

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NORTHERN-PONTIC CITY OF AEGYSSUS-TULCEA TODAY FROM THE PRISM OF ITS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTIMONY - A RICHNESS OF THE EUROPEAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Abstract: The geographical position of Dobrogea in general, related to the presence of major traffic arteries, as well as the natural conditions specific to these physical-geographical units of today's Tulcea County have left their mark on the development of human society, on the development of historical and cultural events, and have exerted a continuous influence on the occupations and spiritual creations of man in this region.

Keywords: Tulcea- Aegyssus Fortress, archaeological evidence, cultural heritage, cultural goods.

Introduction

In our scientific endeavor, we set out to draw an overview of today's ancient fortress Aegyssus-Tulcea, both historically and culturally, recounting the antiquity of the area, being aware of the importance of continuity in this area of a civilization of a European civilization that was born from, we could say, immemorial times.

Therefore, the archeological vestiges, as well as the cultural goods brought to light through systematic archeological researches and through rescue excavations over time reveal the importance, antiquity and at the same time the continuity of a local population from prehistory to our times. Tulcea, the old Aegyssus.

Just as nature endowed this earth with unique riches and beauties, so too the history of our forefathers who lived here presents a series of unique sequences, inscribed not only in national history and attested by descriptive and cartographic historical sources, starting with Hesiod, Pindar, Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius, Strabo, Ptolemy, Antonius' Itinerary, *Notiția Episcopatum*, Genoese Portulanele and many other medieval and modern cartographic and ethnographic documents.¹

1.1. Tulcea-old fortress Aegyssus between past and present

Archaeological evidence discovered and exploited over time by specialists reveals evidence of inhabiting this area since prehistory. An eloquent example in this sense is the discovery in Cernavoda of the statuettes "The Thinker" and "The Woman", cultural assets of exceptional artistic and historical value of Neolithic art being part of the heritage of Hamangia culture², depicting the family.

It should be noted that among the many interactions of Dobrogea with the ancient civilizations the most significant and with the most important consequences is the Greek

¹Gavrilă Simion, „Planul organizării unui complex muzeala la Tulcea”, în *Revista Muzeelor*, București, Editura Întrepriderea Poligrafică „Informația”, 1972, p. 208-209.

² Adrian Rădulescu, Ion Bitoleanu, *Istoria Dobrogei*, ediția a II-a revizuită, Constanța, Editura Ex Ponto, p. 20.

civilization. The integration of Scythia Minor³ (Dobrogea) in the Greek and then Roman culture and life forms, also offered favorable conditions for the spread of Christian teaching.

Aegyssus is referred to by inscriptions and archaeological discoveries until the end of the 16th century⁴. Instead, the name of the city of Tulcea appears for the first time in 1570, when the consul Andrei Taranowschi wrote in his diary on the way to Constantinople the following: "From Chilia I sailed up the Danube and came to a small town called Tulcea."⁵

The importance of the North Pontic city for the European cultural heritage lies in its ancientness, which, as archaeological research has shown, was formed "at the foot of a rocky promontory"⁶, with the oldest level of habitation dating to the VII-VI centuries BC⁷, thus highlighting an evolution of living in this area until the Roman era⁸ and from the Roman era with a brief interruption in the historical time of about 3-4 centuries (seventh-eleventh century) to the present day.

It is notorious that the fortress of Aegyssus is located on Monument Hill (Colnicul Hora) the old name of the city of Tulcea according to Ovid, would have belonged to a legendary founder Aegyssos Caspyos, name of Celtic origin⁹. Recounting the historical events that took place in 12 BC, when the city was attacked by the Getae, Ovid considered it *uetus urbs*.¹⁰

Thus, in a letter addressed to the emperor Severus, the Latin poet wrote: „Near the bank of the Istra with two names, there is an old fortress, which can hardly be entered, due to the fortifications and the place where it is located. If we are to give credence to its inhabitants themselves, Caspyus Aegyssus is the one who would have founded it and would have named it after his name. The cruel ghetto took control of it after suddenly, with war, it destroyed the odrizi ”.¹¹

Starting with the 2nd century AD, after the Danube fleet (Classis Flavia Moesica) was established at Noviodunum¹², Aegyssus evolved as a Roman city in which it was very important to practice a transit trade with people from the northern Pontic steppes¹³, developing thus as a cosmopolitan city¹⁴, among the most important inhabitants being the Greeks (shipowners, merchants, navigators, etc.).

1.2. Early cultural aspects in the North Dobrogea region

³ Emil Dumea, *Creștinismul antic în Scythia Minor (Dobrogea)*, Iași, Editura Sapiientia, 2016.

