

TOWARDS A HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF *EXTREMA SCYTHIAE MINORIS*

A land survey of the south-east shoreline of the Dunavăț Peninsula.
Results and perspectives

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Cuvinte cheie: *peninsula; promontoriu; val; șanț; platou; incintă; obiect; ocupație; țărm; fortificație.*

Abstract: *The paper contains the results of a preliminary land survey carried out in 2007 along the south coast of the Dunavăț peninsula. On that occasion, on the seven existing promontories, six areas of anthropic occupation and activity have been identified.*

Rezumat: *Studiul conține rezultatele unei cercetări de teren întreprinse în anul 2007 de-a lungul coastei de sud a peninsulei Dunavăț. Cu aceasta ocazie, pe cele șapte promontorii existente au fost identificate șase zone de ocupație și activitate umană.*

In an attempt to evaluate and review the number of the identified settlements known thus far on the south shore of the Dunavăț Peninsula, a preliminary land survey has been carried out between July 19 and 21, 2007 along its SE segment¹.

The area investigated encompassed a territory of ca. 5 km in length starting with a point located at the westernmost house of the Dunavățul de Jos village (44° 58' 55" N and 29° 13' 02" E). To the south of this segment a dense concentration of deltaic vegetation (mainly reed) is marked by two existing lakes, the so-called "Lacul Satului", ca. 73.75 ha in surface and the Carabaev Lake ("Ghiolul Carabaev"), to the west, with a surface of ca. 171 ha (Fig. 1)².

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² For the geography of the Dunavăț peninsula see *Geografia României*, București, 2005, 725.

Unfortunately, the visited area enjoyed little attention from a scholarly view point. Except the stone fort A investigated some two decades ago, references to the archaeological and historical aspects are scanty³. Erratic visits or short organized surface reconnaissance have been carried out in the area under investigation on different occasions⁴, although they were not always followed by commentaries on archaeological or topographical condition of the region.

The survey of the above mentioned water border segment, which coincided with the Black Sea shore in ancient period⁵, displays seven promontories labeled **Prmt 1-7** with agglomerations which yielded archaeological artifacts and structures. They are neither many in number nor in density, but show good traces of possible anthropic occupation in antiquity. In addition, five places which allegedly can be taken into consideration for a future systematic investigation have been identified. They are labeled from I-V as **SEDP** ('South East Dunavăț Peninsula').

1. SEDP I Prmt 1 Coordinates: 44° 58' 54" N; 29° 12' 43" E. At ca. 360 m WSW from the westernmost building of the village of Dunavățu de Jos, a south oriented triangular promontory, 11m high at its highest peak compared to ca. 5-6m at outer fringes, describes the ancient shore line;

2. Prmt 2 (Fig. 2) Coordinates: 44° 58' 56" N; 29° 12' 13" E; promontory ca. 500m WSW from the Julian monastery of old Russian rite; 80m protruding shore line towards south; flat surface, with sporadic traces of calcareous and grit stones; no archaeological artifacts; no clear indication of ancient human occupation on this promontory; no buildings or other structures top the area. (Fig. 3).

3. SEDP II Prmt 3. (Fig. 4). A 7.50m wide at the base surrounding earthen wall goes along to the SW and SE. It is doubled by a ca. 1 m deep ditch to the NE and NW in their present day state of preservation; slight traces of earthen wall and ditch to the NW; the wall and ditch appears much flattened but still visible to the NE; a ca. 3.50 m wide opening is plainly visible at the mid way of the SE side and two others of ca. 2.50m in width are possible on the SW side; the structure

³ There are only two direct references to this area in ancient sources in Iord. Get. 28: [...] *haec ergo pars Gothorum, quae apud Filemer dicitur in terras Oium emenso amne transposita, optatum potiti solum, nec mora ilico ad gentem Spalorum adveniunt consertoque proelio victoriam adipiscunt, exindeque iam velut victores ad extremam Scythiae partem, que Ponto mari vicina est properant*; 266 [...] *Hernac quoque iunior Attilae filius cum suis in extrema minoris Scythiae sedes delegit* [...]; see BESEVLIEV 1974, 35-37.

