

The Roman Road on the Teleajen Valley

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Abstract: Although it is among the oldest vestiges found in northeastern Muntenia region (Romania), the roman road established on the Teleajen Valley was never taken into consideration by recent scholars. This economic, commercial and military axis was crossing the mountainous and hilly units of the Carpathian Curvature, facilitating the link between the Roman settlements from Transylvania and the ones fixed along the Danube. The existence and the use of the road were strongly related to the roman fortifications established in Drajna de Sus, Mălăiești, Târgșor and also, to the salt resources from Slănic-Teșani area. The main road paved with stones was intersected in some points by secondary branches, having a local role only. After the withdrawal of military troops, some parts of the road continued to remain operational, while others have been deteriorated until they disappeared from the landscape. At the end of the 19th century, the roman road on the Teleajen Valley figured in the oral tradition under various names, such as “the Trajan's road”, “the Roman road”, “the Tatar road”, “Troian” or “Caldarâm”.

Key words: Roman road, Troian, Teleajen Valley, Curvature Subcarpathians, Drajna de Sus

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1. INTRODUCTION

The existence of the Roman castra outside the Carpathian arch, located within the localities of Drajna de Sus, Mălăiești and Târgșor, has been the subject of intense archaeological debates since the 20th century. According to the general opinion, their function was related to the military defense of the occupied territories, and at the same time, to the supervision of the economic and commercial interests of the Roman Empire, among which an important role was played by the exploitation of saliferous resources in the Curvature Subcarpathians [1] (p. 121).

The Roman castra at Drajna de Sus, Mălăiești and Târgșor had a relatively short period of operation, from the end of Trajan's military campaigns in Dacia to the beginning of Hadrian's reign [1] (pp. 112-113). According to another hypothesis, their construction could have taken place between the two wars between the Dacians and the Romans, or even before the first conflict, which took place between 101-102 AD [2] (p. 11).

Regardless of the time spent by the Roman troops in northeastern Muntenia, they had sufficient material and human resources to organize a local transport infrastructure, consisting of paved roads. The present article aims therefore to bring into discussion the written and oral testimonies that have been preserved regarding the Roman road on the Teleajen Valley, an ancient road corridor on which many historical and geographical uncertainties still persist.

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF RESEARCH

The first written reference to the Roman road on the Teleajen Valley is due to Cezar Bolliac and was published in the Carpathian Trumpet magazine (1869), in the context of the discoveries made north of Slon (Coliba Veche point) [3].

New data regarding a section of paved road (“Troianu”) visible within the villages of Olteni-Teșani (Prahova) were collected in 1873, through the *Archaeological Questionnaire of A. Odobescu* [4]. The Roman

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road also benefited from a detailed description in the *Questionnaire of N. Densușianu* (1894) [5], and soon afterwards in the *Geographical Dictionary of Prahova County* (1897) [6]. Isolated, inconsistent mentions will be made until the Second World War, by authors such as Gh. Murgoci (1909) [7], E. Zaharescu (1912) [8], I. Costeanu (1930) [9] and O.G. Lecca (1937) [10].

The figure that was distinguished by the most consistent contribution, both in terms of establishing an approximate route and in specifying the road construction technique, was Gh. Zagoriș (1912) [11]. The data provided by Gh. Zagoriș were the only ones obtained on the field, through the campaigns carried out by his brother in 1912. In the summer of 1928, Colonel C. Zagoriș, making new excavations, would have found other fragments of the road [9] (p. 9). However, it cannot be specified whether the new results have been published.

The information from 1912 of C. Zagoriș regarding the Roman road has remained until today the most detailed and pertinent. The road on Teleajen was also mentioned by the archaeologist I. Andrieșescu, in the manuscript entitled *Antiquities of Prahova*, only as an "ancient road" [12].

During the communist and post-communist period, for objective reasons, the efforts of archaeologists focused more on sites with a superior complexity and a richer inventory, such as those in the vicinity, from Drajna de Sus, Târgșor, Mălăiești, Slon, or Budureasca. This happened, however, to the detriment of the Roman road, which remained largely unknown.

