

## Dacian Fortresses (Romania)

No 906

### Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Dacian fortresses of the Oraştie Mountains
<i>Location</i>	1 Sarmizegetusa: Grădiştea de Munte Village, Orăştioara de Sus Commune, Hunedoara Department 2 Costeşti-Cetatuie: Costeşti Village, Orastioara de Sus Commune, Hunedoara Department 3 Costeşti -Blidaru: Costeşti Village, Orăştioara Commune, Hunedoara Department 4 Luncani-Piatra Roşie: Luncani Village, Bosorod Commune, Hunedoara Department 5 Băniţa: Băniţa Village, Băniţa Commune, Petrosane Municipality, Hunedoara Department 6 Căpâlna: Căpâlna Village, Sasciori Commune, Alba Department
<i>State Party</i>	Romania
<i>Date</i>	29 June 1998

### Justification by State Party

The defensive system of the Dacian fortresses of the Oraştie Mountains represent a masterpiece of human creative genius by virtue of the uniqueness and exemplary nature of the phenomenon beyond the Greco-Roman world, the concept of the fortified mountain, the planned structure of the group, the architectural vision on the scale of a vast territory, and the ingenious use of the natural environment. The entire site of Grădiştea de Munte- Sarmizegetusa, and in particular the sacred area, is one of the most impressive human achievements for the remarkable suggestion of the place of the gods that is sacred and impenetrable and by the proportions and the spiritual area that is set aside.

#### Criterion i

The defensive system of the Dacian fortresses of the Oraştie Mountains bears unique and exceptional witness to the now disappeared Geto-Dacian civilization, one of the last peoples to be incorporated into the Roman world. The texture and the planned structures of the group, the special technical solutions adopted for each element, and the perfect integration into the natural environment endow the sites

around the capital, Sarmizegetusa Regia, with outstanding value.

#### Criterion iii

The group of Dacian fortresses in the Mountain region of Oraştie is the best example of the coherent architectural programme of a political and religious power, capable of breaking up ancient tribal structures and unifying its *ethnos* around the concept of a state, which was unique for its time.

#### Criterion iv

The Dacian fortresses of the Oraştie Mountains are an example that is nowhere else preserved testifying to an original settlement concept based on site planning with objectives that are precise, traditional, and specific to this civilization.

#### Criterion v

The Dacian ensemble of the Oraştie Mountains is an exceptional landmark in the collective imagination related to the Roman and later Latin history of the Romanian people. For Romanians the past described in the scenes depicted on Trajan's Column is the symbol of their European history.

#### Criterion vi

### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a group of *sites*.

### History and Description

#### History

The civilization of the Getes (*Getae*) and Dacians can be distinguished in the Thracian world long before Herodotus first referred to them in the 7th century BC. The Getes inhabited the Danube plain and the Dacians the central and western part of the region between the Carpathians and the Danube. Their close cultural and linguistic links are emphasized by several ancient authors.

Theirs was a typical Iron Age culture, practising agriculture, stock-raising, fishing, and metal-working, as well as trade with the Greco-Roman world, shown by finds of luxury goods and coinage. When Greek colonies such as Histria, Tomis, Odessos, etc were established along the northern shores of the Black Sea in the 7th century BC, the Geto-Dacian rulers established close links with them and extended their protection. This cultural interchange had a profound effect on societies in the region. The other major cultural influence, adopted by the warrior aristocracy, came from the Scythians who inhabited the regions to the north and east.

During their expansion that began in the 4th century Celtic peoples settled in modern Transylvania and established a hegemony over the region because of their superior weaponry. However, their influence waned from the mid 3rd century BC onwards. A new Geto-Dacian form of territorial organization appeared in the early 2nd century BC, at the same time as important technological developments (wheel-made pottery, iron ploughshares, use of stone for building). It was based on the *dava*, the central place of a tribal territory; these contained many sacred sites (*temenoi*) and other forms of cult centre.

