

## THE LOWER MOESIAN *CANABAE* IN THE 1<sup>ST</sup> AND THE EARLY 2<sup>ND</sup> CENTURY

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*The reign of Trajan in the Lower Danubian lands was the time of significant changes, not only in administration and military issues on a regional scale, but also in local communities which witnessed intensified building activity, the movements of large groups of people, increase of production as a respond to growing demand and many other economic and social aspects. The extramural settlements near legionary bases were involved in all these events directly. This paper presents the evidence of the extramural settlements and their inhabitants who lived along the Lower Danube at the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries and tries to answer the question what changes to these settlements were brought by Trajan's rule.*

Keywords: Lower Moesia, Roman army, Trajan, extramural settlement, *canabae*

At the moment preceding the Trajan's Wars against the Dacians, two legions were based in Lower Moesia – *legio V Macedonica* in Oescus and *legio I Italica* in Novae (Fig. 1). It is possible that before AD 106 *legio XI Claudia* arrived to Oescus before its final settlement in Durostorum (Poulter 1986: 521; Zahariade 1999; Matei-Popescu 2010: 262–263). To this, one has to add at least twenty auxiliary units which were based in the province by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century (Matei-Popescu 2010: 239), mainly along the Danube and in a few places in the interior. After the end of the Trajan's campaigns the map of Lower Moesian legionary bases had changed – with

the veterans' colony deduced in Oescus and the new legionary base built in Troesmis. The knowledge about the extramural settlement near all these camps and forts is far from satisfactory. However, vague traces of non-Roman settlement and the 1<sup>st</sup>-century presence of the Roman civilians compared to the 2<sup>nd</sup> –century evidence may give some impression of a significant change that took place during the Trajan's rule. The present paper focuses on the legionary bases only, as these settlements played a significant role in the development of the provincial economy and the logistic support for the army, both during war and peacetime.

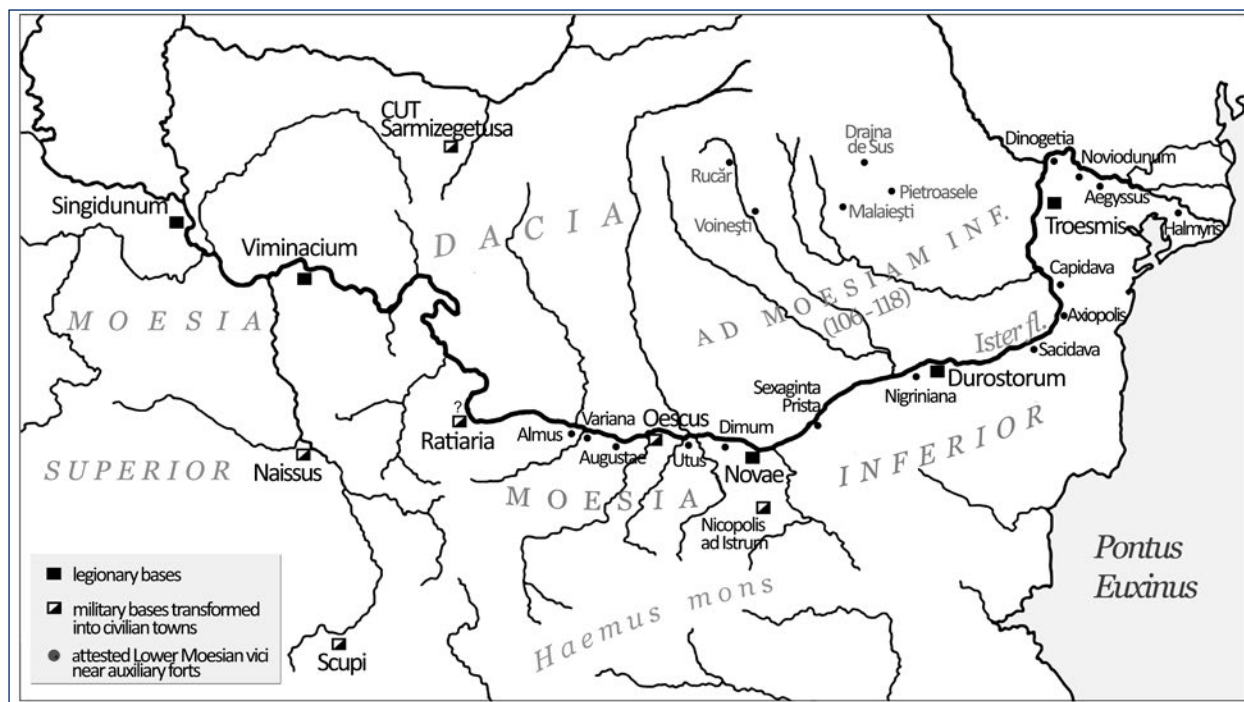


Figure 1. An overview of military bases, towns and settlements in the Lower Danubian provinces in the 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD (by A. Tomas).