3. THE AGE OF THE TRANSCARPATHIAN ROAD FROM THE CARPATHIAN CURVATURE

Important transit route through the region of the Curvature Carpathians and point of convergence of roads with various functions (economic, military, etc.), the Teleajen Valley illustrates the succession of several generations of Transcarpathian roads: the ancient road (natural), the Dacian road, the Roman road, the medieval road and the modern road.

The sickles deposit discovered at Drajna de Jos, dating from the Bronze Age, which includes Transylvanian elements, has shown that the use of the communication route through the Tătaru pass is very old [13] (p. 4). The pieces of this treasure made Vasile Pârvan call the Teleajen Valley "the ancient road to Ardeal", in the work *Getica* [13].

The abandonment of the natural roads in favor of the arranged ones happened gradually, with the political and economic ascent of the Dacians, or much more surely, after the establishment of the Roman power. That there was an important road here in the time of the Dacians, which had the function of a link between Transylvania and Muntenia, is shown quite clearly by the fortified points along the Teleajen.

A first Geto-Dacian fortress guarded at Gura Vitioarei, from the top of Movila, which is on the left bank of Teleajen, at the confluence with Valea Danciului. Archaeologists have found traces of habitation here from the Neolithic era, the Bronze Age and especially from the Geto-Dacian era [14] (p. 11). Also, at the top of Cetățuia, which separates the Teleajen valley from that of Drajna, traces of the Bronze Age (Monteoru culture) and the second Iron Age (Geto-Dacian culture) have been brought to light [15] (p. 79). The Plateau of Cetățuia is surrounded by terraces that seem to be of anthropogenic origin and has been fortified with beds of earth and stone [15]. These things show us that the Teleajen road was the "backbone" of human settlements and fortified points from the Iron Age (La Tène).

But the strategic and economic importance of this ancient sector of human habitation is reflected the best in the improvements brought by the Romans, by building castra and paved roads. The construction of the castra from Drajna, Târgșor and Mălăiești between the two wars between the Dacians and the Romans or even before the first conflict, is a plausible variant in the opinion of the archaeologist Bogdan Ciupercă [2] (p. 11). The hypothesis seems to be confirmed by an accidental discovery, from the end of the 19th century, narrated by the teacher D. Bazilescu (1894) [5]. According to this witness, some workers working on the Teleajen Valley found on *Caldarâm* (on the ancient paved road) a coin with the face of the Emperor Dometian (81-96), a coin that he himself saw [5] (f. 281).

The control of the Roman administration in the Teleajen Valley area was limited to the stationing of auxiliary troops, meant to monitor the key economic activities, to control the roads and to intervene quickly in situations of need. The existence of the paved roads as well as of the three castra in the area of the Prahova and Teleajen rivers, at Drajna de Sus, Mălăiești and Târgșor, can be attributed to the saliferous resources, quantitatively and qualitatively significant.

In this context, it cannot be omitted that some archaeologists hypothetically place the Ramidava fortress, mentioned by Ptolemy in the Muntenian Carpathians, at Drajna de Sus [1] (p. 113, footnote no. 17). The abandonment of the Roman fortifications from Târgșor, Drajna de Sus and Mălăiești took place, most probably, in the first decades of the 2nd century AD [15] (p. 14). After this date, the roads began to be neglected, to deteriorate and eventually disappear from the humanized landscape.

4. THE ROMAN ROAD - STATE OF PRESERVATION AND TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Historical, geographical and socio-economic factors have made the Roman road on the Teleajen Valley not last until today. Its physical condition has permanently deteriorated due to neglect, climatic weather (rain, freeze-thaw) and anthropogenic activities.

In the sub-Carpathian sectors, where the population density was higher, and on the fertile terraces of Teleajen, the road was destroyed in a very large proportion by seasonal agricultural practices (spring plowing). Its degradation intensified as people became more numerous and the land dwindled through the multiple divisions of land lots. At the end of the 19th century, after the social and agrarian reforms undertaken by Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the inhabitants saw themselves in the situation of capitalizing on every piece of land. Thus, people began to plow more and more frequently with the plows the cobbled roads hidden in their gardens, and were forced to destroy them in order to gain agricultural space [9] (p. 9).

