

Closing a Gap. A Roman Fort Rediscovered*

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The mapping and recording of the forts and military infrastructure of the Roman defensive system on the Lower Danube were topics constantly mirrored in archaeological publications. Following new data gathered, this paper aims to outline, the location of an important fort in north-west Dobruja, close to the Danube curvature (fig. 1-2). The area of interest, situated between the forts at *Troesmis* and *Noviodunum*, was particularly important for the Roman frontiers in the area. The Danube curvature corresponds to the Siret and Prut river mouths thus making the area highly vulnerable. This is one of the main reasons why the Roman garrisons were located in this area left to the Danube, both on the fort at Barboși as well as the small fortlets defending the territory delimited by the earth *vallum* Traian – Tuluțești (Țentea / Oltean 2009, 1515-1524).

Close to this area, the forts at *Arrubium* and *Troesmis* were located southwards and that at *Noviodunum* eastwards. In the framework of the discussions related to the communication means between the area within the province and the territory of Galați, one of the issues was the lack of any correspondence datable to the same period in *Dinogetia* area (we know though, that the earliest evidence on the site dates later).

If distances to *Arrubium* and onwards to *Troesmis* allow good visibility between respective forts and implicitly, good opportunities for any corresponding signalling, not the same applies to the forts east to Galați. If from a chronological point of view the forts at Barboși (Galați area) and *Dinogetia* are hard to link, an issue difficult to understand is the great

distance between the said area and *Noviodunum*. As also noticeable on the map in fig. 2, the Luncavița area constitutes a gap in the frontier within the respective territory.

The site was discussed either in syntheses on Roman borders (Polonic 1935, 18-36; Zahariade / Gudea 1997, 81, #49; Gudea 2005, 457-458, #49; Zahariade 2006, 4, 46, 118, 139, 187, 188, 190) or dictionaries, either under short mentions of archaeological research made in the respective area, yet concerning other historical periods or chance finds (Comșa 1952, 413-416; Poenaru-Bordea / Ocheșeanu 1996, 86-87, #140-141). Gudea (2005, 457-458, #49) locates erroneously at Luncavița a more recent rescue excavation carried out at Rachelu (Zahariade 1999, 202), the *quadriburgium* nearby (Băjenaru 2010, 130, #48).

Repertories texts on the limes during the Principate bring no new data compared to Polonic's plans. Noticeably, fort sizes were computed based on the plan in Tocilescu's manuscript (fig. 4): 225 × 75 m (Barnea 1996, 334); respectively 69/75 × 220 m (Zahariade / Gudea 1997, 81 #49; Gudea 2005, 457). This plan delimits the fort on three sides, the northern being seemingly destroyed by erosion.

The first known records are mentioned in Gr. Tocilescu's manuscripts (Tocilescu 1898, 100-101; Polonic 1935, 23; TIR L 35, 49), data which were often used in subsequent works. The plan was drawn up by the topographical engineer P. Polonic in the last years of the 19th century, when he was appointed by Tocilescu (at the time Director of the National Museum of Antiquities) to carry out sur-

