

# FEW NOTES ON TWO PLACENAMES OF GETIC ORIGIN IN PROCOPIUS, *DE AEDIFICIIS*

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*De Aedificiis* is a very important source for history, historical geography and linguistics. Several studies were written about, but many questions are still obscure and disputed. We tried in the following pages to clarify some of them.

## 1. Altina

A minor toponym in Dobrudja, which was often used as a proof for the Romanian continuity in this region, is *Oltina* (a lake and a village in the southwestern corner of Dobrudja, on the right bank of the Danube). Its origin from the Roman name *Altina* is certain, even if some scholars thought that in this evolution was involved a Slavic intermediary form<sup>1</sup>. The Roman *Altinum* was located on that very place. We are absolutely certain, because the source is one of the best: *Notitia Dignitatum Orientis* (XL. 28). The position of this fort in the list (after Durostorum and Cimbrianae and at the end of the province Moesia Secunda) make certain the location in the present-day village Oltina (the Roman name was inherited by the nearby lake *Oltina*).

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, *Altinum* was the garrison of *milites naularii Altinenses*. The turf fort placed 2,5 km north of the village is 190 x 80 m. It was not systematically excavated until now<sup>2</sup>. At Dinogetia were found several brick stamps with the inscription *Altina*, produced during the Anastasius' reign in the workshops uncovered at Oltina<sup>3</sup>. This confirms the name of the fortress in the 6<sup>th</sup> century *Altina* and not *Altinum*. *Altinum* was the official Latinized name used in *Notitia Dignitatum*<sup>4</sup>. *Altina* seems to be a Getic placename ended with *-ina*<sup>5</sup>. According to another viewpoint, the name *Altina* / *Altinum* is Celtic (because it has analogies in Pannonia and northern Italy)<sup>6</sup>. Even so, the Getic inhabitants eventually inherited the placename from Celts.

Procopius recorded the popular form *Altina* in two passages of his work. A fortlet named *Altina* (Ἀλτινα)

appears in the list of the small fortresses located in Scythia, between Becis and Manrovalle (*De Aed.* IV. 11. 20). The position in the list is not significant for the real location, because the order transmitted by Procopius was very biased in this section of his work. A derived form, *Altinon* (Ἀλτηνῶν), is mentioned in *De Aed.* IV. 7. 9, but in a different place of that of *Notitia Dignitatum* namely between Transmarisca and Candidiana. Despite this dissimilarity, Procopius was often used as a second source for the Roman fort of Oltina<sup>7</sup>.

As it is known, Transmarisca is Tutrakan (Turtucaia) and Candidiana is certainly located at Malāk Preslavec (former Cadichioi) where a Roman fort dated between the 3<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries was partially investigated<sup>8</sup>. The traces of the Altinon fort mentioned in IV. 7. 9 should be tracked down between Tutrakan and Malāk Preslavec, if Procopius was right<sup>9</sup>. A fortress of 180x122 m. was observed by K. Škorpil at Dolno Rjachovo (point Kaletu, on the Danube's bank), but it was not archaeologically investigated. The pottery and the coins found at the surface date between 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.<sup>10</sup> Its location is suitable for Altinon, but the few known data are suggesting an earlier date. Nothing is known about the small fort of Pojarevo, located between Tutrakan and Dolno Rjachovo<sup>11</sup>.

M. Perrin-Henry (not based on archaeological evidences!) supposed that there was a single fort Altina, located in the proximity of Transmarisca and not at Oltina. The author believes that the present-day name *Oltenița* (in front of Transmarisca-Tutrakan) inherits the name *Altina*<sup>12</sup>. We could be certain that *Oltenița* has no relation with *Altina*, because the original name of this city was *Otelnija* (of Bulgarian origin)<sup>13</sup>. The name *Oltina* from Dobrudja was preserved because of the lake inherited it. The position of Altina before Tigra, Skedeva and Novas is considered by M. Perrin-Henry as an important proof for the location downstream of Tigra (today, Marten, east of Russe). In fact, the Procopius' list in IV. 11

is very confuse. Altina, Tigra and Skedeva are placed in Scythia, not in Moesia, together with Trosmis, Callatis and other cities from Scythia, but also together with Abrittos and Novae which certainly belonged to Moesia Secunda. Therefore, this list is irrelevant for the location of Altina near Transmarisca.

