

AN UNKNOWN STONE STRUCTURE AT THE EASTERN GATE OF SARMIZEGETUSA REGIA' PRECINCT RECORDED IN THE 19th CENTURY WRITINGS

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Rezumat. Spre deosebire de poarta de vest a fortificației de piatră de la Sarmizegetusa Regia, cercetată cu atenție de arheologi, cea de est nu a beneficiat de prea multă atenție, probabil din pricina faptului că a fost puternic răvășită de căutătorii de comori și de cercetătorii amatori ai secolului al XIX-lea. Totuși, în arealul ei a existat unul dintre cele mai interesante monumente ale sitului de la Grădiștea de Munte, fapt revelat de analiza documentelor rămase de la cei care l-au investigat înainte de Primul Război Mondial. Textul de față își propune valorificarea acestor documente, ignorate până acum.

Cuvinte cheie: cetăți dacice, Sarmizegetusa Regia, fortificații, arhitectură dacică, istoriografie.

Unlike the western gate of the Sarmizegetusa Regia's stone fortress, which has been carefully investigated by archaeologists¹, the eastern one did not receive much attention, probably because it was seriously ravaged by treasure hunters and amateurs in the 19th century. However, in its area there was one of the most interesting stone structures of the site, fact revealed by the writings of those who have investigated it prior to WWI. This paper aims to exploit these documents, ignored until now.

The eastern gate is identified as such by few authors of the 19th century, because in the place where today it is marked on the ground, there was a monument that attracted much more attention. It is an underground structure, often called "cellar". In the documents of the nineteenth century, there are numerous data about the "basement" of the eastern gate, but these have never been used. Among modern scholars, Alexandru Ferenczi is the only one who wrote about this building, noting the opinions from the previous century, but without giving his own point of view². Some of his data are confusing.

Since the first reports of excavations from 1804, belonging to the Austrian tax authorities who sent teams of workers to "investigate" the site in search of gold, they signalled the existence of an underground structure, identified under the stone wall, just on its path. Thus the report, dated 26 May, records that the miners patrolled

¹ Daicoviciu *et alii*, 1953, p. 173-179.

² Daicoviciu, Ferenczi, 1951, p. 79.

to investigate the area and identified a gap in the fortification wall. The indication is important (*“unter der Festung”*), suggesting that the breakthrough was located not above the ground, but below it. They proceeded to enlarge the gap and found a lower level, then excavated on the other side of the fortification, “from the city”, i.e. from inside³. They found several items in the first half of fathom, but without any specification excepting that the objects were recorded in the Annex (that has unfortunately remained unpublished). Their conclusion is that there was a cellar (*“ein Keller”*). The excavations continued and the next report, dated June 2, brings some important details, although the text is very awkwardly phrased. Three people cleaned out the rubble from the “cellar” situated under the wall over a length of about 4 fathoms (7.56 m) and have completely uncovered the room as far as the schist layer. They tested the ground one fathom away, but did not find anything⁴. The excavations at this spot appear to have been conducted for about three weeks, with few people. These reports do not provide clear benchmarks on the location of the area excavated, where exactly on the path of the wall was this “cellar” discovered. But these reference points will come later.

The scholars that had arrived at Grădiștea Muncelului at mid nineteenth century have also recorded a structure under the wall and marked it on their plans.

