

„VADRÓZSÁBÓL TÜNDÉRSÍPOT CSINÁLTAM”

Tanulmányok Istvánovits Eszter 60. születésnapjára

„TO MAKE A FAIRY'S WHISTLE FROM A BRIAR ROSE”

Studies presented to Eszter Istvánovits on her sixtieth birthday

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*Három egész napon át
bújtam erdő vadonát,
gombamezőt, sziklatetőt bejártam.
Három egész napon át
faragtam egy furulyát,
vadrózsából tündérsípöt csináltam.*

(Weöres Sándor: Furulya)

*Three days I spent in the forest’s arms
exploring its enchanted charms,
from its cliff-top crown to its mulchy toe
Three days I spent in the forest’s arms
and there a flute myself did carve
to make a fairy’s whistle from a briar rose.*

*(Sándor Weöres: The flute)
(Translated by John Conyers)*

Almássy Katalin és **Kulcsár Valéria** közreműködésével
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‘Roman ditches’ in Bačka and the outer *limites* of Pannonia

Vujadin Ivanišević – Ivan Bugarski

Among other topics, Eszter Istvánovits, together with Valéria Kulcsár, paid attention to the problem of Csörsz Ditch, or Devil’s Dyke, encircling some 60,000 km² of the Carpathian Basin. In their article, the authors provided an overview of the field research conducted and of the existing interpretations of this neuralgic issue in Central European archaeology and historiography (ISTVÁNOVITS–KULCSÁR 2010.). Our contribution, honouring the author, aims to offer another approach to the problem; to that end we will analyse the so far under-studied relationship between the ‘Roman Ditches’ and the Roman *limes* in Bačka, in the very south of the Carpathian Basin. Our survey of the ditches’ route will be based on the already published archaeological results, Google Earth satellite imagery, and spatial analysis of the wider area of the Roman frontier and its fortifications. It will not employ historic aerial photographs and high-resolution commercial satellite imagery, unlike a long-standing research programme in Romania also dealing with linear defensive systems in the Lower Danube region (OLTEAN–HANSON 2015.).

The first elaborate data on the ‘Roman Ditches’ in Bačka were presented by Count Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli in his well-known work *Danubius Pannonico-Mysicus*. Apart from the general map, schematic illustrations of some sections of the so-called Small and Great Roman ditches were published, including their intersections and some fortification details (MARSIGLI 1726. 7–8, figs VIII–IX). The routes of the ‘Roman Ditches’ were documented within the course of the First (1763–1787) and the Second Military Survey (1806–1869), while the Third Military Survey (1869–1887) provided less relevant information. During these surveys of the Austrian Empire’s territory (Josephinische, Franziszeische, Franzisco-Josephinische Landesaufnahmen), the ditches were drawn to a scale of 1:28,800.

Important data on the route and the preservation of these ditches, as well as on the accompanying fortifications, were supplied by Flórian Rómer, Róbert Fröhlich and Árpád Buday who, at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, surveyed their remains and published the results with historical interpretations (RÓMER 1878., FRÖHLICH 1887., BUDAY 1913.); later research largely depended on their work.

Using the above-mentioned sources and Google Earth imagery, routes of both ditches were drawn – with some sections added – and put into a GIS. In that way, defensive structures were defined, and some potentially new fortifications were discovered. Among them, four large rectangular constructions may well have been parts of the ‘Great Roman Ditch’ fortification system.

‘Roman Ditches’ in Bačka

The route of the ‘Small Roman Ditch’ can be traced from Apatin towards Prigrevica (Bács-szentiván); south of this village it turns to the southeast and, running west of Doroslovo (Doroszló), reaches Srpski Miletić (Militics), where it breaks at the bank of the Mostonga Rivulet. This branch of the ditch, 22 km long, faces the left bank of the Danube (Fig. 1.A).



Fig. 1

Part of the Pannonian *limes* with cities, fortifications, roads, and ‘Roman’ ditches in Barbaricum

1. kép

A pannoniai limes része a városokkal, erődökkel, utakkal és a barbaricumai „római” sáncokkal

Further on, the route can be reconstructed thanks to the trace spotted in one of the Google Earth images (Digital Globe, Imagery Date 3/2/2016), southwest of the Pivnice (Pinzed) village. All the way to Despotovo (Deszpot-Szent-Iván/Úrszentiván) it can be traced only sporadically and, further to the southeast, it runs north of Kulpin (Kölpény) and Kisač (Kiszács) in the direction of Čenej (Csenej), and via Bački Jarak (Járek/Tiszaistvánfalva) to Gospođinci (Goszpodince/Boldogasszonyfalva). This section of the ditch is parallel to the left bank of the Danube.

Between Gospođinci and Žabalj (Zsablya), the ‘Small Roman Ditch’ turns to the north and, passing Čurug (Csurug) from the west, it spreads all the way to Bačko Gradište (Tisza-Fölvár/Bács-földvár). This section is preserved to the length of 63.65 km (Fig. 1.B), and parallel to it, on the west, is another leg of the ditch. Some 27 km long, it continues to the north from Gospođinci; running west of Bečej (Óbecse), it ends in Bačko Petrovo Selo (Bácspetrovoszelló/Péterréve) (Fig. 1.C). The last two branches of the ditch are also parallel to the right bank of the Tisza River.