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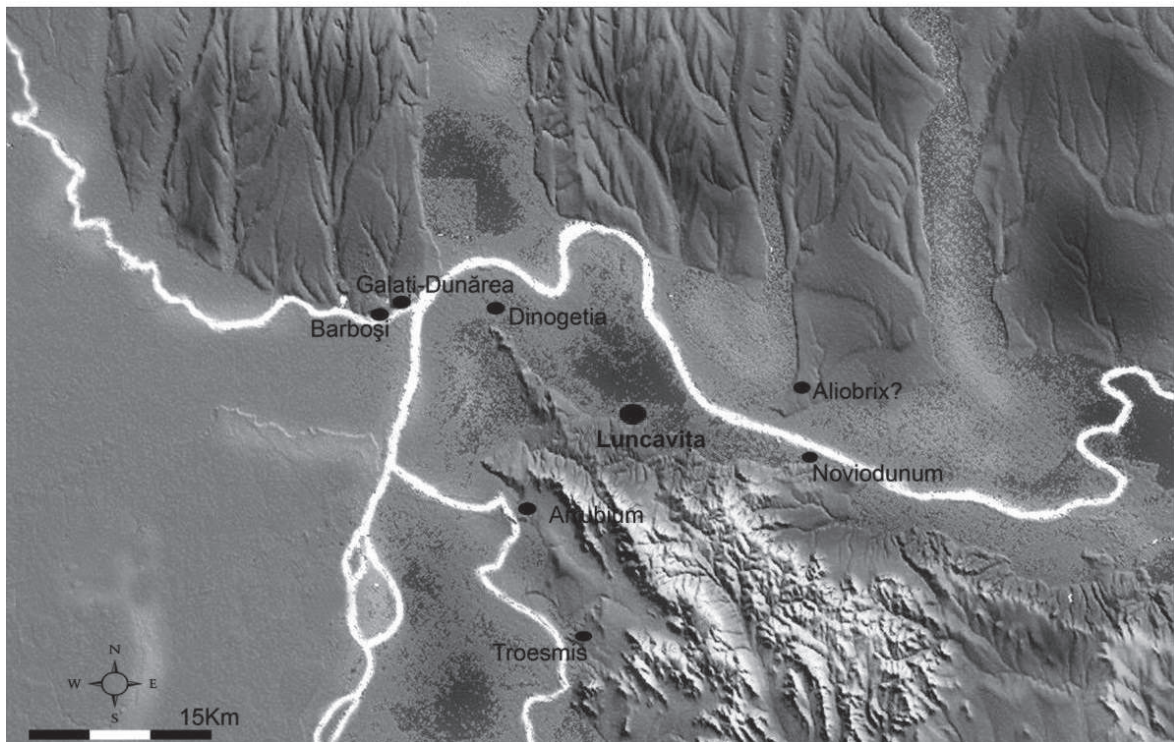


Fig. 1. Roman forts along the Danube during the Principate (after Țențea /Oltean 2009, 1516, fig. 2)