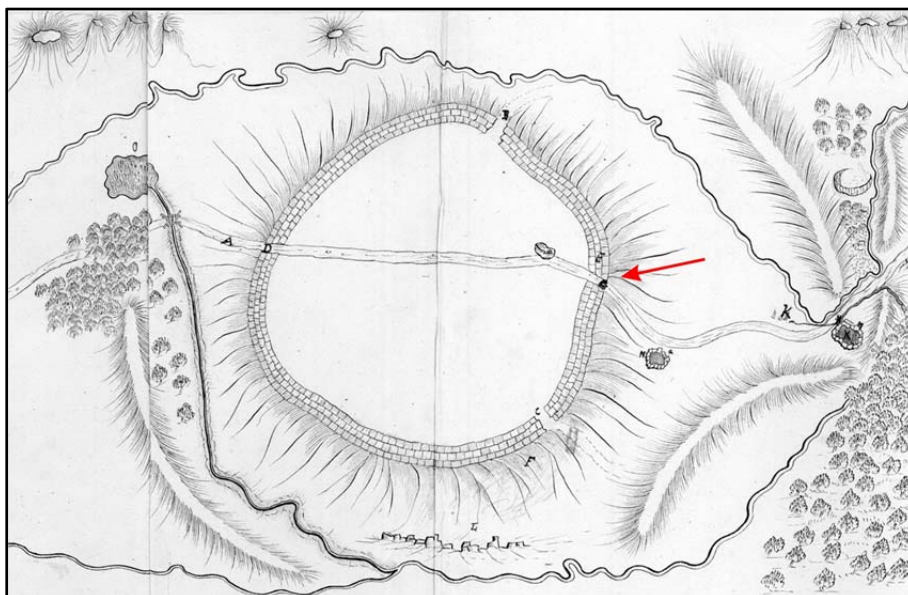


Fig. 1. The basement location on Fodor’s plan.

Following the expedition of 1847, Michael Ackner wrote: *“From this gate [the southern one, n. AP] goes the wall, following the valley situated northward, 90 steps until you reach a hollow that contains large shaped stones and where it seems*

³ Jakó, 1972, p. 587.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 588.

that there was a cellar or a tower and in which they found, according to the statements of witnesses, human bones and heavy metal chains. The appearances indicate that there was also an eastern gate”⁵.

On the plan the spot is indicated by the letter *a*) (Fig. 1), and in the legend additional information is given:

“*a*). The place where the fortress wall reaches a hollow full with shaped stones and where there is a massive flat porphyry slab, and where once, according to the declarations of the residents from the nearby village, human bones with heavy iron chains were found”⁶.

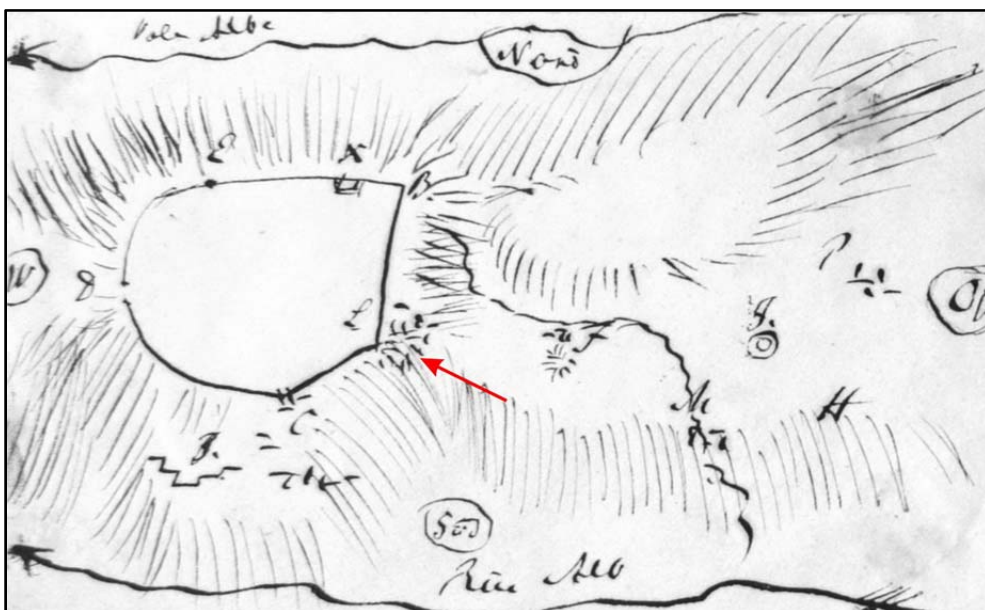


Fig. 2. The basement location on Neigebaur’s plan.

