Original Study

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The *Aquae* Station on the Roman Danube Limes Road in Upper Moesia¹

<https://doi.org/10.1515/opar-2018-0025>

Received November 20, 2017; accepted October 3, 2018

Abstract: The Roman road from *Singidunum* to *Ratiaria* connected the different fortifications and civil settlements along the *limes* in Upper Moesia. *Aquae* (Prahovo) had a favorable strategic position near the mouth of the Timok River that flowed into the Danube and a peculiar character in the military and civil context. It was built at the same time as a Danubian port center which had, without doubt, a large military importance in connection with the conquest of Dacia and commercial significance in relation to mining activities.

Keywords: Upper Moesia, Danubian limes, *Aquae* (Prahovo)

1 Introduction

It is well known that vast preparations for the Dacian Wars from the reign of Tiberius to the Trajan epoch are connected with the territory of the Upper Moesian Danube frontier – *limes*. This territory has been the object of intensive research for decades, especially in the Iron Gate region, because of the construction of the two hydroelectric power plants and the artificial lake that flooded the river banks in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. On both sides of the river, particularly on the right Serbian side of the Danube, were various Roman fortifications and other military structures connected with this border area. Their interest to archaeological and epigraphic researchers is, therefore, fairly understandable because it helps them better understand the importance of this frontier line in Roman times. The aim of this work is to open and suggest some conclusions, in the somewhat restricted form of an article, about the so far rarely treated Roman settlement of *Aquae* (Prahovo) and its prominent military, strategic and economic position within the corpse of the Uppermoesian *limes*. Based on the numerous material finds, we shall propose a more reliable scientific view about *Aquae*. Also, we shall point out the possibility of completely new interpretations of the epigraphic sources connected with this fortification, port and settlement. The scientific method that we shall use is based on the data from the Roman itineraries, as well as on the archaeological and epigraphic findings.

¹ This article is the result of the project of the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts: Society, material and spiritual culture and communication lines in prehistory and protohistory of the Balkans (n° 177012).

Article note: This article is a part of Topical Issue on the Danubian Provinces of the Roman Empire, edited by Mateusz Żmudziński

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2 Roman Fortifications and Settlements along the Danube in Upper Moesia

The fortifications and civil settlements of the Danube River frontier in Upper Moesia were connected by a road along its right bank that fostered terrestrial communication (Petrović, 2011, pp. 404–414). This strategically important road appeared in Roman itineraries and its main route bypassed the difficult Iron Gate region from *Taliata* – Donji Milanovac (Vučković-Todorović, 1961, pp. 137–139, T. 32; *TIR*, L–34, p. 109; Popović, 1982/83, pp. 265–282; Petrović, 1981, pp. 53–63, 1–5) to *Egeta* – Brza Palanka, (*TIR*, L–34, p. 57; Petrović, 1984, pp. 153–159; Petrović, 1986, pp. 369–377) following the southern slopes of Miroč Mountain (*TIR*, L–34, p. 60) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Map of the Danube Frontier Road in Upper Moesia (map by Vladimir Petrović).

The Roman fortifications along the *limes* in Upper Moesia were quite different from each other because of their size and their role in the common defense system (Petrović & Vasić, 1996, pp. 18–19). First of all, we have to mention the camps of the legions IV *Flavia* at *Singidunum* (*TIR*, L–34, p. 102; Bikić & Ivanišević, 1996, pp. 260–261; Bojović, 1996; Popović, 1997, pp. 1–20; Popović, 2006) and IV *Claudia* at *Viminacium* (*TIR*, L–34, p. 119; *IMS*, II, pp. 21–59; Spasić-Djurić, 2015, pp. 1–223; Vojvoda & Mrdjić, 2015; Golubović, 2008, pp. 1–255; Korać & Golubović, 2009, 1–562; Retrieved from: <http://viminacium.org.rs/>), the largest and most important camps whose civilian settlements had obtained the rank of colonies during the reign of Gordian III (Móczy, 1974; Piso, 2005, pp. 494–495). Although its military status seems vague at this point, *Ratiaria* (Velkov, 1980, pp. 61–83; Luka, 2014, pp. 50–64), a colony of Trajan, could join this group of fortifications with developed civil settlements, especially because it was the first place to obtain the highest administrative rank in this northern part of the province. There is a second more consequential group of fortifications planned for the housing of the auxiliary units, the cohorts. We can identify the following fortifications as belonging to this second group: Čezava (*Novae*), Donji Milanovac (*Taliata*), Karataš (*Diana*), Kostol (*Pontes*), Brza Palanka (*Egeta*) and Prahovo (*Aquae*), (Petrović & Vasić, 1996, pp. 15–27; Petrović, 2015, pp. 273–283).