We cannot specify whether the condition of the road was affected to any extent by the construction of the narrow gauge railway, from Măneciu Ungureni to Vama Buzăului, which climbed the Teleajen valley to Boncuța, between 1913-1968 [16] (p. 94). What is certain is that during the socialist regime, a part of the road was covered by the waters of the Măneciu storage reservoir.

In isolated or incompatible areas of agriculture, nature has fully entered into its rights. D. Bazilescu noted at the end of the 19th century that on Devil's Valley, in the mountain area, "trees of 3-5 meters in circumference are grown on the cobblestones" [5] (f. 281).

The Roman roads, built with expense and a lot of work, usually included two elements: *agger* (the middle part, paved with stone or river slabs) and *crepido* (elements that framed and delimited the road like sidewalks) [17] (p. 12). Along them, from mile to mile (1472 m), stones were installed that indicated the distance and from place to place were arranged rest areas or with special functions (Civitates, Mutationes, Mansiones) [17] (p. 12).

Two primary sources from the end of the 19th century and the Zagoriț brothers speak about the construction technique of the Roman road on the Teleajen Valley. The Roman road is described by the teachers-informants from Drajna de Sus and Șoimari with a minimum width of 2 fathoms (according to D. Bazilescu-1894) and a maximum of 4 fathoms (according to I. Alecsandrescu - 1873), which in the metric system represents 3.92 m, respectively 7.84 m (measured with the fathom of C. Brâncoveanu). This fact attracted the attention of C. Zagoriț who, making observations and measurements at the "Troianu" point and elsewhere, will conclude that the width of the path on the Teleajen Valley was of maximum 6 m [11] (pp. 75-76, footnote 5).

As for the *agger*, popularly called "caldarâm" (cobblestones), it was usually made of brook gravel. The stones were placed "partly standing (the small ones), partly scaled (= mounted, the big ones and the wide ones" [11]. North of Vălenii de Munte to Teleajen, the road had "patches", an indication of the advanced degree of damage or perhaps of a hasty execution. According to C. Zagoriț, the cobblestones were framed between two standing stone edges and deeply embedded, forming what archaeologists call *crepido* [11].

From a planimetric point of view, the road was sometimes built at ground level ("it has no ditches on the edge" - D. Bazilescu 1894), and other times it was built on a bed of earth (embankment), popularly called "troian". In this sense, the most conclusive remains the example of the *Troian* that measured a length of 80 m, first described in 1873, in the *Archaeological Questionnaire* of Alexandru Odobescu, and researched in more detail by C. Zagoriț, in 1912.

According to the descriptions made at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, the best preserved part of the road - probably to this day - was in the mountainous sector, on the Teleajen Valley [6]. In the centuries dominated by migrations and wars, deprived of the care it deserved, the Roman road lost its luster but remained in the use of the local population. Between the 2nd and 9th centuries, from the withdrawal of the Roman troops to the rise of a new political, economic and military force in the Balkans - respectively, the establishment of the South-Danubian Slavic administration - the Roman road remained among the main strategic roads in the Carpathian Curvature.

5. THE ROUTE OF THE ROMAN ROAD ON THE TELEAJEN VALLEY

The lack of field research and the contradictory information from the written and oral sources, made the route of the Roman road on the Teleajen Valley to be most often intuited. It was stated, for example, without any scientific basis, that the Roman road would have passed into Transylvania through the Bratocea Pass [27] (p. 521). However, many historians and archaeologists have confirmed the fact that the road passed through the Carpathians through the Tabla Buții pass (Tătaru Mountains), and to the south it advanced to the ports of Oltenița and Giurgiu [27] (p. 521). Regarding the detailed route of the Roman

road in the hilly and mountainous sector of the Carpathian Curvature, the hypotheses set out below crystallized.

5.1. Grigore Tocilescu's hypothesis

The first hypothesis, which found support from G. Tocilescu, states that the Roman road coming from Ploiești left the actual valley of Teleajen near the village of Teișani, crossed the Stănești plain and climbed the Drajna Valley to Crai Peak (Vârful lui Crai). The change of direction was made by the saddle between Piscul Domnului and Cetățuii hill.

The priest Ioan I. Costeanu, confessed about this, in the 30s of the last century: „At the point called Hanul Madamei, on the Ploiești-Bratocea road, there is a natural road, which leads through the Teleajen river ford to the Grădiștea plain (Stănești plain n. n.), between the villages of Drajna de Sus and de Jos. Some say that the old Roman road to Păducel and Crai Peak would have been here”[9] (p. 9).