One could think that Procopius made a confusion, moving Altina into a wrong place within the sector Transmarisca-Sucidava. It seems quite likely. However, it seems that there is no mistake in this passage. The interpretation proposed by A. Aricescu in two studies published in 1970 and 1972 might give the solution. He considered that the passage in IV. 7. 9 was wrongly understood. The text involved is the following: μετὰ δὲ Τρασμαρίσκαν ἔρυμά τε τὸ Ἀλτηνῶν, καὶ ὅπερ καλοῦσι Κανδιδιάνα καθρημενον πρὸς αὐτῶν πολεμίων πολλῶ πρότερον Aricescu translated it in a different way "after Transmarisca, the tower of the Altinon, which is also named Candidiana, destroyed by the enemies long time ago". That means that the restoration of the fort was carried out through the work of the soldiers from Altinum (i.e. the fortress from the south-western Dobrudja)<sup>14</sup>. On the other hand the translation of ἔρυμά as "tower" is not correct. Procopius used πύργο for "tower"; ἔρυμά is used for small fort (*castella*). Except this, Aricescu renders exactly the meaning. The form Ἀλτηνῶν is indeed a plural genitive of Ἀλτινα which means "the fortlet of the men from Altina". The word ἔρυμά is a singular noun matching only with, Ἀλτηνῶν and not with Κανδιδιάνα.

The scarcity of the investigations carried out at Malāk Preslavec hinder any attempt of identification of a 6<sup>th</sup> century building phase. For the time being, we could not be certain about a reconstruction made during Justinian's reign.

However, it seems that a fort named Altina did not exist between Transmarisca and Candidiana. The passage from *De Aed.* IV. 7. 9. was wrongly understood. The real Altina was located at the eastern end of Moesia Secunda, in the present-day village Oltina. The name *Altinum* is a Latinized form of the Getic (Celtic ?) name *Altina*.

## 2. Ibida

In several studies, A. Aricescu proposed the correction of the name Ibida in Procopius (*De Aed.* IV. 7. 19) in *Libida* or perhaps *Libidina*<sup>15</sup>. He made the remark that the

discord between τοῦτον (instead of τοῦτο) and ὄχυρομα (sc. Ulmetum) could be explained if υ is a letter which belonged to the real name of Ibida. This letter could be λ confounded with υ. Ibida is usually located at Slava Rusă, Tulcea County. Few archaeological investigations were carried out in this big town of 24 ha in surface<sup>16</sup>. The name *Ibida* is not attested by other sources, but, according to Aricescu, this *polis* is the same with the city (*polis*) of *Libidina* mentioned by Theophylactus Simocatta (I. 8. 6). The idea was accepted by many historians, except Em. Dorușiu-Boilă<sup>17</sup>, who denied the location of the fortress recorded by Theophylactus in Dobrudja and, as a consequence, she sustained that the true name is that one known from Procopius. She also denied the restitution of the inscription of Quintus Marcius Quadratus found at Slava Rusă. Aricescu proposed *nat(us) Lib(idae)*, but it seems that the real name was *Libicus* or *Liburnus*<sup>18</sup>. The inscription is indeed a weak argument. The idea expressed by Aricescu is mainly based on Theophylactus.

The 7<sup>th</sup> century writer showed how Bookolabras, a "Scythian man" who was a shaman (which is in fact the translation of the name *Bookolabras*) was a refugee in the Byzantine Empire because he had an affair with one of the khagan wives. A Roman commander captured him after he crossed the Danube aiming to go to the city of Libidinon (ἐπὶ τὴν Λιβιδινῶν πόλιν φερόμενος). Next, Bookolabras was sent to Constantinople. The Avars started the war because they interpreted this action as an asylum accorded to an enemy of their ruler. This new invasion that hit southern Dobrudja is dated most probable in 586<sup>19</sup>. The refuge of Bookolabras in the Roman Empire (without other details) was also recorded by Menander Protector, frg. 66 (his name is not mentioned, but the source said that the refugee had adultery relations with Baian's wife)<sup>20</sup>. It should be remarked that Menander, unlike Theophylactus recorded this event in relation with the surrender of Sirmium (582). Although fragmentary preserved, the book of Menander is very important for the Byzantine-Barbarian relations during Justinus II and Tiberius II. If his relation concerns the same fugitive (Bookolabras), then we must correct the date resulted from Theophylactus. The latter wrote half a century after the events and - as it is known - his chronology of the Byzantine-Avar wars is not very clear.

We agree with Dorușiu-Boilă who assumed that only the context of this passage would to resolve the problem. We also agree that Aricescu was wrong when he

considered Bookolabras a man from Scythia Minor. It is clear that in Theophylactus' mind, *Skython* means "Hun", as he explained few lines below: the kinsmen of Bookolabras are the Huns (also named Turks), settled in East, near the Persians.

