

## THE CULTURAL HISTORIC HERITAGE OF THE DANUBE DELTA BIOSPHERE RESERVE (DDBR)

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The Danube Delta has always been of utmost economic, political and strategic importance on account of its natural assets and geographic position. In ancient times, the zone around the Danube mouths proved to be suitable for human settlements thanks to its varied relief and fertile land, to its mild climate and the diversity of its natural riches. Besides, this cross-roads of maritime, river and land transport ensured the exchange of goods, so that trade flourished and traders thrived. The Danube Delta with the neighbouring river meadows (Brăila and Ialomița) has always been the terminal place for the moving of flocks from Transylvania to the Delta.

Archaeological vestiges speak about prehistoric times, about the ancient forms of culture and civilisation that characterised the type of man living here. The platforms around and especially the headlands penetrating into the waters of the Razim-Sinoe lagoon complex or into the waters of the river are sites harbouring vestiges of old local civilisation. The whole littoral zone from Sinoe to Popina Island in the north of Razim lake was the home for the formation and evolution of a Neolithic civilisation of Hamangia type (Baia today) - 5000-3000 B.C. The refinement of the Dobrudjean culture is obvious in the ceramics technology and the pottery decoration with an extremely rich range of geometrical patterns as well as in the anthropomorphic art. The clay figurines belonging to this culture speak about daily life and the to earth statuettes known as "The thinker" and "Woman sitting" represent the ancient family and are considered masterpieces of world Neolithic art.

The defence works consisting of ditches and earth walls on the promontories at Sinoe, Enisala, Babadag, Bestepe, (Boboc's stone), Bălteni, Malcoci, Tulcea and Somova represent only the eastern part of remainders from the habitats of communities dating back to the Iron Age (1220-500 B.C.); and the sporadic hillocks scattered along the river, on the plain or the hill combs from the Danube to Razim, on the sand banks of the Delta - Stipoc, Chilia and Caraorman, they are all spiritual

testimonies of the aboriginal and migratory races that lived or crossed the place, from the great migratory Indo-European wave to Christian civilisation (about 2000 B.C. to 400 A.D.). The princely treasure discovered in a tumular grave at Agighiol, the rich necropolises at Murighiol and Enisala, the remainders of the great refuge fortress at Bestepe are proofs of a sedentary civilisation created by the aboriginal Gethic tribes as we now know them from the Greek sources or by the Dacians according to Roman sources. The fortress impresses even nowadays through its monumentality, through the ingenious mixture of natural and man-made elements which gave the fortress an inexpugnable character.

Likewise, on the most eastern promontory of the Dobrudjean horst bearing the geographical name - Dolojman Cape, are the ruins of the Greek-Roman fortress Argamum (Orgame during the Greek period). Hecateu of Milet mentioned it in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. "de polis Orgame" and this mention is the oldest document in our country in which a human settlement is called "polis"-town. However, archaeological researches give priority to Histria, a colony of Milesians. Both settlements have the same chronology and the same historical evolution ranging from the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. up to the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. At this time Histria was founded by the Romans on an island in the great gulf called Halmyris; nowadays, in consequence of the siltation process, it is part of the mainland. The sea itself created those sand bars which closed the gulf and in time the settlement declined economically, without flourishing any more after the last destruction in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Today the ruins of the defence walls, of the squares, temples, basilicas, the monumental thermal, the remainders of the frontispieces and many architectural elements among which vestiges of streets and of the amazing sewerage offer us a clear image of the urban organisation during the Roman period.

To the north, on the site of an old Getic settlement lying at the ancient mouth of the Danube into the gulf of Halmyris there developed

the town of Halmyris (Murighiol today) as a great economic centre. Second to Dinogetzia (on Bisericutza Island - Church Island - in Garvan village), Halmyris is archaeologically the best-known of all fortresses on the Danube limes: Salsovia (Mahmudia), Talamonium (Nufăru), Aegyssus (Tulcea), Noviodunum (Isaccea) are only some of the names that have survived, while others disappeared completely such as the Roman fortress at Enisala, the one on Parquesh hill, the burghs near Topraichioi Bridge (Babadag), on Carabair hill (Dunavăt) and the ones from the site known as "La scări" - At the steps - on the shore of Erenciuc lake and close to the village of Caraorman. Only a program of researches on all these deltaic sites could clarify in time the ancient information coming from the Homeric and Argonautic epic as well as from the terse inscriptions of Histria referring to the famous Peuce Island with its pine forests and to the whole economic and strategic life of the Danube Delta during the Geto-Greek-Roman antiquity.

After the darkness caused by the great migrations and the crises of the Byzantine Empire, the economic and urban life at the Danube mouths revives.

Portulans and Genovese maps, Byzantine sources inform on the fishery and trade with all sorts of products in the 10<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Danube harbours of Solina (Sulina today), Licostoma (Periprava), Chilia, Vicina (uncertain hypothesis concerning its site)-the place where the first metropolitan bishop of Wallachia was appointed and established. Of all the 80 towns which the anonymous chronicle of time certifies at the mouths of Danube, only the fortress of Enisala still watches the Razim waters and Pereiaslovatzul (Nufăru today); from time to time new discoveries speak of the former flourishing places.

The Russian-Turkish wars in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries and the Russian administration in the Danube Delta until 1856 destroyed everything. But the two commercial centres in the heart of the Danube Delta, Chilia and Sulina, flourished again after the Crimean war. From 1856 to 1940 Sulina developed economically and spiritually in such a specific way that it became unique among the

Danubian towns in our country. Even nowadays there are buildings (European Danube Commission Palace-EDC Palace), the old and new lighthouses, churches and even the cemetery which remind to the visitors of the famous cosmopolitan town of old days.

At the gate of the Danube Delta, the town of Tulcea underwent similar changes after 1860. Town planning developed when the rulers of sangeac (subdivision of a Turkish province) moved here. Two architectural complexes have been preserved: 1) the historic centre with the administrative palace and the palace of the fisheries, the old town hall, the secondary school, the bank and other civil buildings; 2) the dwelling zone round the town cathedral, the Greek church and the catholic one in the former German district.

Of the whole cultural, historic or architectural patrimony mentioned above, we could make the following classification:

1) Monuments and archaeological sites which can be visited and which are part of research and restoration plans, such as: Histria, Argamum, the Byzantine fortress at Enisala, the medieval site near Topraichioi Bridge, Halmyris fortress.

A defensive project against high floods caused by the Danube is necessary for the protection of Noviodunum (Isaccea) fortress.

2) Architectural monuments at Tulcea, Babadag and Sulina. There is a vast program for the protection, restoration and conservation of the monuments in Tulcea. At Sulina only the old lighthouse is restored and the work is in the first stage. For the architectural places at Sulina and Babadag the restoration activity has not been started yet.

3) A vast program of research for the monuments and sites within the reservation, especially at Caraorman and Chilia as well as at Salsovia (Mahmudia), Noviodunum (Isaccea) and Enisala, for their fortress that could become in the future a series of objectives for the touristic activities.

4) The program of restoration in Sulina could lead to the revival of other economic activities in this town, such as tourism.