The route of the ‘Great Roman Ditch’ – which is, in fact, much shorter, but deeper and more impressive – was drawn already by Marsigli. Even today it is well preserved and can easily be traced in both old cartographic sources and satellite imagery. This 25.2 km long ditch

begins near Čenej, north of Novi Sad (Újvidék), and leads to the northeast; running between Temerin and Gospođinci, it leads to Čurug (Fig. 1.D). Unlike the Small ditch, the Great one encloses a large area framed by the Danube and the Tisza.

According to Gyula Cziráky and Kálmán Gubitza, there were some additional structures resembling the 'Small Roman Ditch' in Bačka – the minor routes spanning Apatin and Sonta (Szond), by Bogojevo (Gombos), and near Ravno Selo (Ósóvé). A longer route would be the one running from Svetozar Miletić (Nemesmilitics) to Crvenka (Cservenka) via Čonoplja (Csonpolya) and Kljajićevo (Kerény) (CZIRÁKY 1899., CZIRÁKY 1900., GUBITZA 1909., cf. VELENRAJTER 1961. 55–56). Yet, this last section might be questioned, as it is situated precisely at the seam between two different geomorphological units (GK 2005., cf. BUGARSKI 2008.). On the other hand, Sándor Nagy observed a defensive line leading from Novi Sad to Gardinovci (Dunagárdony) and, further to the north, along the Titel Hill in the direction of Mošorin (Moszor) (NAGY 1971.). This line cannot be seen in the satellite imagery.

In what follows, the routes of the two ditches in Bačka will be commented on separately, according to their concept, function and mode of construction, and with reference to the accompanying structures.

'Small Roman Ditch'

Intersected by the Great ditch and thus older, the 'Small Roman Ditch' follows the two main watercourses in Bačka: its western and southern legs follow the Danube shore, while the eastern branch faces the Tisza. The western leg, spanning Apatin and Srpski Miletić, starts near the Danube and ends at a distance of only 8 km from this river (Fig. 1.A). Its route is particularly well preserved along the Junaković stretch, between Apatin and Prigrevica, and in the Pusztaszentegyház wood southwest from Doroslovo. According to Árpád Buday, the section of the Small ditch near Apatin is 20.80 m in width, consisting of a 13.80 m wide and 1.60 m high parapet and a 7 m wide and 0.70 m deep ditch north of the earth rampart (BUDAY 1913. 22. fig. 3–3a) (Fig. 2).

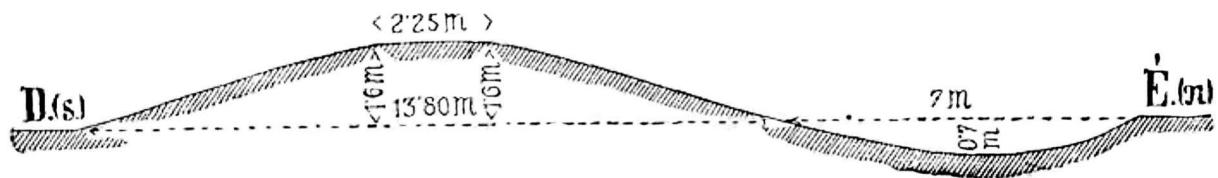


Fig. 2

Intersection of the 'Small Roman Ditch' near Apatin (after BUDAY 1913. fig. 3a)

2. kép

A „kis római sánc” csatlakozása Apatin mellett (BUDAY 1913. 3a. kép alapján)

From Prigrevica to Srpski Miletić the ditches could be seen on both sides of the parapet, the northern one being deeper (VELENRAJTER 1961. 54). In some parts the parapet was preserved to a height up to 2.5–3 m (SEKEREŠ 1986. 147–148). The most important structures in this section are the two gates facing the Bačka interior, with some 10 km between them. One of them, southeast of Prigrevica, was defended by a single tower, while the second gate, in the Doroslovo wood, was flanked by two towers. Southeast of the first gate, 13 m wide, was a round platform – elevated 0.60–0.70 m above the ground and 13.20 m in diameter – upon which the tower had been constructed. The platform was defended by a 9.30 m wide and 1.20 m deep ditch. The tower is right behind the ditch

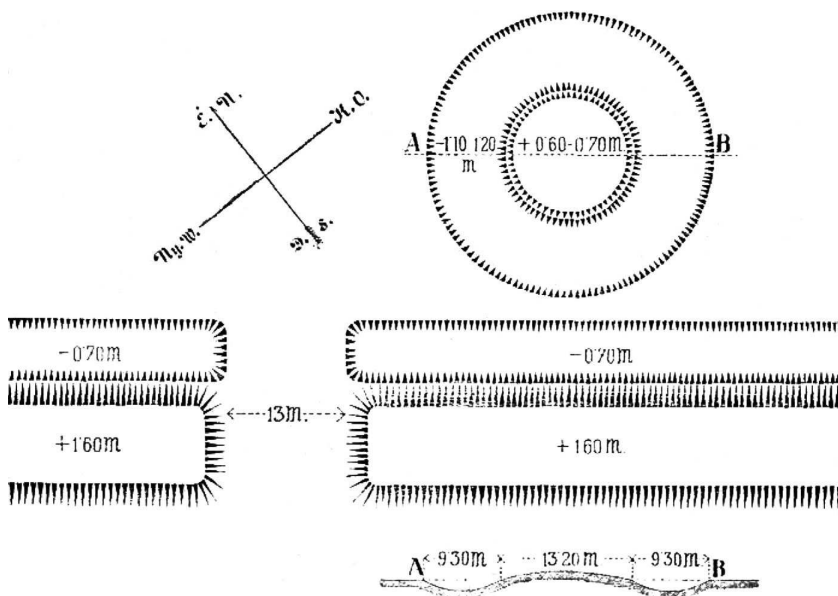


Fig. 3

Plan of the gate by Prigrevica (after BUDAY 1913. fig. 5)

