
RIOTS IN SOUTH-CARPATHIAN DACIA AFTER THE MARCOMANNIC WARS ?

Abstract: The Marcus Aurelius' Marcomannic wars reshaped the Roman world. Their impact can be seen in every Danubian provinces, with evident consequences for many years after Marcus Aurelius' reign period. Because of the war damages and economic decline, in association with the plague spreading, provincial populace was under pressure. In this turbid context some events occur and can be observed in the field even in time of Marcus Aurelius' successor. The damage suffered by three Roman sites situated in South-Carpathian Dacia at Râmnicu Vâlcea, Stolniceni, Ocnîța (all of them are in Vâlcea County), very close one and other, seems to be dated at the beginning of Commodus' reign period. Chronological data can be offered by the Râmnicu Vâlcea I hoard, of which hiding moment have to be place in that time. Although, in South-Carpathian Dacia a hoard horizon was formed in this historical context.

Keywords: *Marcomannic wars, Commodus, Oltenia, Buridava, Râmnicu Vâlcea I hoard.*

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As enlightened men dreamed, a man with philosophic principles arrived to rule the world as emperor of Rome in 161: Marcus Aelius Aurelius Verus. As they anticipated, the new ruler putted himself in the service of the people and state, despite his health situation,¹ but the time was not proper for such a peaceful leadership, soon dark clouds of war and disease gather quickly and consumed the emperor energy and life. One of the most important threats that marked the reign of Marcus Aurelius was the Marcomannic wars². This war had a large impact to the life and economy of many Roman Danubian provinces³. In all the affected provinces the panic left numerous traces illustrated by the archaeological researches⁴ and by the hording process⁵. The war was not entirely finish at the end

¹ AURELIUS 2013, 75, 337; BIRLEY 2001, 89.

² KOVÁCS 2009, 201-250.

³ BIRLEY 2012, 222-230, BURSCHE 1994, 471.

⁴ BÖHME 1975, 153-217; FISHER 2012, 29-44; GUDEA 1994, 67-79.

⁵ FARKAS 2000, 131-140; SUCIU 2010, 128-131; GĂZDAC 2002, 57-

of Marcus Aurelius reign period, his successor, Commodus, trying to close the conflicts scattered all over the Danubian provinces frontiers⁶, in a hard context created by the plague⁷. Border conflicts appears even after the peace was reestablish with the principal tribes involved in the Marcomannic wars, in Dacia generals as: Clodius Albinus and Pescenius Niger⁸ were distinguished by their military actions. Also, is being possible to have existed some internal revolts in the province generated by the difficulties in which provincial populace lived after the war devastations⁹. South-Carpathian Dacia was less affected by the Marcomannic wars, comparing with the intra-Carpathian one¹⁰. Here, the evidences seems to indicate a more troubled situation at the beginning of Commodus' reign period, as we will discuss further.

In the south-Carpathian Dacia we have a series of hoards ended with coins issued in the time of emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, but many of these hoards are just partially recovered. The fully recovered hoards are essential in understanding the crisis pattern in a region. One of those, hid in the debated period of time, is the Râmnicu Vâlcea I hoard, discovered in 1971. This hoard contains 23 denarii, issued from Trajan to Marcus Aurelius, which were deposited in a pottery money box, pot that was unfortunately abandoned by the finders. The last coin of the hoard it's been struck in the years 176-177, type RIC III 359¹¹.

The archaeological context it's very interesting because the hoard was found in a layer full of burned materials and roman pottery fragments¹². It is very probable to have here, between Tudor Vladimirescu and Nicolae

59; GĂZDAC 2010, 70-74, 130-134; PETAC 2010, 179-182.

⁶ HEKSTER, 2002, 44-46, 48.

⁷ SABBATANI/FIORINO, 2009, 268.

⁸ Dio Cassius, 72, 8, 1; RUSCU 2003, 139.

⁹ Historia Augusta, *Commodus*, 13, 5; RUSCU 2003, 140-141.

¹⁰ ARDEVAN/ZERBINI, 2007, 56.

¹¹ DUMITRAȘCU 1996, 95-96, 99; PURECE 2015, 91; see figure 1, 2.

¹² DUMITRAȘCU 1996, 96.

Bălcescu avenues, a roman rural settlement because other roman objects were found in the excavations made in the vicinity of the hoard discovery place¹³. Unfortunately, we don't have many information or objects from this region because of the large construction program developed here in the communist period, with no interest for preserving the archaeological data. Despite this situation, we can associate the end of coin accumulation in this hoard with a calamity that put an end to the building existence in which the hoard was found, or, maybe, to entire settlement. It's very clear that a fire can be accidentally started or being an arson generated by a military conflict. For understanding this we have to discuss the situation observed in the nearby sites.