Finally, at the beginning of the 20th century there were locals who confessed that they had seen traces of cobblestones (paving) on Grohotiș (under Craiului Peak) [11] (p. 73) The main reason for this route was related to the presence of the castrum from Drajna de Sus, an objective that had to have direct access to a transport route. This hypothesis was rejected by the Zagoriș brothers.

5.2. The hypothesis of the Zagoriș brothers

The hypothesis presented by Gh. Zagoriș was based on the descriptions offered by the teacher D. Bazilescu from Drajna de Sus, and on the field observations of his brother. Gh. Zagoriș claims that the Roman road sought to keep the bottom of the valley as long as possible, using the terraces and meadows a little high on the right of Teleajen [11] (p. 76).

In his opinion, the road came from Ploiești and passed through the localities of Boldești, Măgurele, Gura Vitioarei, Văleni, Homorâciu, Izvoarele, Măneciu Pământeni and Măneciu Ungureni. From here it "took the Teleajen Valley, the Devil's Valley, among the Clabucet and Craiului mountains and passed beyond to Poana Fetei" [5] (f. 281). Upstream, the traces of the paved road could still be seen on the right bank of the Devil's Valley [6] (p. 172). The road crossed the mountains in Transylvania reaching the maximum altitude of 1089 m, at the spring of Boncuța [11] (p. 76).

5.3. One road or more? A new hypothesis

Before moving on to the presentation of a new hypothesis regarding the route of the Roman road on the Teleajen Valley, it is worth mentioning the premises (at least doubtful) from which it started previously:

- a. The premise that there was only one road that crossed the Teleajen Valley integral - longitudinally, on the north-south direction;
- b. The premise that all the road remains found between the city of Ploiești and Crai Peak came, with small exceptions, from one and the same road;

Among the remains of the road studied by the forerunners, the Trojan described in the *Archaeological Questionnaire* of Alexandru Odobescu has the greatest importance. It measured approximately 80 fathoms in length (176 m, measured with C. Brâncoveanu's fathom of 2.2 m) and 4 fathoms in width (7.84 m) and "deviated" (sic!) - as the sources say - from the main road to Teișani commune, on the east-west direction [4] (f. 556v-557).

Despite its size, the Trojan was seen in the previous stages only as a secondary road, due to its atypical orientation. It is normal, therefore, to ask whether the Zagoriș brothers did not hurry with the presumption that the main direction of the Roman road was north-south, respectively, that it spread entirely on the Teleajen Valley.

Considering the east-west direction of the Trojan, the relief configuration and the existence of the castra from Drajna de Sus, Mălăiești and Târgșor, in a relatively small area, the Roman road could unite these centers. As a result, the most plausible route is the following: Crai Peak-Drajnei Valley (Drajna de Sus Castrum) - Stăneștilor Plain - Teleajen River ford - current area of Teișani village - Slănic Valley-Vărbilău Valley (Mălăiești Castrum) - Târgșor Castrum.

The described route could be related to a much older road (along which, it must be emphasized, the famous golden helmet from Coțofenești was discovered), but it was also justified by the existence of the salt mines opened in the Slănic-Teișani area.



Figure 1. Stănești Valley – Area crossed by the Roman road and supervised by the Roman castrum from Drajna de Sus

Source: Cruceru Alexandru-Ionuț, 2016

The main saliferous points used in the area over time were the following: 1. on the eastern bank of the Teleajen, above the entrance of the Stăneștilor Valley, 300 m from the top of the Cetățuia; 2. On the western bank of the Teleajen, at the entrance of the Dragomir valley; 3. To the east of the village of Teișani, in the immediate vicinity of the village and a little further, at the place called Hanul Madamei [18] (p. 74) According to the priest Ioan I. Costeanu, the Roman legions extracted salt from the lakes popularly called "Lacurile fără fund" (Bottomless lakes), located east of the village of Teișani [9] (p. 8).

The respective places were exploited in the medieval period (as demonstrated by the historical documents from the 18th century) but, as in the case of the exploitations from Slănic, it is not excluded that they operated with interruptions from the Roman period. The Roman castrum from Drajna de Sus seems to watch over these lands, from a distance of 3-5 km, through the Stăneștilor Valley (Figure 1).