## THE EXTRAMURAL SETTLEMENTS

The camp at Oescus was founded at the mouth of the Iskär River (Fig. 2), probably under Tiberius (AÉ 1927, 51; Conrad 2004: 248–249). Although the name given by Ptolemy suggests it was the centre of the Triballi (Ptol. III 10.10: *Οισκος Τριβαλλών*), no significant traces of Late Iron Age settlement have been identified there. The excavations within the later Trajanic colony indicate that the city was founded on the place of the former legionary camp. Although there are no direct proofs, the area adjacent from the east could have been settled by the camp followers (Kabakčieva 2000: 95, 100–102; Boyanov 2008: 71; Tomas 2017: 96), since the necropolis situated about 2 km to the east and north-east of Oescus is considered to be the earliest (Ivanov & Ivanov 1998: 22; Kabakčieva 2000: 99), since two early 1<sup>st</sup> century funerary monuments were found there, one of a *duplicarius* (AÉ 1960, 127) and another of a *lixa legionis* (AÉ 1990, 862). If so, the extramural remains are hidden under the present village of Gigen and the eastern part of late Roman Oescus.

Although the remains of the *canabae* were not identified, the epigraphic evidence is quite informative. We know about 21 civilians who may have lived near the legionary base before the foundation of the colony: 9 persons who were veterans or members of their families, 9 civilians, and 3 persons whose status is unknown. Among them slaves, freedmen and servicemen, including the afore mentioned *lixa*

but also an architect and a leather worker or a tanner (CIL III 14492: *architectus, coriarius*). It is quite striking that epigraphic finds from Oescus mention only two women, and probably both of them had servile origin (Tomas 2017: 124–125).

Although the earliest dedication to Mithras was made by the *Ilvir coloniae* in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (ILBulg 29), it is possible that the cult appeared here earlier, at the same time as in Novae (see below).

The pre-Roman remains unearthed where the camp of Novae was later founded are misleading. Once, it was suggested that the origin of the name of Novae is Thracian and the hand-made pottery found in Novae was made by the indigenous population (Velkova 1976; Sarnowski 1976; Sarnowski 2009: 15–19; Čičikova 2013).

The exact moment when the 1<sup>st</sup>-century camp was built is unknown and *ca.* AD 50 was suggested (Sarnowski *et al.* 2010: 169). Although one of the earliest finds – a glass *phalera* with a portrait of Claudius – was discovered 150–200m to the west of the western fortress walls (Dimitrova 1982: 97–100, fig. 1b and fn.1; Paunov 2015), we know nothing about the extramural remains dated to the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century on that side of the camp. The earliest layers excavated in the area of the extramural residence on the western side of the camp were issued in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (Vladkova 2003: 222–223; Dimitrov 2008). Therefore, it has been suggested that the earliest *canabae* existed on the eastern