Another participant in the expedition of 1847, Johann Ferdinand Neigebaur, describes the structure with the same words without providing any further information⁷. However, from a letter sent to Wilhelm Henzen it results that he was convinced that it was a tower: “*Surveys were made at an ancient tower, at the wall, where*

⁵ Ackner, 1856, p. 97: “*Von diesem Thore läuft die Mauer, dem sich nördlich wendenden Thalgrunde folgend, 90 Schritt weit bis zu einer Vertiefung, in welcher grosse behauene Steine liegen, und wo ein Keller oder Thurm gewesen zu sein scheint, in welchem bei den Schatzgräbereien, nach Aussage der anwesenden Leute, Menschenknochen und massive eiserne Ketten gefunden worden sind. Hier scheint auch ein östliches Thor gewiesen zu sein; die Stadtmauer aber zieht sich 200 Schritte nördlich bis zum Thalgrunde des Valya-Albe*”.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 98: “*Die Stelle, wo die Stadtmauer an eine mit behauenen Quadern und mit einer breiten massiven Porphyrtafel gefüllten Vertiefung stösst, und wo früher, nach Aussage der nächsten Ortsanwohner, menschliche Gebeine mit schweren eisernen Ketten gefunden worden sind*”.

⁷ Neigebaur, 1851, p. 99, n^o. 4.

today many porphyry slabs can be seen. Inside the tower many bones and a chain were found, indicating the fact that there was some sort of prison”⁸.

He also places it on the plan at the letter *A* (Fig. 2), according to the data in the text, saying it could be a tower or a cellar. The explanation in the plan’s legend mentions: “*A. The place where the fortification reaches the pit where the chain was found and where there are a stone and a porphyry slab, and also other stones*”⁹.

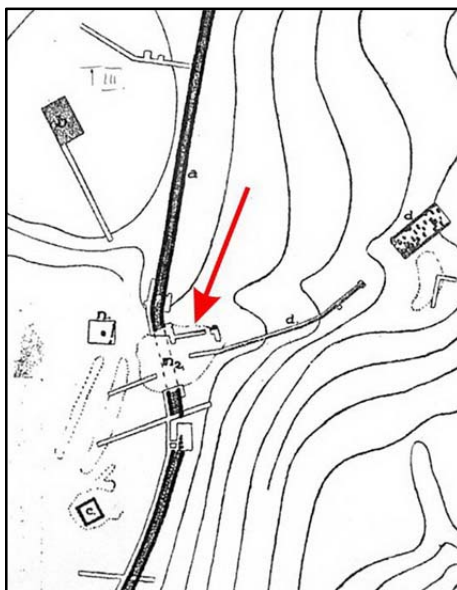
The third participant in the expedition, Fodor András, has also recorded the existence of a construction in the same place, giving some valuable information in addition to that from Ackner and Neigebaur: “*Regarding the discoveries made in the fortress many years ago, at the eastern gate there is a one fathom deep pit, half its height being of shaped stones, where supposedly a leg bone and an iron piece were found, leading to the conclusion that there was once a prison*”¹⁰.

The distances recorded in the documents and also Fodor’s and Ackner’s identifications show that “the pit” was situated on the spot of the nowadays eastern gate.

The pit resulted from older excavations at the eastern gate was marked by Constantin Daicoviciu on his plan in 1951 (Fig. 3), and in the text it is mentioned that the gate was completely destroyed in 1803¹¹.

In the topographic survey from 1979 the hole is still visible¹², but it disappeared the next year when it was filled and the land was levelled as part of a conservation project (Fig. 4). Nowadays, close to the gate several architectural stone items are stored that could come from that enigmatic structure.

Fig. 3. The eastern gate on Daicoviciu’s plan.



⁸ Henzen, 1848, p. 33: “*Furono fatti dei tasti presso una torre attigua alle mura, dove oggi scorgonsi molte lastre di porfido. Dentro la torre stessa furono rinvenute molte ossa ed una catena, che indica che quivi fosse un qualche carcere*”.

⁹ Finály, 1916, p. 27.

