

From Wood to Stone: A Study in Forum Petrification at Sarmizegetusa, Dacia

After the Dacian Wars, of 101-2 and 105-6 CE, one of Trajan's first tasks was to establish an administrative capital for his newly won province, which he dubbed Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa. This city quickly grew from a small settlement comprised of military veterans into a monumentalized, grid-planned city paved in marble (Otlean 2007). This shift from wooden constructions to stone, first begun under Trajan, significantly altered the site for both practical and political reasons. Sarmizegetusa's forum area is altered from wood to stone construction for practical reasons of durability and fire-resistance, to further Trajan's aim of consolidating his power in the new province and over the Empire, and as a sign of prestige sought by the new colonists for their newly minted province.

First, there seems to be a logical and sometimes organic shift at many provincial sites towards more durable and fire-resistant materials, such as stone, the longer the site is in use. That Sarmizegetusa goes through this shift fairly quickly does not negate this as a reason for the monumentalization. In fact, this stone construction offered protection to besieged citizens in the 250's CE in the amphitheatre (Haynes and Hanson 2004). Second, Trajan's ambitious stone construction projects in other provinces as well as at home in Italy during this time suggest a desire for standardization in terms of architectural forms, a desire fueled by Trajan's wish to portray himself as a ruler capable of consolidating and strengthening his vast empire (Zanker 1998). His monumentalizing of several *fora* throughout the Empire at this time not only demonstrated a firm Roman presence in provinces such as Dacia, where Roman rule didn't always mean culturally integrated native populations, but also offered the added bonus of good publicity for the Emperor.

Lastly, Sarmizegetusa shows signs of steady economic and population growth starting from Trajan's principate onwards. This mirrors a growth in wealth and status, as Dacia was a fertile land rich in natural resources (MacKendrick 1975). This development in Sarmizegetusa's economic situation within the Roman Empire may have stimulated the shift from wood to stone in search of status and prestige as the only *colonia deducta* of the newly minted province. These suggestions for the monumentalization of Sarmizegetusa's forum under Trajan have wider applications as well. Any combination of these three catalysts may have affected the expansion of other provincial sites under Trajan, whose successful wars waged against the indigenous population of Dacia resulted in wealth to sustain his ambitious building projects throughout the Empire.

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