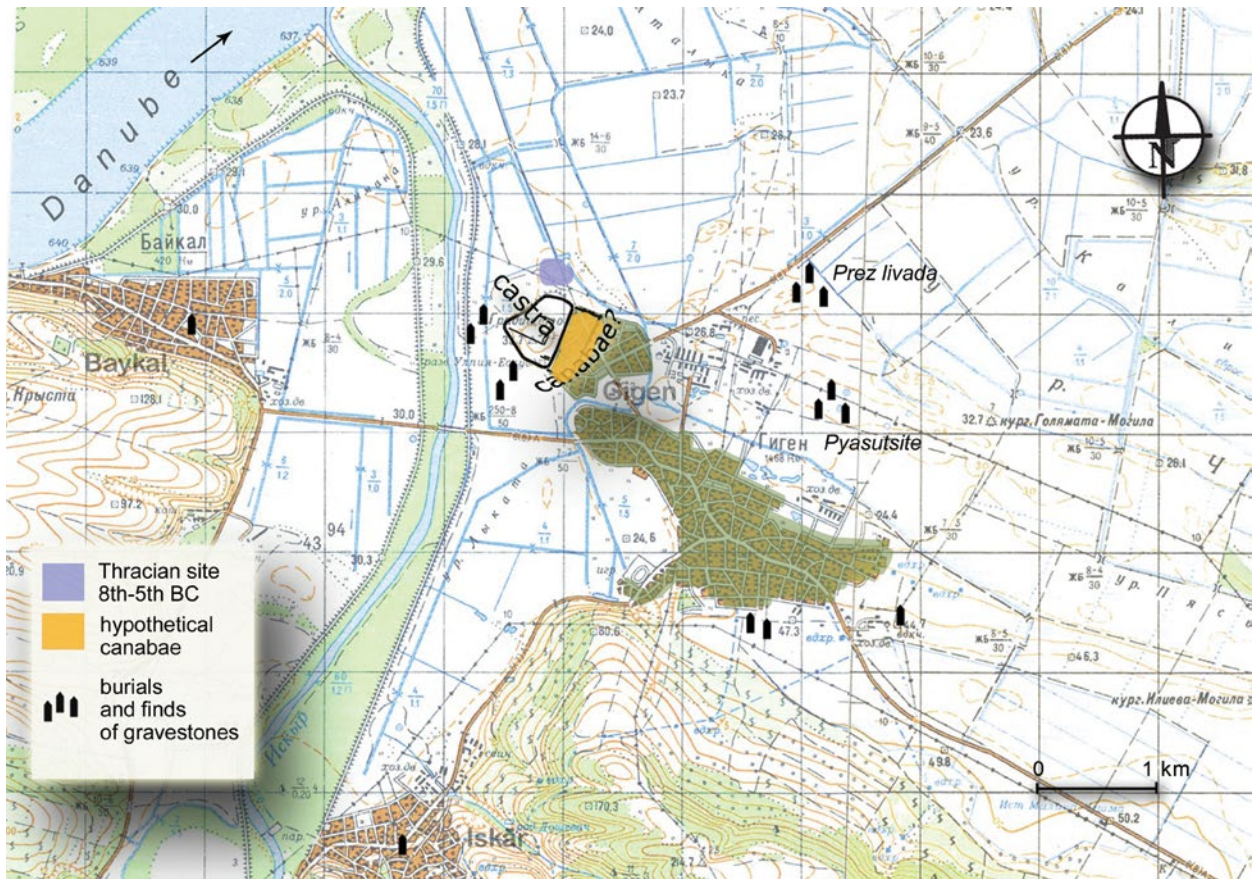


Figure 2. The location of Oescus (by A. Tomas).

side of the legionary base (Fig. 3), in the place which later included within the late Roman fortress in a form of the annex (Sarnowski 1976: 62–63; Čičikova 2013: 241). The 1<sup>st</sup>-century layers preceding the construction of the late Roman fortifications, as well as the *intervallum* near the eastern defensive wall contained hand-made pottery and the early Roman finds, among them imported Gaulish tableware dated to AD 40–70 and a volute lamp dated to the mid-1<sup>st</sup> – early 2<sup>nd</sup> century (Dimitrov *et al.* 1970: 56–57, 68–69). The fragments of native pottery were found in many places inside and outside the fortress (Čičikova 2013 and here Figs. 3 and 6). Up to the present, there are no proves for the existence of a settlement preceding or neighbouring the camp, while the discussed hand-made pottery has been found as late as the early Flavian context (Sarnowski *et al.* 2014: 80; Tomas 2018: 15). The other evidence, which includes the broader area, suggest that the Iron Age settlement survived no longer than until the 80s of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (Tomas 2017: 36–38; Tomas 2018: 15).

In the years preceding the Wars the fortress was significantly rearranged (Sarnowski, in this volume). The main part of the *canabae* at Novae developed outside the West Gate (*porta principalis sinistra*) (Fig. 3). The most magnificent building there is the

residence unearthed just outside the West Gate (*villa extra muros*). The building must have been raised in the late 1<sup>st</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD and the finds of inscriptions and portraits indicate that it had some official function (Čičikova 1992; Vladkova 2003; Sarnowski *et al.* 2006: 148). If we agree with the arguments that Trajan visited Novae during the First Dacian campaign (for the discussion, see Strobel 1984: 180; cf. Poulter 1986: 519; cf. Sarnowski 1996: 195 and fn. 2), this residence would have been the place where he stayed.

The epigraphic finds inform about the existence of an early 2<sup>nd</sup>-century *mithraeum* (IGLNovae 35; AE 1985, 762), probably different from the later one built to the south-west from the fortress (Tomas & Lemke 2015). The *portorium* station at Novae is attested by the same inscription as the earliest Mithras' followers (IGLNovae 35) and the station must have been also somewhere outside the legionary fortress. According to Tadeusz Sarnowski it was to the east of Novae and the building is depicted on Trajan's Column Scene XXXV (Sarnowski 2017: 77–78).

The tombstones dated to the late 1<sup>st</sup> and the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD mention 45 people who may have lived outside the camp. Among them people from north Italy (IGLNovae 81, 93), certain Arrius, the produc-

