



In memoriam dr. István Bajusz (1954–2021)

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# GRĂDIȘTEA DE MUNTE-SUB CUNUNI (HUNEDOARA COUNTY). THE FILE OF A FORGOTTEN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

Aurora PETĂN\*

*The archaeological site at Grădiștea de Munte-Sub Cununi is located in the vicinity of Sarmizegetusa Regia, the capital of the Dacian Kingdom. As early as the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dacian and Roman relics were mentioned in this area. The ruins of some buildings made of shaped stones and bound with mortar drew the attention, being at that time above ground level. The place became notorious after two Roman votive altars were discovered; they were dedicated to goddess Victoria Augusta, respectively to Apollo Augustus by two governors of Roman Dacia from the latter half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Several interpretations were given with respect to the Roman presence in this region: summer residence (villa), Roman camp or statio, fortified dwelling, civil settlement related to iron processing, sanctuary or commemorating monument (tropaeum) or even Decebalus' royal residence. The place was related either to the end of Trajan's wars against the Dacians (identified by some historians with Ranisstorum, where Trajan had his camp in 106 AD when king Decebalus killed himself), or to the events around 158 AD, when the first inscription is dated. Despite its importance, the site never benefited from systematic archaeological research. The vestiges are no longer visible nowadays and their localization is uncertain. This paper brings together all the documentary information available as well as a recent LiDAR dataset, which help in making some aspects clear and invite to starting off the field research.*

**Keywords:** Sub Cununi, Roman Dacia, votive altars, Victoria Augusta, *Ranisstorum*, Trajan, Antoninus Pius

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Sub Cununi, Dacia romană, altare votive, Victoria Augusta, *Ranisstorum*, Traian, Antoninus Pius

## LOCATION

The place known as *Sub Cununi* is located in South-West Transylvania, in the Șureanu Mountains, at about 9 km NW from *Sarmizegetusa Regia*, the capital of the Dacian Kingdom (Pl. I/1). The name *Sub Cununi* or *Sub Cunună* refers to a few households which were once making up a hamlet belonging to the village of Grădiștea Muncelului (today Grădiștea de Munte), in commune Orăștioara de Sus, Hunedoara County. The hamlet is spread over several artificial terraces on the S-E hill

slope of Vârtoape, on the right bank of Valea Anineșului, close to the place where it flows into the Grădiștea River. The name comes from the limestone ridge that borders the settlement to the north, just like a wreath [*Cunună* = wreath].

This sunny place is crossed by a plentiful stream, which makes it appropriate for dwelling. The hill slope was levelled by the Dacians in several places, which resulted in perfectly flat terraces, arranged in steps (Pl. I/2). Such terraces are to be found in the hundreds or even

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thousands<sup>1</sup> around *Sarmizegetusa Regia*, as well as near other fortresses and fortifications in the area. All of them date from the same period (mid-first century BC – the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) and they represent civil settlements around the aristocratic centres represented by the fortresses. In no other epoch were such terracing works done, so that assigning them to the Dacian epoch is doubtless. In fact, after the Roman conquest, it seems that the area was evacuated for the most part, and later on the dwelling continued rather sparsely, including probably only modest pastoral households.

It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the area started to be populated again. The toponym *Sub Cununi* was mentioned for the first time in 1803,<sup>2</sup> but without any information related to households at that time. The main sources for the demographic evolution in this area are represented by the Josephin topographic survey. In the first topographic survey (*Josephinische Landesaufnahme*), performed between 1763 and 1787 (the data for the Great Principality of Transylvania were collected in the period 1769–1773), the area appears uninhabited. The second topographic survey (*Franzische Landesaufnahme*), performed between 1806 and 1869 (for Transylvania, the data were collected in the periods 1853–1858 and 1869–1870), signalled a few households. Hence, one can deduce that the repopulation of the area known as Sub Cununi started no earlier than the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Modern habitation occupied the old Dacian terraces, which have been preserved in almost perfect condition until today and could be used for the placement of households. Today, the largest terraces from Sub Cununi are used as

agricultural fields and gardens, while some of them are being used as grasslands and meadows. Every year, the ploughs bring up Dacian ceramics, but also Roman materials.

This area has outstanding strategic valences, as it is located at the crossroads of important communication ways. Sub Cununi lies above the actual centre of the village of Grădiștea de Munte, which represents the gateway to *Sarmizegetusa Regia*. It is only from this point that Grădiștea Valley is accessible, downstream being a wild gorge, which in antiquity was almost certainly impassable. All mountain routes were converging towards this point, wherefrom could be controlled: 1) Valea Anineșului, 2) the road from Dealul Muncelului to Fețele Albe and Muncel, 3) Grădiștea Valley upstream towards Sarmizegetusa Regia, 4) the important crossroads from Prihodiște, which make the connection with Piatra Roșie fortress and with the great ridge road leading eastwards to Poiana Omului and westwards to Târsa and the fortresses of Costești-Blidaru and Costești-Cetățuie and 5) the access to the north ridge road coming from Prisaca and leading to Muncel (both fortified peaks), through the recently discovered fortification of Cornu Pietrii,<sup>3</sup> located near Sub Cununi (Pl. I/3). Visibility was wide from this point (the position above the valley enabled its widening) and it included the important points from Muncel, Prihodiște and even Comărniceș (position occupied by the Romans during their advance towards the capital), important portions of the ridge roads and even Dealul Grădiștii. Definitely, for the Dacians this was a crucial point and losing it to the Romans would have meant the end.

## RESEARCH HISTORY

The first written mentioning of the vestiges from Sub Cununi (and of the toponym itself!) belongs to the tax inspector Paul Török, who, on 26 August 1803 drew up a rich report in

Latin, related to the antique fortifications around Grădiștea Muncelului, occasioned by an inquiry of the discovery of antique treasures in the area. The local people who were

<sup>1</sup> I. A. Oltean and J. Fonte estimate that around *Sarmizegetusa Regia* there were about 2000 artificial terraces, made by the Dacians (OLTEAN–FONTE 2019, 259).

<sup>2</sup> JAKÓ 1971, 441.

<sup>3</sup> OLTEAN–HANSON 2017, 435–438.

interrogated pointed to an area on the western side of Culmea Anineşului as the discovery point of some Lysimachos-type gold coins. On inspecting the zone, Török reaches Sub Cununi (*La Kununy*), where he sees shaped stones and pieces of roof tiles.<sup>4</sup>

Most information comes from the writings of some scholars who visited the ruins of the fortress at Grădiştea Muncelului in the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Saxon priest Michael Ackner, Doctor András Fodor from Hunedoara and diplomat J.F. Neigebaur, former consul of Prussia in the Romanian Principalities. The first two reached Grădiştea Muncelului for the first time in 1838, respectively in 1844, and then, in 1847, the three of them took part in an important expedition to the ruins of the fortress at Dealul Grădiştii and around.<sup>5</sup> On all these occasions, they also investigated the area known as Sub Cununi and Vârtoape and they made known their discoveries, as well as the information gathered from others.

Another important set of data is offered by Téglás Gábor, who visited twice the area from Sub Cununi together with his brother, towards

the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the most important information being published at the beginning of the next century.<sup>6</sup> A field survey carried out by D.M. Teodorescu at the beginning of the 20's<sup>7</sup> and another one by C. Daicoviciu around 1950<sup>8</sup> offer the latest information on this site. There have never been made any archaeological excavation and neither any other kind of investigation.

