

# 'Terra deserta': population, politics, and the [de]colonization of Dacia

L. Ellis

## Abstract

This article explores the demographic history of Dacia/Romania during and after Roman colonization as a study in the effects of colonialism and de-colonization in the core area vs. the periphery, the identification of local vs. transitory populations, the development of cultural identity, and the more ominous issue of political manipulation of archaeological data. Archaeological surveying and excavations in Romania and peripheral regions, as well as a re-evaluation of ancient literary evidence, suggest a more complex settlement history, rather than a 700-year 'terra deserta'. The post-Roman era has demonstrated an abundant archaeological record of burial and settlement, along with a continuation in distribution of Roman objects throughout former core and peripheral areas. A more thorough analysis of Roman colonization and de-colonization, together with the role of the Roman military, coinage, and commerce, are recommended as avenues towards resolution of the population continuity issue for Dacia.

## Keywords

Demographic history; population continuity; Dacia; Romania; Roman Empire.

## Introduction

Archaeological population studies in Eastern Europe and the Balkans have never been without controversy. Even after the demise of the Iron Curtain in 1989–90, a political tapestry, two millennia in the making, still casts a long shadow over research efforts in the social sciences. The demographic history of Romania, and its territorial antecedent Dacia, is no less an enigma – partly because the region within its shifting boundaries has been divided in various configurations and partly because Dacia/Romania occupied a geographic location conducive to the economic or geo-political interests of the Roman and later Byzantine, Ottoman, Habsburg, Romanov, and Soviet empires. The combined effects of external and internal political interests on the one hand, and the fact that most of the literature is not published in a west European language on the other, have made understanding of the archaeology of Romania elusive.

Despite the difficulties, the ancient demography of Dacia/Romania should have a general archaeological interest for its informative value as a study in effects of colonialism and de-colonization in the core area vs. the periphery, the identification of local vs. transitory populations, the development of cultural identity, and the more ominous issue of political manipulation of archaeological data. This study will explore the aforementioned issues surrounding archaeological research on the population history of Dacia, from the period prior to, during, and after Roman colonization.

### **Historical background**

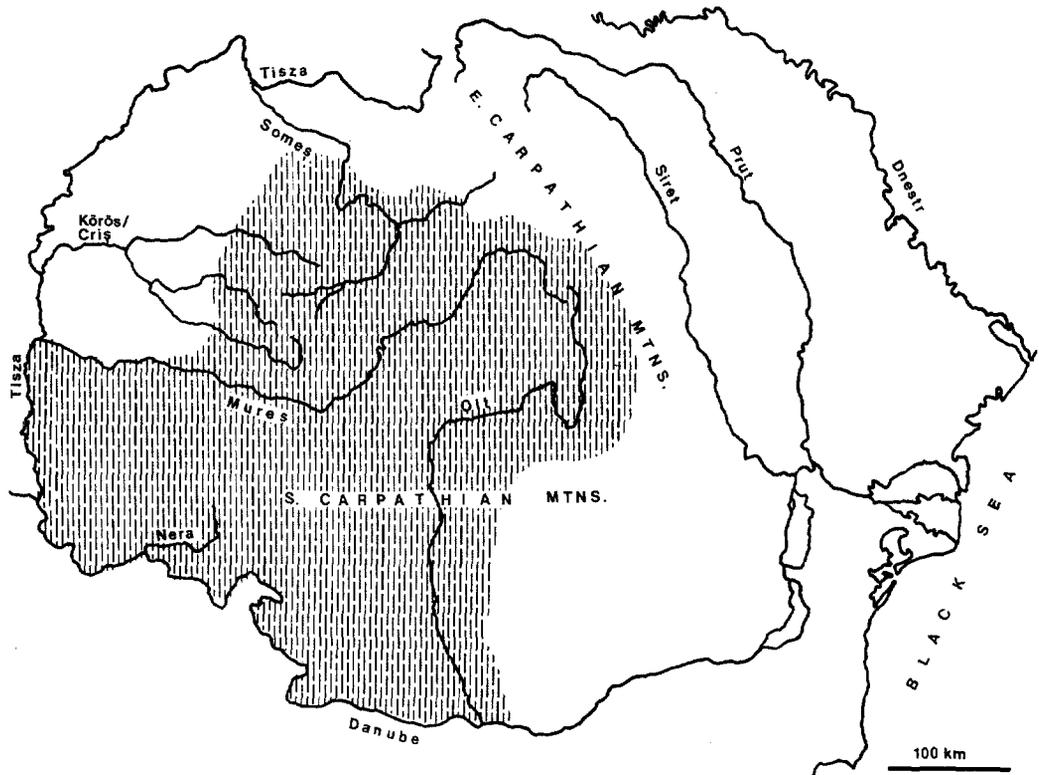
The Dacians first entered written records through Herodotus (IV, 93), on an expedition in 514 BC. In the archaeological record, Dacian settlements flourished during the latter half of the Iron Age (La Tène period), i.e. fifth century BC to 70 BC. The period comprising the first century BC and the first century AD is often referred to as the 'classical period' of Dacian socio-political development, not only for the appearance of monumental architecture (stone sanctuaries and citadels), but also for the unification of a number of tribes, beginning with the Dacian leader Burebista (Strabo VII, 3, 11–12).

