

GRĂDIȘTEA DE MUNTE – SARMIZEGETUSA REGIA FORTRESS. EASTERN GATE AREA – PART. I

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Abstract: Many hypotheses have been proposed over the last decades regarding the evolution, planimetry and chronological modelling of the various phases of construction, destruction and restoration of the fortress at Grădiștea de Munte – Sarmizegetusa Regia. The archaeological data certifying the existence of a fortified site dating before the Roman conquest of the capital of the Dacian Kingdom, while not negligible, are so dissimilar that recomposing its plan becomes a significant challenge.

The present article focuses on recent archaeological discoveries in the Eastern Gate area, an important reference point for re-discussing the particularities of the initial Dacian fortress.

Rezumat: De-a lungul ultimelor decenii au fost formulate numeroase ipoteze cu privire la evoluția, planimetria și eșalonarea cronologică a diferitelor faze de construcție, distrugere, refacere ale fortificației de la Grădiștea de Munte – Sarmizegetusa Regia. Deși nu lipsesc, datele arheologice care certifică existența unei fortificații înainte de cucerirea romană a capitalei Regatului Dacic sunt atât de disparate încât recompunerea planului său întâmpină mari dificultăți.

Articolul se concentrează pe descoperirile arheologice recente din zona Porții de est care oferă un punct de reper important pentru rediscutarea particularităților fortificației dacice inițiale.

In August 1803, a few weeks after the beginning of the excavations commissioned by representatives of the Austrian tax authorities at Grădiștea de Munte, Abbot Eder (Eder József Károly) made note of carved stones and bricks, remnants of walls and of a gate, all of which, with an intuition emblematic of his erudition, he attributed to the Dacians. According to him, the last refuge of King Decebal was to be recognized there, as evidenced by the scenes on Trajan's Column describing a mountainous area where the confrontations of the second campaign against the Dacians took place, an area resembling the landscape of the "Muncel mountains".¹

Two hundred years later, some landmarks pinpointed by Eder have not changed; a series of major events of Trajan's wars with Decebal were demonstrated to have happened in front of or between the walls of the fortress at Grădiștea de Munte, while the Column exerts the same fascination on historians, archaeologists and architects, who try to classify the details of the mentioned confrontations and, not infrequently, to identify the various Dacian or Roman constructions it depicts.

The special significance (as the main scene of some of the most important classical antiquity wars in European history) was amplified by equating Grădiștea de Munte with Sarmizegetusa Regia and complicated by archaeological uncertainties. The fortified site in the capital of the Dacian Kingdom was often at the centre of academic disputes regarding the construction technique, the planimetry in the different phases, the chronology etc. Thus, for several decades, one of the objectives of the archaeological research carried out at Sarmizegetusa consisted in the discovery of structures that would provide clues regarding the Dacian fortress from the initial phase, as well as the later Roman fort.

The present article centres on one element of the fortress: *the first-phase construction in the area of what we currently call the eastern gate* which, thanks to recent archaeological endeavours, offers a starting point for the re-discussion of previously listed information.

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¹ Eder 1803, p. 117.