The site is registered in the National Archeological Repertoire (code 90397.05) as belonging to the La Tène epoch (the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC – the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, Dacian settlement and hearths for iron ore reduction) and to the early Roman epoch (the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, fortified settlement, possibly *Ranisstorum* fortification, the place where emperor Trajan was at the end of the second Dacian war).<sup>9</sup> The two components have the status of class A historic monuments (code HD-I-m-A-03194.01 and HD-I-m-A-03194.02). In the Archaeological Repertoire of Hunedoara County, at the point Sub Cununi is registered a coin hoard discovered in 1847, traces of iron exploitation and possibly a Roman commemorative sanctuary.<sup>10</sup>

### TRACES OF THE DACIAN EPOCH

There is no doubt that at Sub Cununi there was a flourishing Dacian settlement. The artificial terraces dug into the hillside are the first clue in this sense. Also, there is a lot of information related to the pieces dating from the Dacian epoch found there in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The most numerous are the coins, both golden and silver, and then the iron pieces and the ceramic fragments.

On the occasion of his visit at Sub Cununi, Fodor András learned from a forester about

a large, golden bracelet (“pretzel”) – a most valuable proof, which seems to be among the earliest information related to golden multi-spiral bracelets that surfaced only recently, as of 2007.<sup>11</sup> In the forester's storehouse there was an iron anvil, found in the same area. It was rectangular, weighed 85 pounds and its legs were as thick as a thumb. This piece was seen and drawn by Fodor (Fig. 1/1). Neigebaur also reminds this anvil that might have

<sup>4</sup> JAKÓ 1971, 441.

<sup>5</sup> The expedition was organized by Fodor András, see PETAN 2018, 148 sqq.

<sup>6</sup> KUUN ET AL. 1902, 146–148.

<sup>7</sup> TEODORESCU 1923, 21.

<sup>8</sup> DAICOVICIU–FERENCZI 1951, 30.

<sup>9</sup> <http://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?descript=gradistea-de-munte-orastioara-de-sus-hunedoara-situl-arheologic-de-la-gradistea-de-munte-sub-cununi-dosul-vartoapelor-cod-sit-ran-90397.05>

<sup>10</sup> LUCA 2008, 83 and 89.

<sup>11</sup> An even older piece of information could be the one related to a “golden serpent” which would have belonged to the treasury discovered in 1543 in the riverbed of the Strei and ended up in possession of cardinal Martinuzzi, cf. SPÂNU 2006, 85–86.



Fig. 1. 19<sup>th</sup> century drawings of pieces discovered at Sub Cununi.  
1. The anvil (FODOR Mss, VI, 47m.); 2. The jar with the coin hoard (after WOLLMANN 1982, 90, fig. 15.).

been 6½ inches and 88 Austrian pounds and could be found in the forester's storehouse, alongside two pieces of iron in course of processing; These discoveries made him believe that at that place there was a metallurgical workshop.<sup>12</sup>

The existence of iron ore at Sub Cununi has often been mentioned in written documents. The Austrian Tax Authority delegated in 1826 geologist P. Partsch to carry out geological exploration in order to identify ore deposits in Transylvania, south Orăștie area included. The manuscript of his detailed report remained in the Viennese archives, but a protocol of the Forest District reveals that the research was resumed in 1831, right next to Sub Cununi hamlet, where a 2 m thick iron ore deposit was found – it being insufficient for a profitable modern industrial exploitation, but probably valuable for the antique exploitations.<sup>13</sup> Téglás G. also claims that there are antique traces of iron ore processing all along Valea Anineșului.

On 13 July 1847 a coin hoard was discovered, consisting of about 500 Republican and Imperial Roman denars. Neigebaur claims that most of the coins were from Vespasianus, Titus and Domitianus, and some from Trajan, carrying the epithet Germanicus, therefore before

Dacia's conquest.<sup>14</sup> M. Ackner is the one who mentions the most details about this hoard:<sup>15</sup> the diggings had been done by forester (Erdosz) Boer "among the ruins of an old town" and they had led to the discovery of a treasury of 500 very well preserved Roman silver denars, among which 148 Republican denars: Iulius Caesar 15; Octavianus Augustus 10; Antonius and Lepidus 2; Tiberius 3; Agrippina 2; Germanicus 4; Agrippa 3; Caligula 16; Claudius 4; Titus 69; Domitianus 109; Nerva 15; and Trajan 2. He, too, noticed that the coins from Trajan were dated before Dacia's conquest. Among his manuscripts there is also a sketch of the discovery spot and of the vessel that contained the coins – seemingly a Dacian jar-vessel with buttons (Fig. 1/2).<sup>16</sup> It seems that the vessel ended up in Ackner's property, and Neigebaur describes it: it was small, beautiful, reddish, and well burned, with ¼ inch thick walls.<sup>17</sup> The treasury was buried in the context of the war with the Romans. It is interesting to notice that the discovery spot is among some ruins: the only ruins known at Sub Cununi are the Roman ones, but the terrace where they lie was previously levelled and inhabited by the Dacians.

According to Fodor and Neigebaur, on the Vârtoape plateau, about half hour's walk from

<sup>12</sup> NEIGEBEUR 1851, 97, nr. 10–11.

<sup>13</sup> DAICOVICIU ET AL. 1989, 39.

<sup>14</sup> NEIGEBEUR 1851, 97.

<sup>15</sup> ACKNER 1856, 99. See also MITREA 1945, 106, n. 42.

<sup>16</sup> WOLLMANN 1982, 90, fig. 15.

<sup>17</sup> NEIGEBEUR 1851, 97.

Sub Cununi, were discovered golden coins marked ΛΙΣΙΜΑΧ and ΚΟΣΩΝ and some silver coins imprinted ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΟΝ ΠΙΠΟΤΗΣ. Fodor also says that the Lysimachos-type coins were discovered above a cave located at the edge of the plateau. He thinks an important Dacian or Roman town used to lie there.

On the Vârtoape, C. Daicoviciu identified a wide Dacian settlement, between the heights 931–936 m. He, too, mentions remnants of Dacian civilization at the very Sub Cununi, on a terrace located east of the road and on another one, in a neighbouring garden, 200 steps eastwards.<sup>18</sup>

## TRACES OF THE ROMAN EPOCH

The site of Sub Cununi became notorious due to the Roman epoch vestiges, whose presence in such a place, on a mountain slope, is surprising. Almost all those who made it to this place noticed the antique construction ruins.

Following his visit to the ruins on Dealul Grădiștii in 1838, M. Ackner also wrote a few lines about the site at Sub Cununi. He mentions the diggings carried out on the grassland from Valea Anineșului, which revealed buildings, numerous fragments of wall bricks and clay pottery, as well as a stone with inscriptions.<sup>19</sup>

A. Fodor saw there, in 1844 remnants of Roman buildings<sup>20</sup> and he even did some diggings and found a construction with three rooms opening to one another and a “collapsed cellar”, all of which had walls of about half a fathom high (approx. 1 m), as well as Roman roof tiles and bricks and pieces of ceramic vessels.<sup>21</sup> The crumbled walls of some Roman buildings and the “empty cellars” are also mentioned after the 1847 trip.<sup>22</sup>

J. F. Neigebaur<sup>23</sup> did some diggings at Sub Cununi on 14 July 1847 and he found by the stream a significant piece of wall made of quarry stones solidly bound with mortar. Stone blocks were spread all over the hill and one of them was 5 feet long and over 2 feet wide. In the same area, the author found many Roman roof tiles and bricks,

red pieces of fine ceramics and rough pieces of grey pottery. Among these, are mentioned several small bricks, 4 ½ inches long and 2¼ inches wide, a large brick, whose surface is over 2 square feet and the thickness is about 3 inches.

