

# SOCIAL STRUCTURES IN ROMAN DACIA

-Abstract-

**KEY WORDS:** Roman Dacia, Roman society, social history, social structures, social strata, social orders, social mobility.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

I. Introduction

II. Social structures during the Principate

II.1. Terminology

II.2. Social structures

II.3. Transformations of the Roman social system

III. *Ordo senatorius*

III.1. *Ordo senatorius* in Dacia

IV. *Ordo equester*

V. *Ordines decurionum*

VI. The equestrian order and the decurions in Dacia

VII. The Augustales

VII.1. The Augustales in Dacia

VIII. Members of the elite in settlements of inferior status – *vici, pagi, territoria*

IX. Lower social strata

IX.1. *Apparitores*

IX.2. *Collegiati*

IX.3. Slaves and freedmen

IX.4. Other members of lower strata

X. Veterans in Dacia

XI. Social mobility in Roman society

XI.1. Social mobility in Dacia

XII. Conclusions

Table I. *Ordo senatorius* in Dacia

Table II. *Ordo equester* in Dacia

Table III. Decurions in Dacia

Table III.1. Other possible members of the elite and their families

Table IV. Family members of equestrians and decurions in Dacia

Table V. The Augustales in Dacia and their families

Table VI. Members of the elite in settlements of inferior status

Table VII. *Collegiati*

Table VIII. Lower social strata

Table IX. Veterans

Table X. Slaves and freedmen in Dacia

Table XI. Cases of social mobility in Dacia

## Annex XII. The social pyramid according to G. Alföldy

### Abbreviations and bibliography

#### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this research is to analyze all aspects of the social structures in Roman Dacia – to study the structure of every social order/category/stratum. That includes the study of the social position of its members, their interests, their evolution and careers, their social relations and also the study of social mobility. A work depicting the Roman Dacia's society based on its structure, a thorough research of all social strata and social relations is still missing.

Chapter I (Introduction), presents the methodology, the possibilities and the limits of this work. The study of social structures in Roman Dacia relies on the monumental epigraphy of the province. The available data were classified in the annexes representing tables structured according to social categories including data on: name, social position/function, family ties, place (of residence or of provenience of the inscription when it is unclear), deities, ethnic origin (if specified in the inscription<sup>1</sup>). Further categories of the tables include information regarding dating, source (corpora in which the inscription is mentioned) and occasionally other specifications that revealed interesting details. The individuals were listed alphabetically according to their nomen or, if this was missing, according to their cognomen. Only the members of the civilian population resident in Dacia were taken into account, the army being a different structure with its own particularities. The situation of the veterans was also approached - veterans being part of the civilian population albeit they sometimes maintain relations with the army.

The epigraphic evidence provides valuable data for the study of the social structures in Roman Dacia but is unable to offer an overview. It must be analyzed

---

<sup>1</sup> Not being relevant for the profile of the social structure the ethnic structure was not researched.

carefully due to its inherent, objective limitations. The representativeness of the existent material shouldn't be underestimated nor overestimated and the same is valid for the extent of the epigraphic habit in Dacia. The representation of the social strata on the inscriptions is inversely proportional to the real number of their members. The upper strata (the fewest in number of their members) are better represented – their richer cultural background and better economic condition favoured the development of epigraphic culture. For the same reasons the frequency of epigraphic monuments is considerably higher in urban and military areas. However the epigraphic culture is not an exclusive practice of the upper strata. As far as individuals of lower strata come in contact with the epigraphic manifestation, they can afford it and they feel the need to communicate through it, they adopt it. The subjective limitations refer to the fact that the epigraphic monument advertises what the individual who ordered it wants to communicate to the community. It offers social prestige, identity and reports on achievements and connections.

Other types of sources were used for the general aspects of social structures in the Roman Empire, which also apply to Dacia but do not give direct information on the situation in this province.

Chapter II has three parts. The first part deals with the terminology used by historians in relation to social structures during the Principate. It also includes the author's motivation for choosing some of the terms. Finding the right terms to discuss Roman society encounters several drawbacks. In the studied epoch there was no interest in sociology as modern terms describe it. The concepts of modern sociology define socio-political and economic realities that are different from the Roman ones, however the historian has to struggle to find the most adequate terms to define the realities of the studied era.