⁴ The surveys carried out by DESJARDINS 1868a, 267; DESJARDINS 1868b, 51.1868, 267; 1868, 51; P. Polonic in 1898 (at Tocilescu mss 5132, 94-95; 5139, 188) (cf. P. Polonic 1935, 7, 25) remain the most solid evidence thus far. A highly valuable and exceptionally rich topographic, geographical as well as historical description of the eastern parts of the Dunavat Peninsula is offered by Captain M. D. Ionescu (IONESCU 1904, *passim*); see also WEISS 1911 55-56. The diggings executed at the Dunavățu de Sus fortlet in 1982-1983 and Dunavățu de Jos stone fort occasioned some ground reconnaissance of the area which has not been yet published. A team from ICEM Tulcea surveyed some parts of the Dunavăț Peninsula in 1999-2000, but the results remained unfortunately also unpublished. A recent land survey was done in 2009 and 2010 by Dr. Cristian Olariu and his team of students. They focused on the prehistoric tumulus in the Peninsula.

⁵ PANIN 2003, 247-262; *Enciclopedia geografică a României*, București, 1998, 582-584; *Geografia României*, București, 2005, 581-582.

describes a rectangular enclosure, 283m on the ENE-WSW and 206m on the WNW-ESE axes.

4. SEDP II Prmt 4. The shore line displays a recess as a large bay; the coast line deepens ca. 295m in a bay-like and creates to the E another promontory, which is a large, flat surface of ca. 17 ha; a large building and annexes for raising high quality horses has been built at its E end; the focused scrutiny performed on the entire surface yielded no clear traces of occupation, even if a significant part of the surface had been previously ploughed.

Coordinates: 44° 59' 19" N; 29° 10' 29" E; a ca. 70 m to the S protruding plateau, compared with the E-W shore line; it is remarkable rectangular and overlooks the present day water surface to the S with ca. 10m in height; sporadically dispersed on the entire surface are large and mid-sized stone blocks, tiles and bricks of *sesquipedalis* and *bipedalis* type; to the S and E a visibly flattened turf wall clearly marks the outer fringes of the plateau (Fig. 5); a ca. 1m deep ditch is visible to the W (Fig. 6); the long axis of this perimeter is WSW-ENE, while the short axis is WNW-ESE oriented; a ca. 3m in width (Fig. 7) opening in the turf wall is clearly visible at the surface; the enclosed area of the plateau by the wall and ditch is 280 x 178/9m in size.

5. SEDP III Prmt 5 (Fig. 8). Coordinates: 44° 59' 08" N; 29° 11' 28" E; a 50m in length and ca. 12m in height promontory; it looks surrounded by a square enclosure of which only the W and N sides are slightly visible; some calcareous stones have been found at the surface;

6. SEDP IV Prmt 6 (Fig. 8). Coordinates: 44° 59' 26" N; 29° 10' 33" E; at 170 m to the W from **Prmt 3**; a 48 x 27 m and 5m high mound, seriously destroyed by some modern interventions, sticks out of the surrounding terrain; the field is not ploughed; there are no archaeological artifacts at the surface; except the supposed rectangular enclosure of **Prmt 5**, there is no visible indication of ancient occupation.

7. SEDP V Prmt. 7 (Fig. 9). Coordinates: 44° 59' 19" N; 29° 10' 51" E; at ca. 500 m west of SEDP IV prmt. 6 the shore line turns SW, describing a possible maritime bay; from the most recessed point of the bay towards NW and N, on a slightly protruding promontory of ca. 115 x 61m, significant quantities of hewn stones, crumbled bricks and tiles, traces of charcoal are visible; at 50m W from this point a 60 x 70 m area which seems to have served as lime quarry; a remarkable concentration of Late Roman pottery. The dispersal of the artifacts covers a large area to the NW and W.