Compared to the other castra in northeastern Muntenia, the one in Drajna de Sus has a special significance, a fact highlighted by the strategic position, the construction technique and dimensions [19] (p. 95).

In addition to the main road discussed, it must be admitted that there were also secondary roads. Cezar Bolliac pointed out such a branch in the mountainous sector since 1869: "then a Roman road descends to Telejenelu, from which there were signs of a branch gone towards Coliba-vechiă" [3].

The same section could include the part of the road north of the village of Teișani, and the one that leaves from the Drajna-Teișani area, through the current town of Vălenii de Munte, in the direction of Ploiești. Finally, another important branch of the Transcarpathian Roman road headed east, towards the Buzău lands and the mouth of the Danube. It can be stated, therefore, that the "Trajan's road" was rather a network of roads with different ranks, which ensured the rapid transport of people and material goods (especially salt) (Figure 2).

6. THE ROMAN ROAD IN THE FIRST MILLENNIUM AND IN THE MIDDLE AGES

It is no longer a novelty in the archaeological literature that Roman roads continued to be used long after the fall of the empire [20] (p. 151). We also find the idea exposed to the geographer Cezar Popescu, who stated about the Roman road on the Teleajen Valley that "it has been maintained for many centuries" [19] (p. 95). How long the latter continued to function can be understood by analyzing the available archaeological, historical and toponymical data.

The Roman Road on the Teleajen Valley

The first indications regarding the maintenance of the Roman road date, according to the author of the present study, from the period of the early Middle Ages (the 9th century), and are directly related to the Byzantine-type fortification that functioned north of Slon village (Prahova county) [21,22].

