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# ON THE ALLEGED "ROMAN ROAD FROM LOWER MOLDAVIA"\*

**Abstract:** We shall analyse herein a few elements that do not support the existence of a road on the Barboși – Poiana - Brețcu route, as Pârvan assumed over one century ago. We shall discuss a few aspects referring to the site at Barboși, some finds in the fort at Brețcu and make a few notes on the diffusion of import goods on Siret river course.

**Keywords:** Road, frontiers, Danube, Siret, *Moesia Inferior*, *Dacia*

**Ovidiu Țentea**

National Museum of Romanian History  
ovidiu.tentea@gmail.com

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**W**e shall analyse herein a hypothesis expressed over a century ago by Vasile Pârvan, which has thus become a true historical paradigm regarding the Roman road crossing southern Moldova on the Barboși – Poiana - Brețcu route (Pl. I.1).<sup>1</sup> Above author mapped a road joining the province of *Moesia Inferior* to *Dacia*, starting with the crossing point by a supposed ford of the Danube in the Galați - Barboși area (making junction with a road coming from *Dinogetia*), following the Siret river course up to Poiana (*Piroboridava?*) and further through the pass of Oituz, to Brețcu (*Dacia Inferior*). On this occasion, finds in three important sites located along this access route, namely Poiana, Șendreni and Barboși, were analysed. Arguments in favour of an existent road there consisted in the identification of many civil settlements scattered along it<sup>2</sup>. The road would have been the most important communication way by land of the Roman period ensuring the connection between the intra-Carpathian area and the Black Sea. In many studies, this route was suggested as representing the northern border of the area entered under the control of the province of *Moesia Inferior* between Trajan's Dacian campaigns and early Hadrian's reign.

Our aim herein is to detail a few elements that do not support the existence of a road on the route imagined by Pârvan. We shall discuss a few aspects regarding the site at Barboși, some finds in the fort at Brețcu and make a few notes on the diffusion of imported products along the Siret River course.

**1.** We shall start by discussing Barboși, a site lying by the confluence of the Siret and Danube. Its early recording in the specialized literature, the substance of its historiographical significance as a "bridgehead" of Romanity in southern Moldova or a Roman *territorium* left of the Danube, were elements which drew the attention of the researchers to study these issues on many occasions<sup>2</sup>. The Traian-Tuluțești *vallum* was deemed the limit of a

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<sup>2</sup> PÂRVAN 1913, 118, Fig. 13. The *vallum* between Siret and Prut rivers and the places at Ploscuțeni and Stoicani, known in the specialty literature as *Valul lui Athanaric* (*the vallum of Athanaric*)

*territorium* that would have belonged to certain communities of no municipal status, a fact supported by the indication *q(uin)q(uennalis) ... ex de(creto) or(dinis)* in the text of the altar discovered in 1911 at Şendreni<sup>3</sup>.

The location of the fort at Barboşi during the Principate is still open to debate. The place where the Roman garrison, comprising vexillations of various military units, was situated is still unclear, although theories on its positioning vary around the promontory of Tirighina<sup>4</sup> (Pl. I.2). A functional Roman fortification at such location would be possible only starting with the edge of the plateau, yet northwards, near the road. The map published by Pârvan marks ancient *valli* in the north of the promontory of Tirighina (Pl. 2.3)<sup>5</sup>. They might have belonged to either a military or civil fortification, while subsequent to their removal, might have been overlapped by the necropolis stretching along the road. We supported the theory of the extension of the necropolis in certain areas of the site in another paper<sup>6</sup>.

The role of this area was remarkably interpreted by Pârvan as *emporium*. Thus accordingly, a very important<sup>7</sup> port and an equally important entrepreneurial area functioned there, merchandise being river-borne, was distributed from there to the entire area of Siret River basin. This explains the development of the important *dava / emporia* at Poiana, Brad or Răcătău.

We took a closer look at the site at Barboşi starting with the archaeological research carried out in 2004 in its eastern extremity, an area named after the Galaţi quarter "Dunărea". There were uncovered many graves and barrows part of the "largest Roman necropolis from Moldova"<sup>8</sup>. Following the

would have been erected in order to reinforce this road (PÂRVAN 1913, 120).  
<sup>3</sup> SĂULESCU 1991; PÂRVAN 1913, 14-27; DORUȚIU-BOILĂ 1972, 55-58; SANIE 1981, 75-111; PETCULESCU 1982, 249-253; CROITORU 2004, 80-90, 115-124; ȚENȚEA 2007, 217-225; ȚENȚEA/OLTEAN 2009, 1515-1524.

<sup>4</sup> ISM V 296: (*Herjucu{li} / Victori / L. lul(ius) Iulia / nus qui et / Rundaeio / q(uin)q(uennalis) / ex vota po / (s)u{it} l(ocus) d(atu)s ex de(creto) or(dinis)*). No traces of significant Roman buildings were identified, but only scattered pottery fragments – GOSTAR 1962, 505. Analogies with other *territoria* recorded in *Moesia Inferior*, to reference only those cases just nearby: *territorium Aegyssense* (AE 2004, 1281), *territorium Troesense* (ISM V 135 = AE 1980, 818), *territorium Capidavense* (CIL III 12491 = ILS 7181 = ISM V 77), cf. MATEI-POPESCU 2010a, 61-67. Starting from the premise that the stamped pottery building materials with the signs of certain troops were exclusively used for the construction of military buildings, the extension of military territories was specified by the survey of such type finds (DORUȚIU-BOILĂ 1972, 48).