The third group consists of *castella* occupied by small military units of the *auxilia* or *numeri* type: Saldum, Boljetin, Ravna, Golubinje, Hajdučka Vodenica, Tekija, Sip, Rtkovo, Vajuga, Milutinovac, Glamija, Ušće Slatinske reke, Mihailovac, Bordželj.

Watchtowers or signal towers, the fourth set of fortifications, have been identified in the following locations: Livadice by Golubac, Zidinac, Gospodjin Vir, Pesača and Lepenski Vir. The fifth group includes logistics centers such as Porečka Reka, Konopište and Kurvingrad near Kostol, which played an important role in supplying troops at the border.

The sixth group of fortifications is the dams (*claustra*) on the mouths of streams or small mountain rivers flowing into the Danube, such as those of Brnjica, Kožica, Porečka Reka and Kosovica. The seventh and last group brings together *castella* of a particular form, such as that of Bosman, which is triangular, built entirely during the later phase of the renovation of the *limes* during the time of Justinian (Petrović & Vasić, 1996, pp. 15–27).

The fortifications on the *limes* in Upper Moesia were not all on the route of the main communication axis, so the Roman itineraries paid attention only to major stations as toponyms, which include:

- *Tabula Peutingeriana*, segm. VII: Singiduno XIV Tricornio XII Monte Aureo XIV Margum Fl. X Viminatio XIII Punicum XI Vico Cuppe XII Ad Novas X Ad Scrofulas XV Faliatis VIII Gerulatis VI Unam VI Egeta VIII Clevora VIII Ad Aqvas XXIV Dortico XXV Ad Malum XVI Ratiaria.
- *Itinerarium Antonini*: Singiduno castra XXIV Aureo Monte VI Vincea VIII Margo VIII Viminacio XXIV Cuppe XXIV Novas XII Talia XXI Egeta XVI Aquis X Dortico XVII Bononia XVIII Ratiaria.
- *Rav.*, IV 7, 8–18: Punicum Vico Cuppae Novas Scrofulas Taliatis Gerbiatis Luna Egeta Clebora Aquas Dorticum.

The section *Singidunum - Viminacium* is listed also in the itinerary from Bordeaux to Jerusalem (*Itinerarium Hierosolymitanum*):

- *Itinerarium Burdigalense sive Hierosolymitanum*: civitas Singiduno VI mutatio Ad Sextum VI mutatio Tricornia Castra VII mutatio Ad Sextum Miliarem VI civitas Aureo Monte VI mutatio Vingeio VIII civitas Margo X civitas Viminacio.

This article, as noted in the introduction, represents an attempt to reconstruct the importance and special character of *Aquae* within the framework of the Upper Moesian Danube frontier. The station *Aquae*, the subject of this article, is mentioned for the first time in itineraries on the road that ran along the right bank of the Danube and connected the cities and fortifications on the Upper Moesian Danube frontier. According to the Peutinger's *Tabula* (*Tabula Peutingeriana*), the town was located 18 miles downstream from *Egeta* or 16 miles as we read in the Antonine itinerary (*Itinerarium Antonini*), (Vučković-Todorović, 1961, p. 138, T. 33; p. 141; Kondić, 1965, pp. 87–88; *TIR*, L–34, p. 93; Janković, 1981, pp. 121–127; Jovanović, 1984, p. 100; Jovanović, 1996, pp. 263–264). These two distances from *Egeta*, whose position is precisely determined (today Brza Palanka), lead to the region around the modern village of Prahovo (the distance between Brza Palanka and Prahovo is about 26.5 km).

Aquae (*It. Ant.* 218, 4, *Aquis*; *Tab. Peut.* 7, *Ad Aquas*; *Geogr. Rav.* 4, 7, *Aquas*) is mentioned by Hierocles (*Hieroccl.*, *Synecl.* 655, 4) as one of the cities in the province of *Dacia Ripensis*. From Procope's work *De Aedificiis* (Procop. *De Aedificiis* IV, 4, pp. 123–124, Ed. Haury), we learn that the *Aquae* region included forty *castella*, one of which was newly built, and the others were just renovated. According to the cities on this list that have been identified in the field, the *Aquae* region covered the territory along the Danube from the *castellum Pontes* to the *castellum Florianiana* and perhaps beyond, including the entire Timok River Basin. In the same text, further, *Aquae* is simply designated as a “small town”. Perhaps this term refers only to the fortress (Mirković, 1968, p. 88), or, despite its extent, *Aquae* did not have the status of a *municipium* or *colonia* (Dušanić, 1980, p. 31).