Between AD 101 and 106, the Dacian population under the leadership of Decebal was involved in two brutal wars with the Roman Empire, which were later memorialized on Trajan's Column in Rome. The two Dacian wars were the ultimate efforts of Roman imperial expansion. Although Roman commercial interests in Dacia date back to the second century BC, Dacia became the last Roman colony until the Aurelian withdrawal in AD 270–5. The Romans, however, only secured control over central and southern Dacia, what is today Transylvania and western Wallachia; eastern Wallachia was very likely under Roman control but was not officially incorporated into a Roman province. Dobrudja had become part of Moesia Inferior/Scythia Minor, so that the Romans controlled both banks of the lower Danube. The Roman Empire did not establish military control in the area to the west, north, and east and, therefore, this 'free Dacia' (Pârvan 1928) remained a buffer zone against barbarian populations during the second to third centuries AD (Figs 1 and 2).

The eventual reduction in Roman military commitment and the retreat during the reign of Aurelian by 275 created a power vacuum, contributing to the global crises of the third century AD. The late third and fourth centuries AD saw the movement of populations through the Carpatho-Danubian region, among them the Goths. Roman forces were still protecting Moesia and the Roman military lines along the Danube with access to the Black Sea. This demographic and cultural mosaic – instigated by Roman colonization, continued in Late Antiquity with the successive arrivals of the Goths, Huns, and Slavs, and made even more complicated by subsequent population movements during the early Medieval period – has provided an enormous challenge to both archaeologists and historians trying to sort out who was where and when.

### **Geo-politics and population issues**

In addition to the migrations of transitory populations, Dacia/Romania has also been the object of competing power interests in the region and of disputes over territory. Dacia



*Figure 1* Area of Roman province of Dacia during the first half of the third century. The western extension of provincial Dacia to the Tisza River (currently Yugoslav territory and western Banat) is uncertain and disputed (cf. unbiased discussion of the evidence by Tudor 1968: 52–6). This region was sparsely settled probably due to past extensive moors and/or sandy soils; however, there is evidence of a number of *vici* (rural villages), occasional Roman troop movements, and several earthen wall constructions – the latter of uncertain date (Horedt 1974; Vulpe 1974).

was cut in half in the Roman period; the Black Sea region (Dobrudja) was incorporated into the Byzantine Empire; the entire territory was later divided between Habsburg and Ottoman interests; and, finally, the eastern region of Bessarabia and some adjoining areas were annexed by imperial Russian and later Soviet regimes.

However, it is the period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the relations among ethnic groups (Romanians, Hungarians, and Saxons) in Transylvania which is particularly pertinent to the archaeological discussion on demography. Ethnic politics in Transylvania have been a dilemma for centuries (cf. Verdery 1983). The Hungarians had settled in the region of Pannonia at the end of the ninth century and entered Transylvania in the tenth century, making the province part of the Hungarian kingdom in the eleventh century. Colonies of German-speaking Saxons were established in the urban centers of Transylvania during the twelfth century. The controversy centers around the origin of the Romanian population and its relationship with respect to the period of Roman colonization and to the indigenous Dacians. Two diametrically opposed opinions flourished during the



Figure 2 Current political map of Romania with provincial subdivisions (broken lines) and international boundaries (solid lines).

fervor of nineteenth-century nationalism: the Austro-Hungarian worldview saw Transylvania as uninhabited land prior to Hungarian/Saxon settlement; Romanian nationalists saw Transylvania as part of their linguistic and territorial heritage dating back to the Roman colonization of Dacia. Of the numerous publications written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on the origins of the Romanians, two authors in particular stand out for their propagation of a *terra deserta* hypothesis. The historical treatises of Sulzer and Roesler have had a daunting effect on how twentieth-century archaeological research into population history has been conducted in Romania.

The Swiss Franz Joseph Sulzer (d. 1791) had a career primarily in the military and later the law. He became a captain in the Habsburg imperial regiment (1759–73), moved to Transylvania and married into a wealthy Saxon family. He had a short career in jurisprudence and later re-entered the army as an officer in 1782. Sulzer is mostly remembered as an amateur historian who wrote a 3-volume history of the Romanian provinces entitled, *Geschichte des transalpinischen Daciens, das ist Walachei, Moldau und Bessarabiens, im Zusammenhange mit der Geschichte des übrigen Daciens*, published in 1781–3 in Vienna. In the second volume of this work, he developed the theory that Dacia was totally vacated of population after the withdrawal of the Roman Empire. His contention was that, since Romanian-speaking peoples are never mentioned in documents during Late Antiquity and the early Medieval period, they must have moved somewhere south of the Danube by the end of the third century and then migrated back into present Romanian territories in two waves, beginning at the end of the twelfth century and early thirteenth century. Sulzer cited as 'evidence': 1) the influence of Slavic on the Romanian language

(which could not have occurred except further south on the Balkan Peninsula), 2) the absence of political rights among the Romanians in Transylvania, 3) their Orthodox Christian faith (which could only have been embraced south of the Danube and in contact with the Byzantine church), and 4) the ancient literary sources which state that Dacia was depopulated as a result of the Aurelian withdrawal.