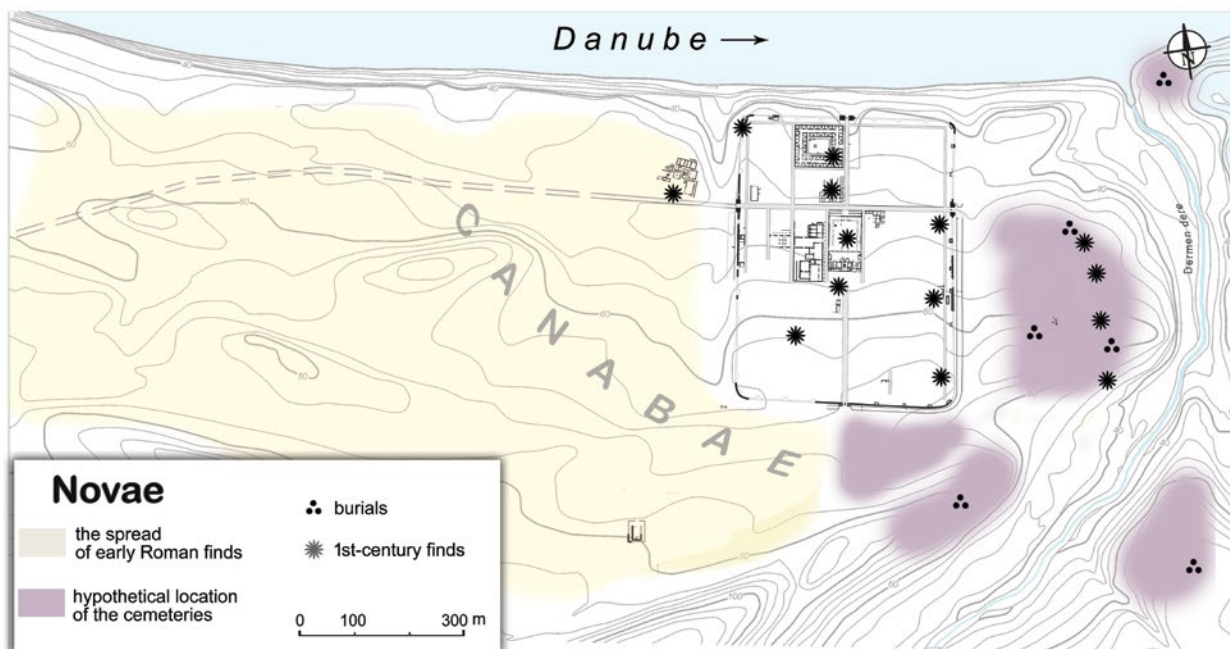


Figure 3. *Novae* in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century compared with places of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century findings of hand-formed pottery (by A. Tomas).

er of clay pipes (AÉ 2011, 1124a; Tomas 2017: 128 and tab. 10.3), freedmen of influential Italian families (Tomas 2017: 128), as well as slaves and freedmen of customs fanners (IGLNovae 35; Tomas 2016: 104ff.; AÉ 2004, 1251). Among the early epigraphic monuments we find the freedmen of Q. Cassii, Granii, Metelli and Paccii – the representatives of rich Italic *familiae*.

The legionary base in Durostorum was founded on the headland of the Danube split here into branches by several islands which facilitated crossing the river (Fig. 4). At present, the ruins of the ancient town are covered by modern Silistra, close to the Bulgarian-Romanian border. The camp and the *canabae* are on the Bulgarian side, while the *vicus* situated ca. 1–2 km to the east is on the Romanian side (Donevski 1990; cf. idem, 1991: 279). Although the origin of the name is probably Thracian, but under the influence of La Tène culture (Tomas 2017: 128), no traces of pre-Roman settlement have been identified there.

The legionary fortress covers an area of ca. 22 ha and the *canabae* stretches around the fortress, possibly over the area of 60 ha (Donevski 1990: 238–239 and fig. 1; 2009: 105–106 and fig. 2; Ivanov, Atanasov & Donevski 2006: 166–180, 227). The major part of the