In 343, *Aquae* was already an episcopal see. The bishop of *Aquae*, *Vitalis*, is mentioned as a participant in the council of *Serdica* (Zeiller, 1918, p. 174 and n. 4). According to Justinian's Novel XI, the episcopacy was rebuilt in 535 in order to fight the *Bonossius* heresy (*Cod. Iust.*, *Nov. XI*, Ed. Kroll, Berolini, 1895). For this reason, the episcopacy of *Aquae* was separated from that of *Meridio* (*Romuliana*?), to which *Aquae* had belonged in the ecclesiastical organization (*Cod. Iust.*, *Nov. XI*, 5). We do not know where the bishopric of *Meridio* was. The list of Procope's fortresses places the *Meridio castellum* in the *Aquae* region, and mentions it immediately after the fortress of Timakiolon (*Timacus Minus*?) so that it should be sought in the southern

part of this region (Mócsy, 1974, pp. 114–115). *Meridio* is followed by *Meridiopontede* (= *Meridio Ponte*), at the southern end of the Timok valley if one looks from the fortress of *Aquae* (Dušanić, 1980, p. 33, n. 190).

The location of *Aquae* near the present village of Prahovo on the Danube is questionable. Previously, scholars sometimes searched for *Aquae* (= *Ad Aquas*) in Vidrovac territory, not far from Negotin. This opinion was based on the research of F. Kanitz (Kanitz, 1892, pp. 57–58), who believed that after Kusjak, the Roman road left the bank of the Danube to head south on Vidrovac. According to Kanitz, at this place two important roads merge, one from the Timok Valley in the South and the other from the Saska Reka Valley in the West. At a height near Vidrovac, Kanitz saw a Roman fortress built according to a quadrangular plan and vestiges of Roman buildings at the foot of it (W. Tomaschek, *RE*, II, 1896, col. 294). New research has shown that the ruins of Vidrovac were only the remains of a small fortress from the time of Justinian. Therefore, the opinion advanced by K. Miller that the ancient way continued along the Danube after Kusjak and that *Aquae* must be located on the site of Prahovo is widely accepted (Miller, 1916, p. 501). A. Mócsy (Mócsy, 1974, p. 114), not seeing that Procope calls “small town” the center of the *Chora Aquensis* in order to mark the legal contrast between municipal and fiscal territory (Dušanić, 1980, p. 31 and n. 172), considered that *Aquae*, as the center of a vast territory, should be identified with Gamzigrad “nearby which are thermal springs that would justify such a name”. In doing so, Mócsy did not exclude the possibility that the same name would have been carried also by a “small town” located on the Danube, on the site of Prahovo. The indications that contribute to such an identification are the distances mentioned in the itineraries (16 or 18 miles downstream of Egeta, i.e. from Brza Palanka) and the discovery of remains of a large Roman settlement with stone walls, a necropolis nearby and a port, abundant archaeological material and inscriptions on the upper bank of the Danube, occupied by the village of Prahovo.

In strategic terms, the position of Prahovo was of extreme importance. The settlement is located on the military road that connects the fortifications of the right bank of the Danube, at the end of the long-branched valley of the Timok River that allows deep inland entry. Placed on a high terrace over the river, protected from floods, with sources of plentiful drinking water and surrounded by fertile fields, the Roman city offered many advantages. The position of the harbor on the Danube, built at the end of one of the largest islands (Veliko Ostrvo), certainly also contributed to its importance.

The first *Aquae* garrison was probably the *I Cantabrorum* cohort. A funerary monument was erected in Prahovo in honor of its decurio or beneficiary (*ILJug II*, 463: *Crispus d[.] dom(o) Ina/quiese / uix/si(t) an(n) i(s) / XXX /⁵ merui(t) an(n)i(s) / VI m(i)l(es) coh(ortis) / I Cantabr/orum he/res fa(ciendum) c(urauit)*). The military diploma from the year 78 testifies that this unit was part of the Moesian army (Eck & Pangerl, 2010, pp. 237–243; Matei-Popescu, 2013, pp. 218–219). Since it is no longer mentioned in other sources or later monuments, the garrison was probably destroyed during the Dacian conflicts, perhaps at the same time as the legion *V Alaudae* during the Dacian War of Domitian (Mirković, 1968, p. 87, n. 14 and 15).

We have no information about the military garrison or the camp at later times; it is possible that there was none during the second and third century A.D. The mention of a veteran of cohort *III Campestris* (*AE* 1971, p. 424) does not necessarily mean that this unit or a portion of it was stationed at *Aquae*; it could only be about someone who had settled there after completing his military service.