Doruțiu-Boilă asserts that *Libidinon* concerns the inhabitants of *Libidurgos* (a name that she supposed to have been a mistaken form for *Libidoburgon*). This is a fortress recorded by the same Theophylactus Simocatta (II. 15. 3), in the relation of the battle lost by Comentiolus in 587. *Libidurgon* and the nearby *Calvomunteis* (attested only by this source) were hypothetically located near Kableškovo (Burgas county), on the road from Marcianopolis to Anchialos<sup>21</sup>. The origin of this name is not certain. It is possible a derivation from *Livii burgus*<sup>22</sup>.

According to Doruțiu-Boilă, Bookolabras had in view to reach Constantinople. This seems very puzzling. If he want to go at his Asiatic kinsmen, he had no need to go through Moesia Secunda and Thrace and to reach the capital city.

The identification proposed by Doruțiu-Boilă is therefore impossible. First, the almost unknown fortress *Libidurgon* could not be a polis, as the source states. Second, the name *Libidinon* could not be derived from

*Libid(ob)urgon*. Third, the placenames ended with *-dina* are specific only for Scythia and for the northeastern part of Moesia Secunda and not for the southern Thracian area.

In fact, the circumstances are not opposed to Aricescu's idea. Bookolabras crossed the Danube in Dobrudja, because this was the shortest way towards the Eurasian steppe. It is possible that he want to reach Crimea, where a Türkic and Utigur domination was established since 576 (in the Bosporan Keré)<sup>23</sup>. The Turks were the old enemies of the Avars. Bookolabras wished perhaps to take a short refuge in the big city *Libidiña*, before to go away (perhaps by sea). The location of *Libidina* in Dobrudja is admitted in the most recent monograph on Theophylactus as source for the Byzantine-Avar wars<sup>24</sup>. The source specified that the commander who defended the Danube captured Bookolabras. This makes more probable the location of *Libidina* in Dobrudja.

The events are dated after 578 when the Avars extended their domination over Wallachia<sup>25</sup> and this could explain why Bookolabras succeeded to quickly cross the river in Dobrudja.

In conclusion, the idea expressed by A. Aricescu is still valid. The form *Libidina* seems to be the true one.

## NOTES

1. R. Vulpe, I. Barnea, *Din istoria Dobrogei*, II, București, 1968, p. 445; C. Poghirc, in *Istoria limbii române*, București, 1969, p. 360; R. Vulpe, *Limite meridională a provinciei romane Scythia*, "Pontica", 5, 1972, p. 218-219; G. Ivănescu, *Istoria limbii române*, Iași, 1980, p. 60; A. Madgearu, *Continuitate și discontinuitate culturală la Dunărea de Jos în secolele VII-VIII*, București, 1997, p. 101.

2. TIR, L 35, p. 22; E. Popescu, *Inscripțiile grecești și latine din secolele IV-XIII descoperite în România*, București, 1976, p. 195; M. Zahariade, *Moesia Secunda, Scythia și Notitia Dignitatum*, București, 1988, p. 119.

3. E. Popescu, *op. cit.*, p. 261 (nr. 246); R. Vulpe, I. Barnea, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

4. A. Aricescu, *Contributions épigraphiques à l'identification de quelques toponymes de Scythia Minor*, RRH, 14, 1975, 4, p. 700, note 32 considered that *Altina* was the feminine form of *Altinum*.

5. It is true that most of these toponyms are composed with the suffix *-dina* (*Beledina*, *Bassidina* etc.), but the name *Altina* has some analogies: *Adina* (*De Aed.* IV. 7. 12-13) and

perhaps *Arina* (*De Aed.* IV. 11. 20). For the placenames with *-dina*, see V. Beševliev, *Amlaidina und Sippe*, "Linguistique Balkanique", 3, 1961, 2, p. 67-70 (who expressed doubts on the affiliation of *Altina* to this family of toponyms). For *Adina*: V. Beševliev, *Zur Deutung der Kastellnamen in Prokops Werk "De Aedificiis"*, Amsterdam, 1970, p. 126.

6. V. Beševliev, *Zur Deutung...*, p. 125. See *Altina*, *Altinum*, RE, I, 1894, col. 1697-1698.

7. See note 2. According to the best edition (Procopii Caesariensis, *Opera omnia*, rec. J. Hawry, corr. G. Wirth, IV, Lipsiae, 1964, p. 148), "hoc castellum [Ἀλτινα] videtur idem esse, quod IV. 7. 9. Ἀλτινων ἔγγραμα dicitur".