¹⁰ Fodor, 1847, p. 363: “*Megjegyzendő még a' várban találtatkról, hogy állítás szerint ezelőtt több évvel a' keletfelőli kapuja feljárója mellett van egy Ől méjjségü tágkerületü lyuk, fele faragott kövekkel, hol egy lábszár-csontot találtak rajta vott vassal, lehet hajdan tömlöcz volt.*”

¹¹ Daicoviciu *et alii*, 1951, p. 104. The destruction is wrongfully imputed to Major Péchy Mihály.

¹² Călinescu, 1982, p. 14, pl. I.



Fig. 4. The eastern gate today.

Summarizing all of the above, it follows that on the spot of the present eastern gates, under the current walking level (or below the wall) a stone structure was identified made of shaped blocks. Its depth could have been of about a fathom (1.89 m) (size which however relates to the hole in which the ruins of the building were identified) and its length was about 4 fathoms (7.56 m). If Fodor's interpretation of the text is correct, in 1847 one could see the "pit" lined with shaped stones up to half its height.

Unfortunately the inventory recorded in the annexes of the Austrian reports has never been published. Identifying these annexes in the archives could bring to light valuable information. However, the findings have very much impressed those who worked there and the locals, so four decades later the witnesses still narrated on how in the "basement" human bones were found which had on it massive iron chains. Also a large slab of andesite is recorded (or even more), about which we have no other detail. It is worth mentioning here that the two large pots of andesite, fragmentary, situated today close to the temples, were found, in fact, very close to the eastern gate and thus also close to the building.

The structure was interpreted as a "cellar" or a "prison" both because of its special inventory and its location below the wall. The hypothesis of a tower also circulated. Details are very sketchy and it is hard to know whether this structure belonged to an older level, subsequently overlaid by the fortification, or was part of the fortification, perhaps even a tower. Only the reprise of archaeological research could provide additional information on this important objective.

On C. Daicoviciu's plan one can see several sections, some of them traced just on the surface of the pit, showing that he still tried to investigate this area. Unfortunately, the published reports do not mention anything about these excavations.

Research occasioned by the conservation work during 1979–'80 brought to light interesting things about the eastern gate area. Firstly, it was demonstrated that the paved road, that remained unknown to the nineteenth century scholars, passed under the eastern gate at a depth of about 2 m. Secondly, they found a segment of *murus dacicus* near the gate, 9 meters west from the gate at a depth of -0.65 m, having a thickness of about 3 m, which belonged to an ancient fortification, demonstrating thus that the Dacian precinct was smaller and had, at least on its southern side, a different path than that visible today¹³. Other research, “*not far from the eastern gate*”, were made in the years 2011–13 in order to determine the path of the paved road inside the fortification, but does not specify the distance from the gate, nor any relations between the finds and the gate¹⁴. It should be added that in these last three campaigns the excavations crossed a large modern pit, conventionally called “the Austrian pit” suggesting that it may be exactly the large pit from the eastern gate produced in the early XIXth century. However, the question of the “tower” investigated in 1804 which very likely generated that hole has remained completely unclarified. It is worth noting that in the “Austrian pit” investigated by Gelu Florea's team fragments and tiles were found in large quantities, limestone blocks and buildings' iron materials suggesting the existence of a construction somewhere nearby. In the same pit they found fragments of clay pipes from a large water pipe, no doubt the same unveiled by the Austrians more than two centuries before¹⁵.

The modern restoration of the eastern gate does not reflect a historical reality. The present-day opening of the gate of about 15–16 m is due to an incorrect interpretation of archaeological data, which resulted in an artificial gate widening to make the paved road pass through it. However, as noted above, the reports clearly show that the paved road belongs to a lower, older level, instead the fortress with its gates was built on a later level. As a result, the tower / basement from the eastern gate remained completely unknown both to specialists and to visitors of the site.

¹³ Daicoviciu *et alii*, 1983, p. 232-233.

¹⁴ Florea *et alii*, 2012; Florea *et alii*, 2013; Florea *et alii*, 2014.

¹⁵ For this pipe *see* Pețan, 2013.

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