After the withdrawal of the Romans from Dacia, the city once again found its strategic importance because of location, the proximity of the port and the Danube crossing. However, it does not appear in the *Notitia dignitatum*. It is possible that the *Aquae* garrison was composed by detachments from *Egeta* or *Dorticum*, where several military units are attested (Mirković, 1968, p. 87).

Archaeological material, buildings and vast necropolises testify to the long and continuous evolution of the Roman settlement from the second to the end of the fourth century (Dušanić, 2004, p. 260). The few inscriptions could be linked with settlers who bear Roman names. The native names are Thracian or Illyrian (*AE* 1901, p. 9 = *AE* 1901, p. 125; *AE* 1911, p. 164). Some funerary monuments, because of their shape and decoration, testify to relations with neighboring Dacia, in particular with the territory around the towns of *Drobeta* and *Apulum* (*CIL* III, 14215, p. 13; *ILD* 55; *AE* 1971, p. 425).

The Roman fortress near Prahovo, with a square plan and small dimensions, was reported at the end of the seventeenth century by Count Marsigli under the name of “Decz” (Marsigli, 1726). F. Kanitz (Kanitz, 1892, p. 57) and Dj. Miličević (Miličević, 1876, pp. 954–955) again mentioned the fortress towards the end of

the nineteenth century. It is unclear exactly which fortification they are referencing: Glameja (measuring about 20×20 m), south of Prahovo, or the one near Radujevac on the Karamizar plateau with stone walls and bricks about 55 m long, or maybe another nearby, close to the mouth of Timok in the Danube.

The Roman civil settlement in Prahovo was also protected by a powerful wall. The fortified area had a rectangular plan with a maximum length of approximately 850 m and a maximum width of 450 m. On the north side, towards the Danube, a stream has dug a section in which we can see part of the foundations of the wall that were built of large blocks of cut stone. In the south-west corner of the fortification, wall sections with massive blocks of stone lined with slabs of stone or brick still reach a height of more than 3 m. Segments of the east and west walls were observed during archaeological excavations in 1959 (Vučković-Todorović, 1961, p. 138 sq.). In some places, the ditch was also well preserved (about 60–90 m wide and about 4 m deep) and it seems to have surrounded the city on all sides, except in the north, the side facing the Danube.

Inside modern Prahovo, many Roman buildings have been discovered, most accidentally, because a modern agglomeration has developed over the ancient site and no extensive archaeological excavation has been carried out. Only an apse building has been studied in more detail: two construction phases, Byzantine and Roman, have been observed and material of Slavic origin was found (Janković, 1981, pp. 121–128).

A spring on the bank of the Danube provided the Roman agglomeration with drinking water. The other abundant springs above the village of Dušanovac, where the Romans captured the water and then supplied the surrounding fortifications, apparently also watered *Aquae*. An aqueduct led from Dušanovac (ancient water pipes were discovered in the village) and entered the city below the western wall.

The Roman port of *Aquae* in Kusjak was discovered during construction work on the Iron Gate II hydroelectric plant in 1987–1988 (Petrović 1991, pp. 295–298) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: The port of *Aquae* in Kusjak (private documentation of Vladimir Petrović).

As the waters of the Danube were diverted, a wharf of a hundred meters long appeared in the dry bed of the river. The quay was built of massive blocks of stone, with at least two transverse walls penetrating the river and creating ponds and docks for safe harbor and longer vessel retention. Columns of stone bearing

traces of rope used for mooring ships, and two rowing warships (*liburnae*) were also discovered. Pilasters, architrave beams, coffered ceilings and other architectural elements, much like those that adorn famous Trajan's inscription at Iron Gate (*Tabula Traiana*), belonged to the public buildings that ran along the wharf. They probably belonged to a structure that bore an inscription of Trajan, discovered on the shore itself, and which should be related to the port rather than the land road as previously thought (*CIL* III, 1642 = *ILJug.* 3, 1362: [*Imp(erator)*] *Caesar d[ivi] Ner/[vae] f(ilius) Nerva T[ra]ianus / [Aug(ustus)] Ger(manicus) p(ontifex) m(aximus) tr[ib(unicia) p]otes/t(ate) co(n)s(ul) II p(ater) p(atriciae)* [...]). The inscription of Trajan's construction, engraved in the cliff at Greben, displayed the same type of decoration as the *Tabula Traiana* of the Iron Gates. We can not exclude the possibility that our port had inspired the artists who carved the triumphal column of Trajan in Rome (Petrović, 1990, pp. 293–298).

The archaeological material found during the excavations indicates that the port was built during Trajan's time and that it was probably destroyed at the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century, apparently during a sudden event (landslide?), since the ships could not be evacuated.

