



# Topolog: the epigraphic and the archaeological record in the northern countryside of the Roman province Moesia Inferior

## Introduction

The modern village of Topolog is located south-east of Tulcea county (the nowadays Dobruja, north of ancient province Moesia inferior) (see Fig. 1 - the map of Moesia inferior). The zone is relatively well-known through surface archaeological researches and chance finds: the most known are the bronze storages at Sâmbăta Nouă [1]. For the Roman period, *villae rusticae*, *vici* and funerary incineration *tumuli* were identified. In the village Luminița, a *villa* dating from the Early Roman Empire was excavated. At 500 m NNV from Topolog was found a pottery kiln dated from 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD, after the amphorae fragments [2]. The kiln is very nearly located from a zone where the surface researches have identified some stone buildings, a lot of pottery and burning levels: the area was interpreted as a *villa rustica* habitation type. The kiln was functional during the existence of the *villa*. An impressive pottery quantity was recuperated, as well as Zeest 72 amphorae type, date 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD. Another kiln was identified alongside, but it was completely destroyed [3].



Fig. 1. Map of Moesia Inferior



Fig. 2. Vow of P. Lae(...) Comicus to Jupiter and Juno

## The epigraphic and archaeological record

For the dimensions of this rural community, the epigraphic record is significant [4]. An inscription on a funerary altar mentions a person coming from Asia Minor, more precisely Amorium[5] – *Aufidius Helius*. Not far from Topolog, in the village of Cerbu, a stela attests two members of a citizens family, (*A*)*elius Auluseus* and his son, (*A*)*elius Marcus*. The texts date to about the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c AD [6]. *Auluseus* (also in the form *Auluseis*) is a Thracian name, having two occurrences in the epigraphic records, in two military diplomas, where the beneficiaries have the ethnonym *Bessus*. One is called *Auluseis Densatralis filius*[7], the other *Auluseus* [8]. *Auluseus* from Topolog is a Thracian who was granted the citizenship; his son has already a Roman name. It is not the only Thracian being mentioned in the proximity. At Mihai Bravu, *Tarsa*, a former *tesserarius* in the fleet of Ravenna, is coming home after he was discharged in 71 [9]. At Ibida, *Durisses Bithi* [10], *Othis Seuti*, *Bithidia Biti*, *Lupussis* (?) are also mentioned in the inscriptions[11]. One can say that there was a quite strong *Bessi* community living in the rural milieu of the northern side of the province; they were colonized by economic reasons (agriculture and surface mining[12]). From the village of Sâmbăta Nouă (after the information of the local peasants), an altar consecrated to Jupiter and Juno was erected by a certain *Lae(...)* *Comicus*, very probably at the half of 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD. (see Fig. 2) [13]. The dedications to Jupiter and Juno are frequent in the countryside of Moesia inferior [14]. A funerary lion of limestone, found in 1970, considered being manufactured in a local *officinae*, completes the image of sculptural monuments discovered in the region. Many funerary *tumuli* are situated at the edge of ancient Roman roads, one leading to *Cius* (Gârliciu) and another to *Beroe*.

In the very village of Topolog, archaeological researches were not achieved; in the village-district, except Cerbu and Sâmbăta Nouă, we can also mention Făgărașul Nou. An inhumation plane grave was found there ; the inventory dated from the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC [15], but the habitation continued in the Roman era. Two votive plaques dedicated to *Bacchus* were discovered [16]. The cult of *Bacchus* is well-documented in Moesia inferior (especially from an archaeological point of view) and it is present particularly in the countryside [17].

At south-east, not far from the terrace of Topolog stream, another *villa* remains and pottery dating from the Early Roman Empire were found. Coins, clothing accessories, military equipment pieces were found in the proximity of the modern graveyard [18]. The intense habitation of Casimcea plateau, in the valleys of Topolog stream is reflected, as shown, by the existence of many *villae rusticae* and villages [19].

## Conclusion

Despite the scarcity of systematic archaeological researches, the epigraphic and archaeological records prove the existence of at least a *vicus* and many *villas* in the zone. It seems that some inhabitants were veterans' descendants, if not veterans themselves, like *Aufidius Helius*. He or one of his ancestors was recruited during Trajan's Parthian wars or during Hadrian's Judaea war. His family was quite wealthy; he was without doubt a rural landlord in this side of Moesia Inferior. Another group of inhabitants was constituted by Roman citizens whose origin were unknown (like *P. Lae(...)* *Comicus*) and by Thracians (*peregrini*, like *Tarsa*, *Othis Seuti* and *Durisses Bithi*, or citizens, like (*A*)*elius Auluseus*). The process of names "Romanisation" is visible (*Auluseus*' son has the surname *Marcus*).

To which territory did the *vicus* belong? It is difficult to answer this question. The town of Ibida was the nearest. It had probably the status of *civitas stipendiaria*, even there is no direct information on this topic. There is, however, not the only possibility.

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## Notes

- [1] ARICESCU 1970, 66-68.
- [2] Unpublished researches by G. Nuțu.
- [3] An oval print of ashes is conserved nowadays.
- [4] ARICESCU 1973, 105, reference 3.
- [5] BAUMANN 1971, 597; BAUMANN 1984, 228-229, no. 16, 626, fig. 69; ARICESCU 1973, 105. On *Aufidii*, see also MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA, DUMITRACHE 2012, 63-64. On *Helius*, see also MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2015, 443.
- [6] BAUMANN (1984, 229-230, no. 18, 625, fig. 67) read *Aulusemius*, but on the stone we can see *Auluseus*.
- [7] ECK, PANGERL 2008, 326.
- [8] RMD V, 348.
- [9] CHIRIAC, MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA, MATEI 2004, 265-269 ; PETOLESCU, POPESCU 2007, 147-152.
- [10] ISM V, 229; see also MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2011, 108-109.
- [11] ISM V, 228; see also MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2011, 107-108.
- [12] See MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2011, 118; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2015, 441.
- [13] MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2014, 303-307; see also MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2015, 439-445.
- [14] See CIL III 7466; ISM I, 324-332 (MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2012, 93-98), 344, 346, 347, 368 (BĂLTĂC 2011, 252-253), 378 (BĂRBULESCU, BUZOIANU 2013, 183-184); ISM II, 141 (BOUNEGRU 2011, 238, BĂLTĂC 2011, 264); ISM V, 13-15, 17-18, 123, 62-64, 69, 129 (BĂLTĂC 2011, 239-240); ILB 235.
- [15] TOPOLEANU 1985, 100-105.
- [16] DRAGOMIR 1962, 421-429.
- [17] See also COVACEF 1998, 163-179; BĂRBULESCU 2001, 245-280; BAUMANN 2011, 208-209; BAUMANN 2015, 91-106. At Lazen is mentioned a *collegium of Bacchi vernaculi* (227 AD) (ILB 438)
- [18] Information provided by Mr. Ion Trofin.
- [19] BAUMANN 1983, 78-81, fig. 26-27.

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