The same ruins are also mentioned by G. Téglás, who says they were located on a terrace on the right of the way up the rocks that give the name of the place. Among the wall ruins he found pavement bricks, roof tiles and Roman-type building bricks. He thinks a Roman summer residence used to lie there.<sup>24</sup>

The first archaeologist to reach Sub Cununi is D. M. Teodorescu, during a field survey whose results were briefly made public in 1923. He identifies the traces of a settlement “on the third terrace” and mentions bricks, roofing tiles and river stones cemented together with lime and sand. He considers them more likely to be Roman, but adds that, according to tradition, numerous Dacians were once living there.<sup>25</sup> The place is imprecisely indicated, as there is a large number of terraces there and the author does not mention the landmark where he started counting from.

In 1951, C. Daicoviciu gives a more precise location: on the first, westernmost terrace there are traces of a Roman settlement, consisting in mortar bound walls, roof tiles and bricks.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>18</sup> DAICOVICIU–FERENCZI 1951, 30.

<sup>19</sup> ACKNER 1844, 23–24.

<sup>20</sup> FODOR 1844, 304.

<sup>21</sup> FODOR 1844, 77.

<sup>22</sup> FODOR 1847, 346.

<sup>23</sup> NEIGEBEUR 1851, 96–97.

<sup>24</sup> KUUN ET AL. 1902, 146.

<sup>25</sup> TEODORESCU 1923, 20.

<sup>26</sup> DAICOVICIU–FERENCZI 1951, 30.



To all the above, one can add that south of this terrace, at about 125 m straight to the south, there is a smaller terrace, whose corner was ruined quite recently by digging a ditch meant for placing a drainage pipe. The digging revealed several large roof tiles, 4 cm thick, apparently of Roman origin (Pl. II/1).

The ruins of these Roman constructions are related to the discovery of two important inscriptions placed by two governors of the Roman province of Dacia: the former, dedicated to Victoria Augusta for the health of Emperor Antoninus by Marcus Statius Priscus (157–158 AD), the latter dedicated to Apollo Augustus by Lucius Aemilius Carus (172–177 AD).

- Victoriae*  
*Aug(ustae) pro sa-*  
*lute imp(eratoris)*  
*Antonini*  
 5. *aug(usti) M(arcus) Sta-*  
*tius Pris-*  
*cus legatus*  
*eius pr(o) pr(aetore)*<sup>27</sup>

and

- A[p]ollin(i)*  
*Aug(usto) L(ucius) Ae-*  
*m[i]l(ius) Car[us]*  
*[legatus] aug(usti)*  
 5. *pr(o) p[raetore]*  
*[II]I Da[c(iarum)]*<sup>28</sup>

After his 1838 trip in the area, M. Ackner mentions the existence of a sole inscription found among the ruins of Sub Cununi, the one dedicated to Victoria. The source of this information was young architect Daniel Zekelius, who had drawn, measured and described it. According to him, the piece was found at Sub Cununi during some diggings, on a sunny terrace, not far from the ruins of a rectangular building.<sup>29</sup> In an article about the 1847 expedition, Ackner says the piece was going to be transported to Vienna, at prince Lobkowitz's will.<sup>30</sup> A few years later, in his famous compendium of Roman inscriptions published together with Fr. Müller, he claims that the piece was found around year 1837 by Daniel Zekelius, in Anineşului Valley, and was brought to Orăştie and mounted in blacksmith Acker's yard.<sup>31</sup>

A. Fodor too, knew just one inscription in 1844, and he thought it had been sent to Vienna<sup>32</sup>, this piece of information being also taken over by J. F. Neigebaur.<sup>33</sup> In 1847 he found out more details: the piece would have been found by prince Lobkowitz when he was in Transylvania on an inspection of the mines. He would have come to Sub Cununi and would have done some diggings that lead to the discovery of the engraved altar, which was transported to Orăştie, with the intention of sending it to the museum of Vienna. But this did not happen because the prince died and the piece remained in Orăştie, in the possession of an ironmonger called Friedrich Acker, who built it into the wall of his house.<sup>34</sup> In 1847, it could already be seen imbedded into the wall of that house. The inscription is most accurately copied by Fodor, and the drawing is kept among his manuscripts<sup>35</sup> (Pl. II/2c). G. Téglás claims that

<sup>27</sup> CIL III 1416 = IDR III/3, 276. Pl. II/2a–b.

<sup>28</sup> CIL III 1415 = IDR III/3, 275.

<sup>29</sup> ACKNER 1844, 23–24.

<sup>30</sup> ACKNER 1856, 99.

<sup>31</sup> ACKNER–MÜLLER 1865, 48, no. 201. Towards the end of the 19th century, the house where the inscription was imbedded belonged to the heirs of a doctor called Gohn (KUUN ET AL. 1902, 146). In 1887, when the 3<sup>rd</sup> volume of CIL was published, the address of the house was Marktgasse 54 (CIL III 1416). Today, the address is Nicolae Bălcescu no. 7 (formerly 56) (Pl. II/3).

<sup>32</sup> FODOR 1844, 77.

<sup>33</sup> NEIGEBEUR 1851, 96.

<sup>34</sup> FODOR 1847, 364.

<sup>35</sup> FODOR MSS I, 43; II, 47 (74); IV, 52; VII, tab. IIIb.

the altar was made of limestone extracted from Călan quarry.<sup>36</sup>

The prince that Fodor and Ackner are talking about must have been August Longin von Lobkowitz (1797–1842). He was governor of Galicia starting 1826, and in 1832 he was called back to Vienna and assigned the newly created office of director of the Chamber for Coinage and Mining (*Hofkammer für das Münz- und Bergwesen*).<sup>37</sup> In 1834 Lobkowitz inspected the mines from Maramureş, as proven by a Latin inscription to be found on a plate in mine Borcut from Baia Sprie, which was dedicated to him in the month of September of the same year.<sup>38</sup> Most probably, at the same time, he made it to Hunedoara County, as proven by the two scholars mentioned above.

However, the piece must have been discovered earlier than Ackner and Fodor think, because the inscription was published for the first time in 1831, by Anton Steinbüchel von Rheinwall,<sup>39</sup> director of the Imperial Numismatic and Antiquities Cabinet from Vienna. It is known that he had asked, in 1830, the governor of Transylvania, baron Jósika János, to have his subordinates from the administrative units send to the Cabinet of Vienna copies of all the Roman and mediaeval inscriptions from Transylvania.<sup>40</sup> The governor asked them to carry out Steinbüchel's request, and that the drawings be made by border engineers (topographers). The drawings were sent to Vienna in the next year and, among them, was the transcription of the piece found at Sub Cununi, which was published in the same year. Therefore, it must have been discovered before 1831. Young Daniel Zekeilius (1806–1877) might have been the one who drew the piece, not the one who discovered it. It

is interesting to mention that, in the letter to the governor, Steinbüchel expressed his desire to have all the inscriptions imbedded in the outer walls of churches, so that everybody could read them and in order to prevent their destruction. It would not be unlikely that the piece under consideration should have been imbedded in a wall as a result of this recommendation.

