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IN CIRCUITU TENUIT… DACIA AND ROMAN GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE[*]

Sorin Nemeti[**]

Abstract: *What were the Romans' geographic notions on the areas north of the Lower Danube before the conquest? We will attempt to give an answer by analyzing certain minor geographical texts and fragments collected from the works of ancient authors that contain geographical data. One peculiarity of this Roman geographical vision is their imagining of the northern and north-eastern parts of Europe as a narrow strip between the Danube and the Pontus to the south and the Ocean to the north. The entire search focused on circuitus Daciae, on the sketched Dacia in Agrippa's map tradition and the transmission channels of this tradition in Late Antiquity (Demensuratio provinciarum, Divisio orbis terrarum, Dicuil, De mensura orbis terrae, Divisio orbis terrarum Theodosiana) lead us to a simple conclusion: Romans, in the fore day of their conquest, did not know much on the actual geographical area north of the Danube. All mentioned sources underestimate the latitude distance between the Danube and the Northern Ocean, qua cognita est: 396 or 386 Roman miles.*

Keywords: *Dacia, geography, Agrippa, map, Ocean.*

Before the conquest of the regions north of the Danube in the beginning of the second century A.D., Romans' geographic notions on the areas north of the Lower Danube were limited. The modern image of the map of ancient Dacia is built starting from cartographic sources that reflect the realities during the Roman conquest, after the conquest, and after *redactio in provinciam* (Ptolemy's Geography on *Daciae situs* and the most important settlements and the two *itineraria*: the so-called Tabula Peutingeriana and the one compiled in the Cosmography written by an anonymous geographer from Ravenna). All these geographical sources are due to the *exploratio* activities performed during the two conquest wars and the *agrimensores'* measuring the new provincial territory in order that it might be divided.[1] But what was the Roman perception of this geographical area before the conquest? I will attempt to give an answer by analyzing certain minor geographical texts and fragments collected from the works of ancient authors that contain geographical data.

decies centena milia passuum

When referring to the province of Dacia conquered by Trajan, Eutropius offers a short piece of information on the perimeter of this province in his *Breviarium*:

Eutropius, *Breviarium ab Urbe condita,* VIII. 2, 2:

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[1] NICOLET 1988a, 101, 167; AUSTIN/RANKOV 1995, 112–120.

[Traianus] *Daciam Decibalo victo subegit provincia trans Danubium facta in his agris, quos nunc Taifali, Victoali et Tervingi habent. Ea provincia decies centena milia passuum in circuitu tenuit*[2].

Festus gives the same piece of information in his own *Breviarum* several years later:

Festus, *Breviarium,* VIII, 1–5:

Traianos Dacos sub rege Decibalo uicit et Daciam trans Danuuium in solo barbariae provinciam fecit, quae in circuitu habuit decies centena milia passum[3];

One can find similar data on the province's surface in Iordanes, *Romana*, 217:

Daces autem post haec iam sub imperio suo Traianus, Decebalo eorum rege devicto, in terras ultra Danubium, quae habent mille milia spatia, in provinciam redegit[4].

J. W. Eadie, editor of Festus' *Breviarium*, believes that the latter was based on Eutropius' text (VIII. 2. 2) for this information in particular. The direct relation between the two fragments in Eutropius VIII.2.2 and Festus, VIII.1–5 is easily perceived: only the word order is slightly changed. What could have been Eutropius' source for this geographic piece of information related to the perimeter of Dacia? H. W. Bird eludes the issue of precise sources and supposes that Eutropius knew these facts from official sources ("probably derived from his administrative duties")[5]. But one still wonders on the origin of this information featuring in the works of late Roman abbreviators. In order to find the answer, one must analyze Roman geographical sources that make reference to the dimensions of the area known during Antiquity as Dacia.

Modern historians took *ad litteram* this value of Dacia's perimeter, of "one million feet" and tried to identify it on the archaeological map of the province[6]. M. Bărbulescu transformed the 1000 Roman miles into kilometers and believed that the value of 1479 kilometers of the perimeter "probably" refers to the territories of the three Dacias (Superior, Inferior, and Porolissensis) during the reign of Hadrian[7]. D. Protase accepted the idea that the circuit refers to the length of the Dacian border after Hadrian's reorganization, but believed that "the 1479 kilometers do not match the circuit of Trajan's Dacia, nor the perimeter of the province during later periods; the on site length of the borders must be at least double that figure"[8]. For C. C. Petolescu the information on the perimeter of the province reflects the situation from around 140/143 A.D. and until the beginning of the third century when the borders of Dacia extended to western Walachia as well, along with the construction of the so-called *limes transalutanus*[9].

In my analysis of the data contained in the paragraphs from Eutropius and Festus concerning Dacia's perimeter I will not follow the same path, i.e. I will not compare the ancient figure with the real value of Dacia's perimeter as measured on the archaeological map, since I believe the Romans, and people of Antiquity in general, had an essentially different vision of geographic space[10]. For them, the known world, *terra cognita,* limited in size, was located in the northern hemisphere, as an island surrounded by the Ocean, and was divided in three regions (Europe, Asia, and Africa). Greek mathematical geography and Roman recording of itinerary

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[2] RUEHL 1887, 54; BIRD 1993, 48–49: (Trajan) ... after defeating Decebalus, subdued Dacia and created a province beyond the Danube in those territories which the Taifali, Victohali and the Thervingi now hold. That province was a thousand miles in circumference.