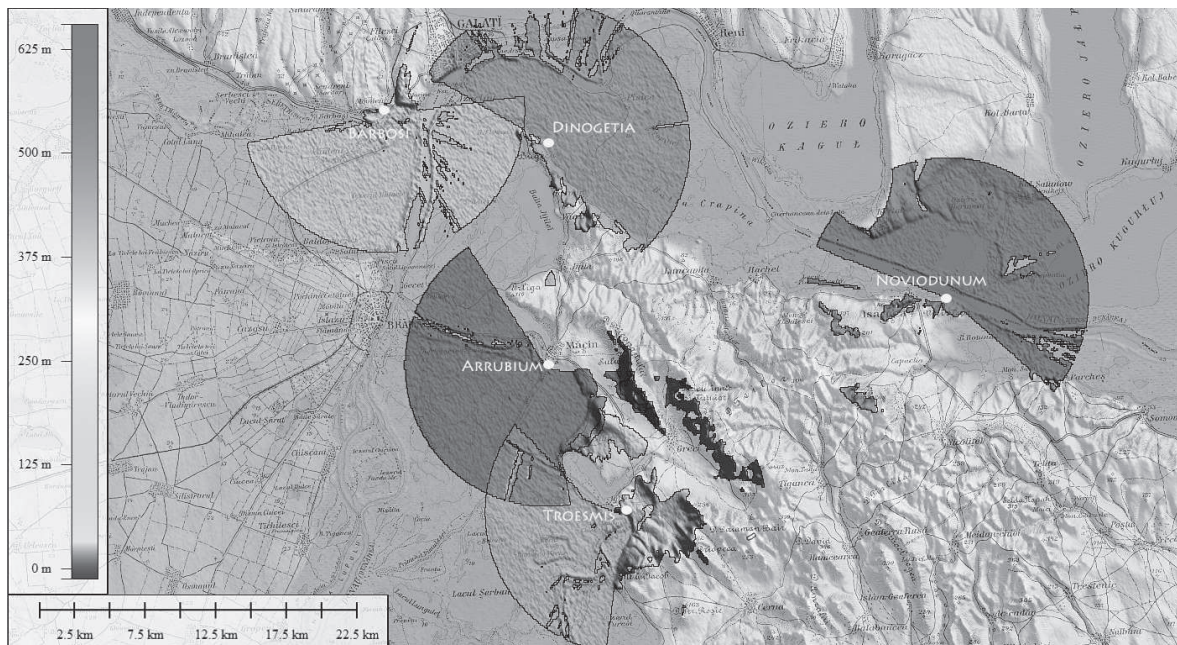


Fig. 2. Roman forts along the Danube curvature and their intervisibility

veys and surface measurements in various areas of Dobruja. These data were most likely included in *Marele dicționar geografic al României (The Great Geographical Dictionary of Romania)*, co-authored by Tocilescu and published in 1901 (Lahovari et al. 1901, 339), in the section referring to *Dealul Milan (Milan Hill)* (local toponym of the hill onto which

the discussed fort lay). Dealul Milan is a 48 m high rocky formation. From its top, among others, the forts at Garvăn (*Dinogetia*) and Galați (*Barboși*) were visible. The author of the note hypothesised on the existence of a Roman fort, also reporting that no inscriptions were discovered following the performed excavations (“not for this purpose [...] of re-

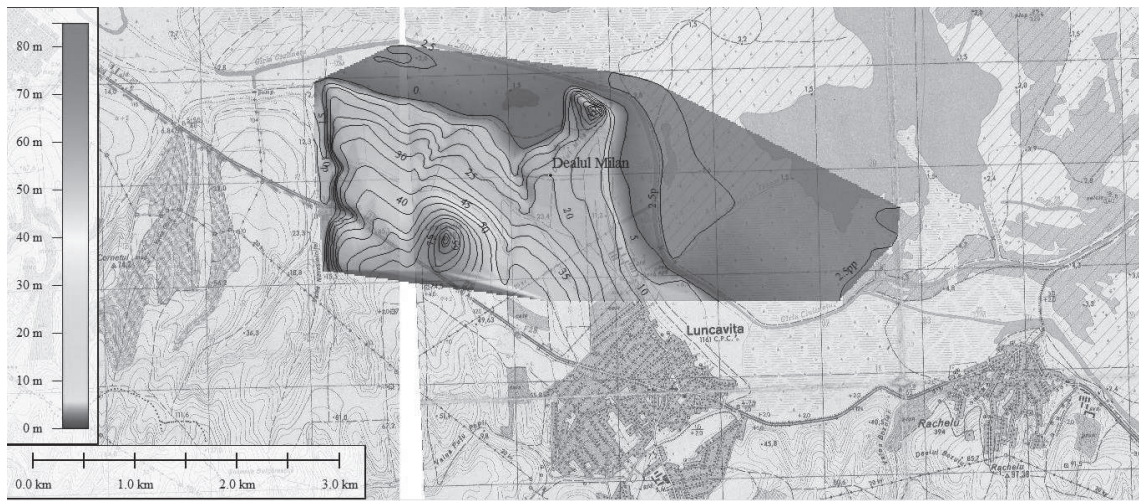


Fig. 3. Location of the fort on Milan hill compared to that of the modern settlement at Luncavița (Tulcea county)

moving stone for house building”); which made him conclude that most likely, a Turkish fortification was located there.

The pointing out of a fortification in archaeological repertoires concerning the limes during the Principate was made up to now without any novel data provided by the respective texts compared to Polonic’s plans.

