

Reexamining Romanization in Dacia: The Presence and Absence of Dacians
in Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa and Adamklissi

Coined by Theodor Mommsen, “Romanization” is born embedded with colonial and imperial perspectives. Scholars who criticize its definition, the process of civilizing the barbarians with advanced technology and socio-political systems (Haverfield 1923), have been attempting new definitions that can properly reflect the complicated, multi-directional cultural blending and social development in Roman provinces. Despite the disagreements, Dacia is generally considered one of the least “Romanized” regions compared with the earlier annexed provinces (Chapell 2005). This paper employs evidence from two specific Dacian sites, Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa and Adamklissi, plus the monuments in Trajan’s Forum, to investigate the engagement of Dacians in the socio-political life of postwar Daica.

Right after the victory of the second Dacian war, Trajan ordered the construction of Colonia Ulpia Traiana Augusta Dacica Sarmizegetusa (Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa) through his intermediary Terentius Scaurianus (Alicu and Paki 1995). The new capital of colonial Dacia was built 40 miles away from the destroyed city Sarmizegetusa Regia and set strategically in equal distance to the two legions stationed at Apulum and Berzobis. It was also the destination or the stop of important roads, providing armies, merchants, travelers, and immigrants from all over the empire with easy access. The city was highly urbanized and diverse by the time of Septimus Severus that it was added a title of “metropolis.” However, archaeological evidence has attested to few traces of Dacians in the city but suggested, instead, their dynamic activities in the suburbs (Ells 2016). In terms of the city scale, population, or the significance, Adamklissi was in no way comparable to the Dacian capital. But geographically, Adamklissi and its surroundings served as

a gateway to the Eastern Balkans from the Scythian plains and Eastern Germany, strategically setting the potential invaders in dilemma. At the important periphery of the peripheral province, Tropaeum Traiani, also called the Adamklissi Monument, was commissioned under the name of Trajan. The comparison of the reliefs on the monument with those on the Trajan's Column reveals the theme here to be purely revenge. Further, it is argued that the Dacian craftsmen managed to carve their subtle resistance to Romanization into the details of the metopes (Ibarra 2009), which I cast doubts personally.

The lack of substantive archaeological evidence left by Dacians in Sarmizegetusa and the offensive message from the Adamklissi Monument indicate the secondary position of Dacians as viewers or participants in the imperial projects, as well as in the society under Roman domination. What I discern from the degree of "Romanization" in the two regions is that Romans lacked the empathy and capability to incorporate Dacians as part of their community. In such circumstances, Romanization does appear like a unilateral output. I will finally return to the meaning of "Romanization," which can hardly find an official definition in the ancient sources. It is as unreliable as "the Five Good Emperors," invented by later politicians or scholars with their unique experiences and purposes in a specific historical era. Thus, the meaning of the term must be in constant change should generations of scholars wish not to abandon its total usage.

Bibliography

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