The aforementioned data lead to the conclusion that the altar was discovered neither by Zekelius, nor by Lobkowitz, but they both had contingency with its story: one of them drew it and the other one tried to transport it to Vienna. The circumstances and the date when the inscription was found remain unknown. It may have been revealed on the occasion of the geological prospection from Sub Cununi in 1826 or even in 1831, if not earlier, under different circumstances.

The information about the second inscription, dedicated to Apollo Augustus, is only given by A. Fodor, in a manuscript and in an article from 1847 in which he claims it was found many years before the one dedicated to Victoria Augusta and was taken to Vienna.<sup>41</sup> He gives a transcription of it, but he never mentions where he copied the text from. Fodor seems to be the only one knowledgeable of this inscription. From him, the transcript was taken over by Loreni József, counsel in Orăştie, who, in turn, passed it over to Theodor Mommsen, through Bardóczy Elek.<sup>42</sup> It was published for the first time in 1848.<sup>43</sup> The piece has disappeared. The scarcity of data related to this inscription, the fact that nobody saw it and that nobody knows where the transcript comes from, raises some questions as to the place of its discovery.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, A. Fodor claims that he saw a silver

<sup>36</sup> KUUN ET AL. 1902, 146.

<sup>37</sup> BENEDICKT 1956, 58.

<sup>38</sup> KACSÓ-IŞTVAN 2007.

<sup>39</sup> The inscription was published in the supplement *Anzeige-Blatt für Wissenschaft und Kunst of Wiener Jahrbücher* magazine, no. 55, 1831, 36 [non vidi].

<sup>40</sup> LASCU 1968, 137 sqq.

<sup>41</sup> The piece appears only in the Hungarian versions of the manuscript, and it is included in the chapter about Sub Cununi together with the inscription dedicated to Victoria. It is interesting that in the German version, which was meant to be printed, is included only this last one, with localization „Bross” (Orăştie). FODOR MSS I, 43; II, 47 (74); FODOR 1847, 364.

<sup>42</sup> KUUN ET AL. 1902, 147–148.

<sup>43</sup> HENZEN 1848, 163.

<sup>44</sup> For the inaccurate character of some information offered by Fodor cf. RUSSU 1972, 648, n. 5 and SZILÁGYI 2020, 153.

coin from Antoninus at one of the inhabitants of the hamlet of Sub Cununi,<sup>45</sup> one more argument

for the Roman presence after the conquest in that zone.<sup>46</sup>

### IDENTIFICATION OF THE ROMAN SITE

If Dacian habitation on the artificial terraces from Sub Cununi is doubtless, the Roman site has not been unquestionably identified yet. Nevertheless, there are enough indications in this sense. J. F. Neigeaur saw an antique wall near a stream, an important landmark, for there is just one stream in the region, and it flows along a large artificial terrace. G. Téglás says that the terrace is on the right of the upward trail, and C. Daicoviciu says it is the first terrace, the most westward one. According to these indications, the site under consideration is now on a terrace lying westwards from the road, at the altitude of 690 m, coordinates 45°38'17" N, 23°13'19" E. The terrace is oval shaped, slightly curved towards the North and its dimensions are about 70 × 26 m (Pl. III/1–2). To the west of it flows the above-mentioned stream, the most important in the area.

On the edge of the terrace, towards the valley, there are numerous fragments of carved blocks made of quarry oolitic limestone, similar to that extracted from the antique quarry of Măgura Călanului for the Dacian fortresses (Pl. III/3). They were probably dumped there from the central area of the terrace after successive ploughing. Other similar blocks can also be noticed below, on the slope under the terrace.

The blocks surely come from the antique constructions that existed on the terrace. As shown before, two centuries ago, the walls were about 1 m high. As a result of the diggings done in those days they must have been ruined even more, then covered by vegetation and finally levelled by ploughing. Yet, the surface of the terrace is not perfectly flat; one can notice a bump, like a flattened mound, where there is probably a more significant concentration of vestiges.

The location of the Roman site is confirmed by a set of LiDAR data collected in 2018,<sup>47</sup> which show a complex of constructions or a larger construction with several rooms all over the surface of the terrace (Pl. IV). The layout of the walls is better distinguishable in the centre and in its western half. The relatively low resolution of the scanning and the disruption of the terrain by diggings during the previous centuries prevent a clear planimetry, but the presence of ruined constructions at that place is beyond any doubt. On one terrace located east of this one stands out a square construction with 11 m sides, but its origin can only be determined by excavation. Several nearby terraces are in the same situation; they were inhabited by the Dacians, but they could have been reused by the Romans.

### INTERPRETATIONS

The existence of some Roman vestiges at Sub Cununi raised the interest of the historians, but without systematic archaeological research, the interpretations will still come down to suppositions. It is beyond any doubt that at that place there is a Roman-epoch site, but its location and the nature of the two inscriptions have been a

puzzle for the researchers who could not agree whether we are talking about a civil, a religious or a military settlement.

G. Téglás supposed that at Sub Cununi there was a Roman summer residence and a trip destination. He thought that governor Lucius Aemilius Carus inspected that forested rural

<sup>45</sup> FODOR 1844, 305.

<sup>46</sup> We do not know exactly which Antoninus is involved, but it is quite likely that this be the very Antoninus Pius, from whose time is dated the inscription dedicated to Victoria.

<sup>47</sup> I thank the company Primul Meridian, to which I owe the set of LiDAR data.



area and was so fascinated by the beauty of the landscape that he dedicated an altar to Apollo.<sup>48</sup> He also claims that the iron reserves in the area were exploited not only by the Dacians, but also by the Romans, after the conquest. This idea was taken over by I. Glodariu and E. Iaroslavschi, who claim that, being rich in iron ore, the area continued to be exploited economically even after the conquest, which determined the appearance of a Roman settlement.<sup>49</sup>

C. Daicoviciu is the first to state that besides a Roman settlement, there was also a sanctuary there, which is the only explanation why the two governors dedicated votive inscriptions at that place.<sup>50</sup> M. Macrea and C. H. Opreanu developed this hypothesis. The former believes that there was a Roman sanctuary there as early as Dacia's conquest, where sacrifices were being brought on an annual basis, maybe, and the inscription dedicated to goddess Victoria was connected with a Roman victory under Antoninus Pius, against the free Dacians, a victory that might have evoked Trajan's.<sup>51</sup> Opreanu supposes that the area of the ancient capital was isolated and forgotten half a century after the conquest and that the only explanation for the two inscriptions would be the existence of a commemorating sanctuary or an altar erected by Trajan after having defeated Decebalus.<sup>52</sup> I. Oltean and W. Hanson too, speak of a "high-profile commemoration of military success taking place up to seven decades after the area had been conquered"<sup>53</sup>. Finally, Cs. Szabó points out that, although it is not clear whether there is a sanctuary there or a triumphal monument dedicated to Trajan, the presence of Victoria Augusta and Apollo Augustus shows clearly the Imperial authority; the place would have been a symbolic

one for the Dacians, and the Romans purposely turned it into a sacred memory of the victory. The maintenance of this sanctuary or memorial for over half a century might have led, according to Szabó, to the purposeful transformation and elimination of the indigenous presence as well as of the Dacians' cultural memory.<sup>54</sup>