3. kép

Kapu alaprajza Prigrevicánál (BUDAY 1913. 5. kép alapján)

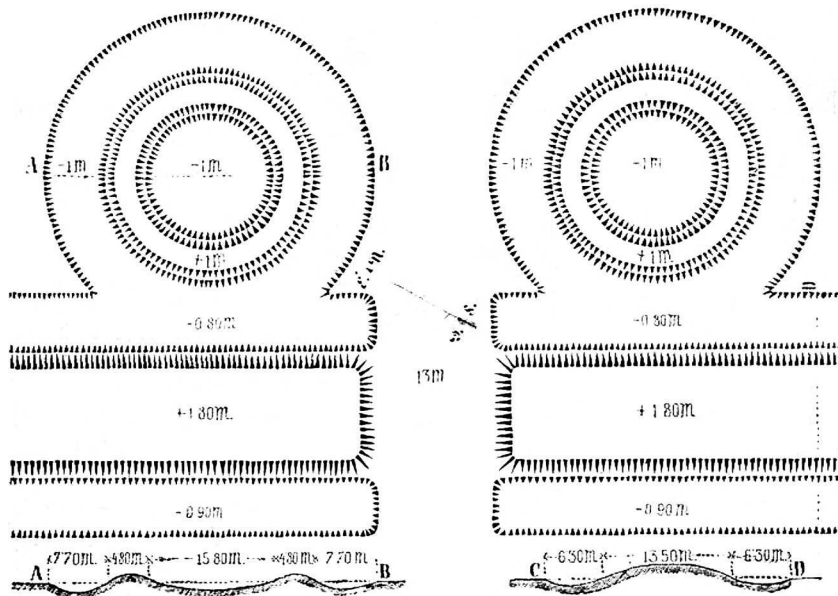


Fig. 4

Plan of the gate by Doroslovo (after BUDAY 1913. fig. 10)

4. kép

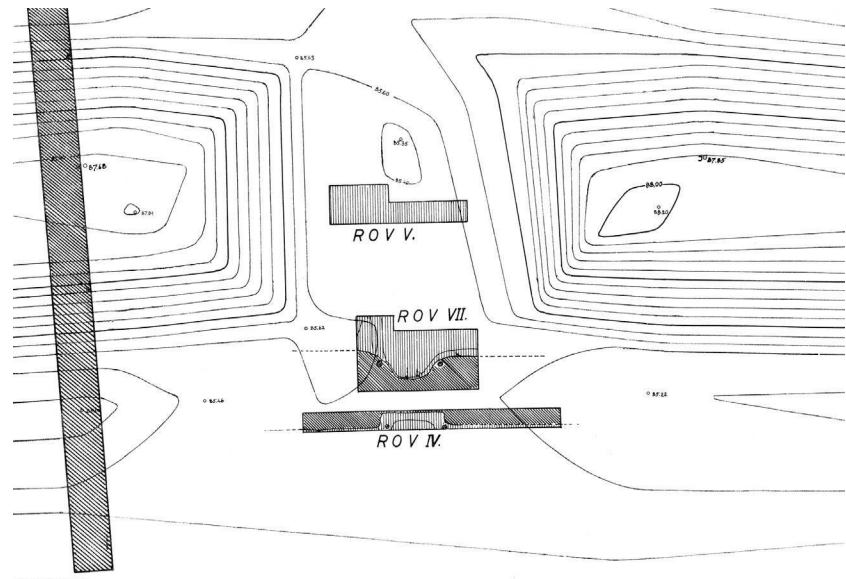
Kapu alaprajza Doroszlónál (BUDAY 1913. 10. kép alapján)

protected by the parapet – earth rampart (BUDAY 1913. 26. fig. 5) (Fig. 3). In the course of the 1892 excavations, Samu Borovszky found parts of a wooden construction there (BOROVSZKY 1893.); thus one may assume that the tower was made out of wood.