Within a project, which aimed at documenting Roman borders in Romania, we investigated the Roman territory from Galați and related areas as a case study (*STRATEG. Defensive strategies and cross border policies. Integration of the Lower Danube area in the Roman civilization*, further details available at www.strateg.org.ro). The detailed examination of the orthophotoplans (fig. 6) and maps evidenced a much more complex situation than that already known from publications. We analysed in detail this matter by increasing the resolution of the relevant satellite images and using oblique aerial photos and a partial 3D scanning of the site. The scanning of the south-western area of the fort and the processing of the data resulted from this preliminary investigation was carried out by Bogdan Venedict, whom we thank this way too. On this occasion, survey measures were taken and main objectives were photographed. During the aerial reconnaissance of the area between *Troesmis* and *Halmyris*, Ioana A. Oltean (University of Exeter) and W. S. Hanson (University of Glasgow) took some aerial photos in July 2008 (fig. 5). The publication of the results is a preliminary one, being the starting point for a future project aiming at a more thorough research of the fort and its main objectives.

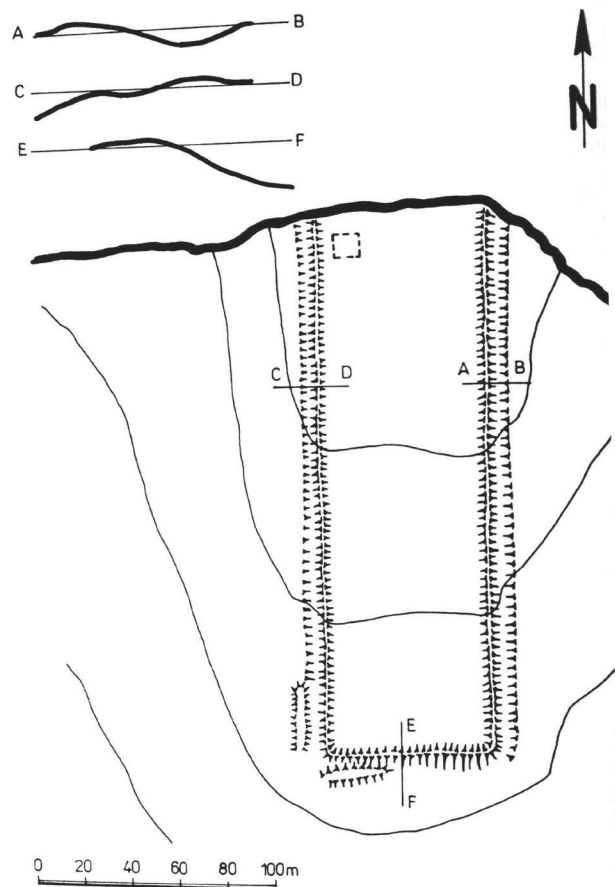


Fig. 4. Luncavița fort according to the plan drawn by P. Polonic (Tocilescu 1898, 100-101)

Which are thus the main data?

The outlines of the enclosure walls and those of certain inner buildings are clearly visible on the negatives of the walls removal trenches (fig. 5). Without being able to draw a very accurate plan, we succeeded in rendering part of the fort layout and



Fig. 5. Oblique aerial photography taken in July 2008 (Ioana A. Oltean, W. S. Hanson – STRATEG project archive)