The process whereby the earlier fragmented tribal structure became centralized is not understood, but there is abundant

evidence that the Geto-Dacian civilization flourished from the 1st century BC onwards, thanks to the intelligence and pragmatism of its rulers and of its priests. A Hellenistic form of kingdom was evolved by Burebišta (82-44 BC), supported by a warrior aristocracy and with its heart in the Oraştie Mountains around the sacred mountain *Kogaionon* where the sacred city was built, *Sarmizegetusa Regia*. It became master of the entire Black Sea coast, absorbing the Greek colonies.

After the death of Burebišta his kingdom was divided up into smaller territories, but Sarmizegetusa retained its primacy; it became in effect the first (and only) true town in Dacia. The Dacian rulers became increasingly involved in the internal politics of the Roman Empire, and suffered accordingly from punitive expeditions. The lower Danube frontier (*limes*) was constantly the scene of cross-border raids and minor campaigns. This entered a new phase in AD 86, which marked the beginning of a series of Roman-Dacian wars.

In the spring of 101 the Roman Emperor Trajan, having secured his Rhine frontier, took the offensive against the Dacians. Decebalus unified the Dacian kingdoms and concentrated his forces in the Oraştie Mountains, where he submitted to Trajan. An uneasy distribution of territory ensued, broken in 105 when Decebalus seized the Roman governor Longinus. This time he could not hold the Dacians together against the powerful Roman army. His capital and his fortresses were overwhelmed and Decebalus himself committed suicide to avoid capture. This campaign is graphically depicted in the reliefs running round Trajan's Column in Rome.

Dacia became a Roman Imperial province, and its fortresses were slighted. New Roman towns were created, but none of them on the site of the Dacian settlements, with the exception of Sarmizegetusa, which was given the resounding Roman name *Colonia Ulpia Traiana Augusta Dacica Sarmizegetusa*. Dacia was to remain part of the Roman Empire until 274, when the Emperor Aurelian abandoned it in the face of irresistible pressure from the Goths.

#### *Description*

The system developed by the Dacians to defend their capital, Sarmizegetusa Regia, was composed of three distinct fortified elements. All of them were strategically placed, to control important military and/or communication arteries, such as mountain passes and river or land trade routes.

The oldest is represented by *fortified sites* on dominant physical features (peaks or promontories). The defences consisted of palisaded banks and ditches, in a style to be found elsewhere in antiquity (eg the Celtic *oppida*). Most of them were important economic and commercial centres, with flourishing settlements both within and outside.

The second group is that of *fortresses*. These were military complexes, invariably on hilltop sites and occupied only by garrisons. They sometimes had small extra-mural civil settlements. Many had a serious drawback, in that they lacked sources of water and so could not withstand a protracted siege.

The final category is that of *linear defences*, which blocked access from certain routes and linked two or more fortresses.

#### - *Sarmizegetusa*

There are three components of this site, the capital of Dacia, which covers an area of 17.83ha: the fortress, the sacred area, and the civilian quarter.

The Grădiştea plateau was terraced to accommodate the settlement. It is dominated by the fortress, which was the centre of secular and spiritual government. An area of little more than 1ha was enclosed by a substantial wall built in stone and timber using the technique of the *murus dacicus*. Little remains of the internal divisions, which were demolished when Sarmizegetusa was captured by the Romans.

The sacred area is situated to the east of the fortress. Access is by means of a paved path on the west and a monumental stone stairway on the east. The remains of a number of round or rectangular shrines survive in the centre of the area. The former, built of volcanic andesite with wooden columns, had central sacrificial hearths. The latter were built in andesite or limestone and had stone or wooden columns.

The civilian settlement spread over more than a hundred artificial terraces, only a handful of which have so far been excavated. The houses were both round and circular in plan, built in stone and wood. A number of craft workshops (metal working, pottery, glass, coining, etc) have been found. A Roman bath-house was found along one of the access roads to the settlement, which had three sources of water which supplied cisterns and water channels.

Included in this nominated property is the nearby Dacian settlement site of *Fetele Albe*, which was associated with the main site. It is a terraced site where excavations have revealed a number of stone-built habitations and sanctuaries. The ceramic and metal material found during the excavations was of high quality, some of it imported from the Roman Empire, testifying to the advanced cultural and economic level achieved by Dacia in the 1st centuries BC and AD.

#### - *Costeşti -Cetăţuie*

A small ellipsoidal plateau on a hill overlooking the left bank of the river Apa Oraşului was terraced to form a strong fortress. Its fortifications were laid out in three concentric bands, erected in successive stages of the fortress's life. The ramparts are constructed of stone, wood, and rammed earth, a different technique being used for each enceinte.

The strongly defended entrance was on the south. A number of towers survive: some of these were bastions, the others used as dwellings. Religious architecture is represented by four rectangular sanctuaries on limestone plinths with wooden columns. Two cisterns have also been discovered.

#### - *Costeşti -Blidaru*

Blidaru is the strongest and most spectacular of the fortresses erected to defend the capital at Sarmizegetusa. It is rectilinear in plan and is located on the levelled summit of a small hill.

There are two enclosures, covering 0.5ha. The first, on the highest point, is trapezoidal. The walls (in *murus dacicus* style) have corner bastions, through one of which access is gained to the interior, where there are the remains of a square building that would have housed the garrison.

A second enclosure was added later, extending the fortress to the entire summit of the hill. It is also rectangular in plan, and the walls were reinforced by a series of buttresses; on two of the walls these were subsequently converted into a

series of casemates, with upper storeys, probably used for storage.

- *Luncani Piatra Roşie*

This fortress consists of two fortified enclosures on the eastern slope of a rocky massif, covering 1.2ha. The earlier and smaller of the two has, which is rectangular in plan, has corner bastions, with a fifth covering the less steep approach from the east. In the interior there is an apsidal timber-framed barrack block with two rooms. To the north and outside the defences there were two buildings on the site of an earlier sanctuary.

The second enceinte dates from the late 1st century AD. Its defences were constructed of crushed stone and rammed earth and enclose a much larger area. There are two large semi-circular bastions at the corners and three others outside the enceinte.

- *Băniţa*

This fortress was constructed on a steep conical hill in the Jiu valley. The only side on which the summit was accessible was on the north, and this was defended by a strong stone wall in *murus dacicus* style. The fortress itself was entered through a gate leading to a monumental limestone stairway with andesite balustrades.

The plateau above has three terraces at different levels. The second of these, in the centre of the plateau, was the site of the timber-framed military barrack. The third is trapezoidal in plan and bounded by a strong stone wall.

- *Căpâlna*

The Căpâlna fortress was constructed at the summit of a steep hill which was terraced and surrounded by ramparts following the natural contours. There is an imposing square structure built using the *murus dacicus* technique, which was occupied by the garrison; it was originally equipped with an upper storey. This is flanked by several smaller structures. Excavations have revealed traces of several timber-framed barrack buildings within the enceinte.

The defensive wall originates from the military building. It served also as the revetment for the terraces. The enceinte was entered by a fortified gateway on the south-east, close to the military building. There was originally another entrance in the north-east, but this was blocked between the construction of the fortress and the Roman conquest in AD 106.

## Management and Protection

### *Legal status*

The properties nominated for inscription form part of the Prehistoric and Historic Reserve of the Oraşie Mountains, established under the provisions of the basic heritage protection Law No 41/1994, as extended and supplemented by subsequent laws and decrees. This requires any interventions on protected sites and monuments to be submitted to the competent authorities for approval. There are two levels of protection zone around each property. No construction is allowed in the inner zones, and there is control over work in the outer zones.

### *Management*

The sites nominated for inscription are all the property of the State. Properties in the buffer zones are partly State-owned and partly private.

Overall responsibility for protected monuments is vested in the Ministry of Culture, which operates through its Directorate of Historic Monuments. This is advised by the National Commission on Historic Monuments on research survey and inventory, evaluation, restoration, conservation, and other aspects of its work.

The Directorate has inspectors with regional responsibilities, and at Department level there are professionally staffed National Cultural Heritage Offices.

The National Land Use Plan (PATN) recognizes the importance of the Dacian fortresses of the Oraşie Mountains. A plan specific to the region was approved in 1997-98. It provides for the investigation and presentation of the archaeological sites, preparation and implementation of measures to ensure their protection in socio-economic planning, re-evaluation of the legal status of the protection zones, continued scientific research, the development of regional tourism policies, greater involvement of lower-tier administrations and local populations, and better access and signage.

There are currently management plans in force for each of the properties that make up the nomination. These relate to investigation, conservation, and presentation, and also take account of potential modifications to ownership and/or land-use in the buffer zones.

Each of the sites has an inner and an outer protection zone, as prescribed in the heritage legislation. These conform adequately with the buffer zones required in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

The sites are all relatively remote and difficult of access. Only at Sarmizegetusa, Cetăţuie, and Blidaru are there permanent guardians on site; they are responsible for general maintenance work.

## Conservation and Authenticity

### *Conservation history*

There has been considerable conservation work preceded by limited archaeological excavation at *Sarmizegetusa* in recent years. In addition to consolidation and limited anastylosis on walls, new floors have been inserted in one of the large sanctuaries, drainage has been introduced, badly degraded architectural elements have been replaced by copies in modern materials, and wooden uprights have been inserted in the large limestone sanctuary in the postholes discovered during excavations.

*Căpâlna* has been the object of systematic scientific excavation, in 1965-67 and 1982-83; the results were published in a monograph in 1989. This formed the basis for a restoration programme initiated in 1998.

Campaigns at *Băniţa* in 1960-61 and at *Luncani* in 1950-52 were not followed up with restoration work, and as a result there was some damage from earth slippage. Excavation

projects in advance of restoration have recently begun at both sites.

There were extensive conservation and restoration programmes at *Blidaru* in 1981-85 and at *Cetățuie* in 1981-86, involving consolidation of walls and insertion of drainage in lower-lying parts of the site, but much remains to be done at Blidaru to prevent further degradation.

#### *Authenticity*

The fortresses were destroyed by the Romans in AD 106 and the sites were never reoccupied. As a result the authenticity of the remains is total. There has been a certain amount of modern intervention, in the form of the replacement of architectural elements that had deteriorated and the insertion of modern wooden uprights to indicate where ancient columns had decayed. However, the overall authenticity of the ensemble of sites is very high.

#### **Evaluation**

##### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited all the properties that comprise this nomination in September 1999.

##### *Qualities*

The Geto-Dacian civilization that developed outside the Greco-Roman world in the later 1st millennium BC achieved a remarkably high cultural and economic level that made its eventual conquest by the Romans inevitable at the beginning of the 2nd century AD. The strength and structure of this civilization is admirably illustrated by this series of fortresses, and in particular by the capital proto-city, Sarmizegetusa.

##### *Comparative analysis*

The only comparable Late Iron Age civilizations are those of the Celtic peoples of Central Europe and Gaul. However, none of these exhibits so well planned and executed a defensive ensemble as that of the Dacian fortresses that are the subject of this nomination.

#### **Brief description**

The Dacian fortresses are a remarkable group of Iron Age defensive works created in the 1st centuries BC and AD as protection against Roman conquest. The extensive and well preserved remains on spectacular natural sites present a dramatic picture of a vigorous and innovative Iron Age civilization.

#### **Recommendation**

That this group of properties be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii, iii, and iv*:

***Criterion ii*** The Dacian fortresses represent the fusion of techniques and concepts of military architecture from inside and outside the classical world to create a unique style.

***Criterion iii*** The Geto-Dacian kingdoms of the late 1st millennium BC attained an exceptionally high cultural

and socio-economic level, and this is symbolized by this group of fortresses.

***Criterion iv*** The hill-fort and its evolved successor, the *oppidum*, were characteristic of the Late Iron Age in Europe, and the Dacian fortresses are outstanding examples of this type of defended site.

ICOMOS, September 1999