The gate by Doroslovo, with a pair of towers, is a unique fortification structure in the route of the ‘Small Roman Ditch’. In this section, the parapet is 13.80 m wide and 1.60 m high. It is sandwiched by two ditches – both 6.30 m wide, and 0.90 m and 0.80 m deep, respectively. Although Sándor Nagy, who had studied this section of the Small ditch, noted that the gate was only 3 m wide (NAGY 1971. 106), its width was in fact 13 m, just as in Prigrevica. Round tower platforms flanking the gate were attached to the outer ditch. According to the plan left by Buday (Fig. 4), the inner diameter of the platforms was 15.80 m. The platforms were encircled by 4.80 wide and 1 m high earth ramparts, in front of which were 7.70 m wide and 1 m deep ditches. The entire construction was 40.80 m in diameter (BUDAY 1913. 28–31. fig. 10). During his excavations in the gate area,

Fig. 5
Plan of the gate by Doroslovo
with the location of post-holes
(after NAGY 1971. plan II)

5. kép
Kapu alaprajza Doroszlónál a
cölöplyukak elhelyezkedésével
(Nagy 1971. plan II alapján)



Nagy documented four post-holes, and interpreted them as the remains of a wooden bridge across the ditch (NAGY 1971. 106. plan II) (Fig. 5). Yet, in the plans by both Buday and Nagy there is no ditch there; therefore we believe that the post-holes were in fact the remains of the gate.

These towers, primarily defending the gates, were also lookouts. Such constructions – rectangular towers with wooden foundations, constructed within the rings defended by ditches – are known from the Roman frontier, e.g. between Taunus and Vettaravia, and on the Odenwald and Rhaetian *limes*. Wooden towers on the Taunus and Arnsburg *limes* have been dated between the reigns of Domitian and Hadrian by Joëlle Napoli. It is thus not surprising that wooden watchtowers from the Danube have been depicted on the Column of Traian in Rome; wooden gates are also known from the *limes*, like the one from Dalkingen (NAPOLI 1997. 202, 222–226, 251–252, 255, figs 96, 123, 125–127, 154).

The southern and eastern legs of the 'Small Roman Ditch' differ in that that the ditches were positioned on opposite sides – the south (BUDAY 1913. 83, VELENRAJTER 1961. 54) and the east (BUDAY 1913. 41–43, fig. 18), respectively – facing the Danube and the Tisza (Fig. 1.B). Apparently, some fortification structures have been documented in this section, but they still remain unexplored. It was already Marsigli who recorded a small round structure at the north intersection of the Small and the Great ditches (MARSIGLI 1726. 8, figs VIII (B), IX (B)) (Fig. 6.B.1). The map from the First Military Survey (1763–1787) shows a rectangular tower west of the ditch, and a similar tower was drawn 3.800 m to the south, as well. The Second (1806–1869) and the Third Military Survey (1869–1887) do not mention the first tower, while the second was labelled Gradište; yet, its plan was not clearly drawn. At present, both towers can be easily studied in Google Earth. These structures are round, 40–45 m in diameter, and they were defended by single round ditches (Structure 1: Digital Globe, Imagery Dates 10/16/2011, 3/27/2017; Structure 2: Digital Globe, Imagery Dates 3/14/2007; 3/27/2017) (Fig. 6.B.1–2, Fig. 7: 1–4).

Another structure, although rectangular, is now recorded on the parallel ditch, leading from Gospodinci to Bačko Petrovo Selo in the north (Fig. 1.C). Similarly to the structures described above, it is 40 by 40 m large (Fig. 6.C.1). In addition to this, Buday mentioned one more rectangular structure, at the place where the road between Nadalj and Bačko Gradište had cut the ditch (BUDAY 1913. 85); however, we could not identify it.

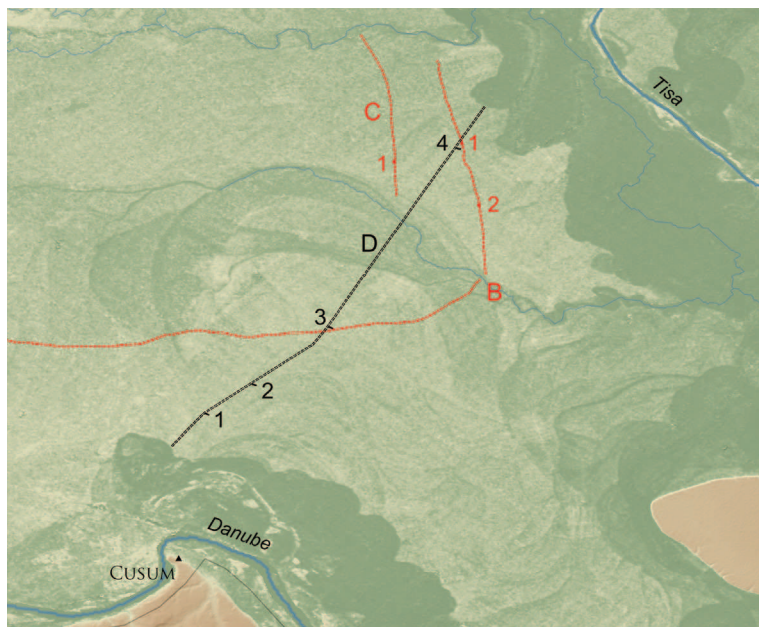


Fig. 6

Map of the southeastern part of Bačka with the location of 'Roman' ditches (B–D) and defensive structures (B.1–2; C.1; D.1–4)

6. kép

Bácska délkeleti részének térképe a „római” sáncok elhelyezkedésével (B–D) és a védelmi építményekkel (B.1–2, C.1, D.1–4)



Fig. 7

Defensive structures on the route of the 'Small Roman Ditch' (B.1–2) 1–2: structure 1 (Google Earth, Digital Globe, Imagery Dates 10/16/2011, 3/27/2017). 3–4: structure 2 (Google Earth, Digital Globe, Imagery Dates 3/14/2007, 3/27/2017)