⁴ Daniel Petre, *Biserica Buna Vestire-Tulcea, File de cronică*, Iași, Editura Sf. Mina 2014

⁵ Petre Cotet, *Tulcea*, București, Editura Cartografică Gh. Vasile, 1975, p. 42.

⁶ Victor Henrich Baumann, *Prezența elenilor la Tulcea*, București, Editura Xpress Printing, 2005, p.15.

⁷ Dating following the intramural rescue excavations carried out in 1996 by I. Vasiliu.

⁸ Rescue excavations carried out between 1973-1974, V. H. Baumann, A. Opaif.

⁹*** *Ghidul turistic al județului Tulcea*, Tulcea, 2011.

¹⁰ ***Ovidius, *Opere*, București, Editura Gunivas, 2001.

¹¹ Petre Cotet, *op.cit.*, p. 41.

¹² Loc. Isaccea.

¹³ Victor Baumann, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁴ *Idem*, „Schiță privind evoluția istorică a teritoriului actual al municipiului Tulcea” în *Steaua Dobrogei*, 2003, an V, nr.1-4, p.33.

For the Roman period, the archaeological discoveries reveal the fact that the new cultural aspects are manifested in the architectural and sculptural field, noting that public and private buildings are characterized by a monumentalism due to economic growth in the time of the Antonines¹⁵.

Of great historical value for our cultural heritage are the funerary stars, bas-reliefs, statuettes, etc. discovered in Moesia Minor in the sec. I-III AD images of the Thracian knight, of Dionyssus, of the statuette Cybele¹⁶etc., cultural goods that attest to the authenticity of perpetuation or even our identity as a people in these lands. He would have preached the first call to the apostolate - St. Andrew¹⁷. But archaeological sources attest to the new religion during the persecutions of Diocletian and Galerius (303-304)¹⁸ and, especially, after the Edict of Tolerance in Milan in 313, during the reign of Constantine the Great¹⁹.

There is not information on the inhabitation of the fortress between the 7th and 11th centuries. But, starting with the 11th century on the Lower Danube, the chronicler Mihail Attaleiates recalls that in the numerous fairs in this area there was „*a mixed multitude of all languages*.”²⁰In the Byzantine era, information about the populations in the area at the mouth of the Danube, comes from the treaty concluded by the prince of Dobrogea, Ivanco, in 1387 with the Genoese, being evoked "Greeks, Bulgarians, vel alli".²¹ Nicolae Iorga, in the work entitled *Histoire des relations anglo-roumaines*, mentions the existence of a bazaar in Tulcea, where Greek merchants landed in the 15th century. 16th century coming from the island of Chios²².

Paul Georgiu²³, in a document from the 16th century, tells us that Dobrogea, the old land between the Danube and the Sea, was habited by Christians, along with the Turks but only by the sea. Between sec. XVI-XVIII, the strategic function of the area develops and the economic one decreases²⁴, in other words, in 1706 Tulcea was described as „a small fortress built on the bank of the Danube, taking care of an arm of the Danube, so that it cannot cross ships without news in the Black Sea and from the Black Sea in the Danube²⁵. During Ottoman rule, the Levantine Greeks were the ones who mediated Dobrogea's trade with the High Gate.

After the Russo-Turkish wars, the Danube centers were depopulated²⁶, being recorded the fact that between 1771-1774 and in 1821 the Russians occupied the Danube Delta²⁷ and in 1828 they deserted everything in their way along the Black Sea.

¹⁵ Adrian Rădulescu, Ion Bitoleanu, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p.117.

¹⁷ Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. I, București, Editura Doxologia, 2004, p. 45.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

¹⁹ Adrian Rădulescu, Ion Bitoleanu, *Istoria...*, 1979, p. 140.

²⁰ *** *Historia*, 1853, 204, r. 20-21.

²¹ Al. P. Arbore, „Așezările bulgarilor”, în *Arhiva Dobrogei*, vol. I, București, 1916, p. 20.

²² C. Șerban, V. Șerban, „Rolul economic și politico militar al orașelor din Dobrogea de Nord în sec. XVI-XVIII” în *Peuce 2*, Tulcea, 284-289.

²³ *** *Monumenta historica Slavorum meridionalium, II*.

²⁴ Victor Baumann, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

²⁵ *** *Arhiva Dobrogei*, București, 1916, vol. I, p. 92.

²⁶ Victor Baumann, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

²⁷ Lelia Postolache, *Bisericile orașului Tulcea și slujitorii lor*, Slobozia, Editura Metamorfozi, 2013, p.27.

