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Living on the River

A Study of the Interactions
in the Lower Danube Gorge
during the Late Iron Age
and Early Roman Times

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Foreword:
Aurel Rustoiu

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F OREWORD

The Danube's gorges in the Iron Gates region, also known in Romanian as Clisură and in Serbian as Djerdap, always attracted human communities, from the times of the settlement at Lepenski Vir until today. This attraction was not only down to the magical character of the local landscape, but mostly to the particular sub-Mediterranean climate of the gorges and the economic potential of the river. The local landscape has changed only after the construction of the hydroelectric dam at Turnu Severin – Kladovo and the appearance of the huge water reservoir covering the entire sector of the Iron Gates.

Consequently, human habitations succeeded over time on both banks of the Danube, from pre-history until today. Though older sites sometimes attracted the attention of learned people in modern times, large scale archaeological investigations were only initiated before the construction of the aforementioned hydroelectric dam. Long before that, the ruins of the Roman bridge built by Apollodorus of Damascus at Drobeta and Trajan's *tabula* carved into the cliff were mentioned by a number of more-or-less educated travellers (see C. Turc, A. Rustoiu, *Podul roman de la Drobeta în conștiința posterității, sec. XVI-XVII*, *Analele Banatului*, s.n., 2, 1993, p. 327–333). These mentions were followed by a series of accidental discoveries and sporadic archaeological excavations conducted during the interwar period, when the Romanian archaeological school was still in infancy, the results being published in some specialist studies (for the history of archaeological research in the Danube's Iron Gates, see F. Medeleț, *Zona Porților de Fier ale Dunării. Istoricul cercetărilor arheologice dintre Baziaș și Orșova pe malul românesc al Dunării*, *Analele Banatului*, s.n. 5, 1997, p. 63–74).

Some results of the rescue archaeological excavations organized in the 1960s on both banks of the river, before the construction of the hydroelectric plants Iron Gates I and II, were mainly published by Serbian archaeologists (see, for example, the contributions of Petar Popović regarding the Iron Age sites, cited in this book), while many of the Romanian investigations are still unpublished.

The information regarding the Late Iron Age remains increased significantly due to the archaeological investigations carried out by Marian Gumă at Stenca Liubcovei, Pescari, and mostly at Divici, the author of this foreword being a member of the research team on the latter site. Unfortunately, the untimely death of Marian Gumă prevented the publication of a monograph about the Dacian people from the Danube's Iron Gates, which we had planned together (for the life and scientific activity of Marian Gumă, see A. Rustoiu, I. V. Ferencz, *Marian Gumă și arheologia Banatului. Contribuții științifice la pre- și protoistoria central-sud-est europeană*, in S. Forțiu (ed.) *Arheovest VI.1 Interdisciplinaritate în Arheologie și Istorie*, In memoriam Marian Gumă, Szeged 2018, p. 21–39). Still, a number of archaeological reports were published (Gumă et alii 1987, 1995, 1997 etc.), followed by some specialist studies regarding various aspects of the Late Iron Age in the Danube's Iron Gates region (Rustoiu 2005a, Rustoiu, Ferencz 2018, Rustoiu et alii 2017 etc.).

Therefore, the scientific information accumulated over time, either published or unpublished, had the potential to allow a synthetic approach, based on a modern theoretical methodology, of the problems concerning the history and archaeology of the Danube's Iron Gates during the transitional period between the end of the Late Iron Age and the beginning of the Roman provincial period. This important investigative step was made by the author of this book.

Andreea Drăgan belongs to the “new wave” of researchers that emerged in the scientific environment of the “Babeș-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca and the Institute of Archaeology and Art

History of the Romanian Academy from Cluj-Napoca. She studied Ancient History and Archaeology at undergraduate and master degree level at the Faculty of History and Philosophy in 2004–2010, then continuing with the doctoral studies at the same prestigious institution. The present book largely represents an updated version of the doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Prof. Mihai Bărbulescu, and defended in 2014.

Starting from a comprehensive analysis of the archaeological information, the author discusses the nature of the interactions between the indigenous populations (named in ancient written sources as the “Lesser Scordisci” on the right bank of the Danube and the “Dacians” on the left bank) and the Roman Empire during a series of successive chronological stages. These are covering more than two centuries, from the “independent” period of the local populations, marked by the emergence of specific identity constructs, to the expansionist phase of the Roman Empire, when the local communities became more-or-less permeable to various aspects of the “new order” imposed by the Romans.

In this book, Andreea Drăgan is demonstrating an outstanding expertise in analysing the archaeological information, from the primary processing of the finds to contextual analysis to synthetic argumentation based on a large amount of archaeological and historical data.

From the theoretical point of view, the entire study is based on the concept of contact zones, which has allowed the author to connect her results with those concerning other areas of the early Roman Empire, thus providing a more complex image of the Danube’s Iron Gates and its inhabitants at the end of the Late Iron Age and the beginning of the Roman provincial period. This comprehensive approach and its results are certainly making sure that the book will become a work of reference for the archaeology of this region, and for the specialists interested in the processes that determined the rapid transformations experienced by the communities of the end of the Late Iron Age in the individual and collective identity constructs while facing the newcomers.

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