[3] EADIE 1967, 52; ZUGRAVU 2003, 166–167, 288, n. 166.

[4] FHDR, II, 406–407.

[5] BIRD 1993, 119–120; an old idea – HODGKIN 1887, 101: "this number is found in all the MSS. of Eutropius, …, and may very probable have been borrowed from some official record to which Eutropius had access".

[6] HODGKIN 1887, 100–101, 102 (Dacia is Transylvania, not Dacia on Ptolemy's map); against HAVERFIELD 1887, 734–736.

[7] BĂRBULESCU 1998, 53–54.

[8] PROTASE 2001, 42.

[9] PETOLESCU 1999, 167.

[10] JANNI 1984, 98–158.

distances lead to the partial knowledge of this oikumene, of the inhabited world. Numerous *eschatiai* / *terrae incognitae* were placed between the Greeks and Romans and the margins of the circular Ocean[11]. For a long time Dacia was among these regions, a partially known area recorded as such by Roman geographical sources from the beginning of the Empire[12]. This geographical tradition prevailed in the Roman vision of areas located north of the Lower Danube and its remnants can be found in the later geographical tradition, that of Late Antiquity, and in medieval cartography.

Dacia in Agrippa's "geography"

During the reign of Augustus, the image of the oikumene was based on the data and figures of Hellenistic geography in the elaboration of maps of the known world. The latter was divided into irregular rectangles like Eratosthenes' *sphragides* and their dimensions were indicated by the values of longitude and latitude[13]. The map reconstructed from preserved fragments of Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* and the two geographic opuscula of Late Antiquity (*Demensuratio provinciarum* and *Divisio orbis terrarum*) is known as Agrippa's map. An uncertain geographical work was attributed by modern science to M. Vipsanius Agrippa, though a consensus was not reached on the nature of that work. Data preserved in Pliny the Elder's text show that the author chose to place the chorographical description of the known world under the authority of Agrippa, citing him in 31 paragraphs from books III–VI in his encyclopedia. For a century, German philology tried to explain which was the geographical work attributed to Agrippa or Augustus, attempting to decide whether it was an *orbis pictus* depicted in *porticus Vipsania,* or there were only some geographic *commentarii*, or both. V. Frandsen, K. Mannert, F. Ritschl, C. Petersen, Th. Mommsen, K. Müllenhoff, D. Detlefsen, A. Klotz, and E. Schweder gathered and interpreted the fragments of this lost geography starting from Pliny the Elder's text, the opuscula *Demensuratio* and *Divisio*, and the so-called Strabo's Chorographs[14].

In order to establish Agrippa's geographical initiative, researchers have discussed the semantics of the Latin terms in *Naturalis Historia*, III. 17: *…cum orbem orbi spectandum propositurus esset,* where *proponere* is understood as a public depiction of the world[15]. Further on in this paragraph, Pliny states that Augustus completed this public display project: he finished the portico containing the "world" (image of the world?); his sister Vipsania Polla started the construction of this portico on the basis of Agrippa's *commentarii* and *destinatio*[16]: *(Divus Augustus) Is namque complexam eum (sc. orbem) porticum ex destinatione et commentariis M. Agrippae a sorore eius inchoatam peregit*[17]. P. Arnaud correctly observes that nowhere in this text is this *orbis* described as *pictus,* but still the terms used belong to the vocabulary of maps[18]. It was believed that this map in the portico was the prototype of the only ancient map of the known world preserved until today, the so-called *Tabula Peutingeriana*, and that the display in a portico might explain the extreme elongation of this Roman *itinerarium pictus*[19]. K. Brodersen is skeptical as to the existence of a map in *porticus Vipsania:* he rightfully noted that Pliny consulted

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[11] HARLEY/WOODWARD 1887, 148–160, 161–176; DILKE 1887, 201–211; ROMM 1992, 3–42.

[12] HENNIG 1944, 285–288 (Scribonius Curio).

[13] DILKE 1988, 196.

[14] ARNAUD 2007–2008, 74–79; PALLU DE LESSERT 1909, 223–245; NICOLET 1988 a, 103–131; CINQUE 2002, 357–363.

[15] NICOLET 1988 a, 109: *proponere orbem spectandum* – " mettre sous les yeux, pour qu'on le regarde".

[16] RIESE 1878, VII–XVII; KLOTZ 1930–1931, 38–45; TIERNEY 1967, 17–22; NICOLET 1988, 134–136.

[17] PLINIUS, *Naturalis Historia*, III. 17:

[18] ARNAUD 2007–2008, 83.