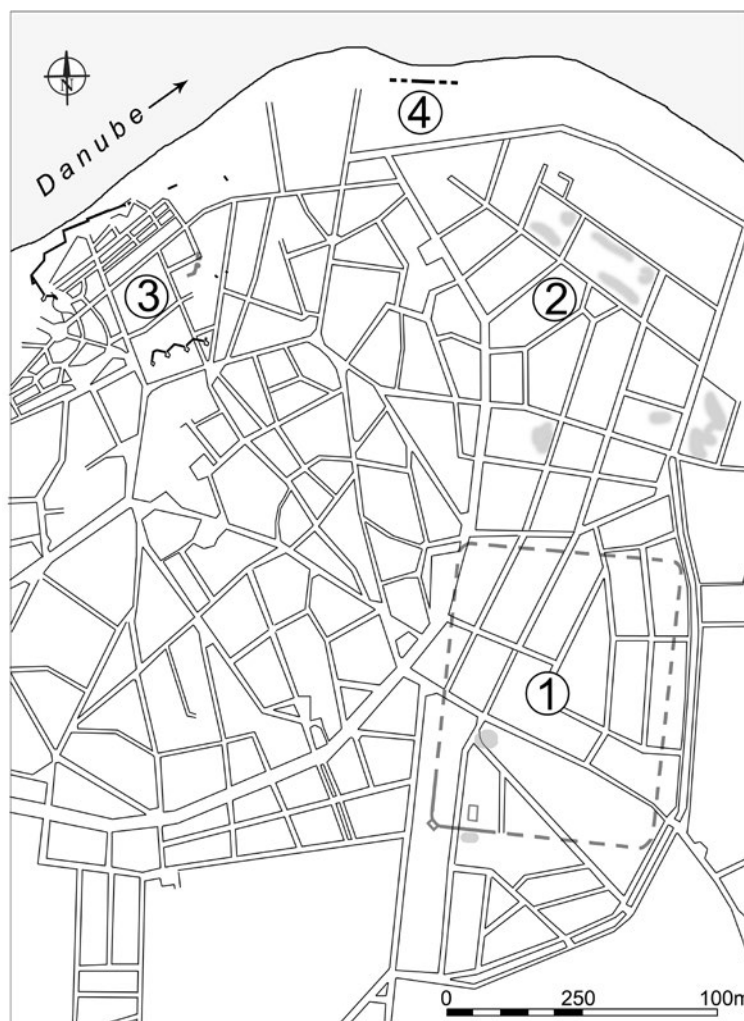


Figure 4. *Durostorum*. 1 – the camp; 2 – the *canabae*; 3 – the late Roman and early Byzantine fort; 4 – the early Byzantine walls (after Donevski 2009 and Atanasov 2014).

settlement seems to be situated to the north of the military base, where “tens of buildings [...] (of) different plans and functions” were discovered (Ivanov, Atanasov & Donevski 2006: 226; Donevski 2009: 106). Although a number of burials have been unearthed within the modern Silistra, only few are dated to the early Roman period. One of them was discovered between the *canabae* and the *vicus*, but no details have been presented so far (Donevski 2009: 110). Some burials in the south-western cemetery contained coins issued by Trajan and his successors up to Marcus Aurelius (Ivanov, Atanasov & Donevski 2006: 261; Tomas 2017: 102).

The second settlement, located to the east of the legionary camp, near the village of Ostrov covers an area of 24 ha (Mușețeanu 1990: 294). It has been suggested that the settlement may have developed from the local pre-Roman site, but a definite proof for this theory is lacking (Vulpe 1976: 290; Donevski 1990: 243). A name Gavidina known from an inscription discovered in the ruins of the late Roman Durostorum may belong to this *vicus* (Boyanov 2010). The local sounding of the name, however, does not necessarily indicate its local origin, but only the origin of its inhabitants. The earliest phases excavated by archaeologists (baths and warehouse) are dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (Damian & Baltac 2007: 67). Nineteen kilns which have been unearthed since 1955 indicate that the inhabitants were involved in manufacturing (Rădulescu 1963; Mușețeanu 1990: 294; Damian & Băltac 2007: 66). Which settlement and when (under Marcus Aurelius or Caracalla) was granted municipal status is subject of a debate (Tomas 2017: 158–159; cf. Matei-Popescu 2018: 255; Donevski & Matei-Popescu 2021).

None of the inscriptions discovered so far informs about the people who may have lived in the *canabae* or *vicus* at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, although the camp was already built at the time. The earliest monument is dated to AD 110–117 and it names a legionary legate (AÉ 1936, 14). Other three inscriptions mentioning a *portorium* slave, a *cornicularius*' freedman and the Thraco-Dacian family are broadly dated to AD 101–300 (CIL III 7476; III 7477; III 12454).

## POSTBELLUM

After the second campaign (AD 105–106) the Dacian provinces were formed and the geopolitical situation of Lower Moesia had changed significantly. Until the end of Trajan's rule the lands of south-eastern Transylvania, Oltenia, Muntenia, Wallachia

and southern Moldavia were part of Lower Moesia (Gudea & Găzdac 2006–2007: 49–52), which made the entire section of the Lower Danube an internal river. The forts between Viminacium and Novae were abandoned, a number of auxiliary units was sent to Dacia and the Fifth Macedonian was moved from Oescus to Troesmis (Mirković 2002; Tețea 2016: 89). It is possible that some of the camp followers remained in Oescus, while others headed east with their legion.

While the legions remained at Novae and Durostorum, the former military base at Oescus was transformed into a colony, which must have been deduced between AD 106 and 112 (CIL III 753; Ivanov 1993: 27; Boyanov 2008: 69; Matei-Popescu 2010: 257–259; Tomas 2017: 99). Moreover, the province had to face the results of Trajanic urban policy, which included the foundation of a new Greek city of Nicopolis in northern Thrace, to the south of Novae (Poulter 1995: 10).

The Lower Moesian *canabae legionis* must have been economically boosted after the military campaigns which required enlarged provisions and service. According to Cassius Dion, in AD 107 Trajan organized extraordinary festivals (*ludi*), which involved combats with Dacian prisoners (Cass. Dio LXVIII 15). It is not without reason to suppose that gladiatorial spectacles were held not only in Rome and in the Dacian provinces, as it is shown on Trajan's Column, Scenes C and XXXIII (Bouley 1994), but also in other provinces of the Empire, including Lower Moesia which was involved directly in the Wars. The military amphitheatres could be built at that time, or they could enjoy renovation.