8. K. Škorpil, *Nekotoriia iz dorogi vostočnoj Bolgarii*, IRAIK, 10, 1905, p. 519-520, pl. XCV/1; S. Georgieva, *Razkopki na obekt S v "Gorno Gradište" pri s. Kadikioi*, IAI, 18, 1952, p. 268-282; V. Velkov, *Zur Geschichte einer Donaukastells in Bulgarien*, "Klio", 39, 1961, p. 215-221; TIR, L 35, p. 53; M. Biernacka-Lubanska, *The Roman and Early Byzantine Fortifications of Lower Moesia and Northern Thrace*, Wrocław-Warszawa, 1982, p. 228 (nr. 11); M. Zahariade, *op. cit.*, p. 113-

114; I. Băčvarov, *Arheološki pametnizi v občini Glavinica i Dulovo*, Razgradska oblast (prodĺenje), "Dobrudža", Varna, 7, 1990, p. 139-143 (nr. 22).

9. The location at Popina (sustained by M. Biernacka-Lubanska, *op. cit.*, p. 260, nr. 33-35) is not suitable, because Popina is placed east of Malák Preslavce.

10. K. Škorpiľ, *op. cit.*, p. 449, pl. CXIV/2 a, c; TIR, L 35, p. 39; M. Biernacka-Lubanska, *op. cit.*, p. 260 (nr. 27); R. Rašev, *Starobălgarski ukrepljenja na Dolnija Dunav (VII-XI v.)*, Varna, 1982, p. 181, nr. 33; I. Băčvarov, *op. cit.*, p. 136 (nr. 7).

11. K. Škorpiľ, *op. cit.*, p. 449, pl. CXIV/4; R. Rašev, *op. cit.*, p. 181, nr. 34.

12. M. Perrin-Henry, *La place des listes toponymiques dans l'organisation du livre IV des Édifices de Procope*, in *Geographica Byzantina*, sous la direction d'H. Ahrweiler, Paris, 1981, p. 103-104.

13. See I. Iordan, *Toponimia românească*, București, 1963, p. 299, note 2.

14. A. Aricescu, *Quelques précisions sur la carte de la Scythia Minor*, *Dacia*, NS, 14, 1970, p. 307; idem, *Încercare nouă de înțelegere a știrilor date de Procopius din Caesarea despre teritoriul Dobrogei în vremea lui Iustinian*, "Pontica", 5, 1972, p. 339-340.

15. A. Aricescu, *Încercare...*, p. 335-338; idem, *Despre numele așezării antice de la Slava Rusă*, *BMI*, 40, 1971, 3, p. 58-60; idem, *Les fortifications de la Dobroudja à l'époque de Justinien*, in *Actes du XIV<sup>e</sup> Congrès International des Études Byzantines*, 2, Bucarest, 1975, p. 497; idem, *Contributions...*, p. 697-700.

16. A. S. Ștefan, *Cetatea romană de la Slava Rusă (Ibida?)*. *Cercetările aerofotografice și apărarea patrimoniului arheologic*, *RMM-MIA*, 46, 1977, 1, p. 3-22; A. Opaï, *O săpătură de salvare în orașul antic Ibida*, *SCIVA*, 42, 1991, 1-2, p. 21-56.

17. E. Doruțiu-Boilă, *Despre localizarea orașului Libidina (Theophylactos Symocattas, Istorii, I. 8)*, *StCl*, 18, 1979, p. 145-149.

18. E. Doruțiu-Boilă, *op. cit.*, p. 149; *ISM*, V, București, 1980, p. 245, nr. 225.

19. A. Madgearu, *op. cit.*, p. 19; idem, *The Downfall of the Lower Danubian Late Roman Frontier*, *RRH*, 36, 1997, 3-4, p. 319.

20. Menander, *Excerpta de legationibus*, frg. 66, ed. De Boor, Berolini, 1903, p. 175 (FHDR, II, p. 522/523).

21. See V. Beševliev, *Zwei Randnotizen zu Theophilaktos Simokattes*, "Byzantinische Zeitschrift", 43, 1950, 2, p. 257-258. For both places, P. Soustal, *Tabula Imperii Byzantini*, 6. Thracien, "Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Denkschriften", Wien, 221, 1991, p. 293, 335.

22. See V. Beševliev, *Latinskite mestni imena v Mizija i Trakija*, *IAI*, 19, 1955, p. 295.

23. W. Pohl, *Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa*, 567-822 n. Chr., München, 1988, p. 66-67.

24. M. Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian. Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan Warfare*, Oxford, 1988, p. 146. The identity Libidion= (L)ibida is accepted by Em. Popescu in his review of P. Schreiner' new edition of *Theophylactus (Dacia, NS, 32, 1988, p. 252)*.

25. A. Madgearu, *Continuitate...*, p. 150.