Under these conditions, "burned and demolished cities are abandoned by the masses."²⁸ According to Hector de Bearn, who accompanied the Russian army, there were only 20 houses left in Tulcea during the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-1829.

Starting with 1829, the repopulation of Dobrogea takes place, and in 1830 there is an overpopulation of the city, being necessary a new systematization or urban structuring, so the first inhabitants who settled in the northeastern part of the city were those from Prislav (locality Nufăru). The peninsular settlement in the area of Colnic Hora is not abandoned, the new city stretching around the central lagoon which becomes, in time, the central area of the city. According to the architect Gh. Brătescu, the Greeks, recently settled at the mouth of the lagoon in the Danube, occupy the territory near the church, St. Nicholas "to the street" Beștepeni".²⁹

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The Adrianople Peace Treaty³² addresses the issue of the Danube Mouths³³, which was resolved with the establishment in 1856 of the European Danube Commission³⁴ (a Commission³⁵ that we could consider the forerunner of the European Communities and now the European Union) and which offered the possibility to reaffirm The mouths of the Danube of the Greek Communities.³⁶ In this geo-political context, an important Greek community is developing in the North Dobrogea city, which contributes decisively to the economic, spiritual and, why not, cultural development of the area.

There is very little documentary evidence from the medieval era and even the modern one until the war of independence, because many of them were destroyed during the confrontations that also included the territory of Dobrogea.³⁷ As a result, documents and images of the old Tulcea are rare. It is known that the Ottoman archive

²⁸ Gheorghe Brătescu, „Tulcea- Schiță urbanistică”, în *Analele Dobrogei*, IX, vol. II, 1928, p.32.

²⁹ Iosif Colcer, Viorel Măgureanu, *File din Istoria Dobrogei*, Tulcea, 1998, p. 33.

³⁰ Lelia Postolache, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

³¹ Gheorghe Brătescu, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

³² The Peace Treaty of Adrianople (also called the Treaty of Edirne), between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire, completed after the end of the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829; this treaty was signed on September 14, 1829 in Adrianople by Alexei Orlov and Abdul Kadirbei. Thus, the Ottoman Empire gave Russia access to the mouths of the Danube and the Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki fortresses in Georgia.

³³ Victor Baumann, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

³⁴ La Commission Européenne du Danube et son oeuvre de 1856 a 1931, Paris, 1931, p. 3.

³⁵ Commission based in Galați and Sulina.

³⁶ Petre Daniel, *Biserica...*, Iași, 2014, p. 10.

³⁷ Tudor Mateescu, „Arhivele din Dobrogea în timpul stăpânirii otomane”, în *Revista Arhivelor*, an LI, vol. XXXVI, nr.1-2, 1974, p. 232.

of Tulcea was mostly destroyed in 1877, another part evacuated to Istanbul³⁸ and Sofia³⁹ following the departure of the Ottoman leadership, a leadership that had been at the head of the blood (province) of Tulcea until the War of Independence -1878). We hope that future research will be carried out that will bring to light the documents that were taken by the foreign authorities, documents so necessary in the knowledge of the history of Dobrogea. As for the archival fund, until the First World War, it is known that it was also partially destroyed, in turn, during the German-Turkish-Bulgarian occupation, when Tulcea and its inhabitants suffered enormously.⁴⁰

To these are added the migration of Tulcea inhabitants of Turkish, Bulgarian, Greek, Jewish ethnicity in different periods of local history, for political, economic or social reasons, carrying with them albums with photos, documents, paintings and stories, which have been lost. maybe forever.

Conclusions

The rediscovery, promotion and capitalization of the historical, artistic and cultural heritage of the territory of each country has recently become one of the key points of European cultural policy and beyond. Thus, history, traditions and culture can guarantee the preservation of the roots of each state. Therefore, the theme of knowledge, protection and enhancement of cultural heritage is not only regional, but also national and international a strategic resource for the relaunch of each nation, its centrality in the reflections of many historians, people of culture, etc. attesting to this overwhelming importance.

In conclusion, it can be said that since the end of the twentieth century, EU Member States have begun important international research in order to identify the best methodology for the management, protection and enhancement of cultural heritage.

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³⁸ Mihail Guboglu, „Despre materialele arhivistice otomane din Turcia și importanța lor pentru istoria Țărilor Române”, în *Revista Arhivelor*, an IX, nr.2, 1966, pp.175-194.

³⁹ Tudor Mateescu, *op.cit.*, pp. 232-233.

⁴⁰ Lelia Postolache, *op. cit.*, p.47.

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