

# THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE AND THE NORTH-DANUBIAN TERRITORIES DURING JUSTINIAN'S EPOCH (527-565)

*ADRIAN URSUTIU*  
*Faculty of History -Cluj*

The presence of the Roman power down the Danube, even after 271, our era (the date when Aurelian left Dacia), played an important role in the political, economical, social and even ethnical evolution of these places. The persistence of the Roman civilization on the right side of the Danube had significant consequences upon the North-Danubian territories, so much the more, as, under the rule of Constantine the Great (305-337), most of these were included in the Empire. This tendency to return to the territories or strategic points from over the river became a constant of the imperial politics, mainly after the capital was settled in Constantinople (330); at this moment, the Inferior Danube gains a special military importance. Procopius of Caesarea, in his work "*De aedificiis*" (IV. 5. 2), said: "Trying to stop the barbarians from the other side to cross the Danube, the Roman emperors covered the whole riverside with fortifications, not only on the right of the river, but even on the opposite side: they built from place to place, fortresses and fortified towns". Therefore, even the former Byzantine rulers had tried to take control over the left Danube side.

The tutelage policy of these territories in the 4th and 6th centuries, testified by archaeology too, is amplified under Justinian (527-565). The fact is generally due to the reconquista action started by the new leader, on one hand, and, on the other, to the need for assuring the Balkans' military security. One of the favourable reasons for success was certainly the continuous economic spiritual contacts of the Empire with the Roman population over the river.

Procopius' work, the main historical source of the epoch, also certifies that the former Banat towns (Lederata, Zernes, Arcidava), as well as the Danubian ones (Drobeta, Sucidava, Turnu Magurele), had been the object of an intense reconstruction and restoration activity.<sup>1</sup> The data given by the ancient author reveal that the re-fortification action had been finished in 535, only 7 years after Justinian's coronation. Practically, the achievements of such an edilitarian project, including an immense work, is impossible, during such a short period of time. The fact that the re-fortification had begun before 527 is proven in the case of Sucidava by the presence of a great number of coins belonging to Justinian's epoch (518-529) which were found near the fortification's walls. Consequently, the construction of the North-Danubian fortress had begun under Justin, Justinian's uncle, when the latter was only associated with the reign.<sup>2</sup>

The archeological arguments for each of the fortified points mentioned above are extremely rich. It would be enough to take the case of Sucidava, the most spectacular one, which has been systematically and thoroughly investigated. Sucidava, re-born mainly because of its military function, played with the neighbouring towns a major part in mediating the trade with the barbarians' territories. The idea is supported by

the intense monetary circulation of the town during Justinian's reign. From his time there have been found several thousands of bronze coins and a standard glass weight, coin-shaped, emitted by Gerontius, the chief of the unities and weights bureau, from Constantinople, in 561. The existence of such a standard, meant for the monetary that entered the Empire, as a result of the trade with the barbarians, supposes the existence of a similar bureau in Sucidava, which would only be justified by a great volume of merchandise for the trade.<sup>3</sup> In the same fields of trade, there was an increased number of coins throughout the whole fortification during Justinian's reign.<sup>4</sup> The bronze small nominal value coin dominates not only the town but the entire North-Danubian area.

Taking into account the data from Sucidava, the basilica from the 6th century, discovered in the North Western area of the fortress, seems to be extremely significant. Its dimensions are 10x20 m., its classical Eastward apsis altar, with some Christian rite tombs, as well as several other Christian objects; the basilica surely exceeded by far the necessities of the garrison. Being in fact an important religious centre, it was also mentioned in Justinian's *Novella XI*, where it appears under the corrupted form of *Recidava*.<sup>6</sup> Taking into account the presence of such a Christian worship place, in the North of the Danube as well as the state action which Justinian undertook, concerning the church organization it is absolutely necessary to bring about discussion on the effects of this politics upon the North-Danubian territories.

Christianity, having its antecedents in the 4th-5th c.<sup>7</sup>, in this area undergoes, during the epoch of Justinian, a certain stabilization as far as the dogma and the superstructure are concerned. The presence of an ecclesiastical hierarchy in the North of the Danube is proved by the existence of the basilica itself and the worship objects from the 6th c., found in the area of the former province. It is important to mention that now the ecclesiastical hierarchy has administrative functions, too.<sup>8</sup> Christianity, through its superstructure, succeeded to replace, to a great extent, the absence of the Byzantine state in these territories.<sup>9</sup> It appears as a connecting element with the South-Danubian Romanity, as an almost traditional passage-way of the spiritual relations with the Byzantine world. Christianity was still at that time a promoter of the Latin language, giving thus the Latin language population the possibility for its very survival as such, in the barbarian world.

## NOTES

1. Procopius, *De aedificiis*, IV, 6, 3-8
2. D. Tudor, *Sucidava*, Craiova, 1974, p. 129
3. Idem, *Romanian Oltenia*, Bucuresti, 1978, p. 463
4. O. Toropu, *Late and Ancient Romanity in South-Carpathian Traians Dacia*, Craiova, 1976, p. 102
5. C. Preda, in: *Realtions between autochthonous populations and the migratory populations*, Bucuresti, 1975, p. 220 and following
6. D. Tudor, Op. cit. p. 137
7. N. Gudea, I. Ghiurea, *From the Christianity's History of Romanians*, Oradea, 1988.
8. Idem, p. 37, 114
9. Idem, p. 115
10. N. Bârza, *The Continuity of the material and spiritual creation of the Romanian people, on the ancient Dacia territory*, Bucuresti, 1979. p. 78