7. kép

Védelmi építmények a „kis római sánc” vonalában (B.1–2) 1–2: 1. építmény (Google Earth, Digital Globe, letöltés: 16/10/2011, 27/3/2017), 3–4: 2. építmény (Google Earth, Digital Globe, letöltés: 14/3/2007, 27/3/2017)

Fig. 8
‘Great Roman Ditch’
(photo by Vladan Zdravković)

8. kép
„Nagy római sánc”
(Vladan Zdravković felvétele)



‘Great Roman Ditch’

This integral defensive structure, spanning Čenej and Čurug and thus enclosing the south-eastern corner of the Bačka region, Šajkaška (cf. DIMITRIJEVIĆ 1975., BUGARSKI 2012.) – also framed by the left bank of the Danube and the right bank of the Tisza – comprises four straight sections built simultaneously, totalling 25.2 km in length (Fig. 1.D). Árpád Buday noted that this ditch’s parapet was 15.50 m wide and 2 m high, while the ditch itself was 13.30 m wide and 1.5–2 m deep (BUDAY 1913. 52–54, fig. 25). These dimensions evidently depend on the state of preservation (Fig. 8); it is important to note here that Radovan Bunardžić recorded the ditch in the vicinity of Čenej (Fig. 9). It was up to 5.40 m deep with its 5 m wide flat bottom, and the earth rampart is preserved to a height up to 3 m; these measures largely match those documented by Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli (BUNARDŽIĆ 2006. 41. figs 1–2). The ditch was dug west of the parapet.

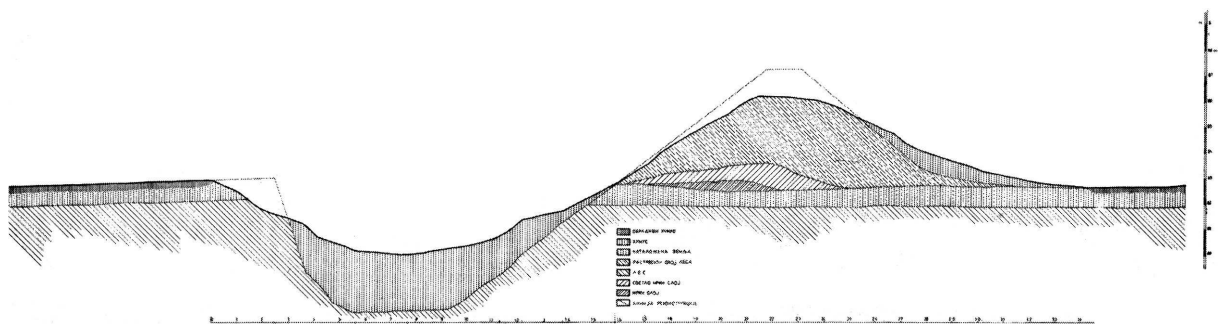


Fig. 9
Intersection of the ‘Great Roman Ditch’ near Čenej (after BUNARDŽIĆ 2006. fig. 2)

9. kép
A „nagy római sánc” becsatlakozása Čenej mellett (BUNARDŽIĆ 2006. fig. 2. alapján)

East of the ditch, four large ‘linear’ structures have been documented by Marsigli (MARSIGLI 1726. 7–8, figs VIII (B), IX (B)). Three of them were constructed in the 14.2 km long western section of the ditch, between the Danube and the spacious floodplain of the Jegrička Rivulet. The rather dense distribution of these structures was apparently caused by the proximity of the *limes*. The fourth



Fig. 10

Defensive structures on the route of the 'Great Roman Ditch' (D.1–4) 1: structure 1 (Google Earth, Digital Globe, Imagery Date 9/1/2013), 2: structure 2 (Google Earth, Digital Globe, Imagery Date 9/1/2013), 3: structure 3 (Google Earth, CNES/Airbus, Imagery Date 5/19/2013, 4: structure 4 (Google Earth, Digital Globe, Imagery Date 3/27/2017)

10. kép

Védelmi építmények a „nagy római sánc” vonalában (D.1–4) 1: 1. építmény (Google Earth, Digital Globe, letöltés:1/9/2013), 2: 2. építmény (Google Earth, Digital Globe, letöltés:1/9/2013), 3: 3. építmény (Google Earth, CNES/Airbus, letöltés:19/5/2013), 4: 4. építmény (Google Earth, Digital Globe, letöltés: 27/3/2017)

5/19/2013; Structure 4: Digital Globe, Imagery Date 3/27/2017) (Fig. 10: 1–4). Due to the limitations of our sources, we can only describe their ground plan and estimate their dimensions. Structure 1 appears to be 223 m long, 41 m wide, and 0.92 ha large, and structure 2 may have been somewhat larger: 228 m in length, 48 m in width, and 1.12 ha in plan size. Structure 3 was 210 m long and 53 m wide, covering 1.11 ha. Structure 4 covered 1.13 ha; it was 212 m long and 51 m wide. In the satellite shot of structure 2 one can observe a construction with an outer ditch (?), c. 4 m wide, and a c. 5.5 m wide rampart (?), which enclose from three sides the inner space, measuring c. 210 by 38 m (Fig.

construction was erected in the 7.8 km long northeastern part of the Great ditch, enclosing the space between the Jegrička and the Tisza (Fig. 6.D.1–4). Count Marsigli presented these elongated rectangular structures as open to the outer, northwestern side; in that he was followed by other authors. According to Marsigli, these constructions were 220 passi long and 110 passi wide. Buday, who had recorded only two structures, concluded that these were gates, each consisting of two separate, 100 m long units, and 13 m wide gateways between them (BUDAY 1913. 52–54, fig. 25).