In 1871, Robert Roesler, a Moravian philologist trained in Vienna, Lvov and Graz, published a revised version of Sulzer's theories in *Rumänische Studien. Untersuchungen zur älteren Geschichte Rumäniens* (Leipzig). Roesler's writings, in particular, contained rather blatant ethnic vilification of Romanians and also referred derogatively to the demands of Romanians for equal rights in Transylvania. Roesler thereby crossed a subtle border from the writing of academic history to the writing of history for political purposes.

Habsburg influence in Romania did not extend to the eastern provinces (Bessarabia and Moldavia) nor to the south (Wallachia and Dobrudja), which would have intruded into Romanov and Ottoman spheres of interest. Moreover, historians were not concerned with the issue of population continuity in these southern and eastern Romanian territories, even though there is a similar paucity of epigraphic or literary references to Dacians in the Roman and post-Roman eras. Therefore, the writings of the early proponents of the *terra deserta* theory are suspect because they cannot be separated from the political aims of the Habsburg Empire, whose policies fomented ethnic unrest throughout the Balkans and led to tragic consequences for the twentieth century.

In the post-Second World War era, Soviet annexation of Bessarabia resurrected pre-First World War Romanov territorial interests in a majority control over the Black Sea coastline with access to the Danube Delta region. Reminiscent of Habsburg interests in Transylvania, Soviet publications on the archaeology of the re-named 'Moldavian SSR' hesitated in their discussion of Dacian-period sites. Some authors even referred euphemistically to Dacian wheel-made pottery as 'kiln products' (cf. Ellis 1996 for review). In the aftermath of the Second World War, Soviet archaeology was also uncomfortable with the presence of fourth-century Goths, albeit a transitory Germanic population, on both Romanian- and even Ukrainian-speaking territories. Publications covering the archaeology of the Iron Age to the post-Roman migration period in the Moldavian SSR are noteworthy for their brief discussion of the Dacian and Germanic presence, with significant emphasis on Scythian, Sarmatian, and especially Slavic populations. Furthermore, the USSR made concerted efforts to manipulate the cultural identity of Romanians in Bessarabia/Moldavian SSR through de-Romanization of both spoken and written Romanian and classification of 'Moldavian' as a separate language (Gabinschi 1997).

The Romanian Communist Party was also not without its controversial claims on archaeological populations. In the Stalinist era of the 1950s, much of the archaeology of Late Antiquity was focused on documenting and emphasizing the presence of Slavic populations in Romania. In 1953, the orthography of the name of the nation itself was changed to substitute the letter î (which exists in Russian phonetically and orthographically) for â so that 'Romînia' would not imply a connection to Roman history, although the spelling was later reversed in 1965. Linguists at Romanian universities were required to confirm that Romanian was a Slavic language and not a member of the Romance family. Archaeologists and historical linguists who did not agree with these ethnic changes

were summarily incarcerated in forced labor camps on the Danube Canal construction – many did not return.

During the Ceaușescu era, archaeology was no less affected by totalitarian politics. Demographic history and ethnic identity were manipulated yet again, only this time the Ceaușescu government, in a dramatic turnaround, claimed for the Romanians direct descent back to the Dacians (cf. Deletant 1991). Simultaneously, the Roman contribution to population history was de-emphasized, as this period represented imperialism and exploitation of the masses. In one of its many attempts to strengthen the pre-Roman lineage, the Ceaușescu régime organized a celebration in 1980 of 2050 years of the establishment of a 'centralized, unified and independent Dacian state'. Even though scholars were consulted, the government selected a rather arbitrary date of 30 BC as the starting point for the genealogy of the nation. One of the foci of celebrations was the Dacian site of Bâta Doamnei at the town of Piatra Neamț, where archaeological excavations during the 1950s and 60s had revealed a sanctuary and dwellings dating to the first century BC, together with stone construction genuinely considered to be the remnants of defense fortifications. Subsequent excavations of a larger surface area beginning in 1980, however, revealed the stone 'fortification' to be supporting walls for terraces, although it still represented a significant construction effort (Mihăilescu-Bîrliba 1997). However, for the 2050 celebration, the Communist Party had plans to rebuild the walls, erect flags on them, and station soldiers dressed up in ancient military uniforms. More realistic archaeological interpretation was therefore ignored (Mihăilescu-Bîrliba 1997). Ceaușescu not only discouraged cogent analysis of archaeological data, but these excessive nationalist policies also tragically detracted from the work of competent archaeologists (of various ethnic backgrounds) in Romania.

