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Architecture and Private Habitat

In

Roman Dacia

- Summary -

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ARCHITECTURE AND PRIVATE HABITAT IN ROMAN DACIA

- SUMMARY -

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KEYWORDS

- Roman house, Private Habitat, *Domus*, Streifenhaus, Insula, Villa, Vitruvius, Faventinus, Planimetry

SUMMARY

The paper entitled “Architecture and Private Habitat in Roman Dacia” is an analysis of the Roman era provincial domestic environment seen through its spatial dimension: the home and the domestic territory. The main aim is to “see” from the inside the ancient’s way of interacting with its closes architectural space, the dwelling, to document its characteristics both from an architectural and anthropological points of view.

Due to the large extent, both in time and space of the Roman era, a double limitation needs to be set up. Spatially, the focus points at one of the provincialized areas at the fringes of the *imperium romanum*’s extent. The temporal frame depends on the study object. Dacia, in its various provincialized forms is part of the Roman world between 106 and 270 or 275 p. Chr., enough time for the development of both typical Roman structures and of local specificities.

Any attempt at understanding the roman provincial space, public or private starts with the setting up of its general traits. We proceeded using a classical method of separating a *genus proximus* from the specific differences. The course of the research followed the line of setting up the typical facts and structures on the private space in the Roman world, as it is known on the entire expanse of the Empire, in order to set up the framework, the background of the developments in Roman Dacia.

The paper opens with an introduction focused on the setting up of a *status quaestionis* for the private architecture in Roman Dacia and of the province’s place in the structure of the Empire. It is important to highlight on one side the province’s peripheral position and the lack of a visible local interface the Romans could link to after the conquest, seen as a research advantage for the Romanization scholars who can investigate the extent and the effects of the massive colonization of the province.

Nevertheless, the province lacks substantial archaeological research in the domestic areas of the settlements and rural landscape. This is both a positive and negative trait as the lack of current data means that most of the information can still be recovered with a higher fidelity, using modern technologies of prospection, excavation and documentation.

The second chapter is dedicated the subject’s historiography. The research on domestic space and habitation follows three main directions. The first focuses on its architectural perspective. The home is seen as an architectural space and is analyzed as such. The second directions is the anthropological one, in which the dwelling’s space is seen from the inhabitation

perspective. This direction leads to analyses that are more complex, on the way the space is occupied and proves useful in understanding the living consistence and the human imprint on this architectural space. The third direction is the *object-oriented* one. The dwellings are interpreted and published through an archaeological monograph, focusing on the actual structure uncovering and artifacts analysis.

The third chapter presents the working method. This also has three layers of analysis, following the three historiographical directions. Firstly, the research focuses on identifying and cataloguing the structures that support such an in-depth analysis. The second step is to set up the Roman provincial backdrop on which the analysis of the structures identified in Roman Dacia can be done. This step needs a thorough sweep through ancient literary sources, of the similar structures and models in other provincial spaces, as well as deep anthropological insight into their functions and uses. The third stage is the proper analysis of Roman Dacia's provincial landscape and of the dwelling in particular, using the resources presented above. This way we have a more comprehensive and contextualized image of the ancient domestic environment.

The fourth chapter is the first layer of this analysis, the exterior one, featuring the domestic environment. The aim is to envision how a home and its various elements are viewed in the ancient's eye. A key element in this respect is Vitruvius' perspective view on the origins of the habitation, from primitive assemblages to the aristocratic home of his times. His view shows the home as the centerpiece of the human societal coalescence and its evolution from the savage to the sage. Other elements show the difficulty in separating the private space from other types of spaces, as is the case with those *termini*, the border stones. The happy encounter between the vitruvian model and the Campanian houses preserved by the Vesuvius' ash, the house with *atrium* and *peristylon*, are described and analyzed here in detail. Viewed side-by-side with the literary text this habitation model is allowed multiple identifications and a contextualization of its components, harder to do where literary elements lack in detail. However, this assembly also shows the flexibility of Vitruvius' work, to which the house with atrium and *peristylon* is just one of the multiple particular cases of Roman homes' types, all drawing towards a common model, the courtyard home, or the *cava aedium* home, where the central room distributes access and assigns functions.

A separate chapter is dedicated to the literary evidence. Its importance resides in its own balance with the space. The vitruvian text was considered too early to account for the architectural

evolutions north of the Danube. Filtering his work through the lens of a IIIrd century *epitomator* Cetus Faventinus, focused on the domestic aspect of Vitruvius' work, showed the validity of Vitruvius principles even later, in the IIIrd century. Based on three criteria, materials, techniques, plan and dimensions, the analysis show that architect's knowledge in the 3rd century is not different in depths and building means with the Augustus' era architect. Alongside this comparison, a separate analysis of literary evidence focused on the villa show the complexities of this type of structure, even if it focuses excessively on its lucrative aspects. These elements, through their scattered nature, build a different version of private habitat: that of farms and farmsteads and their agricultural hinterland.