All four constructions are clearly visible in the satellite imagery (Structures 1 and 2: Digital Globe, Imagery Date 9/1/2013; Structure 3: Image CNES/Airbus, Imagery Date

10: 2). It is clear that these structures were open only to the rampart line in the west, where wooden gates apparently existed. With their ground-plan and size of around 1 ha, these structures may have been large fortifications – *castella*. The shape of these forts is rather uncommon; the closest parallel is the Puținei fortification on the left bank of the Danube, near Drobeta. Built out of stone, it was 100 by 40 m large; with its protruding rectangular corner towers, this fort was most probably erected during the reign of Constantine I. Similar was also Castellum II in Brza Palanka, measuring 84 by 33 m (BĂJENARU 2010. 119, 140, pls 65, 82).

Discussion

As previous archaeological research of the 'Roman' ditches was restricted to several trenches (BOROVŠKY 1893., NAGY 1971., STANOJEV 2004. 37–42, BUNARDŽIĆ 2006. 41), it failed to produce reliable chronological markers, which constitutes the greatest problem in their interpretation. On the other hand, one can discuss fortifications and accompanying defensive structures and the route of the ditches as against the river courses and geomorphological conditions. Their construction with parapets, gates, towers, and fortifications by itself excludes the possibility that they were used for traffic or as canals, as had been supposed (FRÖHLICH 1887. 29–42., STANOJEV 2004.); furthermore, no traces of water have been observed in the ditches (BUNARDŽIĆ 2006. 41). That these ditches could not serve as fortifications was not properly explained; that they were dug merely as a symbolic display of power (CURTA 2011. 23) is a conjectural interpretation which cannot be proven in any way (BUGARSKI–IVANIŠEVIĆ 2012. 486).

The majority of scholars believe that the ditches came from the Roman Period (cf. GARAM-PATAY–SOPRONI 1983.). Moreover, many thought that they were created by the Romans themselves (MARSIGLI 1726. 7–8, FRÖHLICH 1887. 306–307, BUDAY 1913. 89–92), or at least the Great ditch, while the Small one was also believed to had been dug by the Sarmatians (NAGY 1966. 1014–1015, SEKEREŠ 1986. 145, 150). Such an interpretation was refuted by Joëlle Napoli, although without any arguments being offered (NAPOLI 1997. 319–321), while some authors date them – or the Great ditch – to the Early Middle Ages (RUSU 1975. 148–150, FIEDLER 1986., 2016., cf. CURTA 2011. 22–23, n. 36).

We believe that these ditches were part of the outer Roman *limites*, confronting the Sarmatians who, particularly in the 2nd and the 4th centuries, represented a significant threat to the Empire. To approach this issue, which combines ideological, political, administrative and military aspects, we should first return to the Roman idea of the frontier (TROUSSET 1993.), and investigate to what extent the 'Roman' ditches in Bačka can be distinguished from the natural border of the Empire – *ripa*.

At first, the Romans had in fact no philosophical notion of boundaries – as they had subjected the entire *orbis terrarum*, or intended to – 'except the idea that barbarians should stay outside of the Roman's concept of the civilised world' (VIRGIL, Aeneid I, 278: BREEZE–JILEK 2005. 141–142, n. 4–6). As stated by Ovid, *Gentibus est aliis tellus data limite certo/Romanae spatium est Urbis et Orbis idem* (To other people land may be given with a fixed limit/But the space of the city of Rome and the world is one) (OVID, Fasti 2.679–684: SCHNEIDER 2012. 77). In his *History*, Appian did not describe the border as 'the boundary of the empire', but as 'the boundary of the peoples subject to the Romans' (APPIAN, Proem. I: ISAAC 2000. 396).

Already the ideology of the Roman Republic proclaimed the Roman right to control the peoples – *gentes* – beyond the *termini imperii*. A cosmological model, advocated by Augustus and compiled in *Geographi Latini Minores*, considered the existence of provinces – areas under the sphere of influence populated by *gentes* – besides the civilised world. Charles Richard Whittaker