[19] DILKE 1988, 196 (as the map orator Eumenius saw in a portico in Augustodunum); STAHL 1983, 29–32; BRODERSEN 1995, 268–272, inventory of opinions.

one of Agrippa's texts, as indicated by his vocabulary – Agrippa *prodi(di)t, tradi(di)t, credit, estimavit, colligit, fecit, auctor est, taxat, computavit.* K. Brodersen rejects the idea of a map and admits that the portico contained an inscription, a text containing a list of *landmarks* (regions and maybe also a list of cities)[20]. P. Arnaud enumerates three possible scenarios for settling this issue: the existence of a simple text displayed in the portico, of a map, or of a text and a corresponding map. The author believes that it would be hard to support the idea of a simple text displayed there, since the *publicatio* of a map held an increased symbolical power in comparison to that of a simple text, and concludes that: "*l'hypothèse d'une carte, peut-être accompagnée d'un text, …, nous paraît donc la plus vraisemblable.*"[21]

It is highly probable that Agrippa wrote a geography, a description of the world known during his time, following Hellenistic inspiration models and using Roman itinerary data. It is also probable this text was Pliny's source, the one he cites 31 times on issues related to the extent of regions, distances given in Roman miles, and other geographical data. Also, there is nothing against the existence of a map, but on the contrary, I consider that such a map did exist.[22] M. C. Pallu de Lessert's analysis of the diverging opinions on citations from Agrippa in Pliny, *Divisio,* and *Demensuratio* is a significant argument in this. The author believes that these citations are difficult to explain in the context of a presumed common source in shape of a map or a didactical treatise, but easily explained if the above mentioned authors worked on a map that each of them used according to his own comfort and whim[23].

≈

It is important to see what place Dacia held in the overall picture of the known world during the age of Augustus. The fragment that A. Riese and A. Klotz attribute to Agrippa is taken from Pliny and does not mention a region called Dacia explicitly. Its location, between the Danube and the Ocean, the Vistula and the Sarmatian Desert indicates the fact that it was a region north of the Lower Danube, traditionally identified by ancient authors with Dacia.

M. Vipsani Agrippae fragmenta ad chorographiam spectantia

18. *Agrippa totum eum tractum ab Histro ad oceanum bis ad decies centum milium passuum in longitudinem, quattuor milibus quadrigentis in latitudinem, ad flumen Vistlam a desertis Sarmatiae prodidit*[24].

As in the case of the other 23 regions, Agrippa's geography gives the limits of the region to all four cardinal points – the Danube, the northern Ocean, the Vistula, and the Sarmatian Desert, and two dimensions of the region *qua cognita est* expressed according to latitude and longitude. The eastern border is imprecise since it is not a water course but a *terra incognita,* the Sarmatian Desert, and the northern border is only suggested according to the ancient geographical vision that ignored the existence of a large continental mass in north-eastern Europe and Asia and for which the Caspian Sea was a gulf in the Northern Ocean.

One can find the same image in Pliny's detailed paragraph that also enumerates *Scytharum gentes* which inhabit the region between Germania and Sarmatia, a region that the author does not explicitly label as Dacia either.

Plinii Naturalis Historia, IV. XII. 80–81:

Ab eo in plenum quidem omnes Scytharum sunt gentes, variae tamen litori apposita tenuere, alias Getae, Daci Romanis dicti, alias Sarmatae, Graecis Sauromatae, eorumque Hamaxobii aut Aorsi, alias Scythae degeneres et a servis orti aut Troglodytae, mox Alani et Rhoxolani.

[20] BRODERSEN 1995, 274–285.
[21] ARNAUD 2007–2008, 117–118.
[22] MÜLLENHOFF 1875, 190, believed that the map was circular.
[23] PALLU DE LESSERT 1909, 257–260.
[24] RIESE 1878, 3, no. 18; KLOTZ 1930–1931, 421, frg. 21.

Superiora autem inter Danuvium et Hercynium saltum usque ad Pannonica hiberna Carnunti Germanorumque ibi confinium campos et plana Iazyges Sarmatae, montes vero et (81) saltus pulsi ab his Daci ad Pathissum amnem. A Maro, sive Duria est a Suebis regnoque Vanniano dirimens eos, aversa Basternae tenent aliique inde Germani. Agrippa totum eum tractum ab Histro ad oceanum bis ad decies centenum millium passuum in longitudinem, quattuor milibus minus CCCC in latitudinem, ad flumen Vistlam a desertis Sarmatiae prodidit[25].

In order to understand these excerpts correctly, fragments from the above mentioned late opuscula *Divisio orbis terrarum* and *Demensuratio provinciarum* are relevant. These two abridged geographical descriptions have been considered as missing links between Pliny's text and Agrippa's lost geography, both derived from the latter through a channel independent of Pliny.

Demensuratio provinciarum or *demonstratio provinciarum Hieronymi presbyteris* was first published by Schelstrate in his *Antiquitates ecclesiasticae* in 1697[26]. The opusculum was preserved in several manuscripts, among which the oldest are *Vatic. Palat. 1357* (V, 13th century), *Monac. Lat. 794* (M, a. 1436), and *Laurent. LXXXIX sup. 68* (L, 15th century)[27]. A related text is that preserved in *Liber de mensura orbis terrae* written by the Irish monk Dicuil in 825 A.D., first published in 1807 by Walknaër, and then by Latronne in 1814[28]. A text almost identical to Dicuil's, preserved in a single manuscript (*Vatic. Palat. 1357*, 13th century), was first published in 1876 bye E. Schweder under the title *Divisio orbis terrarum.*

[Hieronymi Presbyteri] Demensuratio provinciarum:

8. *Dacia Getica finiuntur ab oriente desertis Sarmatiae, ab occidente flumine Vistula, a septentrione oceano, a meridie flumine Histro. Quae patent in longitudine milia passuum CCLXXX, in latitudine, qua cognitum est, milia passuum CCCLXXXVI*[29].