<sup>5</sup> SANIE (1981, 75-111) located the first troops stationed there on the promontory of Tirighina, later delimiting three sides of a larger Roman fortification (SANIE 1981, 230, Fig. 58.2). The idea of the existence of a fort larger than the promontory of Tirighina, enclosing within its precinct a *castellum* or possibly a *praetorium*, was expressed by S. Sanie (SANIE 1981, 76-79) and taken over by several authors. Oversight include both the chronology of the two supposed fortifications: the fort, respectively the *castellum*, as well as the way they were located and how the fortifications, the civil settlement and the cemetery functioned (PETCULESCU, 1982, 252-252). The small promontory at Tirighina could not accommodate a Roman fortification that would have garrisoned so many soldiers. The place could have served at most as observation and/or signalling point. Two inscriptions dated under the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian were interpreted in general as evidencing the inauguration of buildings inside the Roman fortification (CIL III 777 = ISM V 292; ISM V 293; CROITORU 2004, 90).

<sup>6</sup> PÂRVAN 1913, 111, Fig. 9.

<sup>7</sup> ȚENȚEA 2007, 22-221.

<sup>8</sup> The location of the fortifications on the Danube should not be judged only by their military strategy value, but also by port development conditions, as the river was firstly a supply route. The significance of the Roman fortification

examination of the mentioned archaeological research, we believe that the archaeological finds in Barboşi and "Dunărea quarter" area belong to the same site, as the distance between the barrows in the necropolis at Barboşi<sup>9</sup> and those in "Dunărea"<sup>10</sup> quarter is of approximately 700 meters. The comparison with the extension of similar necropoles in the neighbouring area (*Noviodunum*, *Carsium* or *Histria*) pleads for taking into account of a single necropolis<sup>11</sup>.

The overview of the partial distribution of certain buildings and some infrastructure elements, respectively of the necropolis at Barboşi, was better outlined by corroborating our own archaeological research with those obtained from the aerial photographs taken during WWII<sup>12</sup>. Later, we undertook large scale field walks, whose results were corroborated with the survey of all funerary finds in the area delimited by the Traian-Tuluțești *vallum* and its adjacent area. Thus, we attempted to delimit the alignment of the necropolis / necropoles operational in the Roman period<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, the Roman necropolis was rather large, since the area investigated in the northern part of the fort at Barboşi as well as the graves mapped within the current territory of the city of Galaţi, belonged to the same necropolis. The distribution area of the barrows surveyed in the area is considerable, having different orientation than the approximately east-west oriented Roman road. It is noteworthy that most barrows belong to different chronological periods<sup>14</sup>.

In what the Roman necropolis is concerned, a marble sarcophagus mentioning the name *Alphenus Modestus*, discovered near the promontory at Tirighina<sup>15</sup> is noteworthy.

works should, thus, be argued based on understanding the communication system (ȚENȚEA 2013, 148). Epigraphic records document the early presence of *classis flavia moesica* (MATEI-POPESCU 2010, 29, 245-246) and significantly later of the land units, which at the beginning were designed to ensure the safety of transports on the Danube. The tile stamps recorded on the Danube sector corresponding to the province of Moesia Inferior evidence transport and control activities carried out mainly by *classis Flavia Moesica* (the action range was likely as early as its set up the Dobroudja sector of the Danube: *Troesmis*, Barboşi, *Dinogetia*, *Noviodunum*, Cartal-Orlovka (*Aliobrix?*) – ISM V 217, 241, 263, 283) and the fleet of *I Italica* (SARNOWSKI/TRYNKOWSKI 1986, 536-541). This legion's involvement in port and Danube patrol activities was so well structured that even after the departure of legion V Macedonica from *Troesmis*, part of its activities were assumed by strengths of *I Italica* and not *XI Claudia*, as one would be tempted to believe (the activity of legion *XI Claudia* seems to have been rather oriented to *Tomis* and as a result, to the Black Sea area, from where also likely the title of *Pontica*, used as *cognomen* of the legion - MATEI-POPESCU 2010, 136. After the legion stationed at *Troesmis* was moved to Dacia, the command of the vexillations displaced to the north of the Black Sea was assigned to the *angusticlavii* tribunes in legion *I Italica* - MATEI-POPESCU 2010, 278-279). The diffusion of the pottery building material bearing the stamp of legion *I Italica* in many sites along the lower course of the Danube is explained by the fact this legion was provided with its own naval squadrons (*navalia legionis*), which facilitated movement between the fort at *Novae* and the ports under its control. This would explain the many stamps where the legion name is figured in a ship-shaped cartridge (SARNOWSKI/TRYNKOWSKI 1986, 536, 540).

<sup>9</sup> The phrase belongs to M. Brudiu (1998). For the research results: BRUDIU 1976, 85-96; BRUDIU 1980, 314-320; BRUDIU 1981, 59-72; BRUDIU 1998, 210, Fig. 1. Our research – ȚENȚEA/CLEȘIU 2006, Fig. 19.2. More recent research - JUGĂNARU *et alii* 2011, 61-76.

<sup>10</sup> PÂRVAN 1913, 19, Fig. 9.

<sup>11</sup> BRUDIU 1998, 210, Fig. 1; ȚENȚEA/CLEȘIU 2006, Fig. 19.1.

<sup>12</sup> ȚENȚEA, CLEȘIU 2006, 52-53; ȚENȚEA 2007.

<sup>13</sup> ȚENȚEA/OLTEAN 2009, Pl. 3, 4; OLTEAN 2013, 160, Fig. 9.5.

<sup>14</sup> ȚENȚEA/RAȚIU 2015.

<sup>15</sup> BRUDIU 2003, 59-62 (no. 258), 171, Fig. 16, 175, Fig. 20, 176, Fig. 21; ȚENȚEA/OLTEAN 2009, 1515-1524.

At an appreciable distance eastwards, in Dunărea quarter, a tomb datable to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>16</sup> was found. The so-called “mithraic”<sup>17</sup> sarcophagus was discovered by chance in 1867 also within the territory of Galați city, on Lozoveni Street, on the northward road. These Roman funerary finds could not lie aligned anywhere else but along a main access road or just nearby such a road<sup>18</sup>.

Taking into account this criterion and the way the Roman necropolis spread, the course of the Roman road significantly deviates from the north-east direction, reaching south Brateș Lake. Under such circumstances, the hypothesis according to which this road would have made possible the crossing of the Danube via a ford nearby the confluence of the Siret and Danube rivers is no longer true. It is hard to believe that a ford existed in this area of the Danube.

The relevant detail for the discussion herein is the representation in the ancient and modern cartography of the lower course of the Danube. It appears like an approximately linear projection, slightly oblique to the river mouth, while depiction differences between *Tabula Peutingeriana* and some maps made even during the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>19</sup> are not significant from this detail point of view. This depiction manner, rather far-off the geographical field realities, lasted until the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, around the Crimean War and even the Russo-Turkish Wars. At that time, the north of the Black Sea and the Danube mouths start being accurately mapped, which leads to proper corrections in the corresponding rendering on maps of the Danube curvature in the Galați area<sup>20</sup>.

Among the cartographic data provided by a military map, pinpointing the location of the Russian and Turkish troops around 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1877, there may be noted the route of a road passing left of the Danube, by the south of Brateș lake then running to the east (Pl. 3.5). The same detail may be noted on an Austrian map made in 1910 (Pl. 3.6). Above lake was linked to the Danube by a narrow channel, fed by only the western branch of Prut River. During the modern period, on the land side situated south the lake a road ran on a west-east direction to the current place of Reni.

Regardless of whether or not an alleged road to *Tyras* existed, a hypothesis supported by Tocilescu, yet which Pârvan doubted<sup>21</sup>, it is very likely that in antiquity a functional road reached north *Noviodunum*, where the river could have been crossed by a ford<sup>22</sup>.

**2.** At the other end of the hypothetical road discussed herein lies the fort at Brețcu. The discovery of a large number of amphorae during the archaeological research conducted there was related by N. Gudea to its location on the trading road Barboși – Poiana – pass *Angustia* – Brețcu, thus, also indicating their geographical origin in the Black Sea area<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> PÂRVAN 1913, 118, Fig. 13; ISM V 300.

<sup>17</sup> BURDIU 1976, 85-96.

<sup>18</sup> PĂLTĂNEA 1972, 383-385.

<sup>19</sup> For a complete view on the funerary finds in the area defined by the Traian-Tulucești *vallum* and its adjacent area, see ȚENȚEA/RAȚIU 2015.

<sup>20</sup> ȚENȚEA 2013, Pl. I/3, II/1-3.

<sup>21</sup> ȚENȚEA 2013, 148, Pl. I.3, II.

<sup>22</sup> PÂRVAN 1913, 120.

<sup>23</sup> There, the Roman road built to the right of the Danube joined the central road, crossing Dobruđa from north to south, respectively from *Noviodunum* / *Aegyssus* to *Marcianopolis*, crossing *Tropaeum Traiani*, Medgidia and *Ulmetum*. This road was not mentioned on ancient itineraries, yet its route

The idea was welcomed by M. Brudiu when discussing the Roman building structures identified at the confluence of the rivers Siret and Danube rivers<sup>24</sup>. Until the completion of the detailed analysis of these finds and the establishment of their origin, we call for caution, like Alexandru Popa, in interpreting the relevance of the amphorae discovered at Brețcu, since army supply was influenced by many other factors beside the location of the respective fort in the vicinity of a hypothetical commercial route<sup>25</sup>.

**3.** At the time when the Romans controlled the trading activities in the east of the sub-Carpathian area, one should take into account the fact that commercial transports were mainly carried on the navigable routes of rivers due to low costs<sup>26</sup>. The commercial transport commonly took place on Siret River, as noted from the study of imports in the three settlements on Siret River bank, specifically Răcătău, Brad and Poiana<sup>27</sup>. In the current state of research, one may argue that after these centres ceased to operate, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD the distribution of the Roman imports is more pronounced near Prut river basin, to refer only to the area in the proximity of Dacia<sup>28</sup>. Interestingly enough, imports diffusion areas were mainly recorded in sites lying north of Poiana. Thus, the distribution of such goods should be connected with river transport rather than the land diffusion imagined more than one century ago by Vasile Pârvan<sup>29</sup>.

If in the case of the site at Barboși, we may broadly agree that phrases like “bridgehead” or the single *territorium* left of the Danube are not peculiar, as precisely nearby, there are other sufficiently clear analogies, the same may be applied with the interpretation of the alleged Roman road crossing south of Moldova. Such supposition should no longer be granted a historiographical value greater, we believe, than the reality itself.

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<sup>24</sup> GUDEA 1980, 301-306.

<sup>25</sup> BRUDIU 1998.

<sup>26</sup> POPA 2015a, 832, note 4.

<sup>27</sup> POPA 2015, 183, note 1594.

<sup>28</sup> POPESCU 2013, 94, Map 12.

<sup>29</sup> POPA 2011, 214, Fig.10, 218, Fig. 13; POPA 2015, Taf. 11-18.

elte.hu/hun/digkonyv/topo/3felmeres.htm

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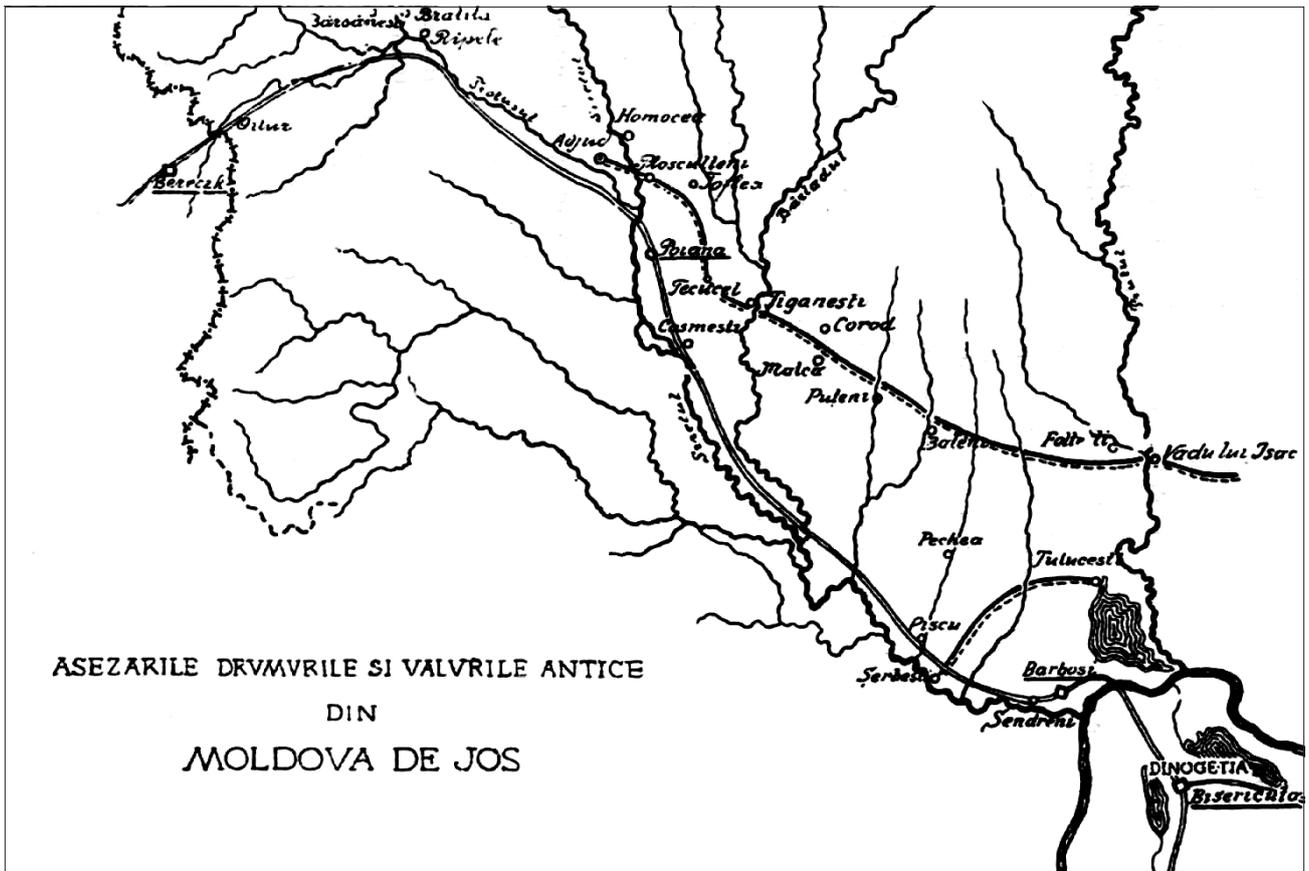
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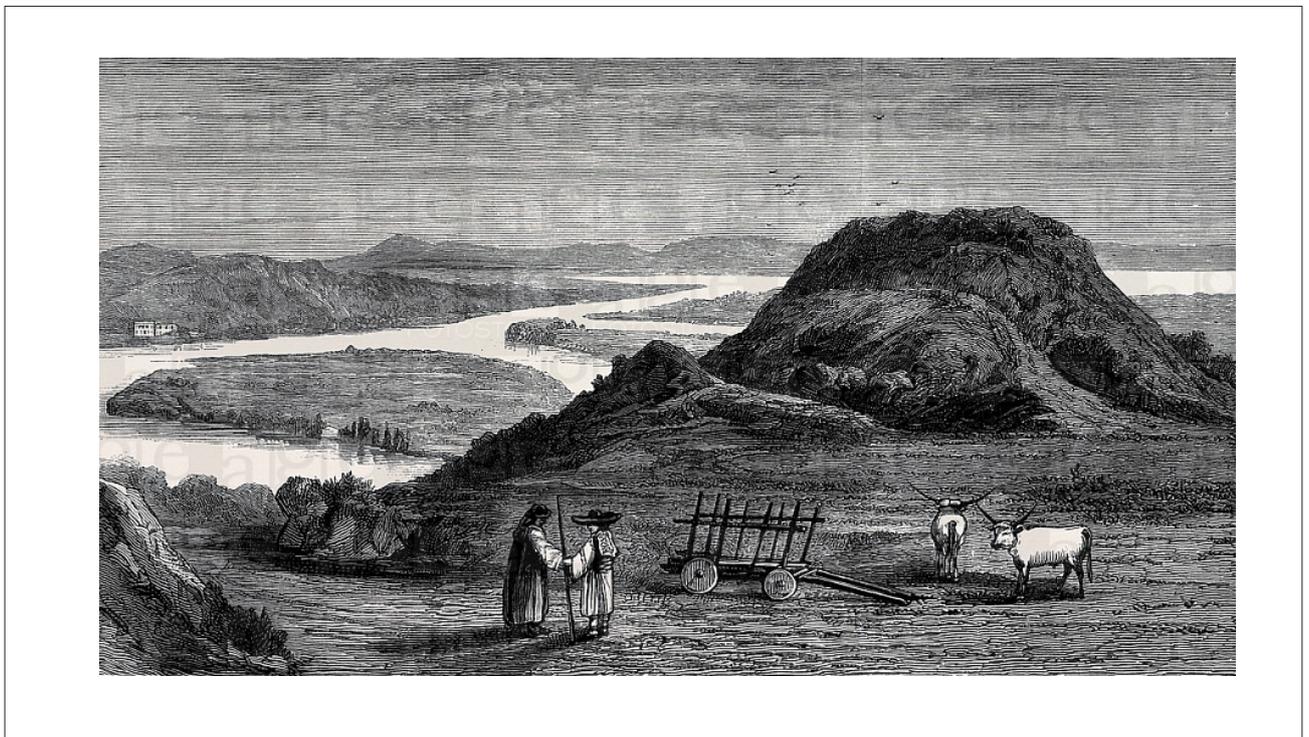
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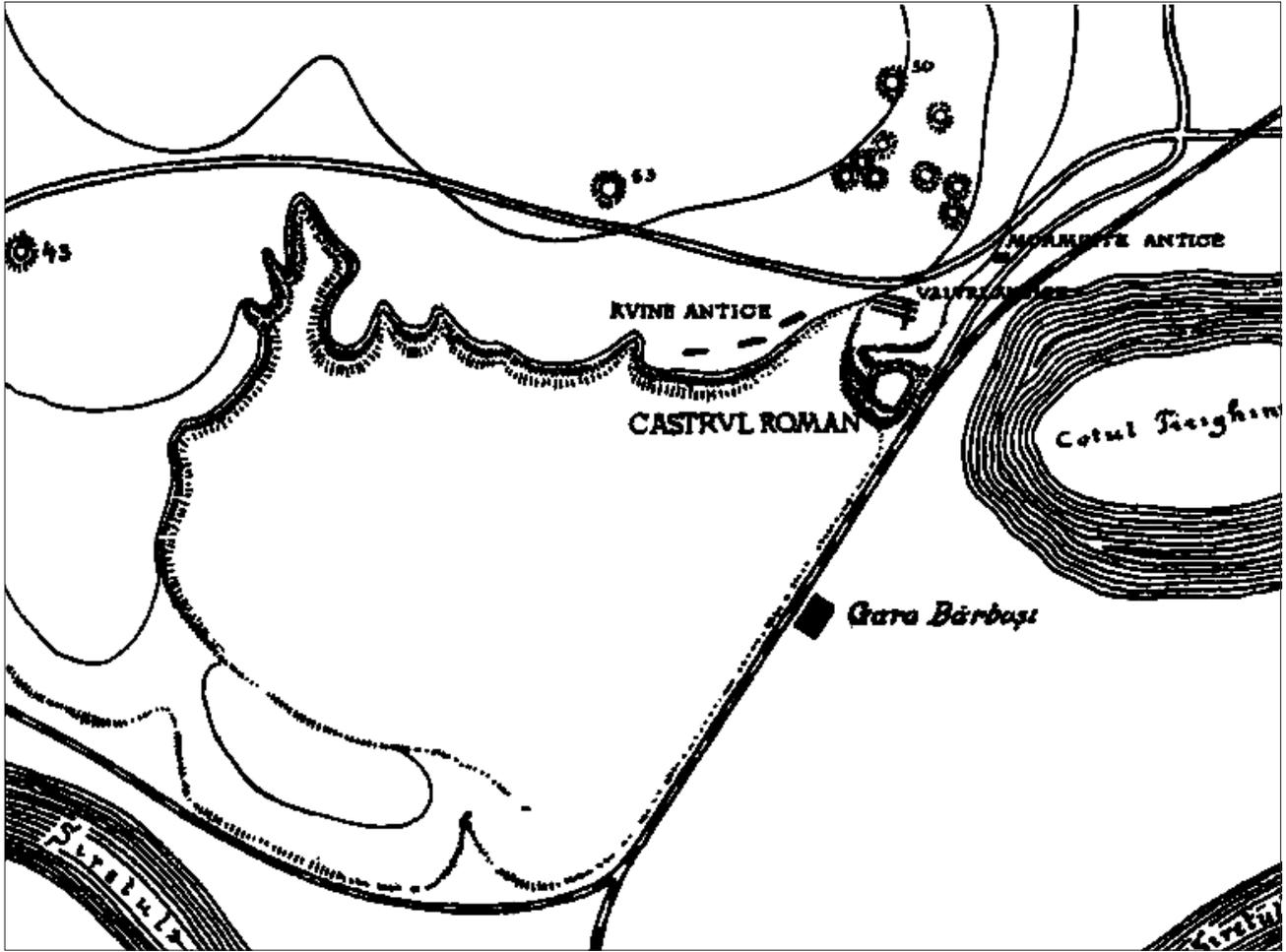
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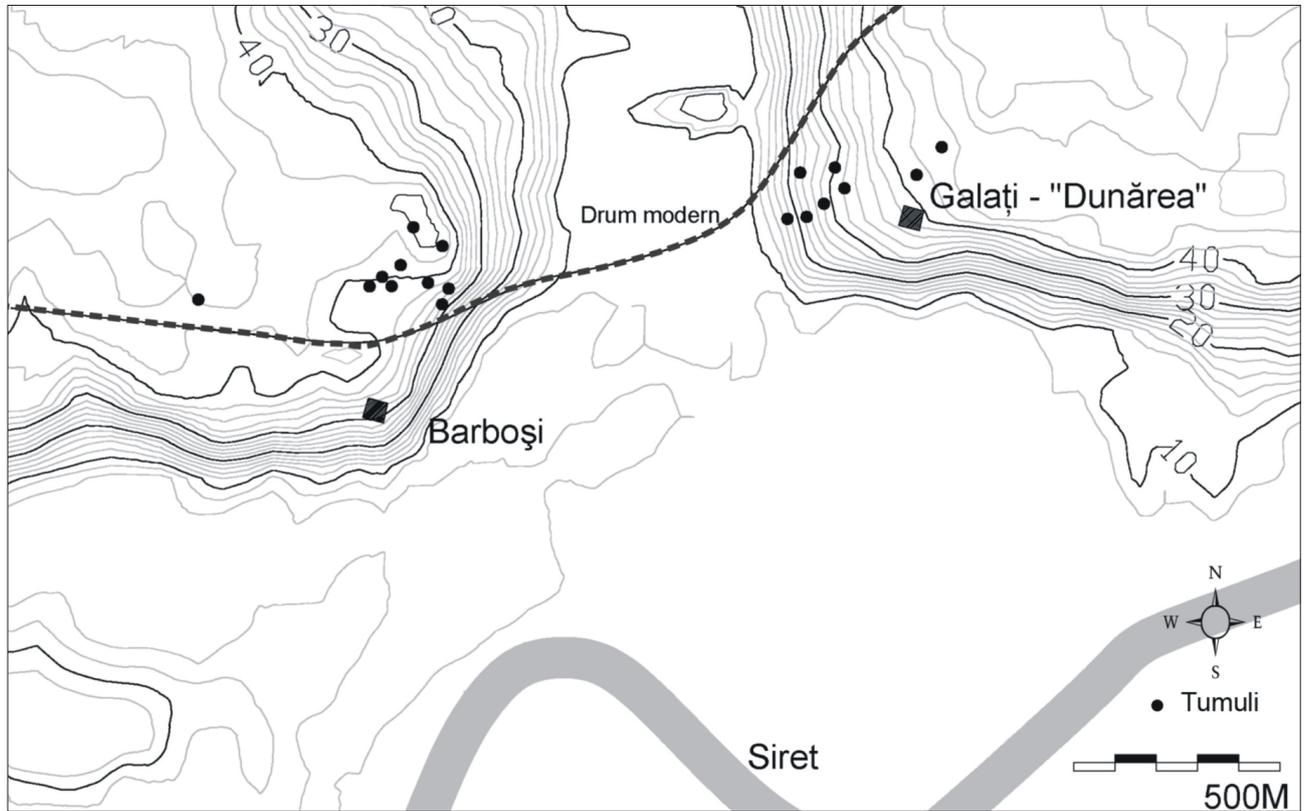
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