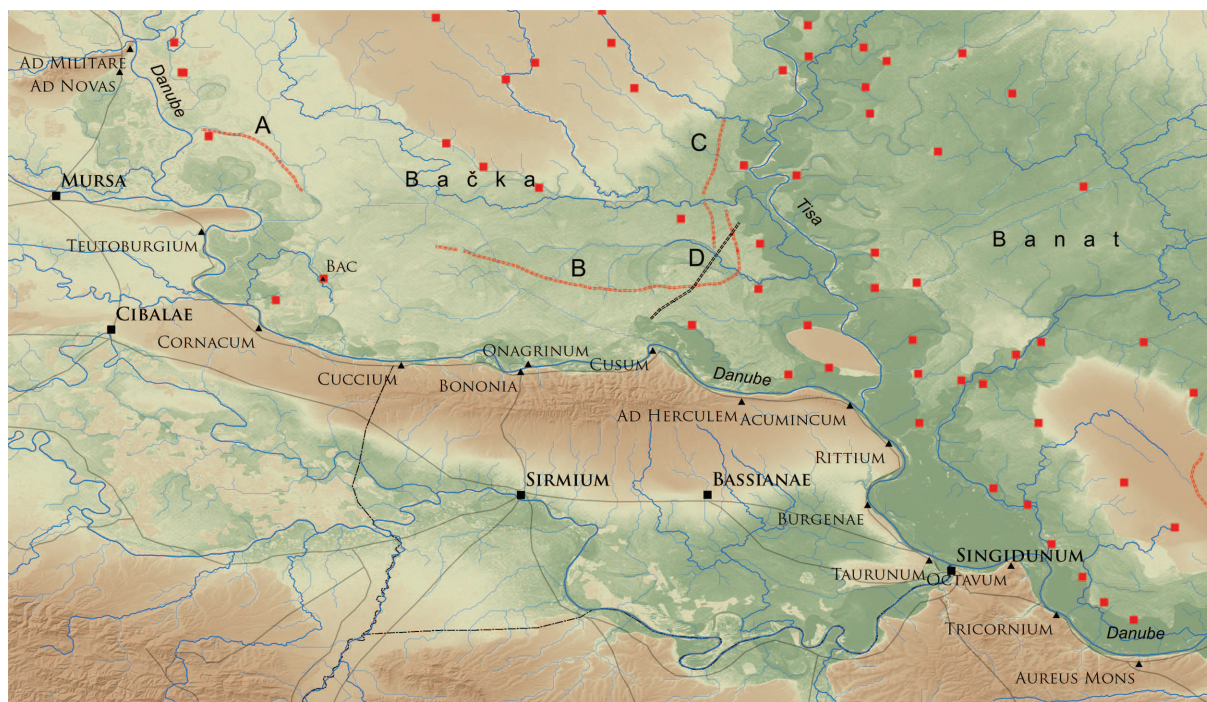


Fig. 11

Map of southeastern Bačka and southwestern Banat with the distribution of Sarmatian settlements (based on DAUTOVA-RUŠEVLJAN 1990.)

11. kép

Délkelet-Bácska és a Délnyugat-Bánság térképe a szarmata településekkel (DAUTOVA-RUŠEVLJAN 1990. alapján)

presents this model through three spatial spheres: the first with inner *gentes* and under Roman administration, the second with *gentes externae*, controlled by Rome, while the third sphere comprised remote peripheries – *Oceani* (WHITTAKER 2004. 40). The Roman control extended outside the established defensive line: in his *Annales*, Tacitus mentions ‘unoccupied lands, reserved for the use of our soldiers’ beyond the Rhine (Tac. Ann. 13.54: ISAAC 2000. 399).

It is well known that the peace concluded by Marcus Aurelius in 173 prevented the settlement along the left bank of the Danube. The Quadi and the Marcomani had to move from the newly-established, 38 *stadia* wide buffer zone, while that imposed on the Yaziges was twice as wide. Dio Cassius further informs us that in 178 the Roman army was stationed in the land of the Quadi and Marcomani (DIO CASSIUS. LXXI.16, 20); an inscription from 179/180 identifies a Roman winter camp in present-day Trenčín, Slovakia, 120 km north of the Danube (CIL III 13349: BREEZE–JILEK 2005. 146, n. 33). It was already noted by Árpád Buday that the width of 76 *stadia*, or 14 km, matches the distance between the Small ditch and the Danube *ripa* (BUDAY 1913. 89). The analysis of the Sarmatian settlement matrix in Bačka and Banat reveals that the area between the Small ditch and the Danube was sparsely settled and, therefore, apparently controlled by the Romans (VELENRAJTER 1958., DAUTOVA-RUŠEVLJAN 1990.) (Fig. 11).

Such intentions were clearly signalled by the establishment of castellum Onagrinum in Bačka, *contra Bononiam*, at the time of Diocletian (FRÖHLICH 1889., VELENRAJTER 1958., DAUTOVA-RUŠEVLJAN 1973.). According to András Mócsy, there was another outwork, *burgus*, near Bač

(Bács) (MÓCSY 1969. 71–75., JOVANOVIĆ 2005. 85–86; for the Roman fortification activity in Banat cf. BUGARSKI–IVANIŠEVIĆ 2012.). Round constructions from the northern leg of the Small ditch (Fig. 6.B.1–2, Fig. 7: 1–4) would belong to the same fortification type, while four large rectangular structures along the Great ditch could well have been temporary military *castella* (Fig. 6.D.1–4, Fig. 9: 1–4).

Ammianus Marcellinus, the chronicler of the 4th century Roman clashes with the Sarmatians, labelled the wider border area in plural form: *Limigantes Sarmatas...regiones confines limitibus occupasse* (The Sarmatian Limigantes ... had seized upon the regions bordering on their *limites*). He further mentions the efforts by Constantius II to secure the border during his war against the Sarmatians: *Post quae tam saeva digestis pro securitate limitum, quae rationes monebant urgentes, Constantius Sirmium redit* (After these cruel affairs Constantius made arrangements for the security of the *limites* as considerations of urgency demanded, and returned to Sirmium) (AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS XIX.11.1, 17: DRIJVERS 2011.). This piece of information testifies to the importance of the frontier to the Romans in the times of Sarmatian pressure during the reigns of Diocletian, Constantine I, Constantius II, and Valentinian (KOVÁCS 2011., KOVÁCS 2013., KOVÁCS 2016.).