Divisio orbis terrarum:

14. *Dacia. Finitur ab oriente deserto Sarmatiae, ab occidente flumine Vistla, a septentrione oceano, a meridie flumine Histro; patens in longitudine |X|CC milia, latitudo qua cognoscitur m. p. CCCXXXVI*[30].

Dicuil, *Liber de mensura Orbis Terrae,* 16–17:

16. Datia et Alania finiuntur ab oriente desertis Sarmatiae, ab occidente flumine Hiustia, a septentrione oceano, a meridie flumine Histro, patens in longitude decies centum milia, latitudo qua cognoscitur CCCLXXXVI. 17. Iuxta Plinium Secundum in secundo: Agrippa totum eum tractum ab Histro ad oceanum bis decies centum milium passuum in longitude, quattuor CCCC milibus in latitude ad flumen Hiustia a desertis Sarmatiae prodidit[31].

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[25] RACKMAN 1947, 178–181: From this point all the races in general are Scythian, though various sections have occupied the lands adjacent to the coast, in one place the Getae, called by the Romans Dacians, at another the Sarmatae, called by the Greeks Sauromatae, and the section of them called Waggon-dwellers or Aorsi, at another the base-born Scythians, descended from slaves, or else the Cave-dwellers, and then the Alani and Rhoxolani. The higher parts between the Danube and the Hercynian Forest as far as the winter quarters of Pannonia at Carnuntum and the plains and level country of the German frontiers are occupied by the Sarmatian Iazyges, while the Dacians whom they have driven out hold the mountains and forests as far as the river Theiss. From the river Maros, or else the Dora if it is that which separates them from the Suebi and the Kingdom of Vannius, the opposite side of the country is occupied by the Basternae and then other German tribes. Agrippa describes the whole of this area from the Danube to the sea as being 1200 miles in length by 396 in breadth, as far as the river Vistula in the direction of the Sarmatian desert.

[26] PALLU DE LESSERT 1909, 218.

[27] KLOTZ 1930–1931, 45.

[28] PALLU DE LESSERT 1909, 217–218; CINQUE 2002, 355, 364.

[29] RIESE 1878, 10.

[30] RIESE 1878, 17.

[31] TIERNEY 1967, 50–51: 16. Dacia and Alania are bounded on the east by the desert of Sarmatia, on the west by the river Vistula, on the north by the ocean, on the south by the Danube. The longitude is one thousand miles, the latitude, so far as it is known, three hundred and eighty-six. 17. According to Plinius Secundus in his second book: Agrippa gave the whole distance from the Danube to the ocean as twelve hundred miles in longitude, and three hundred and ninety-six in latitude, from the deserts of Sarmatia to the river Vistula.

Unlike Pliny, the three variants of the fragments referring to Dacia, preserved in similar but not identical form in *Demensuratio* and *Divisio* / Dicuil, mention the name of the region located between the Danube and the Ocean, a name that Pliny omitted in his citation from Agrippa: Dacia (*Divisio*), Dacia Getica (*Demensuratio*), Datia et Alania (Dicuil). One must also note that due to the fact that these texts were transmitted through a manuscript tradition, the distances they give according to longitude and latitude are different. The fact that *Demensuratio* and *Divisio* were inspired by a common source, independent of Pliny, is apparent in this fragment referring to Dacia as well. Further more, Dicuil, who gives in his work an abstract of a text identical to that of the *Divisio,* adds the different values of longitude and latitude that he finds in Pliny (citing Agrippa). Dicuil gives in this fragment two longitudes (1000 and 1200 miles) and two latitudes (386 miles according to the *Divisio,* 396 according to Pliny). In the *Divisio* edited after the manuscript and in *Demensuratio,* one finds the same latitude (of 386 miles).

As all modern commentators of these excerpts from Agrippa's geography agree, *longitudo* is longitude, i.e the value of distance measured along the west-east direction, while *latitudo,* the latitude, is the distance along the north-south direction.[32] All graphic reconstructions of Agrippa's map (envisaged as those of Erathostenes, Strabo, or Mela as an ovoid representation of the oikumene located in the northern hemisphere in the Ocean) show Dacia as a rectangle measuring 1000 (Dicuil) / 1200 (Pliny, *Divisio*) Roman miles along its longitude and 396 (Plinius), 386 (*Demensuratio, Divisio* / Dicuil) Roman miles along its latitude. Giving the value of the latitude, late opuscula add the mention *qua cognoscitur* (*Divisio* / Dicuil) or *qua cognitum est* (*Demensuratio*), considered as a mark of the borrowing from Agrippa's geography. The excerpt from Pliny suggests another interpretation: for him, the entire region measures 1200000 feet in length (*longitudo*) "between the Danube and the Ocean" and 396000 feet in width (*latitudo*) "between the Sarmatians' Desert until River Vistula". One might add *qua cognoscitur* and then the length and width given in this ancient text might be understood without reference to the cardinal points or the projection of geographic space on the terrestrial globe, according to the Greek mathematic geographic method with coordinates according to latitude and longitude. In Pliny, *longitudo* and *latitudo* would thus mean strictly the length (the longer side) and width (the shorter side) of a rectangle. *Demensuratio* and *Divisio* / Dicuil just give the limits towards the four cardinal points (the Sarmatian Desert to the east, River Vistula to the west, the Ocean to the north and the Danube to the south (in this order) and go on mentioning the longitude and latitude (also in this order). According to our interpretative key, the sides of the rectangle would consist of the Sarmatian Desert – Vistula, i.e. the longitude (east-west) and Ocean – Danube (north-south), as known at the time. I therefore suppose that in Pliny's inclusion of Agrippa's text, the dimensions of the rectangle were reversed, with the longitude understood as the north-south distance (Danube – Ocean) and the latitude as the east-west distance (Vistula – the Sarmatian Desert).

In this case, we must take into consideration a smaller value of the latitude, of 396 (Pliny) / 386 Roman miles (*Demensuratio, Divisio* / Dicuil), i.e. 396 / 386 thousand feet from the Danube to the Ocean, *qua cognitum est.* Navigators did not explore the Northern Ocean beyond the Cimbrian Promontory, therefore Scandia (the Scandinavian Peninsula) was seen in Antiquity as an island, not as a peninsula. Greeks and Romans imagined that people could navigate around the inhabited world. Several arguments support this idea, such as Pytheas's travels through Northern Ocean, the news of Indian messengers reaching the Roman court from the northern Ocean, and maps depicting the Caspian Sea as a gulf in the Septentrional Ocean[33]. Thus the Romans knew that the Ocean must have been located somewhere north of Dacia, but the extent of these areas along the north-south direction were only known over a distance of ca. 400 Roman miles.

Orosius as well describes this part of Europe in a similar fashion.

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[32] MATTERN 1999, 49.

[33] MATTERN 1999, 51, 64.

Pauli Orosii Historiarum adversus paganos libri primi caput alterum. 21; Cosmographia. 21:

A montibus Riphaeis ac flumine Tanai Maeotidisque paludibus, quae sunt ad orientem, per litus septemtrionalis oceani usque ad Galliam Belgicam et flumen Rhenum, quod est ab occasu, deinde usque ad Danubium quem et Histrum vocant, qui est a meridie et ad orientem directus ponto accipitur: ab oriente Alania est, in medio Dacia, ubi et Gothia; deinde Germania est, ubi plurimam parte Suevi tenent (…)[34].

Between the Rhine and Gallia Belgica to the west and Tanais, Palus Maeotis, and Montes Riphaei to the east stretch the following countries, in this order: *Germania, Dacia* (*ubi et Gothia*) and *Alania.* One must note that Orosius gives the meridional border (Danube and Pontus Euxinus), but does not set the northern limit which he also understands as being the Ocean. Orosius' geographical introduction, inspired by the Agrippan tradition[35], is the source for medieval depictions of the TO mappaemundi (Beatus' map, the mappamundi in Hereford etc.)[36], in which Germania, Dacia, and Alania are bordered towards the north by the Ocean.

Pomponius Mela, in his chorography, describes the area without mentioning Dacia. Germania and Sarmatia, separated by River Vistula, stretch between the Danube and the Ocean. Mela's image of Europe thus differs, through the absence of Dacia, from Agrippa's image, transmitted by Pliny and the late Roman opuscula, but not essentially: one finds the same flattened version of North-Eastern Europe between the Danube and the Ocean.

Pomponii Melae, De situ Orbis, I. 3; III. 3, 4:

I. 3. *Europa terminus habet, ab oriente Tanain et Maeotida, et Pontum; a meridie reliqua Nostri maris; ab occidente Atlanticum; a septentrione Britannicum Oceanum.* (…). III. 3. *Germania hinc ripis ejus usque ad Alpes, a meridie ipsis Alpibus, ab oriente Sarmaticarum confinio gentium, qua septentrione spectat, Oceano littore obducta est.* III. 4. *Sarmatia intus, quam ad mare latior, ab his quae sequuntur, Vistula amne discrete, qua retro abit usque ad Istrum flumen immittitur*[37].

In conclusion, we can state that Roman geography / chorography preserve for a long time this image of North-Eastern Europe, flattened along its latitude, an area bordered by the Danube and the Pontus in the south and the Ocean in the north. Tabula Peutingeriana reproduces exactly this image of Dacia bordered towards the north by the Ocean, with the Caspian Sea depicted as a gulf in the latter[38]. The dimensions transmitted by Pliny and the late opuscula are not to be taken strictly, since they were corrupted through the manuscript transmission of Pliny's texts and of the treatises *Demensuratio* and *Divisio.* We must only note that the distance, along the latitude, is under-valued at ca. 396 / 386 Roman miles (a recurrent value), while the longitude is accompanied by formulae such as *bis ad decies centenum millium passuum* (Pliny) and *decies centum milia* (Dicuil). But how did 4th-century abbreviators come to the value of *decies centena milia passuum in circuitu*?

Theodulf's Mappamundi and *in circuitu* dimensions

Roman geographic tradition (Agrippa/ Plinius, *Demensuratio, Divisio*) shows regions as irregular rectangles with dimensions given according to two coordinates (latitude and longitude). There are nevertheless a few cases, especially for islands, when dimensions of a geographical unit are given *in circuitu,* thus stating their perimeter. Agrippa's map also included such perimeters (*ambitus, circuitus*): *circuitus Siciliae* (Pliny, Hist. Nat., III. 86), *ambitus sinus Italiae et Illyrici*

[34] RIESE 1878, 62, frg. 21; 95, frg. 21.

[35] MERRILS 2005, 70–77.

[36] JANVIER 1982, 61, 266–267.

[37] NISARD 1863, 604, 648, 649.

[38] PRONTERA 2003, 30 (Hellenistic model / Erathostene, Caspian Sea – gulf of the northern ocean, the continuous chain of Taurus mountains that divides Asia in two unequal parts).

(Plinius, Hist. Nat., III. 150), and *circuitus Ponti* (Plinius, Nat. Hist., IV. 77). An excerpt in Suetonius, that P. Arnaud believes to have been directly inspired by Agrippa's geography, renders thus the dimensions of Gallia[39]:

Suetonius, Vitae duodecim caesares, XXV:

(…) *Omnem Galliam, quae saltu Pyrenaeo Alpibusque et monte Cebenna, fluminibus Rheno ac Rhodano continetur patetque circuitu ad bis et tricies centum milia passuum, praeter socias ac bene meritas civitates* (…)[40].

Similar paragraphs in Pliny (Hist. Nat. IV. 105) and *Divisio,* 7 that mention the same borders (the Pyrenees, Mons Cebenna, the Rhine, and the Rhone) but give the dimensions expressed in distances along longitude and latitude, support the idea of a borrowing in Suetonius:

M. Vipsani Agrippae fragmenta ad chorographiam spectantia:

Agrippa Galliarum inter Rhenum et Pyrenaeum atque oceanum ac montes Cebennam et Jures, quibus Narbonensem Galliam excludit, longitudinem CCCCXX, latitudinem CCCXVIII computavit[41].

One must note that, in this case as well as that of Dacia, the added dimensions in Pliny and *Divisio* do not match the value of the perimeter in Suetonius, i.e. 3200 miles (420 miles in longitude, 318 miles in latitude in Plinius, 828 miles in longitude, 263 miles in latitude in *Divisio*).

Expressing the extent of regions through perimeter size is an exceptional trait of Roman cartography. One finds the same in Hyginus' fables for example, where the perimeter size of certain regions or islands is expressed in *stadia:*

Hygini Fabulae, CCLXXVI, 5–20:

5. Mauretania posita ad solis occasum in circuitu stadia LXXVI. Aegyptus in sole et austro posita, quem Nilum circumlauat, circuitu stadia…. Sicilia in triscelo posita, circuitu stadia XXXDLXX. 2. Sardinia in circuitus stadia XCCL. 10. Creta in longitudine … et oppida utraque parte centum possidet, circuitu stadia XXC. Cyprus posita est inter Aegyptum et Africam, similis scuto Gallico, circuitu stadia XLIC. Rhodos in rotundo posita, circuitu stadia XXC. 15. etc.[42]

The presence of these fragments, *disiecta membra* of an ancient geographical tradition that used to present regions expressing the size of their perimeter (*circuitus, ambitus*), makes possible the existence in Antiquity of maps of the known world with dimensions expressed *in circuitu.* As the excerpt from Suetonius on *Gallia comata* indicates, the main source must have been the lost geography attributed to Agrippa or the map inside the above mentioned portico. Before establishing a direct connection between Agrippa's commentaries and the fragments including the dimensions of regions expressed *in circuitu* (Suetonius, Hyginus, Eutropius, Rufius Festus) by indicating the source that might be the "missing link", we must return to the Carolingian treaty signed by monk Dicuil. In the prologue of his treatise, *De mensura orbis terrae,* he copies a text and a twelve-line epigram that explains that *mensura orbis* was done at the order of Theodosius II during his 15th consulship, i.e. in 425, by two of his *famuli*, according to older models (*veterum monumenta*)[43]. Two other manuscripts of the *Divisio orbis terrarum* (Vatic. Lat. 642 and Leyde, Bibl. Der Rijksuniv. Scaliger 39) also make reference to Theodosius II[44].

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[39] ARNAUD 2007–2008, 121.

[40] ROLFE 1914, 32–33: (…) All the part of Gaul which is bounded by the Pyrenees, the Alps and the Cevennes, and by the Rhine and Rhone rivers, a circuit of some 3200 miles, with the exception of some allied states which had rendered him good service (…).

[41] KLOTZ 1930–1931, 392, frg. 7; RIESE 1878, 5, frg. 23.

[42] ROSE 1933, 169–170.

[43] TIERNEY 1967, 23–24: Dicuil, *De mens. Orbis terrae,* I, 1: *in quinto decimo anno regni imperatoris Theodosii praecepit ille suis missis prouintias orbis terrae in longitudinem et latitudinem mensurari.*

[44] RIESE 1878, 15: *Dicuil praef.: cogitavi ut liber de mensura provinciarum orbis terrae sequeretur, secundum illorum auctoritatem quos Sanctus Theodosius imperator ad provincias praedictes mesurandas miserat…*

Thus, an early medieval tradition makes note of Theodosius II ordering the creation of a map of the known world by bringing up to date older information on the topic. Two manuscripts, dated to the 9th and 11th centuries, bring to our knowledge a map known as Theodulf of Orléans' mappamundi: *Leyde, Bibl. Der Rijkuniversiteit Voss. Lat. F. 12 d* (L, 9th century), originating from the region of Orléans and *Vatican, Reginensis latinus 123* (V, 11th century), written in Santa María de Ripoll[45]. The 11th century manuscript (V) is not a copy of the 9th century one, but derives from a shared model. The manuscripts include a circular mappamundi each, measuring 30 cm in diameter, surrounded by a blue ring representing the Ocean and protomae of the 12 winds. Under the drawing there are cartouches that contain the map legend and a Latin poetry written by Theodulf, bishop of Orléans. The manuscript in Ripoll also preserved an opusculum entitled *Divisio orbis terrarum Theodosiana* that has the peculiarity of rendering the size of regions in *in circuitu* values.

After a short description of the division of the world in three parts – Europe, Asia, and Lybia – with the dimension of each expressed in longitude and latitude follows the enumeration of Europe's regions, with size *in circuitu.* After Hispania, Gallia, Italia, Retia et Vindelica (sic) come Germania, Sarmatia, Thracia et Getica, Moesia, Macedonia, Illyricum, and Peloponensus (sic).

Divisio orbis terrarum Theodosiana:

[18] Germania utreque, proxima Gallie et +Senonica, patent in circuitum milia passus [19] |XXX|DLXXV. [20] Sarmatia omnis a flumine Vistula perque Histrum flumen et litora Pontici maris, et [21] ex parte Caspii et ore septentrionali in circuitum patent milia |L|DCCXII. [22] Thracia et Getica in unum patent milia passus |X|DCLXXXIIII. (ms. V – |X|DCLXXVIIII).

Thus, the Carolingian geographical text that takes over a late Roman source mentions for Thracia and Getica (like in *Demensuratio* – Dacia Getica) together a perimeter of 1684 Roman miles (1679 Roman miles in the manuscript in Ripoll). These figures have no real value for the actual geography of the North-Danubian era, no more than the distances along longitude and latitude provided by Agrippa / Plinius, *Demensuratio* and *Divisio* / Dicuil or Dacia's perimeter mentioned by Eutropius and Festus. Moesia, mentioned in the following paragraph, interposes between Thracia and Getica (if it is indeed Dacia) in the actual geographical space.

The Carolingian map inspired by a late Roman source, a *Divisio orbis terrarum Theodosiana,* contains, probably, in its main data, information transmitted by Agrippa's map tradition and the late geographical treaties, with the difference that the dimensions of the province are expressed in perimeters. It is not relevant if it is the result of a *mensura orbis* ordered by Theodosius II, as the medieval tradition claims, but the fact that it is proof for the existence of a rich and varied production of geographical compendia and opuscula spread in late Roman libraries. *Divisio orbis terrarum, Demensuratio provinciarum, Cosmographia Iulii Caesaris, Excerpta eius spherae vel continentia* by Iulius Honorius, *Aethici Cosmographia* are but a few examples of such works[46]. Excerpts from historians that provide the size of regions *in circuitu* (Suetonius, Eutropius, and Rufius Festus) and the existence of geographic descriptions such as *Divisio orbis terrarum Theodosiana* allow us to suspect the fact that fragments referring to Dacia's *circuitus* of 1000 Roman miles also come from a Latin geographical opusculum that could be found at the imperial court in Constantinople during the 4th century.

The value of Dacia's perimeter in Eutropius and Festus, the 1 000 000 feet (*decimum centena milia passuum*) they mention, cannot be found in the figures provided by the Roman tradition. One could calculate the perimeter of rectangular Dacia and thus Pliny's data lead to a size of 3192 Roman miles, almost as much as Gallia's perimeter in Suetonius. Close figures can be found in *Divisio* – 3172 miles and Dicuil – 2772 miles. The closest value to the 1000 miles

[45] DALCHÉ 1994–1995, 91–93.

[46] DILKE 1987, 243–244.

found in the writings of 4th-century abbreviators can also be found in *Demensuratio,* where Dacia measures only 1332 miles in perimeter. Also, in *Divisio orbis terrarum Theodosiana,* Thracia and Getica together measure only 1684 miles.

Traianus … litus totum arctoum oceanum ambulavit

One peculiarity of this Roman geographical vision is their imagining of the northern and north-eastern parts of Europe as a narrow strip between the Danube and the Pontus to the south and the Ocean to the north. All mentioned sources – Agrippa / Plinius, *Demensuratio, Divisio* / Dicuil underestimate the latitude distance between the Danube and the Northern Ocean, *qua cognita est:* 396 or 386 Roman miles. The tendency towards flattening the northern regions continues as one goes from west to east: Romans only navigated up to the Cimbrian Promontory and were not aware of the fact that Scandinavia was a peninsula or that present-day Russia was such a vast territory. The unexplored territories north of the Black Sea were populated by Amazons and Hyperboreans and included the Riphaei Mountains. The Caspian Sea was just a gulf in the Northern Ocean for Plinius, Mela, Seneca, and Aelius Aristides and on the Tabula Peutingeriana[47]. This sketched vision of the world influenced, according to Susan P. Mattern, Roman strategy and statesmen's decisions. When Julius Caesar wanted to conquer the Persian Empire, he intended to start with conquering Dacia and then to surround the Persians from the north (Suet. Caes. 44.3). Conquering the territories up to the Ocean was a source of glory and pride for the emperors. Dacia's location on a modern map is bizarre because it extended the empire's border and was a vulnerable province, exposed to attacks. According to Susan P. Mattern, Trajan wanted to conquer the entire territory between the Danube and the Northern Ocean by conquering Dacia: "but the most likely frontier imagined by Trajan when he invaded this territory was the ocean itself. It is likely that he shared the prevalent view of a flattened northern Europe; Agrippa had, after all, placed the ocean only 396 miles from the Danube River"[48]. We can find an echo of this ancient tradition in a passage from the anonymous cosmographer from Ravenna:

Ravennatis Anonymi Cosmographia, I. 13. 12*:*

Sed si legeris, Odo care, bellum quod gessit Traianus Romanorum imperator, quando litus totum arctoum oceanum ambulavit, quando et Dacorum regem devicit,…[49].

After this remark on Trajan's walks along the shores of the Northern Ocean during the Dacian wars, the anonymous geographer expressed his amazement on how the wisest among the Romans believed that they owned the entire Earth.

This entire search focused on *circuitus Daciae,* on the sketched Dacia in Agrippa's map tradition and the transmission channels of this tradition in Late Antiquity, and on Trajan wanting to reach the Ocean through Dacia, lead us to a simple conclusion: Romans, in the fore day of their conquest, did not know much on the actual geographical area north of the Danube. One must wait for their conquest, for military itineraries, cadastral operations of people such as Balbus, and for *formulae provinciarum* in order for Dacia to appear on maps or in geographical works in the shape that we are accustomed with today. Ptolemy, Tabula Peutingeriana, and the itinerary of the anonymous geographer from Ravenna resize the sketched Dacia and depict it as a Roman province, part of *terra cognita.*

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[47] MATTERN 1999, 54–55; NICOLET 1988 a, 88–89 (the Hyrcanian / Caspian Sea communicates freely with the Northern Ocean through a straight called "Northern Hercules' Columns" – Strabo, II.1.17; VII.2.4; XI.6.1; Tacitus, Germ., 34; Lucan, III.278); RACZKA 2000, 189–199.

[48] MATTERN 1999, 61.

[49] SCHNETZ 1940, 12.

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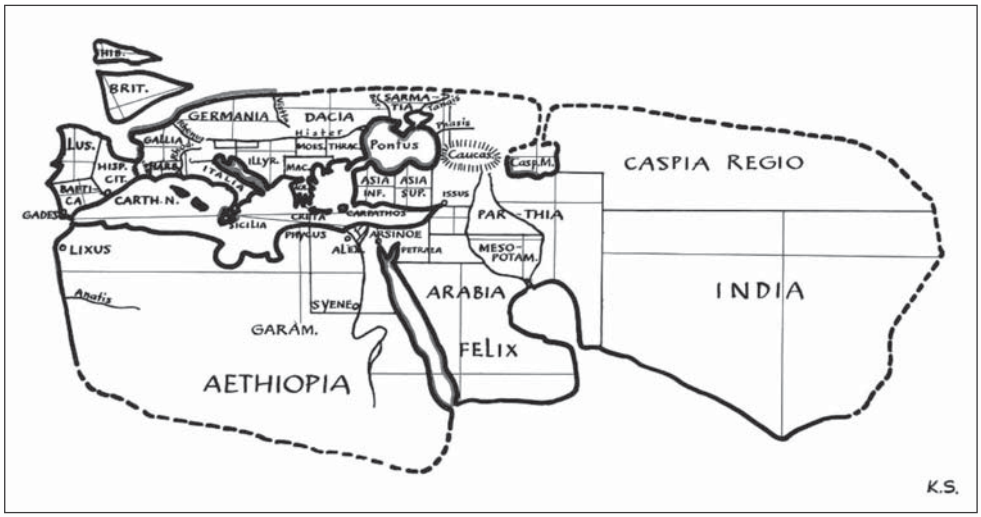

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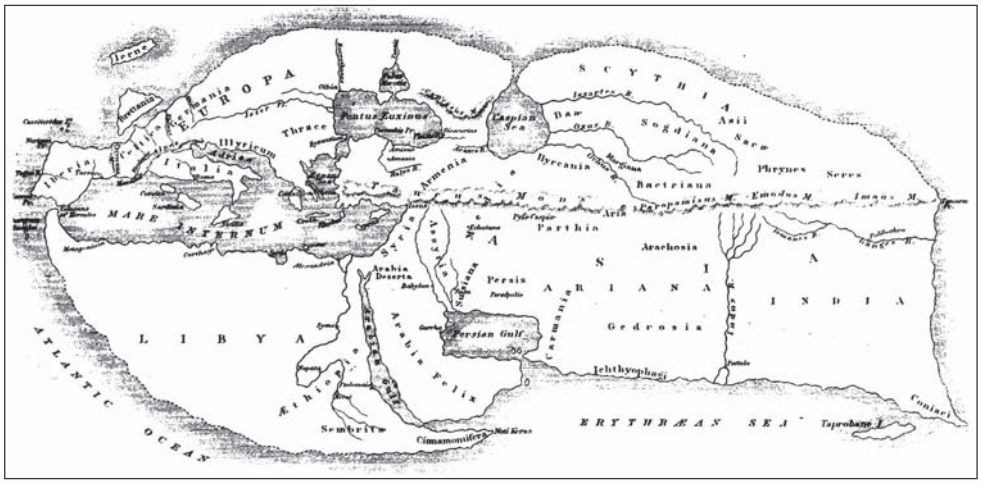

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Plate I. 1. The Agrippa's Map. 2. The World of Strabo. 3. The Known World of the Greeks and Romans (1–2 rebuilt by K. Sallmann, after MATTERN 1999; imagined by R. Dion, after NICOLET 1988).