One of the most important roman settlement from the south-Carpathian Dacia is situated at Stolniceni¹⁴, approximatively nine kilometers to the south from the one discussed above. The strategic importance of this location was essential for controlling the Olt river valley, here the river meadow become larger for the first time after the river passed through the narrow Carpathian pass. This place is situated close to the important Dacian tribal center: *Buridava* and the salt mines situate nearby *Buridava*, nowadays Ocnele Mari region. Actually the salt was carry by Dacians from the mines to the Olt River along an affluent: Pârâul Sărat, about 5 kilometers, where was embarked on rafts and transported to the Danube¹⁵. This salt's embankment place was, also, used by the Romans, a new settlement arousing here after de fall of Dacian *Buridava*. We don't know for sure the name of this settlement, some researchers considering that here was the Roman *Buridava*¹⁶, name attested by the *Tabula Peutingeriana*¹⁷, others thinking that here was *Colonia Malvensis*¹⁸.

¹³ DUMITRAȘCU 1996, p. 96, IDR II, 574; TUDOR 1978, 90-91; see figure 1.

¹⁴ ARDEVAN, 1998, 99; see figure 1, 3.

¹⁵ BICHIR 1982, 44.

¹⁶ BICHIR 1982, 44.

¹⁷ FODOREAN 2014, 110

¹⁸ ARDEVAN, 1998, 99; NEMETI/DANA 2017, 219.

The most important archaeological researches was conducted at Stolniceni by Gh. Bichir and were concentrated on the baths complex¹⁹. Studying the rich archaeological material found here he observed the existence of five levels, all of them being ended by a burned layers and destructions²⁰. Those five archaeological levels were chronologically dated as following²¹:

- the 1st level: Trajan – the first part of Antoninus Pius’ rule
- the 2nd level: the last part of Antoninus Pius’ rule up to Commodus’ rule
- the 3rd level: the Commodus – Caracalla period
- the 4th level: the Caracalla – Philippus Arabs period
- the 5th level: the Philippus Arabs – Aurelian period²² (very probably the end of this level have to be placed close after 260 in time of Gallienus²³)

The last habitation level, namely the 6th level, belongs to the post-Roman period.

We have to observe that the second level end it is placed in time of Commodus. No Commodus coin was identified at Stolniceni until now²⁴, but we have to take note that the monetary production in his time was low²⁵. Not many Commodus coins were discovered in the Roman sites of Dacia²⁶. In fact, because of this situation we have to presume that many issues made by previous emperors remain in use, especially those of Marcus Aurelius.

Near the old Dacian power center *Buridava* (Ocnița Village), 300 m north, on the Pârâul Sărat Valley, a very interesting roman site emerge probably short after the Trajan’s conquest. The site was discovered in 2009 and it is called *Downstream from the Dam*. In this site had dug nine buildings, almost all of them being constructed with wooden walls, and an

important number of furnaces and ovens. The most important construction it’s a large edifice made with stone walls, named L 12, with interior dimensions of 6,70x6,70 m and the walls thickness being between 0.70-0.90 m. A large quantities of archaeological material was recovered from this construction, having no match in comparison with other complexes of this site. For example 10 coin, representing 45.45% from the total number of coin discoveries, were found in this building²⁷. It is very clear that this building stands out both by the style of construction, dimensions and inventory compared to the others, having, very probably, an important role in this area. We presumed that here it is possible to be, taken in consideration the preliminary archaeological information and the position of the site, the location of Roman administrative center for salt exploitation from nowadays Ocnele Mari region²⁸. As in the case of Stolniceni settlement, the archaeologists observed here a level of destruction dated in the second part of 2nd century²⁹.

Until now, we know 22 coins from this site distributed between the reigns of Trajan and Antoninus Pius. The most recent one is a denarius issued by Antoninus Pius for Faustina II, RIC 495a³⁰. The lack of Severian coins, coins that are very common in Roman Dacia sites, indicate, in a connection with the destruction level observed by the archaeologists, a catastrophic situation occurred after the time when Faustina coin was issued and until the beginning of Severian dynasty.

It is very clear that the site from Ocnița- *Downstream from the Dam*, it is umbilically linked with the settlement from Stolniceni, situated just five kilometers away, near the entrance in Ocnele Mari depression were the site is located. The level of destruction observed at Ocnița- *Downstream from the Dam* it is possible to be dated as the end of 2nd level from Stolniceni. In this phase of research we can suppose that a single event affected

¹⁹ See figure 3.

²⁰ BICHIR 1982, 50.

²¹ BICHIR/BARDAȘU 1983, 336.

²² BICHIR 1982, 50.