The majority of buildings unearthed within the area of the *canabae* at Durostorum belong to the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, among them urban villa, public baths and the official residence about 100 m to the north of the *castra* (Donevski 2009: 52, 108 and figs. 12–15; Tomas 2007: 100–102). The latter residence may have been the seat of the governor of Lower Moesia during this period (AÉ 1985: 726; 1980: 793.1 and 2; 1985: 727; Piso 2014). The inscriptions dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century provide information about 74 people who may have lived in the civil settlements near Durostorum – 25 veterans and military families, 38 civilians, 10 persons of unknown status (Tomas 2017: 138–139 and tabs. 11–13). The 2<sup>nd</sup>-century texts from Novae name 76 people, 69 of them civilians. Among the inhabitants, we find new elites of veterans, wealthy local producers, and freedmen or their descendants (Tomas 2017: 127–129 and tabs. 8–10). The neighbourhoods of the military bases became multicultural and diverse socially and economically. This phenomenon is at-

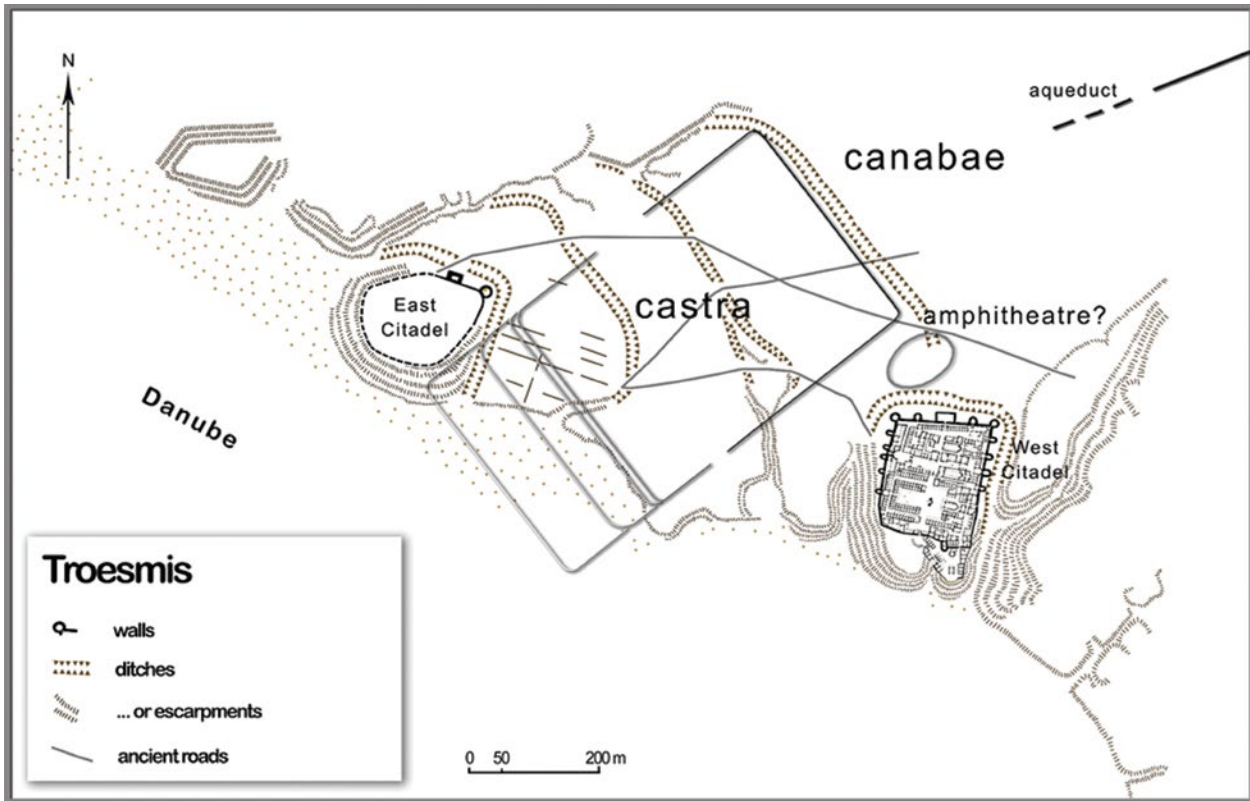


Figure 5. Troesmis. The legionary camp and its canabae (after Chr. Alexandrescu, Chr. Gugl 2016).

tested by the origin of people living there, their religiosity and social status.