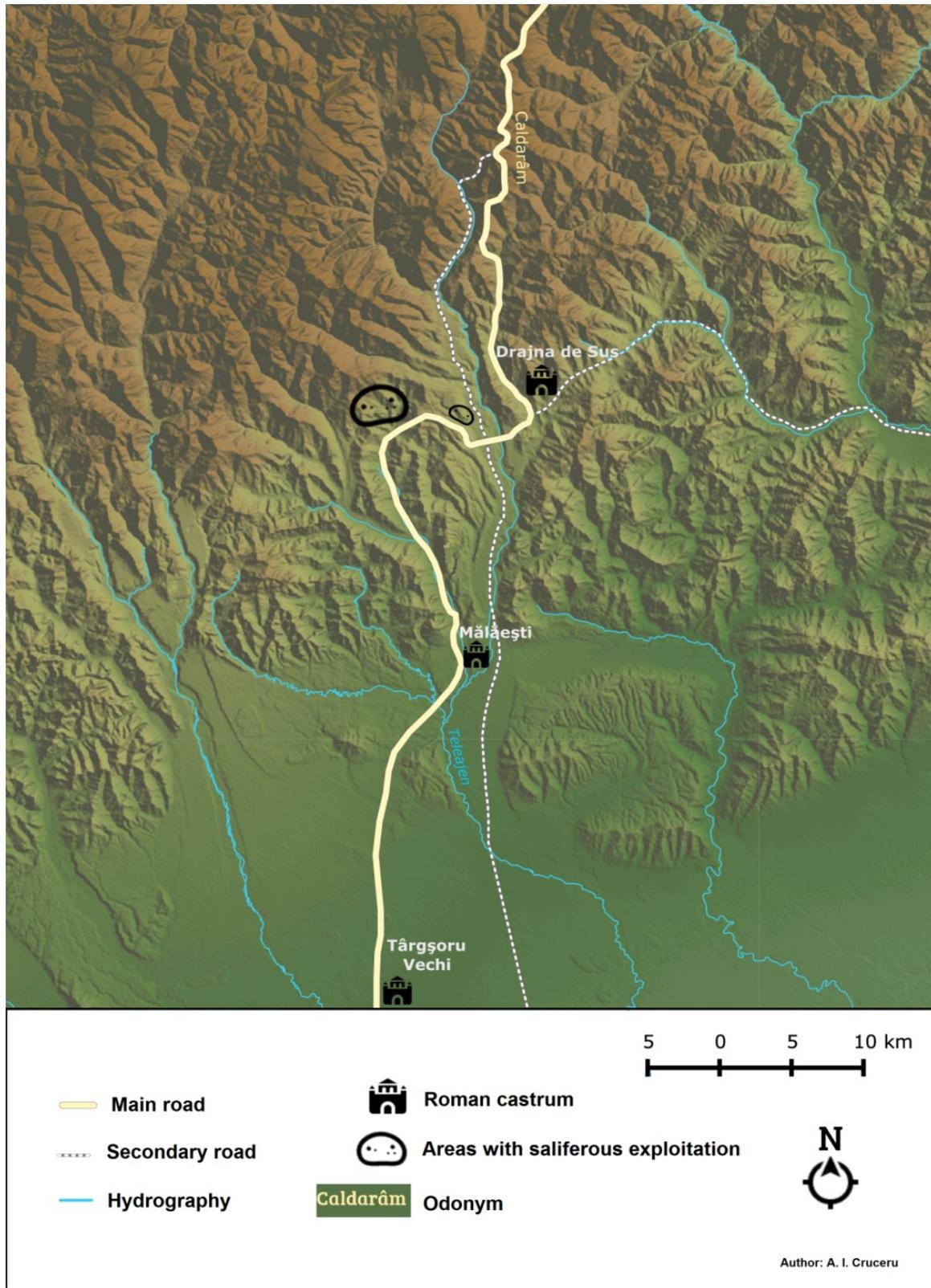


Figure 2. Hypothetical route of the Roman roads in the Teleajen Valley area
Source: Cruțeru Alexandru-Ionuț, 2020

Whether the fortification was the center of power of a local leader, as Maria Comșa believed, or was only a means of surveillance and control imposed from the south of the Danube, the fortress obviously occupied a strategic position on one of the important salt roads. It is about the road over the Tătar mountains and Tabla Buții (the old Roman road), which connected Transylvania with the ports at the mouth of the Danube and the Balkan Peninsula. Geographical toponymy also provides us with interesting clues, which could indicate the persistence of the Roman road in everyday life and collective memory.

After the withdrawal of Roman troops from the Carpathian and Pericarpathian lands, valleys and watercourses were often differentiated on the basis of accessibility, thus giving rise to two categories of valleys or waters: valleys / waters with roads and valleys / waters without roads. The dichotomous division of the valleys / rivers (with a road / without a road) is reflected until today in some local place names, such as Bâsca cu Cale (=Bâsca with a road) and Bâsca fără Cale (=Bâsca without a road), but especially in the hydronym Teleajen.

The name of the Teleajen river appeared in internal documents in the 15th century, but as far as its formation is concerned, a previous period can be admitted. The most common etymological theory belongs to E. Petrovici and states that Teleajen comes from Slavic and translates as "road of chariots", "road of buckboards" [23] (p. 194). Another hypothesis is the one presented by G. Weigand, in the work *Ursprung der subcarpatischen flussnamen in Rumänien*, taken over by the philologist N. A. Constantinescu: Telejna dolnia „roadway" [24] (p. 461).

In fact, it is very important to emphasize that the real Teleajen, in the historical sense, is not the river currently accompanied by the DN1 A road, but the Telejenel brook, located further east, along which it is known that the road paved with stone descends.

Both etymologies specified above lead to the conclusion that during the period of expansion of the power of the Bulgarian Empire on the southern slopes of the Carpathians (the 9th century), the South-Danubian Slavs found in operation parts of the Roman road. For economic and military reasons, they fortified the highlands and encouraged the use of the summit road (Plaiul Buților), contributing decisively to shaping the persistent socio-economic realities during the Middle Ages. Therefore, it would not be excluded that Teleajen was, originally, the "Slavicized" version of a toponym inherited from the Latin substratum, with reference to the Roman road. At the semantic level, the Slavic form Teleajen ("road of chariots", "roadway") has similarities with the toponym *Via Lapidea* ("paved road"), mentioned in a document from 1346, designating the Roman imperial road Ulpia Traiana Zarmizegetusa-Apulum, in the Cricău-Galda de Jos sector [25] (p. 56).