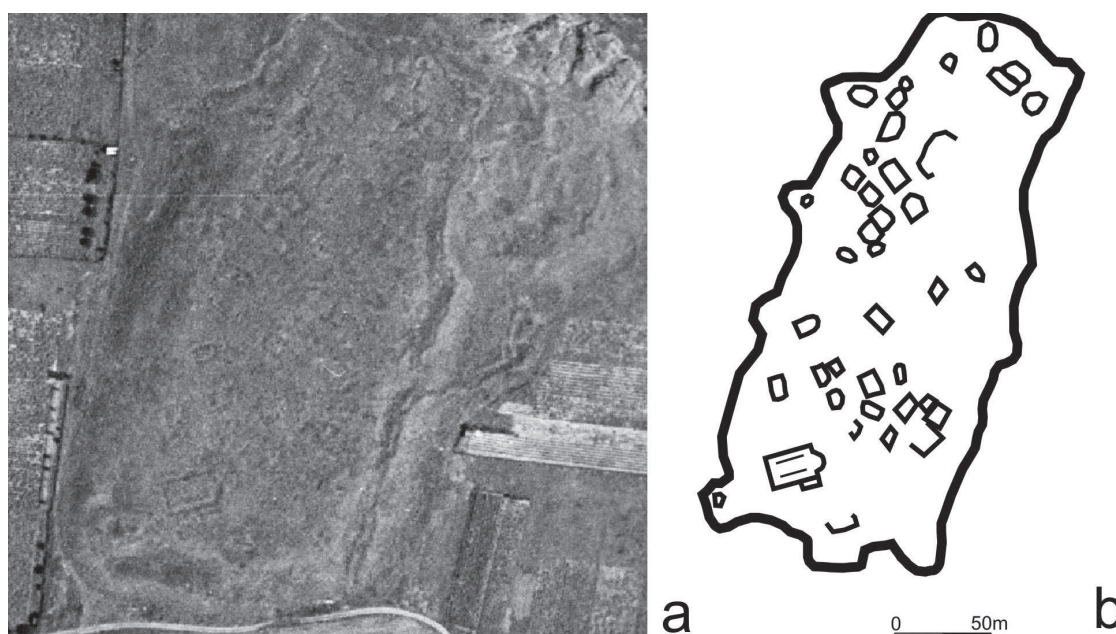


Fig. 6. a. Orthophotoplan (ANCPI – Agency for National Cadastre and Real Estate Publicity); b. Luncavița fort layout

some of the inner buildings. The deviation correlation had no major influence on the layout of the entire fort. Walls removal trenches were dug along them, tracing one of the walls sides. The quantity of earth disposed of following such works is not high, thus our observations were not much disrupted. Not the same applies to the case of clean-

ing up the enclosure walls. Their outlines are hardly noticeable, namely the watchtowers and gates. As previously mentioned, these works were carried out prior to the beginning of 20th century. The enclosure shape is rectangular, being almost double in length compared to the width (fig. 7), which also shows on Polonic's plans.

The long side, oriented north-south is 237 m long and the short varies between 87 m (northern side) and 93 m (southern side). Watchtowers and gate towers are noticeable on the eastern, southern and western sides and in the corners. The south-western tower is best visible. Three towers may be seen on each of the long sides, the gates area being only supposed. Their shape cannot be defined with precision, however they most likely must have been in a horseshoe shape, which is the most frequent tower shape in the Lower Danube area (Scythia), for instance at *Dinogetia*, *Capidava*, *Halmyris*, yet the U-shape cannot be excluded either.

A good analogy for the shape and dating of the fort is *Egeta/Brza Palanka – castellum II – Dacia Ripensis* (Băjenaru 2010, 199 #28, 295, pl. 65/ 277, 278). Other shape analogies may be established

with Vodno – “Markovi Kuli” (Dardania, near *Scupi*) (Băjenaru 2010, 47, 220, 249 pl. 10/37); *Ram / Lederata* (Băjenaru 2010, 222, 269, pl. 39/224 [2]), *Bushati* (Băjenaru 2010, 218, 239, pl. 9/30), however smaller. Analogies with the forts in closer areas may be made only in terms of surface and certain aspects related to the internal planning: *Dinogetia* (Barnea 1986, fig. 3), *Troesmis*, the western fortress (Tocilescu 1882, 105), *Salsovia* (Haynes *et al.* 2007, 135, fig. 3). None of the above analogies though have enough common elements with our case that would support any furthering of the discussion for the time being.