The Roman necropolises of *Aquae* developed just beyond the walls, at the exit of the city to the east (between the current school and the railway) and to the west (the land situated between the city and the port). Stone tombs and sarcophagi were discovered; some tombs contained cremated dead, others skeletons.

Aquae was also the center of the mining region of the *Moesi* tribe (*civitas Moesorum*), which was also the case with *Pincum* (*Pincenses*) and *Tricornium* (*Tricornienses*) (Dušanić, 2004, pp. 247–270), both located further west on the Upper Moesian Danube frontier. It thus possessed a permanent military garrison, a customs post, an administration, a vast territory and a port on the Danube. The *Aquae* mining region was a district of Upper Moesia that occupied the territory on the right bank of the Danube from the mouth of the river Porečka reka to that of Timok, with small tributaries known to have been used for gold washing. The delimitation of the mining districts of *Pincum*, *Aquae* and *Timacum Minus* in the Danube hinterland is not very clear. *Aquae* territory to the south probably began on the southern slope of Deli Jovan Mountain. The gold, silver and copper mines of Lukovo – Valakonje, Zlot, Krivelj, Šaška and Rusman – were probably under the control of the *Aquae* Mining Authority. The mining region of *Aquae* also included the *Florentiana* fortress near the Florentine village in Bulgaria, close to the mouth of Timok and by the border with modern Serbia (Dušanić, 2004, p. 260).

In the province of Upper Moesia, the Roman road passed through *Dorticum* (Vrav) (*TIR*, L–34, p. 55; Biernacka-Lubanska, 1982, p. 231; Ivanov & Stoickov, 1992, pp. 76–93), *Ad Malum* (Košava) (*TIR*, L–34, p. 71; Ivanov & Stoickov, 1992, pp. 76–93), *Bononia* (Vidin) (*TIR*, L–34, p. 28; *AE* 1938, p. 107; *AE* 1985, p. 723 = *AE* 1988, p. 983: *Anastasiana Ratiaria semper floreat*), and ended in *Ratiaria*, on the territory of modern Bulgaria.

3 Conclusions

According to the archaeological and epigraphic remains, one can distinguish four periods of development of this agglomeration, which developed into a strategically important place. The first military phase could be linked to the preparations for the conquest of Dacia. There is evidence of the presence of the army in the city, and the construction of a port in Kusjak is confirmed by architectural remains and a commemorative inscription from the time of Trajan. The second stage of development of *Aquae* would have been attached mostly to mining activities, since at this time the city was the center of the vast mining region of the *Moesi* tribe. The third phase corresponds with the time of the withdrawal of the Romans from Dacia when once again the city has found an important role because of its favorable position. In late antiquity, the fourth phase of its development, the city of *Aquae* became an episcopal see and had a significant position in the ecclesiastical organization. Unfortunately, after the preventive archaeological research completed in the 1980s, little progress has been made in the reconstruction and development of this precious archaeological site or in scholarly publications on it. This immense work awaits the contemporary archaeologists hoping that the entire Upper Moesian Danube frontier soon will become part of the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations of Literary Sources

<i>It. Ant.</i>	<i>Itinerarium Antonini</i>
<i>Tab. Peut.</i>	<i>Tabula Peutingeriana</i>
<i>Geogr. Rav.</i>	<i>Ravennatis anonymi cosmographia (Anonymi Ravennatis)</i>
<i>Hierocl., Synecd.</i>	<i>Hierocles Synecdemus</i>
<i>Procop. De Aedificiis</i>	<i>Procopii de aedificiis</i>
<i>Cod. Iust. Nov.</i>	<i>Codex Iustinianus Novellae</i>

Abbreviations in the Literature

<i>AE</i>	<i>L'année épigraphique</i> , Paris.
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum</i> , Berlin.
<i>ILD</i>	<i>Inscriptiones latinae Daciae</i> , Bucharest.
<i>ILJug</i>	A. et J. Šašel, <i>Inscriptiones Latinae quae in Iugoslavia inter annos MCMXL et MCMLX repertae et editae sunt</i> , Ljubljana, 1963.
<i>IMS</i>	<i>Inscriptions de la Mésie supérieure</i> , Belgrade, 1976 sqq.
<i>RE</i>	A. Pauly, G. Wissowa, <i>Realencyclopädie der classischen Alterumswissenschaft</i> , 1894–1978.
<i>TIR</i> , L–34	<i>Tabula Imperii Romani, Aquincum – Sarmizegetusa – Sirmium</i> , Budapest, 1968.
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i> , Bonn, 1967 sqq.

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