At the contact of the Curvature Subcarpathians with the mountain, other toponyms also draw attention, which refer with some prevalence to the lithic element. Regarding the name of human settlement of Starchiojd, the most widespread etymology derives it from the Slavic "star", which means *ancient*, and the Magyar Kövesd, *rocky*. Starchiojd translates as "old (and) stony place" [26]. Geographically, the explanation becomes less ambiguous if we interpret the name of human settlement of Starchiojd in the context of the paved Roman road that transits the area. The interpretation of Starchiojd as "old (and) stony road" seems all the more plausible to us as the toponym had the strength to impose itself before the 14th century. Related to the same aspect, it should be noted that the Roman road sector on the Telejenel valley, paved with stone slabs, was preserved in the folk dialect until the end of the 19th century under the name *Caldarâm* (pavement executed with boulders) [5] (f. 281).

The socio-economic changes that have taken place at the regional level, and those at the level of the local communities, having in their center the groups of elders, have caused that over time the old Roman road (or more precisely, its main branch) to degrade and lose its initial configuration. From a single road that crossed the valleys of Drajna, Teleajen (in the Stănești-Teișani sector), Slănic and Vărbilău, it gradually reached two separate sections, functionally independent: the first section, the Teleajen road, was the heir of the Roman transcarpathian summit road and had two variants, towards the Buzău valley and to the south, on the Teleajen Valley. This road of Teleajen has been found since the 16th-17th centuries, recorded by the nickname "the old road" [28, doc. 75] (pp. 79-81) or "the old way" [29, doc. 458] (p. 170). The branch to the Buzău valley, which offered the shortest connection between Transylvania and the mouth of the Danube, appears in the 15th century as an objective of strategic importance at the Carpathian Curvature. In the opinion of the historian Laurențiu Rădvan, this road is referred to by the act of 1358, by which Louis the Great granted the Saxon merchants from Brașov the right to move freely "between Buzău and Prahova", until the Ialomița and Siret flow into the Danube [30] (p. 74-75).

The second section was *the salt road* that had its starting point in the Slănic-Teișani area (the richest in saliferous resources) and descended on the Slănic and Vărbilău valleys, with the main destination the Balkan Peninsula. Contrary to expectations, the toponym "salt path" is used as a reference point in the sale-purchase deed of 1689, concluded by Mihail Cantacuzino with the elders of Slănic people, for the future Spătarului exploitation [31] (p. 103). This apparent anachronism (attestation of the salt road before

the opening of the salt mines) should not be surprising, given that the most important economic activity of the villages in the middle basin of Teleajen, in the 15th-17th centuries, was related to the salt trade. In the customs duty registers of Braşov from 1503-1554 there are numerous carriers from settlements such as Berevoieşti (Vălenii de Munte), Ghitoara, Slănic, Teişani, Homorâciu, Ogretin, Teleajen (unidentified) and others [32] (pp. 259-303), which prove a long tradition in the exploitation and transportation of salt.

The Roman road on the Teleajen Valley has been preserved in the collective memory under various names, most of them referring to the people or the figure considered to be the founder. Thus, we have: "the Tatar road", "the Roman road", "the Trajan's caldarâm", "Troian" [4, 5].

7. CONCLUSIONS

The Roman road on the Teleajen Valley was counted next to the castra from Drajna de Sus, Mălăieşti and Târgşor, among the strategic requirements imposed by the saliferous exploitations in the Slănic-Teişani area. According to the descriptions, the road was paved with river stones and its width varied between 2 fathoms (3, 92 m) and 4 fathoms (7, 84 m).

The main branch, popularly known as *Caldarâm*, crossed the Carpathian Mountains through the Tabla Buţii pass, descended on the Drajna Valley, passed between the Lord's Peak and Cetăţuie at Teişani and from here descended on the Slănic and Vărbilău valleys, from where it went to the castrum at Târgşor. In the sub-Carpathian sector, the road benefited from several secondary branches.

After the withdrawal of the Roman administration in the 2nd century AD, the road remained in the use of the local population and over time began to deteriorate. However, in the mountainous sector, the road could be maintained for a longer time, reviving in a first stage under the administration of the south of the Danube (the 9th century) - in the context of the construction of the fortifications from Slon - and in a second stage, under the rise of the trade in the Middle Ages.

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