he thought that it had to be looked for elsewhere, maybe in the neighborhood of the site on Grădiștea Hill⁸².

It must be stressed that the researches on Grădiștea Hill and the interpretations given to the existing diggings represent just a stage, which, according to many critics, does not meet all the exigencies of modern research⁸³. Therefore, a final verdict with respect to the inexistence of a royal residence cannot be given at this moment. The extremely low percentage of the site being researched is also relevant. At the same time, no other site identified up to the present in the inner Carpathian

⁸⁰ Timotei Ursu, *Pledoarii pro-dacice*, Cluj-Napoca, 2009; Timotei Ursu, *Kogaion*, Cluj-Napoca, 2011.

⁸¹ Zoe Petre, *Cum au reinventat istoricii comuniști biografia lui Burebista*, *Historia*, no. 120, December 2011.

⁸² Opreanu 1999-2000, p. 151-152, 164.

⁸³ Unfortunately, after so many decades of research, no monograph of this site has been published, and the thematic works are rare. Karl Strobel's critical observation related to the unsatisfactory stage of publishing the results of the researches from Sarmizegetusa Regia is still actual (Strobel 1998, p. 82-83; see also Strobel 2010, p. 232). It goes the same for Kris Lockyear's observations with respect to the utmost priority of publishing some complete digging reports, not published, or partially published (Lockyear 2004, p. 69). Harsh criticism of the research methods used on this site can be found in Coriolan Opreanu's recent articles (Opreanu 2015; Opreanu 2016) and in Strobel's publications (e.g. Strobel 2010, p. 231-233).

area corresponds to the requirements of a royal capital, the settlement from Grădișteea de Munte being, by far, the widest, most complex, richest and most important one in the entire pre-Roman Dacia. Its position, in the center of a large group of settlements and fortresses, the presence of a monumental sacred zone⁸⁴, the network of ridge roads connecting it to all the important communication ways of the time, the huge investments in town works (hundreds of artificial terraces, roads, supporting walls, water supply networks and others) the habitation density, the rich economical resources (particularly related to iron, but also to bronze, precious metals and even glass processing), the impressive quantity of precious metals discovered in the area (gold coins and jewelry, identified by illegal detection), the luxury imports from the Greek and Roman world and many other arguments plead for the identification of the impressive settlement of Grădișteea Hill with Sarmizegetusa Regia either during the entire period of the Dacian Kingdom or only in the latter part of it. What is left to be done is for the archaeologists to clarify the chronology of the site and to discover the “palace” where the Dacian kings actually lived.

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⁸⁴ The legitimation of the political power by religious instruments and even the association between the king and the great priest in the leadership are suggested by literary sources, see Strabo, VII, 3, 5; Jordanes, *Getica*, XI, 67 and 71, XII, 73.

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