²³ PURECE 2014, 94.

²⁴ PURECE 2007, 111-130.

²⁵ HOBLEY 1998, 19.

²⁶ MUNTEANU 2017, 114, chart 68.

²⁷ PURECE/TUȚULESCU 2016, 4; see figure 4.

²⁸ PURECE/TUȚULESCU 2016, 5.

²⁹ DANA/TUȚULESCU 2017, 198.

³⁰ PURECE/TUȚULESCU 2016, 4, see figure 5.

all those three sites, event that have to be chronological placed after 176-177, the issue period for the last coin of Râmnicu Vâlcea I hoard. Taken in consideration that in Dacia we have a decline in number of coins/year in Marcus Aurelius' reign period and a fall to the lowest value for the time of Commodus³¹ we have to take in the consideration that newer coins were hard to found on the market. Because of that, we have to presume that the hoarding moment, in this period of time, have to be places some years after the last coin issue moment, in our case after 180³². This situation seem to be illustrated by other hoards discoveries from south-Carpathian Dacia³³. Taken in consideration those arguments, we consider that the event took place at the beginning of Commodus' reign period, a turbulent period for Dacia, as we mentioned in our introduction, dominated by an internal provincial riot³⁴ and instability.

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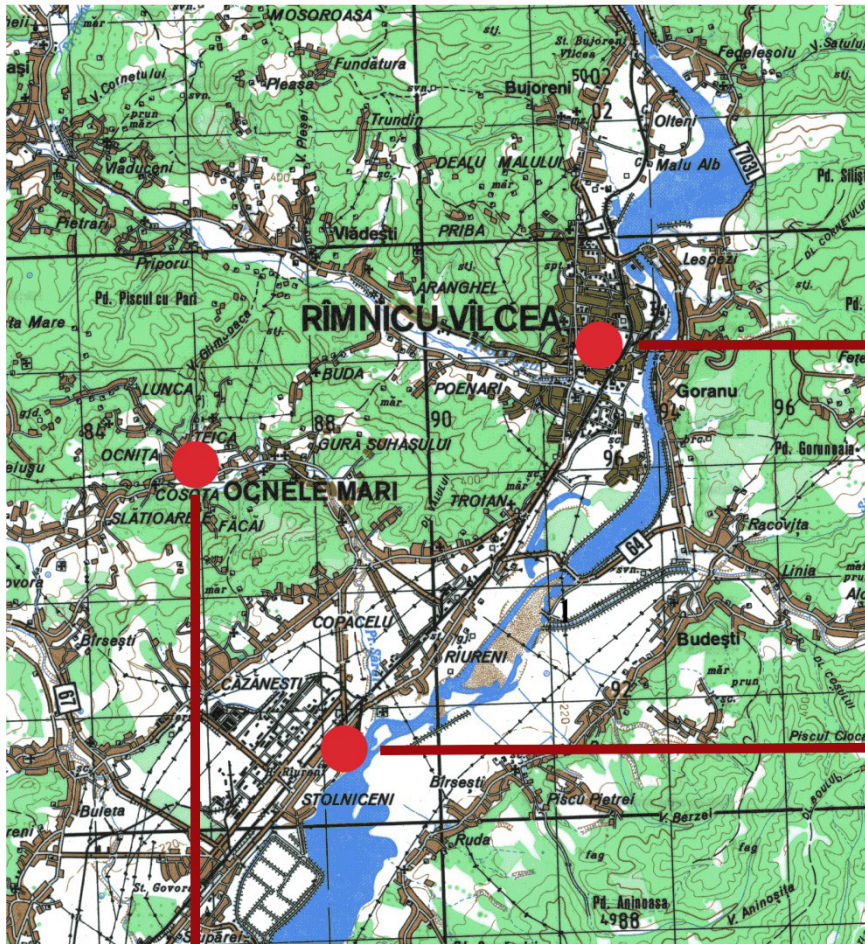
³¹ DUNCAN-JONES 1998, 168, GĂZDAC 2010, 200; MUNTEANU 2017, 114.

³² PETAC 2010, 181; PURECE 2015, 189-191.

³³ PURECE 2015, 189-191.

³⁴ ARDEVAN, ZERBINI, 2007, 244.

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**RM.VÂLCEA I
HOARD**

STOLNICENI SITE

OCNIȚA-Downstream from the Dam SITE

1. MAP WITH SITES AND HOARD LOCATIONS



2. RM.VÂLCEA I HOARD - MARCUS AURELIUS COINS



3. STOLNICENI SITE- ROMAN BATHS



4. OCNIȚA-Downstream from the Dam SITE -L 12



5. OCNIȚA-Downstream from the Dam SITE - FAUSTINA II COIN