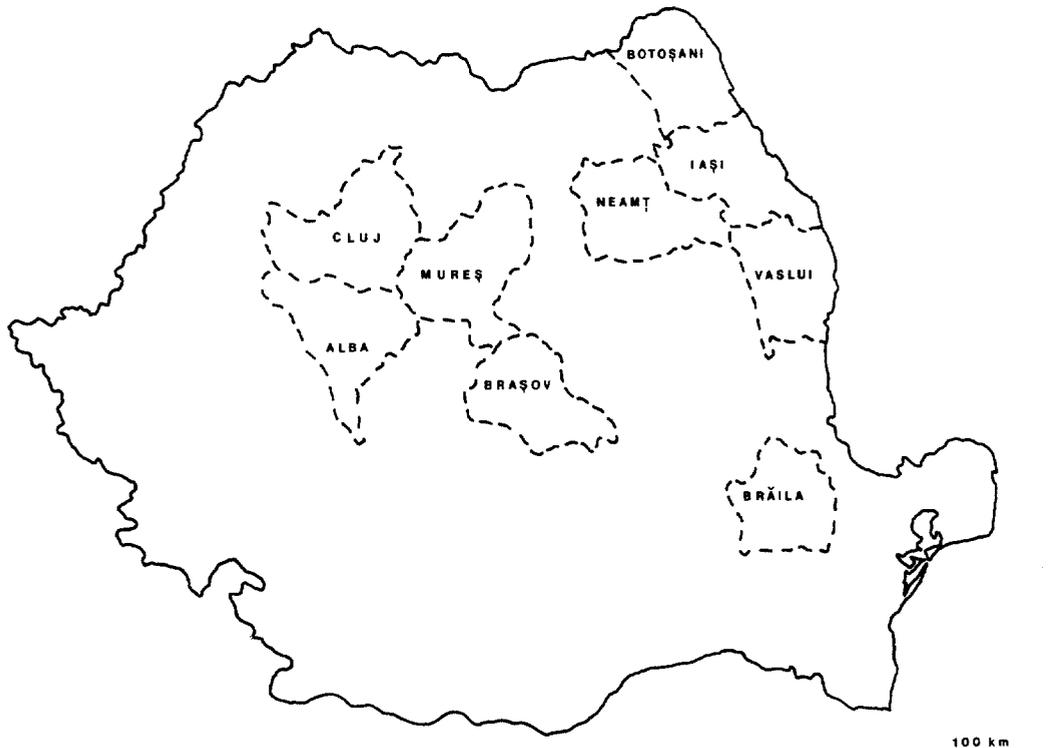
Hundreds of publications have been written over the past 300 years, mostly by authors of Hungarian and Romanian ancestry, and an article of this brevity cannot do justice to this complicated topic (cf. Köpeczi 1994 and Pop 1996 for extensive discussions of Hungarian and Romanian viewpoints, respectively). It also should be noted that there is a variety of opinion as to specific details of the general hypothesis presented above. Two issues, however, have been inextricably combined in the literature on this controversy and perhaps should be considered separately (*vide infra*): the ethnicity of the inhabitants of Dacia during the period of Roman colonization and the depopulation of Dacia by the Roman Empire, both as a result of the Trajanic wars and of the Aurelian withdrawal.

### **Archaeological data on demography**

After the Second World War, archaeological fieldwork was reorganized through the Institutes of Archaeology in major cities and through a network of regional museums located in each county in Romania. In this highly centralized system, annual funding for archaeology originated from the national government in Bucharest and was subsequently allocated throughout the country. Since Romanian archaeologists conducted field campaigns each year and presented and published the results annually, the volume of archaeological research escalated logarithmically in contrast to the corpus of fieldwork prior to the Second World War.

In addition to excavation, some archaeologists also undertook the compilation of inventories of archaeological sites and finds, for all periods, complete with bibliographic documentation, illustrations, and maps. The first published archaeological inventory, and the most ambitious to date, covered all chronological periods for the entire province of Moldavia (Zaharia et al. 1970; updated by Teodor 1997 for the fifth to eleventh centuries). Subsequent inventories have been on a more intensive county-by-county basis for Botoşani (Păunescu et al. 1976), Iaşi (Chirica and Tanasachi 1984, 1985), Neamţ (Cucoş 1992), Vaslui (Coman 1980), Cluj (Horaşiu et al. 1992), Alba (Moga and Ciugudean 1995), Mureş (Lazăr 1995), Braşov (Costea 1995), and Brăila (Harţuche 1980) (Fig. 3). This preliminary level of site documentation comprised all known published information about sites and records of museum collections, together with archaeologists' own knowledge based on both excavations and established relations with rural, agricultural populations in their respective counties. Systematic surveying programs have also been conducted on a district-by-district basis (Păunescu and Şadurschi 1983, 1989a, 1989b, 1994) or focused on larger zones (Ioniţă 1967; Dumitroaia 1992) within counties, as well as along major river systems (Ioniţă 1961; Şadurschi and Ursulescu 1989; Ursachi et al. 1992; Andronic 1997).

Because these published inventories were compiled on a voluntary basis, not as a result of a national directive, only a select number of counties have published archaeological gazetteers. However, their contribution to the knowledge base has vastly changed the image of the archaeological landscape and has provided especially valuable information



*Figure 3* Current political map of Romania showing counties (broken lines) for which published inventories of archaeological sites exist.

for population studies. Combined with extensive settlement pattern studies of Transylvania and the Banat regions (Rusu 1977), as well as in the Apuseni Mountains (Dumitraşcu 1980), what has emerged from the decades of excavation, surveying, and inventorying of archaeological data is a more complex view of settlement history which clearly outlines the importance of population studies in archaeology.