There are also hypotheses related to the possibly military character of this site. Its strategic position, on the communication line between Valea Mureșului and the former capital, through the auxiliary camp from Orăștioara de Sus was an argument for choosing that place, considered to be a stage point (some kind of *statio*).<sup>55</sup> A. S. Stefan considers it necessary to have an intermediary stage between Luncani–Târsa (or the opposite fortification from Prisaca) and the settlement from Fețele Albe, which is thought to have been conquered during the campaign of 102 AD. At Sub Cununi would have been the most comfortable place in the vicinity of *Sarmizegetusa Regia* for setting up such a base. It is also here that the troops coming along the ridge route Blidaru–Luncani could rejoin those coming along the valley, from the camp of Orăștioara de Sus. It is also from here, says Stefan, they could attack the fortress of Vârful lui Hulpe and the settlement from Fețele Albe, maybe in collaboration with the column coming on the ridge road from Prisaca. Also, from Sub Cununi they could advance towards *Sarmizegetusa Regia* along the valley, up to the confluence of Valea Albă with Valea Godeanului, and from there, along the ridge of Dealul Grădiștii.<sup>56</sup>

The debates related to the military role of the settlement from Sub Cununi have been stimulated by the discovery of Tiberius Claudius Maximus's funeral stele from Grammeni

<sup>48</sup> KUUN ET AL. 1902, 148.

<sup>49</sup> GLODARIU–IAROSLAVSCHI 1979, 22. Recently, the fortification from Cornu Pietrii, which is not far from Sub Cununi, has also been connected with a possibly metallurgical activity in that area, during the Roman epoch see OLTEAN–HANSON 2017, 443–445.

<sup>50</sup> DAICOVICIU 1933–1935, 246, n. 4.

<sup>51</sup> MACREA 1969, 55.

<sup>52</sup> OPREANU 2000, 85–86.

<sup>53</sup> OLTEAN–HANSON 2017, 443.

<sup>54</sup> SZABÓ 2018, 145.

<sup>55</sup> IDR III/3, p. 275.

<sup>56</sup> STEFAN 2005, 618–619.

(Macedonia), where is mentioned the Dacian named place *Ranisstorum*. Maximus claims that he would have caught king Decebalus and brought his head to Trajan at *Ranisstorum*, where the emperor allegedly had his headquarters at the end of the war.<sup>57</sup> Most probably, this is the place depicted on Trajan's column in scene CXLVII, where Trajan shows the king's head to the soldiers, announcing the victory. M. Speidel says it is a legion camp, that took its name from an important Dacian town located nearby, identified as *Piatra Craivii-Apoulon*.<sup>58</sup> I. Glodariu contests this interpretation, showing that it is more likely the site of Sub Cununi, which is more suitable for an emperor's camp at that stage of the confrontations with the Dacians. He thinks the place was far enough from the capital to bear another name.<sup>59</sup> But the identification with *Ranisstorum* implies the existence of a camp at Sub Cununi.

On the contrary, K. Strobel thinks that Sub Cununi belongs to *Sarmizegetusa* and that there, or somewhere upstream would have been Decebalus's *Regia* (the royal residence): this would explain the existence at that place of a commemorative monument erected by Trajan.<sup>60</sup> He says that the barrage fortification from scene LXXXIV on Trajan's Column might have been on the heights in front of the site from Sub Cununi and would have been meant to block the mid and upper course of Valea Anineșului and Valea Mică.

Since the site has not been systematically explored yet, its dating from Trajan's time does

not benefit from archaeological arguments, but of conjectural ones (the closeness to the former capital, the interpretation of some scenes from Trajan's Column). The two inscriptions are about 50, respectively 70 years later and the presence of the two governors on a site founded by Trajan needed explanations. The arguments focused on the years 156–158 AD, when many researchers think there were confrontations with the free Dacians from outside the province, who were defeated by Dacia's governor Marcus Statius Priscus,<sup>61</sup> and the monument from Sub Cununi would have marked the end of these confrontations. A second inscription, placed at *Apulum* by the same governor,<sup>62</sup> would support the same idea. Priscus's appointment as *consul honorarius* for 159 is considered to be a high honour, quite unusual for a former *eques* and it would represent a reward for the victory of 158.<sup>63</sup> But what happened in that year?

Most historians consider that there were confrontations between the Romans and the free Dacians (and the Iazyges Sarmatians) at the western border of the province. They invoked in this sense a piece of information from *Historia Augusta*, which mentions rebellions of the Dacians during Antoninus Pius.<sup>64</sup> To this is added the (unofficial) epithet of *Dacicus* given to this emperor in 157 or 158 and mentioned in two African inscriptions,<sup>65</sup> which gave some troubles to the researchers. Some considered that such epithets are adulatory,<sup>66</sup> others that they are completely erroneous,<sup>67</sup> and some ascribe them to the presence in North Africa of

<sup>57</sup> SPEIDEL 1970. C.H. Opreanu translates *Ranisstoro* as *from Ranisstorum*, not *to Ranisstorum*, and considers that that could be the place where the king killed himself, not the place where Trajan was (OPREANU 2000, 86). The translation is erroneous: it would have needed the preposition *a* (*a Ranisstoro*) in order for such an interpretation to be justified.

<sup>58</sup> SPEIDEL 1971, 515.

<sup>59</sup> GLODARIU 1981.

<sup>60</sup> STROBEL 2019, 279.

<sup>61</sup> For his career, see PISO 1993, 66–73.

<sup>62</sup> CIL III 1061 = IDR III/5, 181.

<sup>63</sup> STROBEL 2019, 285.

<sup>64</sup> SHA, *Vita Pii*, 5, 4: *Per legatos suos plurima bella gessit. Nam et Britannos ... vicit et Mauros ad pacem postulandam coegit et Germanos et Dacos et multas gentes atque Iudaeos rebellantes contudit per praesides ac legatos.*

<sup>65</sup> CIL VIII 20242; CIL VIII 12513. See also KIENAST 1996, 135. This epithet is no longer mentioned in the posthumous edition of Kienast's book (KIENAST ET AL. 2017, 129).

<sup>66</sup> KNEISSL 1969, 97, who admits, nevertheless, that epithets had a real basis, represented by the conflicts successfully solved at the northern border of Dacia.

<sup>67</sup> GOSTAR 1972, 643.

some soldiers from the Dacian troops.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, it has been mentioned that, in the same context, the emperor is also called *optimus maximusque princeps*, which, obviously points to Trajan's image: was Antoninus Pius seen as a second Trajan who defeated the Dacians again? Possibly. An outdated argument in favour of a strain on *limes* is the bringing of north-African troops to the western border of Dacia, which is inferred from a military diploma from 158 AD;<sup>69</sup> a later discovery confirmed that these troops were in Dacia as early as 146.<sup>70</sup>

M. Macrea believes that the conflicts took place on the eastern border of the province and involved the eastern free Dacians, namely the *Costoboci*. He invokes in this sense the burial of two large coin hoards in Viştea (Cluj County) and Sălaşuri (Mureş County) whose last coins are from 156, respectively 157 AD.<sup>71</sup> D. Benea agrees that the Dacians attacked from east to west.<sup>72</sup>

C. C. Petolescu thinks that there are no arguments for fighting against the free Dacians

in that period and that the year 158 is not an important one in the history of Roman Dacia.<sup>73</sup>

Other voices claim that the reason of this inscription would have been a successful military action against the rebel Dacians in the very area of the former fortresses from the Orăştiei Mountains.<sup>74</sup> The information from *Historia Augusta* and the emperor's epithets are also valid for this variant of interpretation; moreover, the phrase *Dacos rebellantes* would hint to a revolt of the subdued Dacians rather than to an attack from the free Dacians (although their synchronization is not excluded). According to B. Mitrea, the hidden coin hoards (at Gherla, Sighişoara, Caşolt, Viştea) suggests troubles in 156–157 inside, not outside the province.<sup>75</sup> Finally, a rather unusual phenomenon takes place in 157–158 in the province: simultaneous repairs to edifices in *Apulum*, *Porolissum* and *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*; they were explained by Mitrea as an outcome of the destructions resulted from the attacks of the revolted Dacians.<sup>76</sup>

## SHORT CONCLUSIONS

The data given above lead to a few observations, whose provisional character is obvious, considering the lack of systematic research.