In the analysis and description of Roman society's structure, the terms and methods of modern sociology were applied; also the roman notions were used where suitable. Combining both types of approach can reveal a more accurate image. Using the antique concepts is justified by the fact that being part of certain groups/categories offered an identity to the individuals, modeling their actions and social relations.

Nevertheless the modern notions are useful to describe and analyze the different types of groups/categories, their dynamics, their interactions and the relationships between them. With these modern and antique terms we tried to find a general pattern without abandoning the effort to explain the problems and the exceptions. In describing and analyzing the Roman society, we consider that the most appropriate terms are social strata and social orders – the Roman social stratification considers juridical, political and economic criteria that are not always concordant. When we discuss Roman society, we are referring to the community of the inhabitants within the boundaries of the Roman Empire with its specific dynamics, relations and hierarchies, being fully aware of the inherent regional differences.

The second part presents the main theories of the literature that deals with Roman society during the Principate and the author's options and analyzes the structure of the Roman society in the time of the Principate.

Delineating the social categories and classifying them in a hierarchy implies the existence of relevant social characteristics (i.e.: wealth, offices/roles played in the economic and authority structures, honor, education, mentalities) that are applicable to all members. The factors that advocate that a clear line of separation can be traced exclusively between the upper strata and the lower strata, between the ones with social prestige and the ones without social prestige, are the following: the Roman economy's mainly agricultural feature, the interdependence between the political organization and social structure, the Empire's unitary jurisdiction and administration and the ideology of the era. This chapter deals with the influence of these factors on social level.

In order to define a middle stratum several criteria need to exist that are applicable to all its members. Whether we consider the issue on a large scale or a small one - a province or a *civitas* - between the upper strata and the base of the lower strata there is a very heterogeneous mass, too heterogeneous to be classified as a middle stratum. But we agree with the opinion according to which there are intermediary social categories in every community – members of lower stratum that are at the margins of the aristocracy.

Due to the complexity of the factors that create social inequality and their interconnections some problems appear while trying to define the social structures during the Principate. We tried to analyze these inadvertencies.

The third part briefly presents the transformations of the Roman social system during the military anarchy.

Chapter III deals with the senatorial order in the Empire and in Dacia.

The chapters IV and V present the equestrian order and the decurional orders in the Roman Empire.

Because the great majority of the Dacian equestrians takes part in the municipal administration, the analysis of the equestrian order and of the decurional orders in Dacia was done in the same chapter (VI). This way the image of the urban aristocracy is clearer. From a juridical point of view the equestrian and decurional rank is personal. But from a social one it extends on the whole family together with the honor, privileges and obligations attached to it. Considering this the family members of the equestrians and decurions were included in the study. We analyzed the orders of each town and we tried a comparison between them. Sarmizegetusa and Apulum have the richest epigraphic material and the most active elites at provincial scale, they seem to be wealthier. Considering this it was possible to make a more detailed study of the aristocracy in these two towns. Still, less epigraphic material doesn't necessary mean big differences of other nature, too. Different epigraphic habits and the state of discoveries can also be an explanation.

Chapter VII deals with the study of the Augustales in the Roman Empire and in Dacia. According to municipalities' edicts and other official acts the Augustales were mentioned after decurions and before the plebs. This proves that in a town's social hierarchy *ordo Augustalium* is next in importance after the decurions and that the Augustales are part of the elite. For the majority of the Augustales of Dacia the condition of freedman is proven but in the inscriptions only few of them appear alongside their patrons. More frequently they are mentioned on their own or together with their families,

that could prove their independency based on their wealth. For about a third of them it is not possible to state anything about the juridical situation of their personal freedom. The peak of this order seems to have been during the rule of Severus Alexander, when we have the highest number of datable Augustales. But after this period we have no further evidence regarding them, this situation being similar to other manifestations of the municipal life in Dacia. In their case too, the most numerous records come from Sarmizegetusa and Apulum.

Chapter VIII deals with the elites of the settlements with lower status. These elites' political and social status is not similar to the status decurions of the towns have. Still they definitely are their communities' elite and have a superior political, economical and social status. Unfortunately the limited information regarding these elites rendered impossible a thorough study. Their majority holds the superior office of *magister* and generally the monuments attesting them are of official nature.