Tables 1 and 2 provide summaries of six site inventories for Moldavia and Transylvania, respectively, for the purposes of contrasting the settlement history of non-Roman (periphery) vs. Roman provincial (core) areas. These gazetteers include precise documentation of finds from settlements, fortresses, coin hoards and isolated finds, cemeteries and burial

*Table 1* Number of locations with archaeological materials from gazetteers published for three counties in Moldavia (eastern Romania) from the Iron Age to the early Medieval period (including settlements, burials, cemeteries, sites with cursory remains; numbers in parentheses indicate additional locations of possible but uncertain date; authors' original chronological groupings of sites are preserved here).

<i>Century</i>	<i>Botoşani (1976)</i>	<i>Vaslui (1980)</i>	<i>Iaşi (1984-5)</i>
5th BC-1st AD	51 (?11)*	205 (?8)	229
2nd-3rd AD	23 (?4)	89 (?3)	172
3rd-4th	204 (?8)		
4th		348	535
4th-5th	8 (?2)		27
5th	3		22
5th-6th	1		35
end 4th-beg. 6th		111 (?5)	
6th-7th	10	68 (?3)	
7th-8th			48
8th-11th	35 (?3)	344 (?8)	133

\* Authors indicated insufficient field research for first century AD.

*Table 2* Number of locations with archaeological materials from gazetteers published for three counties in Transylvania (central Romania) from the Iron Age to the early Medieval period (including settlements, burials, cemeteries, sites with cursory remains; authors' original chronological groupings of sites are preserved here).

<i>Century</i>	<i>Cluj (1992)</i>	<i>Alba (1995)</i>	<i>Mureş (1995)</i>
5th BC-1st AD	59	111	252
Roman	144	155	332
3rd-4th			79
5th			49
6th			48
7th			40
8th			39
9th			19
10th			16
4th-10th cumulative	40		
5th-10th cumulative			211
11th-13th	47		
4th-13th cumulative		67	

grounds, isolated burials, and other find spots. Roman and post-Roman sites are dated by standard archaeological seriation techniques via multi-component sites, tracing items of commerce (especially Romano-Byzantine imports), and using coinage (an exceptionally prevalent find in all classical and post-classical periods). Most notable are the effects of Roman de-colonization in Cluj and Alba counties – a reduction in number of sites, but not the purported *terra deserta*. Moreover, the data from Mureş county warn us against generalizing about population history across a wider territory, and in fact show more consistent settlement in the post-Roman period. Based on this preliminary evidence, the abandonment theory is certainly questionable and a closer analysis of post-Roman human settlement is warranted. At this juncture, we now have to examine the dynamics of colonization and decolonization by the Roman Empire.

### **Colonization and de-colonization**

Both ancient literary sources and archaeological data need to be examined in order to ascertain the effects of Roman colonialism and de-colonization, not only in the core area (provinces of Dacia and Scythia Minor) but also throughout the peripheries (non-Roman, ‘free’ Dacia). Unfortunately, not all arguments or evidence can be examined in an article of this brevity, thus some selectivity has been employed to permit a concise presentation and to elucidate larger issues surrounding population studies. But first, two issues, *ethnic* continuity and *population* continuity, need to be separated, since they have become muddled amidst centuries of political fray.

With reference to the population continuity issue, there have been two arguments presented against Romanian historical claims for Transylvania: first, that the Dacian population was completely annihilated by the two wars with Trajan, i.e., as a result of Roman colonization; second, that the province of Dacia was completely depopulated during the Roman withdrawal, i.e., as a result of de-colonization. Turning to the ethnicity issue, the first hypothesis implies the destruction of a native, Dacian-speaking population; the second hypothesis, the removal of a colonial population speaking Latin and probably other languages. The primary faults with these eighteenth-century population models are that they rely on a singular cause (colonization or de-colonization) for population changes amidst major political, economic, and military events and also fail to address the complexity of human behavior. Nevertheless, these issues can be addressed by re-evaluating the ancient literary evidence and examining excavation data both in Romania and in surrounding countries.

#### *Colonial period*

The theory of the annihilation of Dacia’s native population as a result of Roman colonization, relied significantly on ancient historical texts, principally the *Breviarium ab urbe condita* of Eutropius (316–87) which was written during the reign of Valens (364–78). The *Breviarium* consists of ten books which synthesize the major historical events of Rome and the Roman Empire. Eutropius makes four references to Dacia (*Breviarium* VIII, 2; VIII, 6; IX, 8; and IX, 15). The first critical edition of the *Breviarium* was published by