8. SEDP VI (Fig. 10). Coordinates: 44° 59' 02" N; 29° 09' 40" E. At ca. 700 m W of **SEDP IV**, on the very border of the lake, at +30m from the water surface a plateau of 480 x 310 m in size; a 2 m in height mound, highly suspected to be artificial; it is E-W oriented, with its W half slightly curved; stone blocks, fragmentary roofing tiles and 5-6th century fragments of pottery are in abundance at the surface; the N side of the plateau is bordered by an earthen wall, at present 0.60-0.80 m in height (Fig. 11). The country road on the border of the lake runs along the S side of the structure. The satellite view shows some structures in the NW corner of the plateau and two parallel roads, ESE-WNW oriented.

9. SEDP VII The Stone fort A (Fig. 12). The thus far most known point, "Cetatea Zaprojenilor", lies on a promontory, at ca. 5 km along the shore line from the Dunavățu de Jos village, part of the Murighiol Commune. A stone fort was identified at mid 19th century and partially investigated (see n. 4) through archaeological diggings and surveys for the first time by the French archaeologist and epigraphist E. Desjardin. The fort was described by P. Polonic and presumably visited by J. Weiss in 1909 or 1910. C. Moisil seems also to have seen the fort which he describes shortly⁶. The systematic research was resumed between 1986 and 1989 by the undersigned and prof. Al. Barnea. The results, still awaiting a complete study, are unfortunately parsimonious and their publication released thus far in short information offered in the annual chronics of archaeological excavations in Romania are partial and limited⁷.

Conclusions and perspectives

Geologically, the SE shore of the Dunavăț peninsula shows an argillaceous *facies* pierced from place to place by hard grit stone and quartz formations. In fact, the Dunavăț Peninsula is a diluvial terrace, a surface of old maritime abrasion and appears as a steppe and semi-steppe region, without rivers; however, it displays some short mature waterless valleys⁸. The area is still short in archaeological or related research. That hinder much any assessment on the density, chronology, and the character of occupation on the SE shore of the peninsula. Presumably, the intensity of occupation subsided once the process of siltation of the Danube mouths intensified and the offensive of deltaic vegetation took over large areas of the once Halmyris gulf⁹.

The ground investigation resulted in the visual identification of some structures in the area, but the survey process was rather atypical. The ground survey was followed by an analysis of the satellite images of the sites provided by Google Earth. However, both operations cannot offer, under any circumstances a chronological frame and final answers. They can only set some benchmarks for future confirmation or rebuff of these preliminary observations. Repeated ground surveys and focused archaeological investigations must obligatorily be carried out repeatedly by different teams with different eyes on the ground and finally coalesce to conclusions and proceed to systematic excavation.

If some of the promontories **Prmt 2** and **Prmt 3** are highly questionable as to the occupation and activities both in the centuries BC and AD, there are some points on the map which displays good evidence of fortified places. **SEDP I Prmt 1** shows a 5.82 ha square enclosure that covers almost the entire promontory. The earthen wall surrounds the promontory on four sides, although the ditch is visible

⁶ MOISIL 1909, 85-92; MOISIL 1910, 93-94; see also PATSCH 1912, 2878-2879; TIR L 35, 39; POPESCU 1976, 180; IONESCU, PAPUC 2005, 113, no. 2.

⁷ BARNEA 1989, 296; BARNEA 1990, 317-318; BARNEA 1991, 257; BARNEA 1992, 435; BARNEA, ZAHARIADE 1994, 24, no. 47; BARNEA, ZAHARIADE 1996, 44, nr. 93; BARNEA, ZAHARIADE 2005, 155; short references SUCEVEANU, BARNEA 1991, 191, 260.

⁸ IONESCU 1904, 69-83; BRĂTESCU 1928, 3-67; *Monografia geografică a Republicii Populare Române*, București, 1960, 249-250.

⁹ On the lacustrine complex Razim-Sinoe see *Enciclopedia geografică a României*, 8-9; *Geografia României*, 581-584.

only towards NE and NW. A ditch could have been useless towards the water shore line. The visible openings on SW and SE sides leave a strong impression of the existence of gates, in which case the enclosure could have certainly represented a considerable fortification. However, nowadays this large structure lacks archaeological support. The investigated surface yielded no clear traces of pottery, other artifacts, or stone. Even if **SEDP VI Prmt 4** does not show any clear traces of a fortified place it is still impressive through its density of artifacts on an area of ca. 11 ha. **SEDP II Prmt 4** yielded a roughly rectangular enclosure with earthen wall and ditch of 4.98 ha in surface. The clearly visible opening towards the water and the artifacts, almost all of them late Roman in date (5th -6th cent. AD), together with significant stone blocks found at the surface would indicate a solid structure either of economic, military, or both in character.

