

THE ROMAN ROAD MONTANA – NICOPOLIS AD ISTRUM – MARCIANOPOLIS – ODESSOS

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Abstract: The road crossing the northern half of today's Bulgaria from west to east runs north of the Balkan Mountains and parallel to the *limes* road. It is only partially represented in the Tabula Peutingeriana and Itinerarium Antonini. The segment represented in the Tabula Peutingeriana is between Melta and Marcianopolis. The only intermediate station between the two is Nicopolis ad Istrum. The segment Odessos - Marcianopolis appears only in Itinerarium Antonini, and is considered part of the coast-road. The route segments that do not appear on the ancient cartographic sources were reconstructed based on field research that led to the identification of ancient road segments, traces of settlements, stations, as well as on the basis of inscriptions on milestones. These were found in Topolite, Povljanovo, Devnija, Odessos, and Tlačane. Except for the latter, they fall chronologically in the period between the reign of Gordian III (238-244) and the reign of Tacitus (275-276). Since the pieces are relatively late, the issue of dating the road is still an open question, as well as its role, in the scientific literature several suppositions were advanced over time.

Rezumat: Drumul roman care traversează jumătatea nordică a Bulgariei de astăzi de la vest la est este plasat la nord de Munții Balcani și paralel cu drumul de *limes*. Este reprezentat doar parțial în Tabula Peutingeriana și Itinerarium Antonini. Segmentul reprezentat în Tabula Peutingeriana se află între Melta și Marcianopolis, iar singura stație intermediară între cele două este Nicopolis ad Istrum. Segmentul Odessos - Marcianopolis apare numai în itinerariul antonin și este considerat parte a drumului care mergea de-a lungul țărmului Mării Negre. Traseul drumului a fost reconstituit pe baza cercetărilor de teren, care au condus la identificarea segmentelor rutiere antice, a urmelor de așezări, a stațiilor, precum și pe baza inscripțiilor de pe stâlpii miliari. Borne antice au fost descoperite la Topolite, Povljanovo, Devnija, Odessos și Tlačane. Cu excepția acesteia din urmă, ele se datează în perioada cuprinsă între domnia lui Gordian al III-lea (238-244) și cea a lui Tacitus (275-276). Aceste piese fiind relativ târzii problema datării drumului, precum și rolul său, este încă o chestiune deschisă în literatura științifică fiind avansate de-a lungul timpului mai multe ipoteze.

One of the main elements in the Roman organization of territory is the roads network. "They are not simply physical structures enabling movement towards a destination. They also embody issues of ideology, power and identity, and are intimately involved with our social constructions of the world".¹ From the Roman point of view building a coherent and functional system of roads is equal to the introduction of a certain area under the direct control and administration of the Roman authorities.²

Proper roads are absent from the pre-Roman landscape in the Lower Danube area, the existing ones being rather access routes. Their lines and directions can be reconstructed based on the information gathered from archaeological sources: researched or only identified in the field, settlements and necropoleis provide us with valuable data on this matter. The Romans "modernized" them and also built new roads in order to assure a good communication between the *limes* area and the inner part of the province, and also with the neighbouring territories. Apart from this information there are numerous other categories of sources which contribute to the reconstruction of the road network in Moesia Inferior.³ Among them the milestones are the most important.⁴

The first actions in organizing the road construction at the Lower Danube date back to the time of Augustus, become more visible in the time of Claudius and Nero,⁵ and decisive actions are recorded from Vespasian onwards.⁶ It is the emperor Trajan who really established an integrated system of roads in the area. He laid the foundations for an integrated roads system in Lower Moesia. After the conquest of Dacia, the *limes* stretched all the way to the mouths of the Danube. Gradually appearing new branches filled out the communication network. The coast-road was also modernized at this time and a road parallel to the *limes* begins to be build. Trajan's successor begins the construction of the central road running through Dobrudja,

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¹ Witcher 1997, p. 60.

² Panaite 2016, pp. 151-164.

³ Panaite 2012a, pp. 67-80.

⁴ Panaite 2015, pp. 593-600; Panaite 2012b, pp. 131-143.

⁵ Conole, Milns 1983, pp. 183-200.

⁶ Batty 2007, pp. 441-450.