Hans Droysen in 1879, using eight codices which contained the word *viris* in the final sentence of *Breviarium* VIII, 6: 'Dacia enim diuturno bello Decibali *viris* fuerat exhausta' (Dacia, in fact, had been depleted of *men* in the lengthy war with Decebalus). However, not all existing manuscripts of the *Breviarium* are consistent and some contain copyists' errors. In 1979 Carlo Santini republished Eutropius' work using twenty-four codices. Five codices (dating to the ninth to thirteenth centuries) contain the variant *res* ('Daciae enim diuturno bello Decibali *res* fuerant exhaustae'); two codices (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), the variant *vires* ('Daciae enim diuturno bello Decibali *vires* fuerant exhaustae'); and yet another group (also dating to the ninth to thirteenth centuries) contains the variant *viris* ('Dacia enim diuturno bello Decibali *viris* fuerat exhausta'). The variant *vires* may be an erroneous derivative from *res*, since the syntax is the same for both. The variant *viris*, however, has significant differences in syntax and grammatical agreement when compared to the other two variants (Diaconescu 1993: 350). The variant *res* would imply then that Dacia was depleted of *things* or perhaps more appropriately, *resources*. Given that the Roman Empire's primary interests lay in the economic resources of its colonies, especially Transylvania's gold mines, the transcription of *res* as opposed to *viris*, appears more logical to this author. But, more importantly, we as archaeologists must accept some degree of uncertainty when relying on copyists' versions of classical texts as sources for precise data on the ancient world.

As to whether or not the native population continued in existence directly after Roman conquest, it would be difficult to envisage the annihilation of every person across terrain measuring 250,000 to 300,000 square kilometers. Well-documented Roman military and colonial policies included maintaining a local power élite in addition to establishing opportunities for resettlement of Roman citizens and veterans, the latter of which was recorded for provincial Dacia (Eutropius VIII, 6). Although speculative, the logistics of removing both settlements, as well as potentially recalcitrant populations from the southern Carpathians, would have been a daunting task for the Roman legions; even late twentieth-century military technology has been stymied in the mountainous regions of the Balkans.

The second supposition, that the province of Dacia was completely depopulated as a result of Roman de-colonization, does not consider the initial divisive nature of colonization in this region. The Romans only secured the southern and central parts of Dacian territory to organize the province of Dacia in 107. However, neither administrative nor military control was achieved north-west, north and east of the province. The area beyond the eastern Carpathian Mountains (Moldavia) was especially perilous and was used as a buffer zone against 'barbarian' populations during the second to third centuries AD.

Archaeological data from the colonial period (second to third centuries) is exceptionally rich and well published (cf. Ioniță 1982; Bichir 1973, 1984). Ceramic manufacturing traditions continue from the pre-Roman to the Roman period, both in provincial and unoccupied Dacia and well into the fourth and even early fifth centuries (Ellis 1996). Settlements likewise continue in non-Roman Dacia throughout the second and third centuries. Other Roman products – glass, amphorae, coin hoards of hundreds or even thousands of Roman silver coins in Dacian pottery vessels – are numerous in the sub-Carpathian region of Moldavia (Mihăilescu-Bîrliba 1980, 1994).

Cemeteries also continue into the Roman period. Burial ritual among Dacians consisted of cremation, a centuries-old practice dating to the Iron Age, and continued

during the second and third centuries, both in the Roman province (Diaconu 1965; Protase 1971, 1976) and beyond the frontier in free Dacia (Ioniță and Ursachi 1988). Cremation was the preferred rite for adults; the remaining bones were placed in a ceramic urn, with or without a lid, or placed directly inside a pit. This pattern is consistent on every necropolis. Inhumation was also practiced among Dacians, but appears to have been used primarily for children or adolescents. Dacian cremation and inhumation burials were usually quite modest in inventory (usually glass beads, a fibula, a couple of pots, etc.) – a pattern similar on both sides of the Roman frontier.

### *Post-colonial era*

After Roman withdrawal, likewise we do not see a *terra deserta*, neither in the provincial core zone nor in the peripheries. However, the late third and fourth centuries did bring significant cultural and population changes as a result of de-colonization – not only in Romania, but also in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Archaeologists in the region have designated these changes the ‘Sântana de Mureș Culture’ in Romania (Ioniță 1966; see note on spelling *infra*) and the ‘Černjakhov Culture’ in the Ukraine (Rybakov 1960; Magomedov 1987) and the Republic of Moldova (Federov 1960), both terms deriving from the first type sites in these respective nations. These sites date from the late third to the early fifth centuries – a period contemporaneous with the migrations of the Goths, who traversed the Carpathian region for approximately 100 years following Roman de-colonization. So we are faced not so much with depopulation as with the ethnic continuity issue and identification of migratory peoples.

The most visible changes in the archaeological record of the post-Roman period are the method of burial (from cremation to inhumation) and the augmentation of burial inventories. Inhumation, with corpses oriented north–south, became a principal and widespread burial method from the late third century and continuing to the early fifth century. In contrast to the relatively poor contents of Dacian cremation burials, inventories of post-Roman period inhumations averaged 10–12 pottery vessels (Rybakov 1960; Ioniță 1966, 1977; Vulpe 1957: 276–96). This pottery comprised mostly fine gray ware (50 percent or more) identical in technology to colonial and pre-colonial period sites, together with a melange of wheel-made, gravel-tempered ware, archaic hand-made pottery, and Roman amphorae – two, three or even all four types of pottery are found in individual graves (cf. Ellis 1996 for summary in English). A variety of other items are also found in burials, such as fibulae, belt buckles, knives, jewelry, loomweights, needles, glass beads, bone combs, and glass drinking vessels, as well as food offerings as indicated by bones of sheep, pig, domestic birds (bones, whole eggs, and egg shells), and cattle. What is also noteworthy of third to fifth century graves is the widespread distribution (from Transylvania to the Ukraine) and substantial number of objects of Roman manufacture, in excellent condition, which must be indicative of an active system of exchange.