SEDP V remains the largest occupational area identified on the SE shore of the Dunavăț Peninsula. Its surface sticks out of the surrounding terrain at a considerable height over the water surface (+30m), a place which exceptionally overlooks the entire shore line to the E and W. The place is highlighted on the ground by a brown soil which contrasts with the bare yellowish lime soil around it. The surface of ca. 14, 88 ha rectangular area is the largest of all enclosures surveyed in 2007. The satellite image indicates the existence of two parallel possible roads in running through the middle of the enclosure, although traces of them remain only scarcely visible. The flattening of the surface is now in full swing and the comparison of two different satellite images of 2008 and 2010 shows how the plough operations in depth can modify a surface under investigation. According to the 2008 satellite image, in period when agricultural interventions were less active, the surface was highlighted on the ground in almost its initial rectangular layout, while after the area was ploughed much of the soil was dispersed to such a degree that modified much of the apparent the contour of the previous agglomeration.

Rigorously speaking, the primary identification of areas with clear traces of occupation does not solve the chronological problem. There is a suspected density of sites. Even if Late Roman artifacts prevail, that does not automatically mean that there were the same number of settlements which functioned at that time or concomitantly.

SEDP I Prmt 1 and **SEDP II Prmt 4** display large enclosures whose chronology is far to be even presumed. They could be well prehistoric structures reused in later Roman period or simply fortified rural settlements as stated by some sources of 5th -6th centuries (CTh. VII 15. 1; Proc. *De aedif.* IV 1. 35).

The analysis of the satellite images should accurately be compared in the future, as the first and as an extreme necessity, with aerial photography. Complete aerial surveys studies with separate restitutions of each site as well as a hypsometric situation of the area remain an obligation for the investigators in the reconsideration of the resources and potential of the region as a human occupational component of the peninsula in ancient times. Repeated and focused surveys must also continue along the shore line with the perspectives of an extension inland for identifying possible sites potentially connected with the littoral settlements.

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Fig. 1 - The SE coast line of the Dunavăț Peninsula. The arrows indicate the places where the presence of anthropic occupation in antiquity has been identified. The figures show the existing promontories where important agglomerations of artifacts have been detected.



Fig. 2 - The promontory no. 2. The systematic land survey yielded no trace of anthropic occupation. To the right lies the Julian monastery of Old Russian rite.



Fig. 3. Ground view of the surface of the promontory no. 2.



Fig. 4 - The enclosure area on the promontory no. 3. The black arrows mark the turf wall; the white arrows mark the 3 m wide opening in the southern wall.



Fig. 5 - The enclosure turf wall on promontory no. 4.



Fig. 6 - Ground view of the ditch of the enclosure on the promontory no. 4. The white arrows mark the lines of the ditch.



Fig. 7 - The square turf and timber enclosure on the promontory no. 4. The black arrows mark the turf wall. The ditch surrounds the wall to the exterior. The ca. 3m wide gate which opens to SE is highlighted by white arrows.



Fig. 8 - Promontories no. 5 and 6. The black arrows indicate the possible line of a turf wall on the promontory no. 5 and an enclosure on the promontory no. 6.



Fig. 9 - The promontory no. 7. The occupation on this place is indicated by a significant amount of artifacts (hewn stones, fragments of bricks and tiles). No stone or turf structure has been detected as yet. The black arrows indicate the approximate spreading of the artifacts in the area.



Fig. 10 - The large plateau on the coast line (SEDP VI). The stone fort and its civil settlement situated to the N. The nearness to the fort is noticeable. The black arrows show the perimeter of the presumable occupation area; the white arrows show the civil settlement of the stone fort A; the white bold arrow shows the position of the stone fort A.



Fig. 11 - Ground view of the turf wall surrounding the large size occupation area at SEDP VI. The black arrows indicate the line of the turf wall.



Fig. 12 – Stone fort A (SEDP VII).