1. The Roman site seems to be larger than it was thought so far. On at least one more terrace there is a possibly Roman construction. On other neighbouring terraces one can notice rectangular foundations of buildings, but only field investigation can establish if they are Dacian or Roman.

2. The Roman building identified in the 19<sup>th</sup> century does not seem to be characteristic for

a *tropaeum*. Fodor András's descriptions and the LiDAR data show that it has several rooms (at least three of them were visited and seen by Fodor), but one cannot exclude the existence of several buildings on the same terrace, one of which could have had a religious function. The only argument for its interpretation as a temple is represented by the votive altars, but such pieces can be found in other contexts, as well.

3. At present there are no clear indications of a fortification at Sub Cununi. No enclosure

<sup>68</sup> PETOLESCU 2014, 313.

<sup>69</sup> PISO 1993, 70 sqq, with earlier bibliography.

<sup>70</sup> ECK–PANGERL 2014, 271 sqq. See also STROBEL 2019, 285, n. 476.

<sup>71</sup> MACREA 1969, 55–56.

<sup>72</sup> BENEA 2010, 166 sqq.

<sup>73</sup> PETOLESCU 2007, 110.

<sup>74</sup> IDR III/3, 277. D. RUSCU (2003, 124) wrongly attributes this interpretation to M. Macrea and claims that it is difficult to accept the idea of a Dacian revolt in the area of the former fortresses, because this very area had been evacuated after the conquest.

<sup>75</sup> MITREA 1997, 478–482.

<sup>76</sup> M. Bărbulescu is against this interpretation: he considers that these simultaneous repairs were determined by the anniversary of the semi-centennial of Dacia's conquest (BĂRBULESCU 2006) or by the peace that was established after the border conflicts were put an end to (BĂRBULESCU 2010, 80).

walls, vallums or ditches have been identified, either on the spot or by LiDAR data analysis. The hypothesis of a camp or of a fortified settlement remains questionable. However, there are some features in the field in some places, which will have to be checked in the future. Beyond any doubt, the position is a strategic one, as from there the access to the former capital could be controlled.<sup>77</sup>

All the data point to the fact that the site from Sub Cununi is an outstanding one: it is the nearest Roman site to the Dacians' former capital and, at the same time, it seems to be the only place in the entire province that is neither a town, nor a camp (at least from what we know so far), but where a governor (or two) dedicated votive altars to gods. Hence, the place must have had a really high signification for the Romans. Most historians connected the 158 AD inscription to a victory of the Romans over the free Dacians from the western or eastern border of the province, but it is questionable why Dacia's

governor made this thankful gesture towards gods at Sub Cununi, at a great distance from the place of the victory. We may wonder if there was a monument there, marking the Roman victory over the Dacians in 106 AD, as most people think, and if a new victory over this population had to be celebrated in the same place. Was that a highly important strategic place controlled by the Romans? Or was it a sacred place for the Dacians and the Romans tried to wipe out its memory, as Szabo thinks? Or was there even Decebalus' residence, as Strobel thinks? Or, maybe, there were revolts in the area of the former fortresses half a century after the conquest and the Roman site dates back from those times only? Systematic investigation of the site at Sub Cununi will clear up the role of the Roman presence in this place and could bring valuable information related to crucial moments of the Dacian history and of the Roman province. We can only hope that this research will start as soon as possible.

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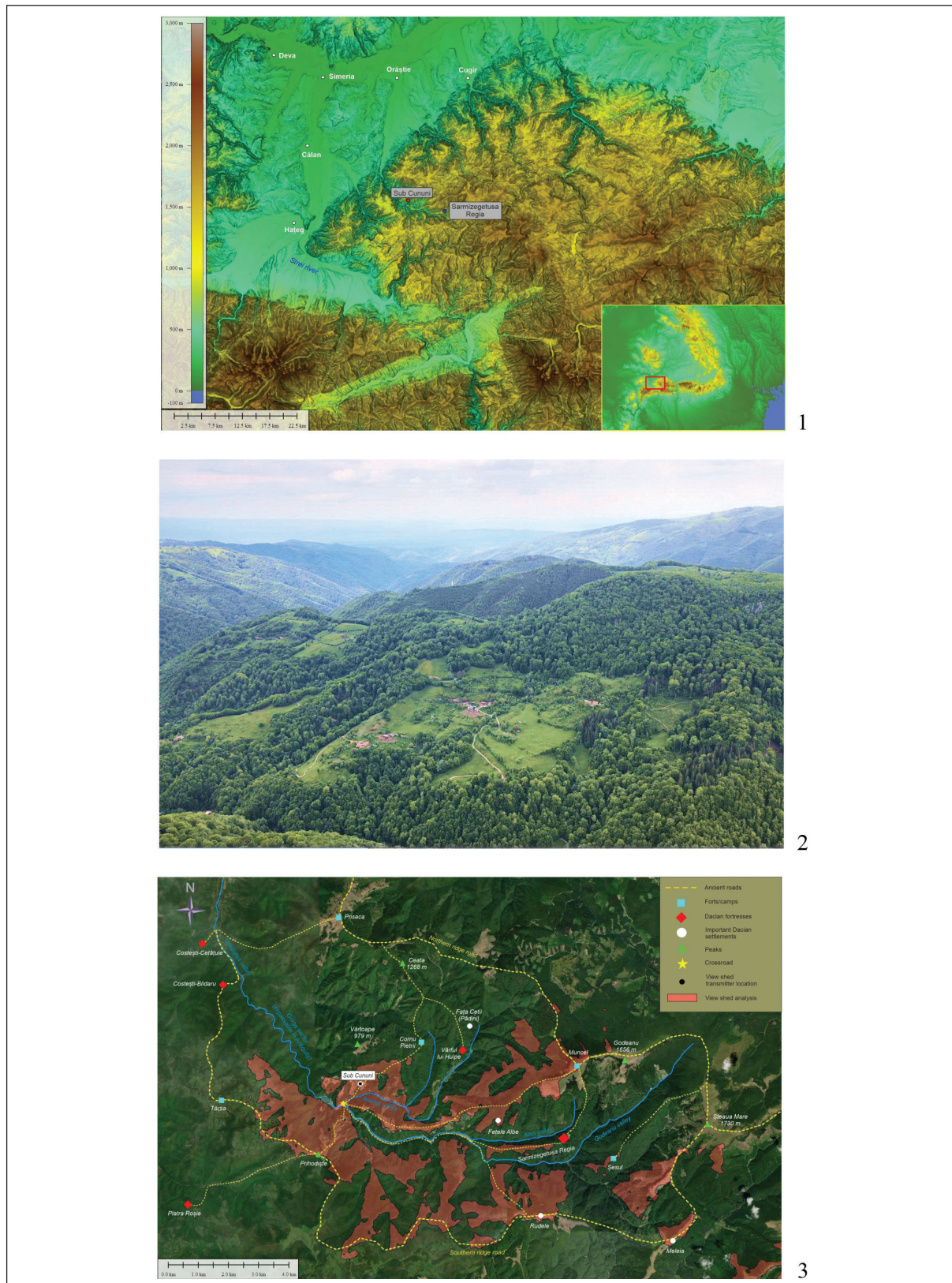
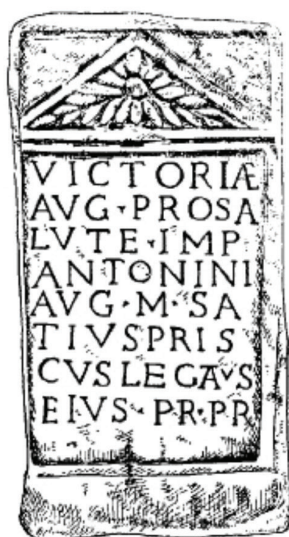