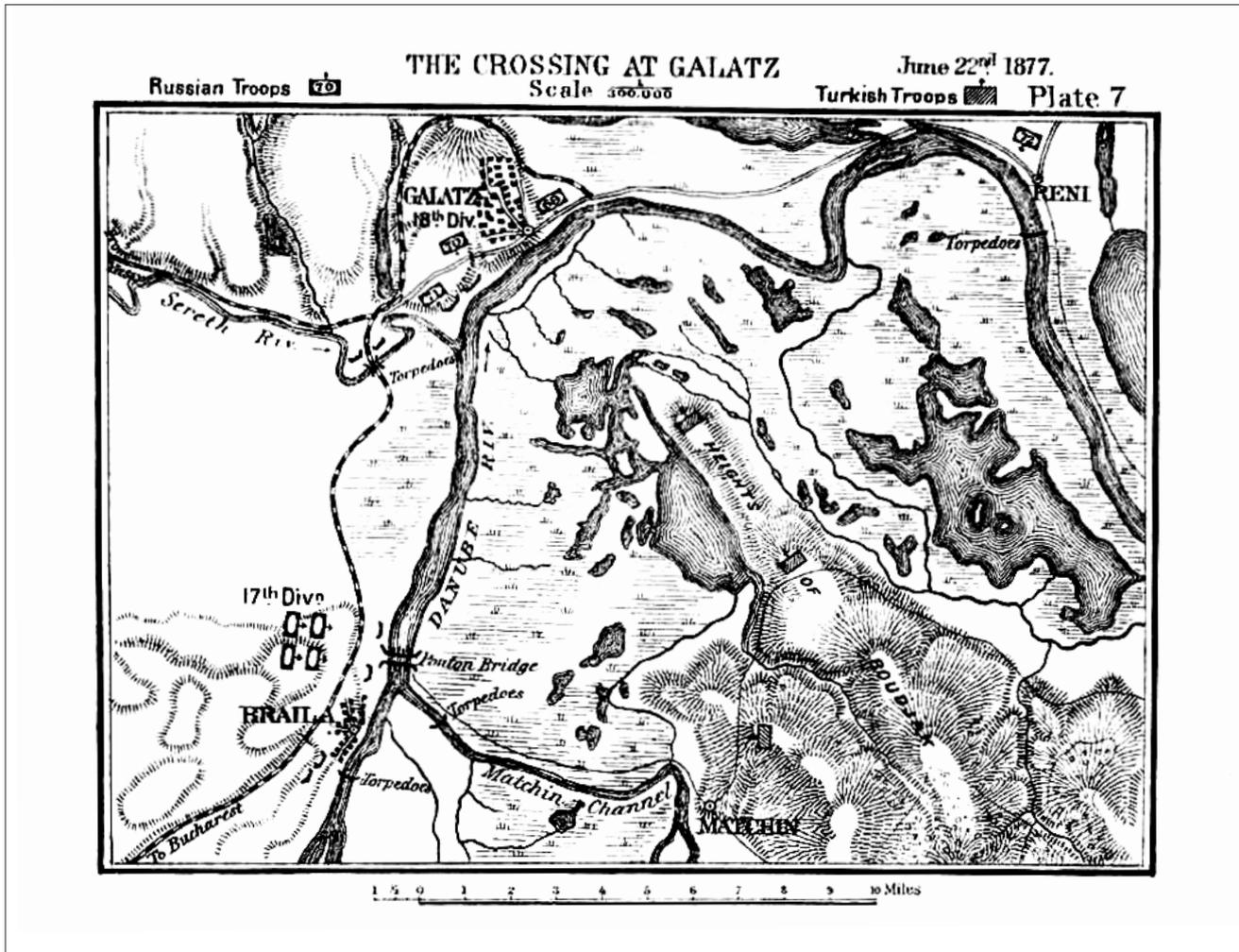
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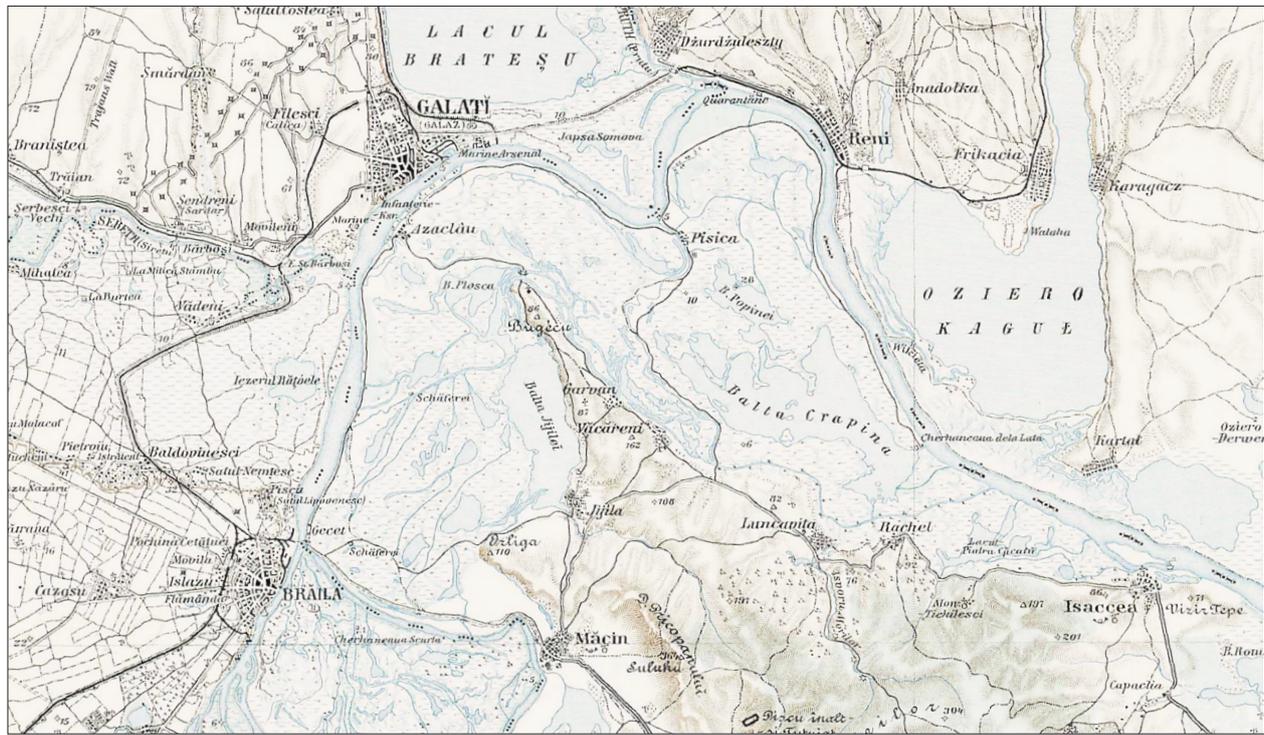
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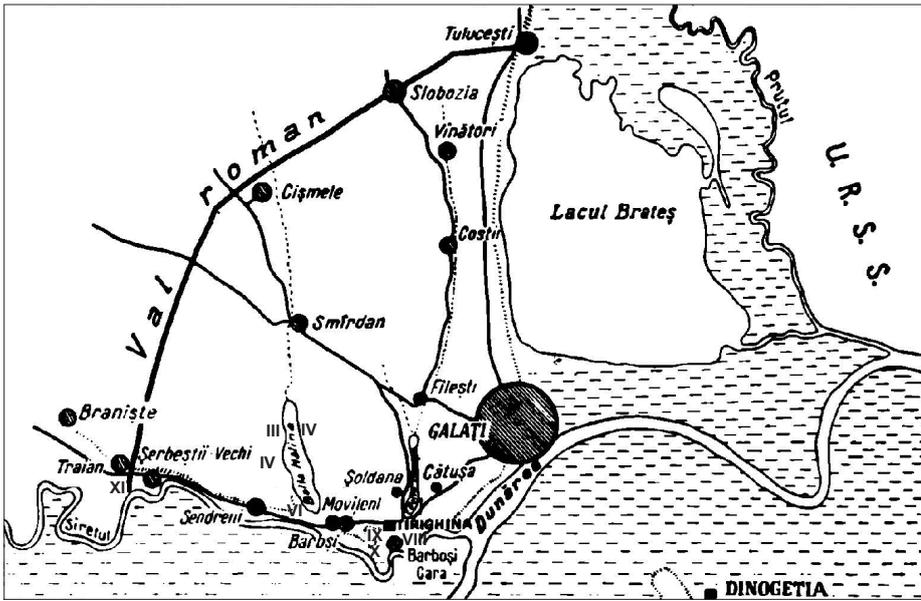