Another significant difference can be found in the funerary treatment of children, which reveals much about the nature of wealth and inherited social status in the post-colonial era. On burial grounds throughout the Sântana de Mureș–Černjakhov Culture, both children and adults show highly variable grave inventories. At Miorcani, northeast Romania, two examples (among many others) of children’s grave inventories (nos. 48 and 129)

contrast substantially with each other (Ioniță 1977: pls R 44 and R 50a–R 50b, respectively). Grave no. 48 of a very small child included relatively few offerings, most of which were damaged before burial: a pot with a broken rim, a small metallic fragment used as a pendant, a bronze fibula with an unraveled spiral wire base, and two glass beads. Grave no. 129 was endowed with five ceramic vessels, two bronze fibulae, a bronze pendant, bronze ring, clay spindle whorl, two amber beads, a boar's tusk pendant, a violet glass bead with fourteen facets, and sixty-eight additional glass beads of various colors. At Bîrlad-Valea Seacă, southeast Romania, children's burials again show significant contrasts (Palade 1986: pls R84 and R 91a–R 91b, respectively). Burial no. 417, for instance, contained ten blue glass beads, a ceramic bowl (which had been broken and repaired before final disposal), two other pots, and a bronze fibula. The burial of the other child (no. 541), however, has an abundance of goods which exceeded that of most adults and compares well with the wealthiest of adult graves: seventeen ceramics in excellent condition, a Roman amphora, a Roman glass vessel, two elaborate silver fibulae, a clay spindle whorl, a bone comb, animal bones, bird bones, egg shells, and an iron knife.

These necropolises are multigenerational, comprising many hundreds of burials, and certainly attest to a rich demographic history in the post-classical period. The social, economic, and demographic implications of these dramatic changes in burial custom have yet to be explained. Inhumation was long known and practiced among Dacians, albeit on a very limited scale, as well as among the Goths. Contributing to the population mosaic were the Sarmatians, who co-existed and collaborated with the Dacians in the Trajanic Wars and whose burials are found on many sites across Dacia. The explanation of cultural change in this region has been hesitant, since ethnic identity is invariably involved.

While it is still an unsettled issue, the shift to the use of inhumation coincided both with the Aurelian withdrawal from provincial Dacia and the movement of Goths into the Carpatho-Pontic-Danubian region. It is noteworthy that a contemporaneous and similar shift in burial ritual, from the native custom of cremation to the adoption of inhumation, was also occurring in Gaul (Nock 1932: 325–6). Furthermore, Roman society on the Italian peninsula was changing its burial practices from the use of cremation to inhumation, with burial gaining popularity during the reign of Trajan and becoming the exclusive rite by the end of the fourth century (Nock 1932: 322–4). Therefore, we may have to consider not only the effect of transitory populations such as the Sarmatians and Goths who practiced inhumation, but also the impact of Imperial withdrawal, changing frontiers, and contact with Romanized populations.

A valuable contribution for understanding the post-colonial period is the recently published archaeological survey for the Banat region (southwest Romania) which has recorded numerous settlements, storage pits, pottery kilns, glass furnaces, metallurgical production sites, and coins (both as hoards and found on sites) (Bejan 1995). These surveys indicate a continuation of both a sedentary population and maintenance of Roman military and economic interests via control of the left bank of the Danube as well as possible control over the Tisza and Mureş regions. The fortifications along the *limes* on the left bank of the Danube were strengthened after the third century. New fortifications appeared on both sides of the Danube at several locations. At Gornea, in particular, a castellum was constructed (294–300), where previously no Roman construction had existed. Coin circulation likewise continued in the Banat region after Roman withdrawal during the third and

fourth centuries: 52 hoards and over 100 isolated discoveries of coins, the majority of which are bronze (Bejan 1995: 54 ff.). Coin finds for the third century are considerably fewer, but the monetary reform of 348 saw an influx of money from the Danube north to the Nera River in the mountainous region of the Banat. Exchange systems in general extended from south of the Danube to the north via river systems and may very well have been connected with the salt trade along the Mureş River (Bejan 1995: 91). A thorough study of post-Roman settlement patterns in Transylvania and the Banat regions, likewise, has revealed close associations with major salt reserves as well as metalliferous zones (Rusu 1977). Further research into the salt trade is merited when one considers that the mountainous regions of Romania have some of the richest salt deposits in Europe, which were exploited as early as the Neolithic (Ellis 1984: 205–6). Circulation of Roman and later Byzantine products was active throughout Late Antiquity on both sides of the Danube.