In Chapter IX we talk about the lower strata. These strata form a very heterogeneous social category and there are no constant characteristics that would allow us to contour a hierarchy. It is possible to delimitate the ones living in rural settlements from the ones living in urban ones considering the differences in the areas of occupation, education, tradition and mentalities. Further distinctions can be made according to juridical situations among the ones who were born free (Roman citizens or not), freedmen, and slaves. However the social position of an individual is only partly defined by the above-mentioned characteristics, other criteria such as material situation, occupation and the relationship with the upper strata are more important. The subchapter IX.1. deals with the *apparitores* – auxiliary personnel in the municipality's administration. These offices are a source of income and give specific social status to several educated plebeians. The subchapter IX.2. talks about the members of different *collegia* (ethnic, religious, professional) of Dacia. In an urban community the *collegium* is a civic group with visibility and a dialogue partner to the elite. The composition of a *collegium* is heterogeneous and the differences between the *collegiate* can be big regarding wealth and the positioning within the professional activity. Certain coherence reveals itself in the members' aspiration for respectability and identity in the community

and in the fact that the members of professional *collegia* have somewhat constant activities and income. In Roman Dacia as well as in the central and western European provinces of the Roman Empire the evidences on professional *collegia* prevail. The presence of professional *collegia* indicates a high level of urbanization and Romanization but does not indicate the professional structure; there are other professions that are not organized in corporations. The lack of evidence regarding the existence of corporations in a town does not prove anything, new evidence can always be found. The inscriptions attest mostly members with certain ranks in the *collegia*, the ones who most probably had a better economical situation. It has been observed the collaboration with the municipal aristocracy through the institution of the patronage (a way for both to gain social prestige), through possible business connections and through clientele or patronal relationships. Subchapter IX.3. analyses the slaves and freedmen of the Empire and Dacia. The existence or lack of personal freedom and its juridical situation was of high importance for the status of the individual in Roman society. Only the individuals with identifiable connection with the master or patron or those whose social status was mentioned as such were classified as slaves or freedmen. The subchapter IX.4. includes other members of lower strata, the ones who mention their activity in the inscriptions. A rather large number of inscriptions lack the necessary details to classify the individuals from social point of view and this is the reason why these individuals were not analyzed. We don't think the counterargument that the positions were usually specified is generally valid; familial motivations or reasons of personal piety could have come first.

Chapter X. deals briefly with the veterans of Dacia. Over 200 veterans and members of their family are attested in Dacia so far. We did not count the ones mentioned in lists or in military diplomas because we chose to focus our study on their private monuments. Simple veterans and their families are mentioned in a fairly big number – three quarters of the total number. Their number is significant and is very important that the veterans without military rank are in such large number. This situation confirms the good economical condition and epigraphic culture of the military. Studies on other provinces show that veterans prefer not to give up their immunities in order to take an office. This situation is also confirmed in Dacia. Even so almost every urban



settlement has its own veterans amidst its leading elite especially former officers, that means that veterans are also interested in the honour gained through magistratures.

Chapter XI. has its focus on social mobility. We use this modern sociological notion to analyze situations from other historical eras. It indicates the voluntary or involuntary move of the individual between different position and/or categories of the social environment. Horizontal and vertical, intragenerational and intergenerational social mobility are different types of mobility. The Roman social system was never rigid – there were no social orders or strata that functioned as casts - with zero or insignificant permeability. We discussed only the cases from Dacia with obvious social mobility. There are several examples with only presumable mobility. Of all evident cases the majority show intergenerational social mobility.

Chapter XII (conclusions) observes that all forms of the Roman social system are attested in Dacia. We have no knowledge about the existence of different or parallel social structures. In case these existed they must have been in small and isolated communities. As expected, most of the monuments were erected by members of the upper strata. We have to take into account that there are many inscriptions that don't give information on the social status of the ones mentioned on them therefore the percentage could be higher. This situation has economical and cultural explanations – that is why there are social groups and categories we can detect only through archeological evidence. Undetectable in the epigraphic material is also the poor population; individuals who are accustomed to the epigraphic habit need to have more material means than the ones affording subsistence in order to erect even the cheapest monument. The situation regarding the *collegiati* where the number of inscriptions mentioning members holding offices in the *collegia* is higher than the one mentioning simple members is relevant.