Given the extent of field research, it is not easy to judge which phase of Roman domination the 'Roman' ditches in Bačka belonged to, but their construction should certainly be connected with that of the Csörsz Ditch, the building activity seen by many as Roman (MÓCSY 1972., SOPRONI 1978. 113–137, MRÁV 1999.). Their strategic importance in defending the *limes* speaks in favour of a Roman background. Judging by the orientation of the ditches and the gates, the section of the Small ditch between Apatin and Srpski Miletić (Fig. 1.A) was facing the interior of Bačka and defending the access to the *limes*, particularly to Mursa and Cibalae, and the communication routes leading to the inner parts of Pannonia.

The other leg of the Small ditch, i.e. its sections from Pivnica via Gospođinci to Bačko Gradište and the parallel branch leading from Gospođinci to Bačko Petrovo Selo, were oriented towards the major rivers (Fig. 1.B–C, Fig. 6.B–C). Together with fortifications, it defended a wide corridor along the Danube and a narrow one along the Tisza, and, at the same time, the approach to Sirmium and Bassianae, the military road and the communications to the interior. The northern leg of this ditch, reinforced by a parallel rampart, defended Bačka from incursions from Banat.

In contrast to the latter section of the Small ditch, the 'Great Roman ditch' was to protect Šajkaška and the approach to Banat from Bačka, as well as access to the Danube *limes*, cities of Bassianae, Sirmium and Singidunum, and routes along the military road leading to the provinces' interior (Fig. 1.D, Fig. 6.D). The role of both ditches should be discussed in the context of the defence of Sirmium, one of the most important Pannonian centres, which was, especially in the first half of the 4th century, frequently visited by Roman Emperors – to mention only Diocletian, Galerius, Constantine I and Constantius II. From Sirmium they repeatedly campaigned against the Sarmatians, paying special attention to the reinforcement of the Danubian frontier (MIRKOVIĆ 2008. 64–70., KOVÁCS 2011., KOVÁCS 2013., KOVÁCS 2016.).

In the end, *Do rivers make good frontiers?* On that we agree with Boris Rankov, and not with e.g. Edward Nicolae Luttwak (RANKOV 2005., LUTTWAK 1976.) – they do; especially when the river is seen as a crucial part of an elaborate border system, extending far beyond the riverbanks in both Barbaricum and the Empire (BUGARSKI–IVANIŠEVIĆ 2012.). The 'Roman ditches' in Bačka were part of such a system set along the left bank of the Danube, a river which was the natural border of the Roman Empire.

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„Római sáncok” Bácskában és Pannonia külső határain

Munkánkhoz a már közölt régészeti eredményeket, a Google Earth felvételeit és téranalízist vettünk alapul. Ezek segítségével elemezzük a „római sáncok” és a bácskai római limes közötti, eddig kevés figyelmet kapott viszonyt. Különleges figyelmet szentelünk az előzőleg dokumentált, ún. kis és nagy római sáncokhoz csatlakozó erődítményeknek, amelyek ma jól látszódnak a műholdas felvételeken. Egyikük az újonnan felfedezett 40x40 m-es burgus a kis sánc Gospodinci (Goszpodince/Boldogasszonyfalva) és Bačko Petrovo Selo (Bácspetrovoszelló/Péterréve) közötti szakaszán. A kapuk és burgusok kivételével, a nagy sánc vonalában lévő négy castellumhoz fűzünk megjegyzéseket. Az árkok, sáncok, kapuk, tornyok és erődítmények kialakítása kizárja annak lehetőségét, hogy közlekedési célokra használták volna őket vagy csatornaként. A korábbi szakirodalom nem támasztotta kellőképpen alá, hogy a sáncokat miért nem használhatták erődítményként. Az, hogy csupán szimbolikus hatalmi jelekként szolgáltak volna pusztá feltevésen alapuló értelmezés. Sáncaink interpretálásában a legnagyobb problémát a megbízható kronológiai támpontok hiánya jelenti, de építésüket mindenképpen össze kell kapcsolnunk a Csörsz-árokéval. A kutatók többsége úgy vélekedik, hogy a szóban forgó alkotmányok római koriak, és mi is egyetértünk ezzel a gondolattal. Erre utal, hogy stratégiai fontosságuk a limes, a római városok – ezen belül különösen Sirmium – és a birodalom belsejében vezető utak védelmében rejlik. A kis és nagy sánc egy átgondolt határrendszer részei voltak, amely mind a Barbaricumban, mind a birodalomban messze túlterjeszkedett a folyópartokon. Azáltal, hogy Duna, a Római Birodalom természetes határának bal

partján haladt, a sáncok a római külső határok (*limites*) elemei voltak, védve a provinciákat a szarmatáktól, akik különösen a II. és IV. században komoly fenyegetést jelentettek a Birodalomra nézve.

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