On the northernmost frontier of ‘free’ Dacia, another recent publication examines the cultural and economic transformations from the Iron Age to the fourth century in the upper Tisza region of Transcarpathia (Slovakian-Ukrainian-Romanian border) (Kotigoroško 1995). The archaeological inventory for the second to fourth centuries comprises 400 sites, 350 of which are settlements, others being necropolises, workshops, and coin hoards; to date, 21 coin hoards and 147 other isolated finds of coins, forming a total of 4,000 Roman coins (95 percent of silver, the rest of bronze, copper, or gold) with 97 percent of emissions from the first to fourth centuries and ending with Valens (364–72) (Kotigoroško 1995: 132 ff.). Since coins could remain in circulation for 100 or 200 years, precise dating is sometimes difficult. However, Kotigoroško was able to date ninety-two sites with coins independently of the emission date and estimates that coin circulation steadily grew in the first and second centuries with a decline in the third, and a rise again in the fourth century – the same frequency pattern as observed for the Banat region to the southwest. What is remarkable is the extent and increase in coin circulation even after Roman withdrawal from Dacia and as far north as Transcarpathia, which has no other analogy in neighboring provinces, nor in the rest of ‘barbaricum’.

### **Population studies: future directions**

Understanding of the population history of Dacia/Romania has been restricted largely by self-imposed limitations. The major issue discussed throughout is that archaeological research has focused on proving population and ethnic continuity in response to an agenda pre-determined by the Habsburg era. But yet another limitation is the ‘culture’ factor – the description of unifying blocks of material culture which is the legacy of archaeological methodology worldwide (Hodder 1978). The dangerous combination of culture = people = linguistic group = ethnicity forces one to examine archaeological data within a very narrow framework. Hodder’s call to eliminate the culture paradigm has significant application here to population studies in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, where ethnic and political tensions have clouded archaeological research. By separating specific classes of objects, such as products of Roman and Byzantine manufacture, heretofore unrecognized patterns of commercial and social relations allow us to re-evaluate long-held hypotheses about cultural history in this region.

Archaeological data have shown that Romano-Byzantine commercial interests continued along river systems; the specific dynamics of these processes is only now beginning to emerge. The abundance of silver coins in the post-Aurelian period along the Danube may have been connected to east-west trade, especially with respect to Roman interests in slave procurement (Duncan 1993: 112–13). However, other economic issues, which would clarify population interaction and settlement, have yet to receive sufficient attention for this region, such as an analysis of natural resources (e.g. salt), local trade and products of local industries vs. long-distance trade and imported items (such as the use and distribution of Roman coinage, pottery and glass) across the entire territory (cf. comprehensive coin distribution maps in Butnariu 1987, 1988, 1991). Trade at towns along the Danube and the Black Sea coast vs. trade along tributary river systems should also be explored in connection with understanding settlement distributions beyond imperial borders.

The social and economic roles of the Roman legions, stationed along the *limes* during the colonial and post-colonial periods, merit investigation other than from the view of military history. Since most coins struck during the late empire were used to pay the military, the role of soldiers in the development of commercial activity along the Danube has been suggested (Duncan 1983). Social relations among the Danube legions and the issue of intermarriage (Benea 1983: 231) may also have had a significance in population dynamics.

Likewise concerning ethnic continuity, recent theoretical work in archaeology has forced the re-evaluation of long-held precepts about cultural identity (Shennan 1994). Ethnicity is a fluid category of human self-identification, subject to change, even during an individual's lifetime, under political, economic, or other cultural-historical circumstances. Equally important is that ethnicity is a behavioral strategy not only for self-identification but also for survival and for maintaining and crossing cultural, economic, and political boundaries. Unfortunately, throughout the Balkans and Eastern Europe, ethnicity continues to be a *cause célèbre*, defined in rigid terms and viewed as unchanging.

Perhaps pertinent here, in conclusion, is evaluating the Roman concept of 'citizenship' – first a privilege but eventually a universal right – as a legal and political paradigm designed to change one's self-identity and to unify a larger, multi-ethnic world. This new Roman order and its accompanying strategy for self-identification is quite apparent in the results of a recent statistical and linguistic analysis of personal names from the capital of Roman Dacia, Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa (Alicu and Paki 1995). Although a majority of the colonists were of Italic origin, this study confirms Eutropius' statement that colonists derived *ex toto Orbe Romano* settled in this newly founded Roman urban center. However, what is intriguing is the absence of Dacian names in this city which appropriated the name of a Dacian citadel, while, concurrently, Dacian burial ritual continued under Roman occupation and into the post-Roman period (Diaconu 1965; Protase 1971, 1976). Rather than viewing the absence of epigraphic evidence as singular 'proof' of ethnic and population discontinuity, are we perhaps seeing a more complex rural-urban dichotomy with cultural as well as economic implications for Roman colonial frontier society?

*Department of Classics and Classical Archaeology  
San Francisco State University, USA*

### Note on spelling and names

Romanian orthography has undergone two changes. During the post-Second World War era, the vowel â was replaced with the identical vowel sound î. After December 1989, the letter â was restored. Hence, geographic names mentioned in this text are affected by these changes (e.g. Bîtca Doamnei is now Bâtca Doamnei, and Sîntana de Mureş Culture is now Sântana de Mureş Culture). The officially restored spelling is used here in text discussion, but the orthography of pre-1990 bibliographic items is preserved as originally published so that readers will be able to locate correctly the relevant archaeological literature.

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