The new legionary base at Troesmis was founded in the place which was previously inhabited (Ov. *Pont.* IV 9.78–79; Alexandrescu & Gugl 2015: 251). The civil settlement which was identified recently (Fig. 5) is well attested by several inscriptions, which show that the community was well-organized from the beginning of its presence. As the texts on 25 inscriptions inform, Troesmis consisted of two communities – the *canabae* and the *civitas*. It is possible that the *canabenses* augmented the local *civitas Troesmensium* and all Roman settlers formed a community of *veterani* and *c.R.* who acted jointly, regardless of whether they lived in the *canabae* or in the close neighbourhood, within the *civitas*. The possibility that the second settlement existing prior to the arrival of the legion formed a part of the *canabae* is also accepted (Alexandrescu & Gugl 2016: 18).

In AD 118 the Roman administration was withdrawn from the transdanubian part of Lower Moesia. Populating Dobruja with Thracian settlers was probably intensified during the rule of Trajan and Hadrian (Poulter 1980: 738). Indeed, the process may have been long and include the people living previously in Wallachia and southern Moldavia, as well as those living in the rural hinterland of north-eastern Thrace. Apart from forced displace-

ments of people, a number of military units were moved and many of the civilians followed the army. The former soldiers also migrated and settled down both in the countryside and near military bases, not necessarily of their mother units. One of them was a Thracian named Tarsa Bassus, a former *miles cohortis I Tyrriorum sagittariorum* who settled down near Novae just after Trajan's Dacian Wars (Tomas 2017: 129 and tab. 8.14; RMM 10).

## DISCUSSION: THE CIVILIAN MILITARY INTERACTIONS AND THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Rapid growth of demand during wartime was stimulating for the local business and a good opportunity to enrich for the tradesmen and servicemen who were close to the army. Before the Flavian period Moesia was a province with the troops garrisoned in its western part (Poulter 1986: 519–520). Under Flavians more military bases were created, probably after the attacks of the Roxolani in AD 67/70 and later of the Dacians in AD 84/85 (Poulter 1986: 520). Trade activities and a coin influx during the Dacian Wars had fundamental influence on the local monetisation and the developing economy. The growth of silver coin influx observed in the Lower Danubian sites during Trajan's rule is obviously re-

lated to the growing number of military units, but a large group of bronze Flavian coins found in military settlements along the Danube is the evidence trading activity carried out by the inhabitants of the *canabae* and *vici* (Katsari 2008: 247, 252; Tomas 2017: 108). The events which took place during Trajan's rule had also some more complex influence on the civilians, both Roman and indigenous.

The finds of native pottery inside military bases needs special attention. Such discoveries are usually interpreted as a proof for the supply of goods and not of pottery itself (Carrol 2002: 902–903). One of the vessels found in the left *retentura* at Novae (Fig. 6) contained seeds of grapes, and provisions of local food in such vessels would be obvious (Sarnowski *et al.* 2016: 188–189; Tomas 2017: 72). It is noteworthy, that some of the vessels found at Novae are hand-formed and wheel-turned, while a scant amount are wheel-thrown, as if they were made by potters who gradually developed their skills. One specimen discovered inside the fort Drajna de Sus and interpreted as a Roman vessel, has a typically Roman shape and a characteristic Thracian/Dacian ornament (Stefan 1945–1947: 126, fig. 8).

The main question is who made the local pottery, including characteristic cups made in local tradition (*cupae Dacicae*) and why these vessels were found inside and outside the camp – both on the western and the eastern side of it (Fig. 3), in the 1<sup>st</sup>-century context (Čičikova 2013: 231, fig. 2 and 239; cf. Tomas 2017: 44). According to Tadeusz Sarnowski, the natives living somewhere to the

east of the fortress furnished the army with hand-made cooking pots and supplied food to the fortress (Sarnowski 2009: 19). This explanation seems to be right. However, some forms such as so-called Dacian cups or jugs present inside the camp in the 1<sup>st</sup>-century AD Roman layers cannot be explained by provisions. Moreover, no traces of indigenous dwellings have been unearthed in Novae for almost 60 years of intensive excavations. If the presence of the indigenous pottery inside Roman fortresses should be considered as left by local people, one should ask then, what they were doing there?

The possibility that the native Thracian soldiers serving in auxiliary cohorts would produce them is rather impossible and should be rejected, since we know only about one Thracian cohort (*II Flavia Bessorum*) which was based in the fortress at Oescus during the absence of the Fifth legion and later was dispatched to Rucăr (Matei-Popescu 2010: 193). Although in both these places native pottery was found (Bogdan-Cătaniciu 1986; Kabakčieva 2000: 62), hand-made vessels are found also in other military sites along the Danube, e.g. in Diana (Cvjetičanin 2005).

Therefore, it is not without ground to consider the presence of this pottery as the evidence of mass displacements from the other side of the Danube or some more remote areas. The people who were forced to resettle by the Romans might have been involved in the service to the Roman army, e.g. as forced civilian labour. In such case, the locals would have been forced to settle outside the fortress, while some of them may have been enslaved and kept in-



Figure 6. The hand-formed vessel unearthed in the left *retentura* in Novae in 2014 (photo: A. Tomas).

side the camp. Perhaps the presence of these vessels in the early Flavian context is the effect of the mass deportations during Nero's reign (CIL XIV 3608, Tibur; Tomas 2016: 49) or some later unrecorded ones.