A number of over 30 prints delimited by stone removal trenches may be seen inside the fortification, from buildings belonging to the last inhabitation stage there. Some are irregular in shape, ovoid, yet

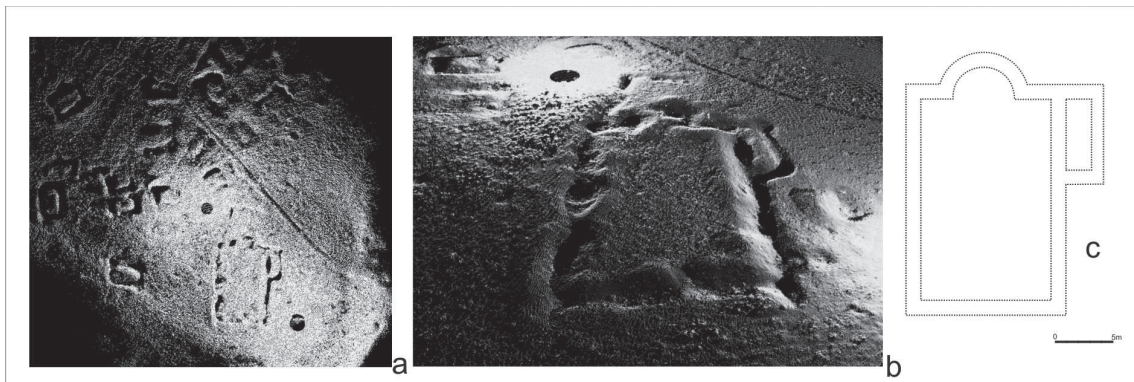


Fig. 7. Early Christian church at Luncavița. a. 3D scanning; b. 3D scanning – detail; c. Hypothetical reconstruction of the layout.



Fig. 8. Early Christian church at Luncavița – photo during the 3D scanning

the majority are rectangular. By analogy to the well known circumstances in *Capidava*, this is a fortified settlement of huts, overlapping the internal structures of the 5th-7th century Romano-Byzantine fortification (Florescu 1958, 138-152; Florescu 2001).

Among these vestiges a church located in the south-western side of the fortification is distinguishable. It (fig. 8-10) has a rectangular nave, very likely made up of a single aisle, which together with the altar apse evidences the total building length (measured onto the axis oriented east-west) to 19 m. Its width is 11 m. Sizes were calculated on the outer part of the trenches for the walls' cleaning up. In the central part on the western side becomes apparent a rather well marked curve, which must pertain to the building apse. A rectangular additional building is obvious close to the south-eastern corner, attached to the southern side. No prints of any internal divisions of the aisles or other details are noticeable. The best analogy is the church at *Capidava*, datable to the 6th century AD (Achim / Opreș 2010, 528, 533 fig. 3).

Another analogy for this building is found at *Dinogetia*, with size and proportions very much alike, similarly to the location of the building in the south-western corner of the fort (Barnea 1986, fig. 3). Additionally, at *Troesmis*, in the western fort, there is the basilica II, an edifice located north to the so-called Episcopalian basilica, resembling that in

our case (Tocilescu 1882, 105; Barnea 1948, 229, fig. 9). Below, we shall mention a few other analogies in a more recent work for easy examination: *Nicopolis ad Istrum* (Atanasov 2012, 344, fig. 13), St. Cyril (Golesh) (Atanasov 2012, 347, fig. 15), *Durostorum* (Atanasov 2012, 367, fig. 18), *Abritus* (Atanasov 2012, 367, fig. 19), Boljetin/Smorna (Băjenaru 2010, 100, 222, #48, pl. 48/242).

According to the fort features restorable upon the data available to the moment, we may argue that in the Late Roman period Luncavița becomes a pillar of strength between *Noviodunum* and *Dinogetia*. The *quadriburgium* type fort at Rachelu (Zahariade 1999, 202) is an intermediary insertion from the Tetrarchic period, meant to support the activity of the fort at Luncavița. The ancient name of the fort is unknown for now and there is no record on any of the troops garrisoned there.

A detailed analysis of the materials discovered there over time as well as of all data registered in the field would bring additional information on its history. We argue that the Late Roman fort overlapped a fortification of the Principate; the elements of both defensive structures are yet to be identified. These must have fulfilled an important function in both monitoring the afferent frontier sector, as well as in connecting the forts located close to the Danube curvature, since visibility from hill Milan was very good.

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