Different types of habitation is probed through another type of literary evidence: the "contemplated architecture". The description of Villa Laurentina by its owner, Plinius Secundus, offers the opportunity to cross from the physical geography of the home to its imaginary. The analysis shows that even these types of texts can be used in assessing private space, as even imaginary architecture is linked to the real one (the one intelligible) in order to give the impression of materiality.

The next chapter aims at ordering the architectural and anthropological information gathered until this point. The aim was to identify structural patterns that can simplify to its core the setting up and organization of the habitational space. As the theoretical models were combined with the archaeological record from different provincial spaces of the Roman Empire (Rome, Ostia, Northern Italy, Gaul, the northern limes or even the African environment), a series of domestic structural patterns emerged. The analysis of these patterns show the incredible flexibility and adaptation of the dwelling structure, even inside the more standardized architecture of the evolution from the Antonins to the Severans. This evolution finds the north-danubian province in full development swing. Three generic models, *domus* (the familial residence), *insula* (common habitation, condominium) and *villa* meet in this area a structure of military inspiration and design, the so-called Striphouse/Streifenhaus. The latter shows, at a closer look the same base organizations as the first three. Its addition to these main models shows the strong influence of the military element in molding the provincial habitat, but incapable of affecting the way the inside structure is modelled.

The next chapter marks the first step inside Roman Dacia's territory. Taking advantage of the well known roads structure of the province, we proceeded in evaluating, as is the custom of

ancient itineraries, of the provincial space. The conclusions from this short but insightful journey show some general and more particular observations on the provincial habitat of Roman Dacia. Firstly, it is visible a certain concentration of important settlements that provide for most of the structures that can be investigated, on the axis Tibiscum-Ulpia-Apulum, to which we can add the terminal danubian points of Drobeta și Sucidava and having Porolissum the main northern barbarian interface.

The step towards an analysis of the Roman Dacia's dwellings is focused on evaluating and separating the provincial aspects. Due to the importance of the military element Roman Dacia, the provincial space has three dimensions: urban, rural and military.

The urban aspect is represented by a series of structures in Ulpia Traiana Dacica Sarmizegetusa, the fragment of a habitation *insula* from the first phases of the settlement and two *extra-muros* constructions, of a mixed function, with some rooms possibly for rent. To these we can add the building unearthed by A. Cserni at Colonia Aurelia Apulum, most likely a dwelling-workshop. To these we can add also the 2 homes uncovered in Napoca, with courtyards in the back and a complex building excavated on the other side of the Timiș river from the fort and the vicus from Tibiscum.

The military dimension is the most present here as it probably was the case in Antiquity also. The structures are concentrated in three vici militares: Tibiscum, Micia and Porolissum. Even if the Streifenhaus model is mostly encountered, we have other models appearing here and there. In addition, if we consider for analysis the interior separation, organization and use, the flexibility of its elements are more connected to a general blueprint instead of relying on the military model. This generalizes hard and justifies our approach of studying the structures individually, and compare their structure at the end.

The rural environment is a complex part of Roman Dacia. The use of space and the coagulation of the settlements varies, which allowed a classification of rural settlements in 3 types: commercial settlements, villa rustica and "indigenous" settlements. The first category includes settlements as Cristești and Micăsasa, both big pottery producers. Villa (rustica, fructuaria etc.) is a complex environment, of which we have chosen a few structures to assess their *pars urbana*, and see if their pattern matches the provincial urban environment. The so called "indigenous" settlements are probably the hardest to include in the provincial space, requiring a more thorough

field investigations all across the provincial landscape and a more detailed analysis of their position in the empty spaces delimited by the main roman road.

The analysis of the provincial habitations of Roman Dacia, the ones presented above confirmed the canonicity of the structural patterns set up initially. Even with little evidence, especially in the urban environment and the large number of military *Streifenhaus* settlements, a series of base traits are common to all these structures: the presence of a large central room/hall/garden/corridor, the development of the building in the depth of the lot, the multiplication in depth of the rooms, the tendency to simplify the entrance access and the overcrowding tendency of the dwellings. Unfortunately, the lack of more detailed analysis do not allow any temporal periodization of these buildings in order to make any attempts of setting up a typology.

The conclusions encompass the entire series of analyses. Based on the elements above we can assume the existence of a underlying model of structuring the domestic habitation, an ancient Mediterranean one, based on a central area of distributing access and light. The reduction of all individual traits of this small architectural corpus lead to this type of structure.

Secondly, weighting the 3 dimensions of domestic environment, urban, rural and military the large number of military-type structures can be a sign of the known importance of the military in the life of the province. It also may well be a question of research selection, military structures being favored over the others. The low profile of rural settlements is most likely caused by the lack of research more than their assumed scarcity in the provincial landscape.

The private habitat of the province north of the Danube emerges in a fragmentary state from our research, both as models or structures. Future researches, with the advantage of developing remote sensing technologies could shed a new light on these fragments of provincial space. Until then, the present work reached its target to gather and assess the knowledge about the housed of Roman Dacia and their environment, to clarify, where possible, the vague situations, contributing to a better understanding of the inhabitants of Roman Dacia.