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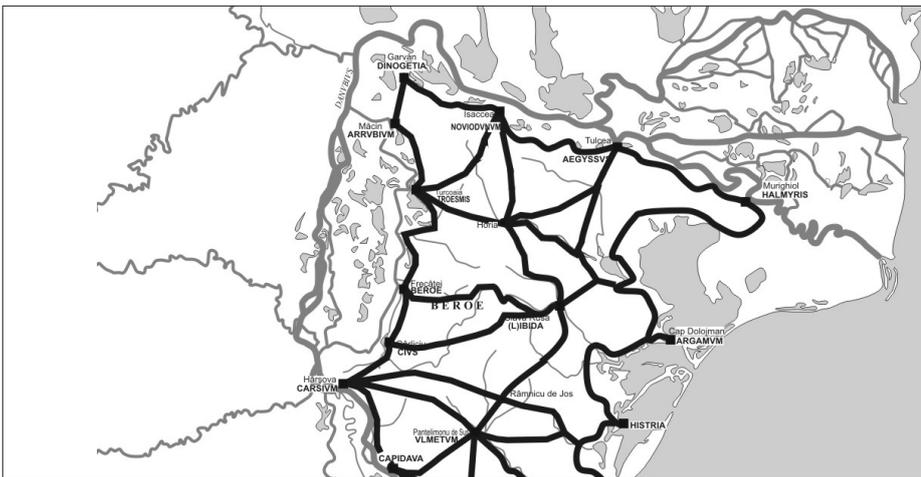
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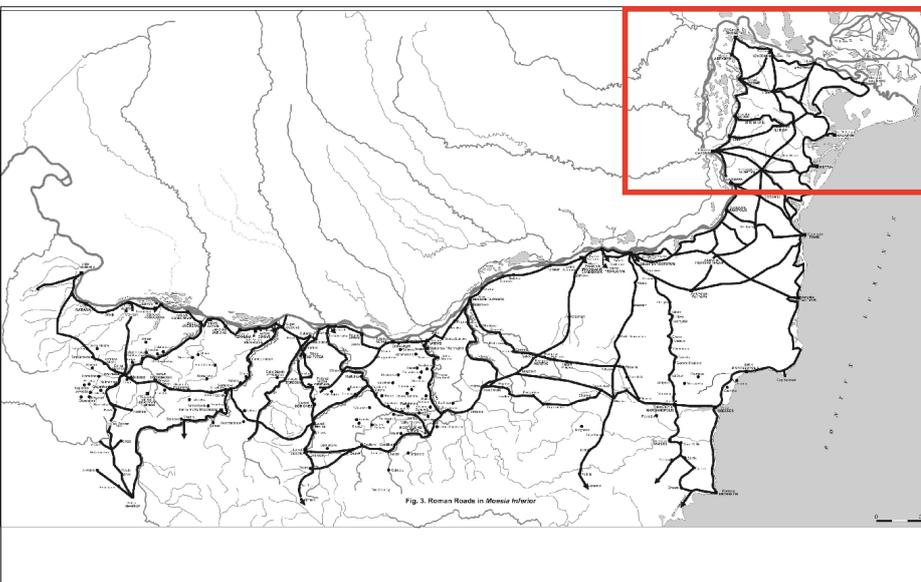


Fig. 3. Roman Roads in Moesia Inferior

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