Similar as in other frontier provinces, by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> the Roman craftsmen started production of the so-called "legionary pottery" made in a significantly different manner and technology, while local hand-formed vessels disappear in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (Gassner & Jilek 1997: 303; Carrol 2002: 904; for Upper Moesia, see Cvjetičanin 2005; for Novae, see Dyczek 2016). The disappearance of hand-made pottery in Novae overlaps with the start of the local pottery production in Boutovo pottery centre, some 40 km to the south from Novae (Sultov 1984; Vladkova 2011). The same area provided Thracian and Dacian names on the afore mentioned album from Butovo and other inscriptions from Novae and its hinterland (Tomas 2016: 129 and App. 2, E.86, Butovo; E.101, Obedinenie; E.144, Novae), and this is one of three concentrations of Dacian names in Lower Moesia (Matei-Popescu 2017: 149).

We can suppose that in the first quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century solid stone dwellings in the Lower Moesian *canabae* and *vici* were still not a common view, but baths and official residences seem to be built near many military bases of that period. It is very probable that the residence near the West Gate of Novae hosted officials and their staff, including emperors. Analogical residence may have been raised at Durostorum which played an important strategic role during the Trajan's Dacian Wars. The main parts of the *canabae* in Durostorum and in Novae developed on that side of the fortress, where the official residence existed. Used as the seat of the provincial governor not only during campaigns, Durostorum was appreciated either by Hadrian or by Antoninus Pius who granted honorific title *Aeliae* to the *canabae* (CIL 7474; Tomas 2017: 158–159).

Italian families and some former soldiers involved in business were those who profited during the war-time. The members of the Arrii family who migrated from Italy and started their business in Novae, became producers in the pottery centre at Boutovo, which involved local people as labour (Kolendo & Żelazowski 2011: 71–72; Tomas 2016: 119). The Arrii are also attested in Troesmis and Tomi (Tomas 2017: 128). The influential family are the Oppii family, whose freedmen's descendants lived at Novae

and Durostorum (Tomas 2017: 66, 129). The military production of building materials is attested by stamps TRA' EX (Sarnowski pers. comm.; cf. Kolendo & Żelazowski 2011: 72). The enrichment of the veterans' relatives are observable in various places in the Roman empire, and this may be the result of their privileged legal position in the military settlements, as well as their business connections.

The foundation of Nicopolis and deduction of a new colony at Oescus – both in the relative proximity of Novae – must have affected the civil settlement near the legionary base. The commercial activity of these two cities, especially of Nicopolis' *chora* which supplied Novae, had negative affect on the prosperity of the *canabae* workshops. From the Flavian period onwards, the north Thracian pottery centres at Boutovo and Pavlikeni started their production of pottery (Vladkova 2011: 148), and soon this pottery started to be sold in bulk in Novae. Large quantities, relatively good quality, variety of forms and possibly good price of *sigillata* produced in Nicopolis' *chora* dumped the pottery manufacturing near military bases. Additionally, both newly founded cities were more attractive places for the Lower Moesian elites and could offer more to the civilians, who preferred living in stable conditions. This process resulted in the creation of a specific society at Novae, where freedmen were numerous and influential, while veterans and Roman citizens – as it seems – did not form any collegial body which would have called for the municipalisation. It is possible, that this specific geographical position which Novae had after the Trajan's Dacian campaigns became the reason why the *canabae legionis I Italicae* did not develop into a prosperous town as it was Durostorum. The geopolitical position of Durostorum and Troesmis was far better, as they were placed at a certain distance from the other Lower Moesian cities, but near the main river route.

It is quite obvious to say that the military investments made before and during the Trajan's Wars changed the Lower Danubian military landscape significantly. The inhabitants of the *canabae* and *vici* profited from these events some time later, as war brings money, but peace and stabilisation give possibilities to develop prosperity. The effects of major events and decisions may be visible and evaluated from the long-term time span, and this may be the case of the Lower Moesian *canabae*.



## ABBREVIATIONS

AÉ	L'Année épigraphique.
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> , Berlin, 1893–1896.
IAI	<i>Izvestija na Arheologičeskija Institut</i> , Sofia.
IGLNovae	J. Kolendo & V. Božilova, <i>Inscriptions grecques et latines de Novae (Mésie inférieure)</i> , Bordeaux, 1997.
ILBulg	B. Gerov, <i>Inscriptiones Latinae in Bulgaria repertae, Serdicae</i> , 1989.
RMM	B. Pferdehirt, <i>Römische Militärdiplome und Entlassungsurkunden in der Sammlung des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums</i> , Mainz, 2004.

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