Plate I. 1. Location of the site Grădiștea de Munte–Sub Cununi; 2. Sub Cununi area. Aerial view from the south-east; 3. Ancient roads, fortresses and camps around Sub Cununi.





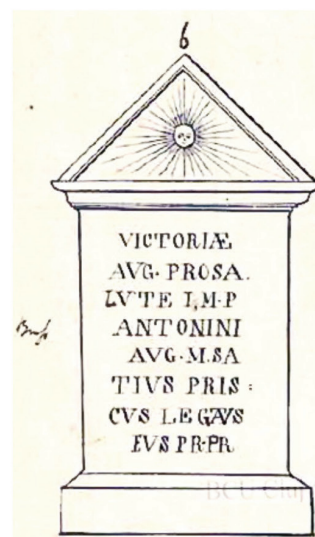
1



2a



2b



2c



3

Plate II. 1. Fragments of roof tiles at Sub Cununi; 2. The inscription dedicated to Victoria Augusta: a. IDR III/3, 276, fig. 208; b. Author's photo (2021); c. FODOR MSS. VII, tab. IIIb.; 3. The current location of the inscription dedicated to Victoria Augusta in Orăștie, N. Bălcescu street no 7.





1



2



3

Plate III. 1–2. Aerial and ground view of the “Roman terrace”; 3. Fragments of limestone blocks on the “Roman terrace”.



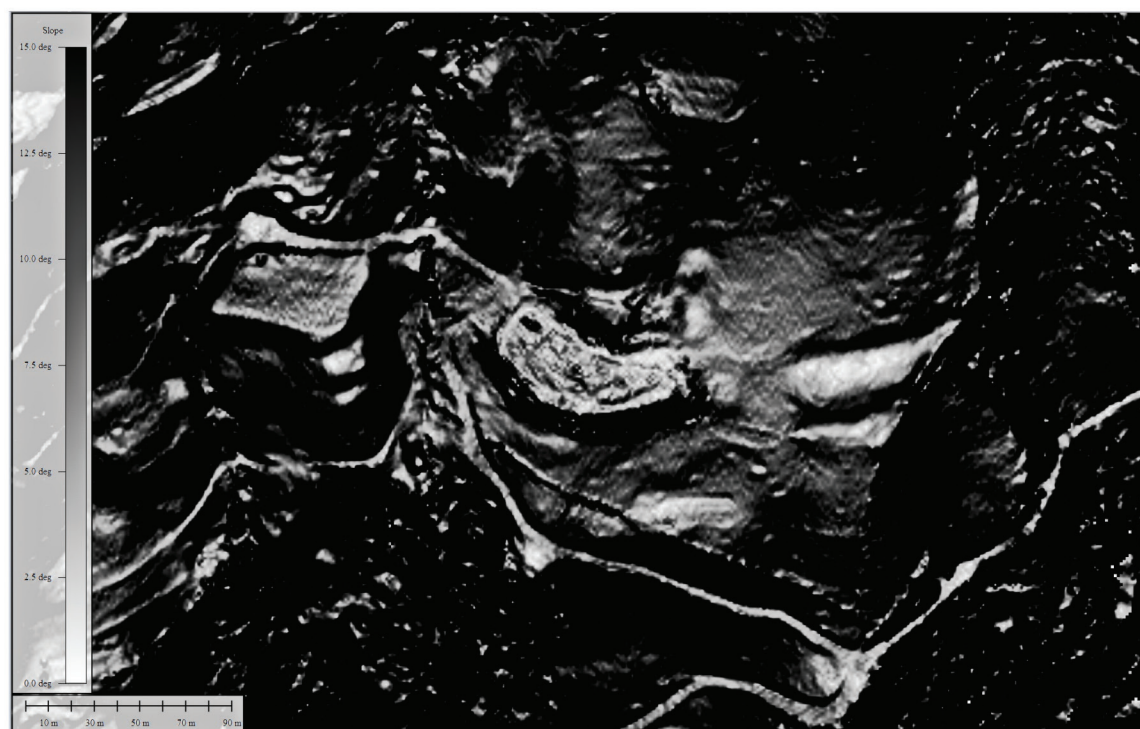
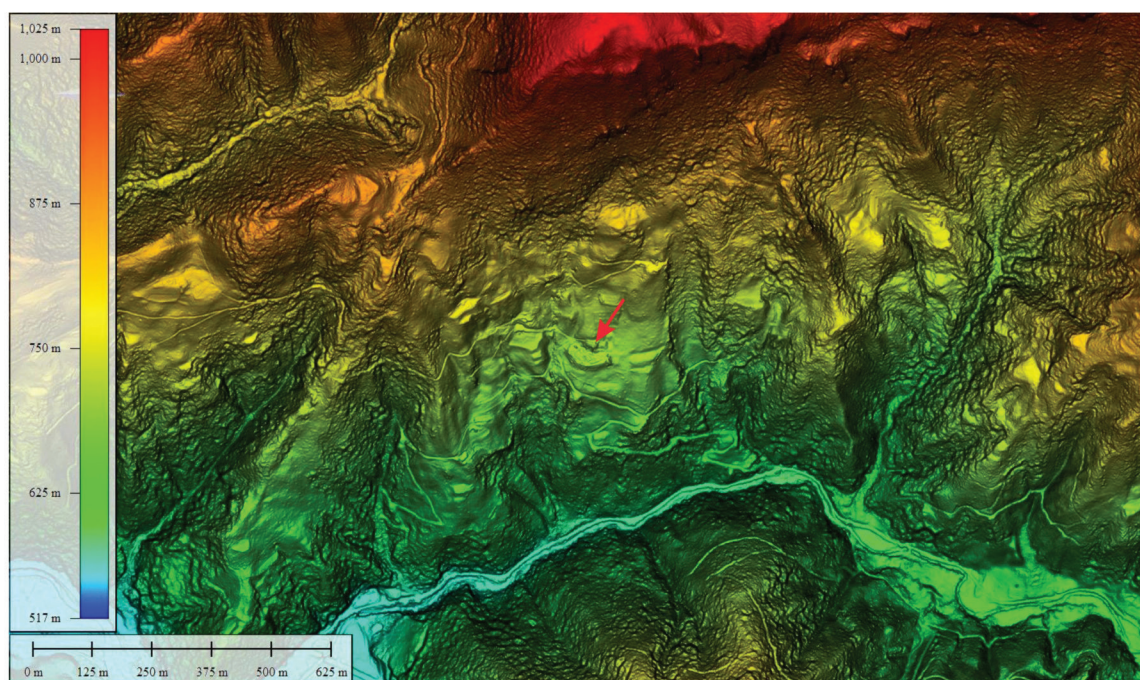


Plate IV. 1. Sub Cununi area and “the Roman terrace”. LiDAR-based Digital Terrain Model; 2. “The Roman terrace”. LiDAR-based slope shading analysis (vertical exaggeration: 30).

## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ActaArchHung</i>	Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae
<i>ActaMN</i>	Acta Musei Napocensis
<i>AISC</i>	Anuarul Institutului de Studii Clasice Cluj
<i>Aluta</i>	Aluta. Studii și cercetări
<i>AnB</i>	Analele Banatului (Serie nouă 2006–)
<i>Angustia</i>	Angustia. Muzeul Carpaților Răsăriteni
<i>AnnUA-Hist</i>	Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Historica
<i>Antiquity</i>	Antiquity. A Quarterly Review of Archaeology
<i>Apulum</i>	Apulum. Acta Musei Apulensis
<i>ArchÉrt</i>	Archaeologiai Értesítő
<i>ArchHung</i>	Archaeologia Hungarica
<i>ArchKorr</i>	Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt
<i>ArchSlovMonComm</i>	Archaeologica Slovaca Monographiae: Communicationes
<i>Argesis</i>	Argesis. Studii și comunicări
<i>AVSL</i>	Archiv des Vereins für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde
<i>Banatica</i>	Banatica, Muzeul Banatului Montan
<i>BB</i>	Bibliotheca Brukenthal
<i>BCȘS</i>	Buletinul Cercurilor Științifice Studentești
<i>BeitUfGMMKR</i>	Beiträge zur Ur- und Frühgeschichte des Mittelmeer-Kulturräume
<i>BerRGK</i>	Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission
<i>BICA</i>	Bullettino dell' Instituto di corrispondenza archeologica = Bulletin de l' Institut de correspondance archéologique
<i>BHAUT</i>	Bibliotheca Historica et Archaeologica Universitatis Timisiensis
<i>BJ</i>	Bonner Jahrbücher
<i>BMA</i>	Bibliotheca Musei Apulensis
<i>BMM</i>	Bibliotheca Musei Marisiensis
<i>BudRég</i>	Budapest Régiségei
<i>CA</i>	Cercetări Arheologice
<i>Carpica</i>	Carpica. Muzeul Județean Iulian Antonescu
<i>CCAR</i>	Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice din România
<i>CH</i>	Cahiers d'Histoire. Publiés par les Universités de Clermont-Ferrand
<i>CommArchHung</i>	Communicationes Archaeologicae Hungariae
<i>Dacia (N. S.)</i>	Dacia. Recherches et découvertes archéologiques en Roumanie, I–XII (1924–1948), Nouvelle série (N. S.): Dacia. Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne
<i>DDMÉ</i>	A Debreceni Déri Múzeum Évkönyve
<i>DissArch</i>	Dissertationes Archaeologicae ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös Nominatae
<i>DM</i>	Dissertationes et monographiae Beograd
<i>DolgKoložsvár (Ú.S.)</i>	Dolgozatok az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Érem- és Régiségtárából, (Új sorozat 2006–)
<i>DolgSzeged</i>	Dolgozatok a Szegedi Tudományegyetem Régiségtudományi Intézetéből
<i>EDR</i>	Ephemeris Dacoromana
<i>EMúz</i>	Erdélyi Múzeum

<i>EphemNap</i>	Ephemeris Napocensis
<i>HOMÉ</i>	A Herman Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve
<i>IA</i>	Internationale Archäologie
<i>ICA</i>	Interdisciplinary Contributions to Archaeology
<i>IPH</i>	Inventaria Praehistorica Hungariae
<i>JAHA</i>	Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology
<i>JAAH</i>	Journal of Archaeology and Ancient History
<i>JASc</i>	Journal of Archaeological Science
<i>JbRGZM</i>	Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums
<i>JRA</i>	Journal of Roman Archaeology
<i>JRS</i>	Journal of Roman Studies
<i>KM</i>	Keresztény Magvető. Az Erdélyi Unitárius Egyház Folyóirata
<i>KuBA</i>	Kölner und Bonner Archaeologica
<i>Lymbus</i>	Lymbus. Magyarságtudományi Forrásközlemények
<i>Marisia</i>	Marisia (V–XXXV): Studii și Materiale
<i>Marisia-AHP</i>	Marisia: Archaeologia, Historia, Patrimonium
<i>MCA</i>	Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice
<i>MFME (StudArch)</i>	A Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve, (Studia Archaeologica 1995–)
<i>MGLDMS (N. F.)</i>	Magazin für Geschichte, Literatur und alle Denk- und Merkwürdigkeiten Siebenbürgens, Neue Folge
<i>Mousaios</i>	Mousaios. Muzeul Județean Buzău
<i>MSVFG</i>	Marburger Studien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte
<i>MűvtÉrt</i>	Művészettörténeti Értesítő
<i>NuclInstMethPhys-Sect. B</i>	Nuclear Instruments and Methods in Physics Research. Section B
<i>OJA</i>	Oxford Journal of Archaeology
<i>PAS</i>	Prähistorische Archäologie in Südosteuropa
<i>PBF</i>	Prähistorische Bronzefunde
<i>Radiocarbon</i>	Radiocarbon. An International Journal of Cosmogenic Isotope Research
<i>ReiCretActa</i>	Rei Cretariae Romanae Fautorum Acta
<i>RégFüz</i>	Régészeti Füzetek
<i>RevBis</i>	Revista Bistriței. Complexul Județean Muzeal Bistrița-Năsăud
<i>Sargetia (S.N.)</i>	Sargetia. Acta Musei Devensis
<i>SBA</i>	Saarbrücker Beiträge zur Altertumskunde
<i>SCIV(A)</i>	Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche (și Arheologie 1974–)
<i>SlovArch</i>	Slovenská Archeológia
<i>StCl</i>	Studii Clasice
<i>StComSibiu</i>	Studii și comunicări. Muzeul Brukenthal
<i>StComSM</i>	Studii și Comunicări Satu Mare
<i>SUBB-Historia</i>	Studia Universitatis Babeș–Bolyai, series Historia
<i>StudUCH</i>	Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis, Series Historica
<i>Terra Sebus</i>	Terra Sebus. Acta Musei Sabesiensis
<i>Thraco-Dacica</i>	Thraco-Dacica. Institutul de Arheologie “Vasile Pârvan” Centrul de Tracologie
<i>Tisicum</i>	Tisicum. A Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok Megyei Múzeumok Évkönyve
<i>Tyragetia</i>	Tyragetia. The National Museum of History of Moldova
<i>UPA</i>	Universitätsforschungen zur Prähistorischen Archäologie
<i>VAH</i>	Varia Archaeologica Hungarica
<i>WMMÉ</i>	A Wosinsky Mór Múzeum Évkönyve
<i>ZPE</i>	Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik