A possible Dacian royal archive on lead plates

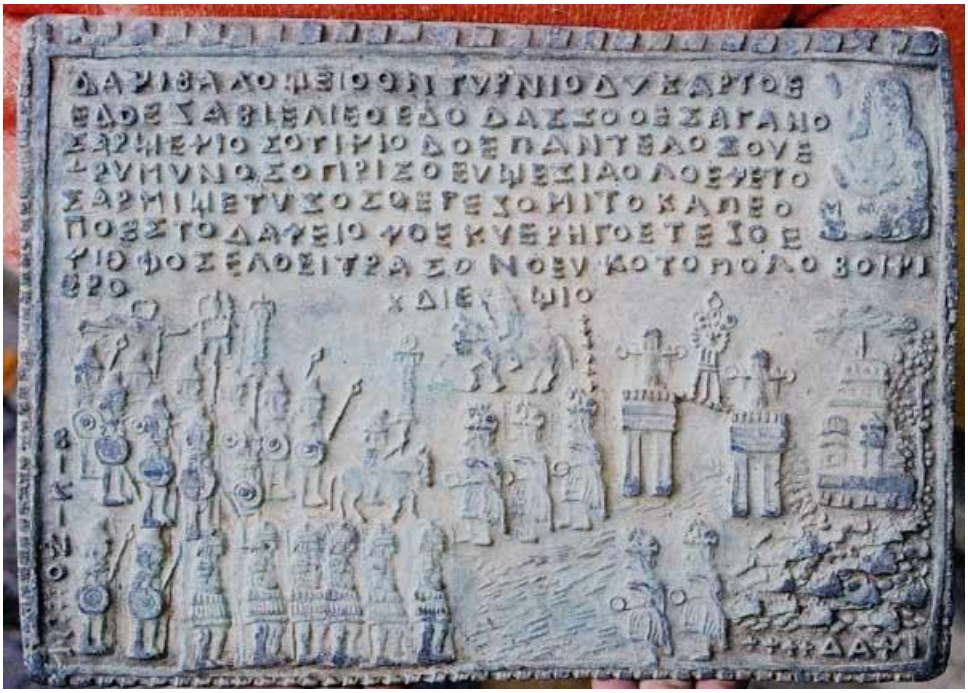
Aurora Petan

The Story

In the second half of the nineteenth century an impressive archive composed of over 200 inscriptions on lead plates turned up at the Museum of Antiquities in Bucharest. The inscriptions were made in relief, using the Greek alphabet, written in an unknown language. The texts obviously refer to the Dacian civilization, involving names of some known Dacian kings, toponyms and hydronyms. The plates were considered as fakes, probably due to the unknown provenance and to their brand-new appearance, without any traces of corrosion to indicate that the lead had laid underground for almost 2000 years. An inventory of the pieces was never performed and no research of them has ever been conducted by specialists.



***Figure 1**. Two types of scripts, rending, probably, the same text, the second one 'translating' the first one.*



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Figure 2. *Dacian victorious soldiers and roman prisoners are received by priests at the gate of the Sarmizegetusa fortress.*

Nowadays, there are only 35 pieces left, together with some photos taken of other pieces in the time of the Second World War (Romalo 2003). However, the oral tradition testifies that the lead plates represent copies, made in 1875 by order of King Carol I, of some gold originals. The copying of the hundreds of pieces was accomplished at the nails factory in Sinaia, and the copies were stored first at the Sinaia Monastery and afterwards were transported to Bucharest. Nobody knows what happened to the gold originals. The detailed analyses of the samples extracted from all the 35 surviving artefacts, performed at the Institute of Nuclear Physics in Bucharest, stated that the composition of the plates is typical for the printing lead from the second half of the nineteenth century.

Description

The plates are rectangular, except for one which is round. The dimensions vary between 93 x 98mm and 354 x 255mm. Many of them present hanging traces, like holes. Most of them are written in the Greek alphabet, together with three foreign signs: V from the Latin alphabet and the signs for the palatal consonants [ce] and [ge], specific for the Cyrillic alphabet. Besides the Greek alphabet, there are some unknown scripts, monograms and strange symbols. Most of the pieces seem to be originated in Burebista's time, in Sarmizegetusa, the capital of the Dacian kingdom. The Decebal's ones are fewer, smaller and less elaborated. The texts are written in *scriptio continua* and the easiest words to identify are the names, anthroponyms, toponyms and ethnonyms - Dacian and foreign as well.



Figure 3. *Alliance between Dacians and Scythians.*

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Figure 4. *Royal genealogy.*

Besides the texts, on the plates there are many illustrations. The representations are extremely complex and cover a great part of the realia domain: armies, fortresses, portraits of kings (even detailed royal genealogies), totemic animals, gods, temples, religious symbols, war machines, trophies, various buildings, vegetation etc. The representation of the plan of Sarmizegetusa stronghold is striking at a time when the first systematic excavations had not started yet. Equally amazing is the detailed representation of the Burebista's two-storied limestone temple, discovered only in 1956 (Crisan 1986: 176-180).

The language of the texts has somehow an Indo-European appearance, but it is not like the expected Dacian language: that language seems to have nothing in common with the known remains of the Romanian substratum. There are some Indo-European words, but no final consonants, no desinences or inflection, and subsequently no grammatical marks for gender, number, case or person. Almost all the nouns end in *-o*, including the feminine ones ending in -a in the Greek and Latin sources: *Boerobiseto*, *Dacibalo*; *Napoko*, *Sarmigetuzo*. The groups of consonants are infrequent, proving the predisposition to open syllables. There are some words borrowed from Greek, especially in the field of military terminology (*basileo*, *chiliarcho*) and some from Latin. The most important words do not have cognates in other Indo-European languages: *mato* 'king', *kotopolo* 'priest', *talipiko* 'fortress'.

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Figure 5. *The plan of the Sarmizegetusa fortress. The west-gate is the main entrance. On the other side of the east-gate is the complex of sanctuaries.*

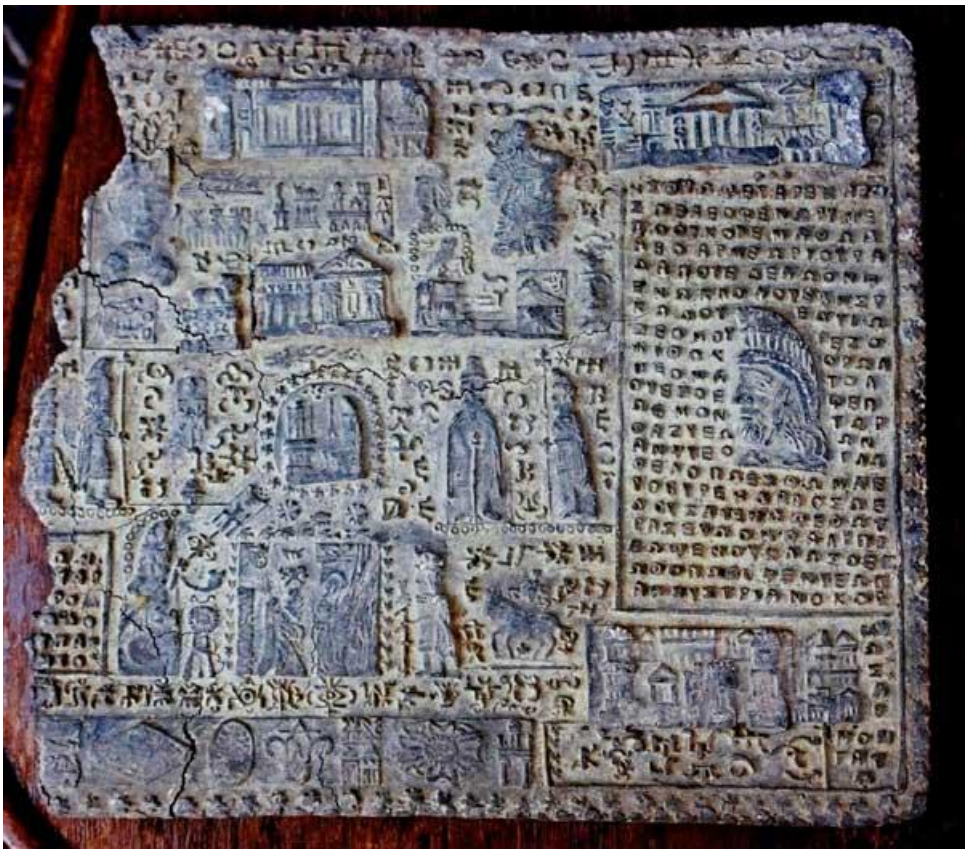


Figure 6. *The two-storied temple in Sarmizegetusa is represented in the upper right corner. The ruins of the four rows of columns, the stairs turning to right at the west side, the wall and the tower at east side, the gallery and the platform of the second floor were discovered only in the second half of the twentieth century.*

Conclusion

The hundreds of pieces are extremely elaborate, nevertheless nobody was ever tempted to take advantage of

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them, either pecuniary or ideologically, which is opposite to the logic of a forgery. Besides, the plates provide data that could not be known at that time and nobody has succeeded in proving the forgery so far. As a consequence, the authenticity of this archive is a plausible hypothesis. Unfortunately, the artefacts have not proper conditions for conservation or security and are gradually deteriorating. Specialists have lacked interest in the written pieces for more than a century and most of the archive is now lost. At this moment there is no official program or project for studying and protecting these intriguing testimonies.

References

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