

A. Tomas, *Inter Moesos et Thracas: The Rural Hinterland of Novae in Lower Moesia (1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Centuries AD)*, Archaeopress, Roman Archaeology 14, Oxford 2016, ISBN: 978-1784913694

Agnieszka Tomas's book aims at being an exhaustive monograph of the territory around the city of Novae. It presents the realities of the area from multiple points of view and it resorts to all types of sources: archaeological, literary, epigraphic. The book is structured into seven chapters, a catalogue, five appendices with the epigraphic and monetary finds from the area, an index of ancient and modern place names and the bibliography.

The first chapter presents the *Geography of the region*, with modern-day maps, photos and data, as well as with consistent references to the ancient sources and how the landscape and climate of the region come through from reading them. The difficult and in many cases still obscure matter of identifying ancient toponyms is also discussed here.

*Methodological remarks and classification of the sites* brings forth a very useful opening, in the form of a short synthesis of political and military history. This, along with the map and the periodization included in the sub-chapter, is enlightening for the reader, regardless his/her previous level of knowledge on the area and serves as needed contextualization. The author makes a typology of settlement types (p. 30-31) and offers definitions for each of them. In the sometimes extremely subjective context of Roman provincial archaeology, this endeavour is very useful and provides a potentially universal pattern of investigation and cataloguing settlements.

The 'narrative' develops organically and the next chapter is focused on *Settlement structures*; this is the largest chapter of the book and attempts at rendering the complete image of site locations and types, building materials and techniques, periodization, economy of the region, religious life and infrastructure. A salutary initiative in the military presence sub-chapter is discussing both sides of the Danube and thus offering a correct strategic and geopolitical image. The presentation of settlements, associated with Catalogue, stands out as the solid core of the book and the research and documentation processes behind it. The typology (p. 27-28) based on the area of the settlement is interesting, especially because we get a diachronic look at it as well, underlining the decline of large (over 10 ha) settlements during the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> C AD; even if this is an affirmation that historians generally could, out of intuitive reasons or based on analogies, make, it is always welcomed to see hard data proving it.

The sub-chapter dedicated to religious life is multi folded as investigation means. One of the pleasant specificities of the book is narrating, whenever possible, the accounts of 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> C scholars or travellers; here, we get the rather romantic image of a *heroon* dedicated to the Thracian Horseman still standing during the 19<sup>th</sup> C AD. As the chapter moves forward, we

are presented with the general image of a 'rural' religion, with visible preferences for Diana, Artemis, Liber. As well, a very interesting detail is underlined (p. 84): while Roman deities are worshipped mostly through Latin language inscriptions, there is a strong predominance of Greek dedications (86%, even if the author takes the information from older scholarly sources<sup>1</sup>) for local divinities. As well, at the end of the chapter, early Christianity is discussed, with the few martyrs attested and the Christianisation of the Lesser Goths by Wulfila, during the 340s AD.

The next sub-chapter focuses on infrastructure: aqueducts and drainage facilities, roads, bridges, water routes and harbours. A very welcomed and profound contribution are the maps presenting data in a comparative manner: types of settlements, classified according to the area, are correlated with epigraphic finds (taking into account and marking in a different graphic manner language, dating, if the attested characters are veterans or soldiers) and respectively, with the road routes and harbours (p. 94).

*Local administration and government* are largely from a historiographic point of view, with an introduction on the formation of the province and the local administration, getting to debatable matters such as the military jurisdiction over the settlements neighbouring forts and the municipal status of Novae itself. The exact localization of the *canabae* and the *vicus* are also discussed, and even if a certain degree on uncertainty lingers on, the questions are more or less settled.

In the *Language in use, ethnic and social structures chapter*, it is justly noticed that the most relevant documents for the actually spoken language in the rural area are the *instrumenta domestica* (p. 119). Even if their presence is scarce in the discussed area, the remark is useful and completely in trend with today's research tendencies. Directly connected to the situation of languages of adoration presented before, Greek seems to be the language of the hinterland, Latin being employed mostly by veterans and administration personnel. Amid discussing social structures in the area, a fairly comprehensive chart of the epigraphically attested social categories is presented. One remarks the low number of veterans, given their good general representativeness in Moesia Inferior (4% in the area, compared to 7,91% in the whole province, according to new scholarship on the matter<sup>2</sup>).

In the end of the book, in the chapter entitled *Military and civilian interactions: realtions, impact and development*, it is conclusively described how the interaction between civilian and military shaped the area, its landscape, the society inhabiting it, its historical evolution and ultimately its evolution through Late Antiquity and beyond.

The *Catalogue* records all the registered sites from the area. It is well structured and extremely easy to use – which is a great plus for the book as a whole. For each site, it records the name, modern and ancient (when possible), the type of site, location, topography, plan,

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<sup>1</sup> GEROV 1980, in this case.

<sup>2</sup> PÁZSINT 2019.

state of preservation, remains and finds, chronology and history of surveys. The *Appendices* present the boundary stones (delimiting the territory of the *Moesi* and of the *Thracés*), other relevant epigraphic monuments (with pictures included for a selection of artefacts), and tables with the stamped building materials from the area, the coin hoards and the individual coin finds.

As a general remark, we want to draw attention to the multitude of tables, charts and graphs included in all chapters. Besides proving the solid documentation undertaken by the author, they are extremely useful for the reader to systematize and better visualize the presented data. For example, the toponym tables, presenting literary (p. 17) and epigraphic (p. 18) sourcing attesting toponyms from the area are exhaustive and eloquent for the reader. As well, each chapter (types of settlement, military presence, etc.) has an introductory part of Latin terminology, which is useful in the context of the book and of understanding the debated matters, but as well in a more general sense, even serving a didactic-like purpose.

The general sense that the books offers is of thorough and solid documentation, thus seeming completely trustworthy in regard of the provided data. Even if aspects of this investigation have been revised and enhanced recently<sup>3</sup> (e.g. Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2018), micro-monographs for mainly rural provincial areas are scarce for this part of Europe, thus A. Tomas's book serves as a methodological example, as well as an important source of information and data.

Rada Varga  
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca  
radavarga@gmail.com

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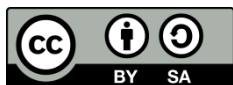
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<sup>3</sup> MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2018.

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