

Digging and excavating in Sarmizegetusa Regia in the 19th and 20th century

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Until the early 19th century the ruins of Gradistea de Munte (Sarmizegetusa Regia) were a target for the treasure hunters, being virtually unknown to the academics. Only after some fabulous coin hoards were found, and after the Austrian imperial administration took over the diggings (in 1803 -1804) historians, architects and antiquities collectors became interested in the site. Some of them (e.g. M. Ackner, J.F. Neugebauer, A.Fodor) even organized excavations, researching mainly the “enigmatic buildings” found nearby the ancient ramparts, others just noticed and described the monuments that still were visible in the woods.

These 19th and early 20th century writings (already published or still kept in the archives) are important sources of archaeological data. Sometimes artifacts have been described in details (a lot of them do no longer exist), topographical surveys and plans of the ruins were recorded.

In those early times a new idea took shape: the ancient inhabitants of the area were the Dacians – the ones that ancient sources mention and that are figured also on the Trajan’s Column. In this context the ruins from Gradistea de Munte were identified for the first time as representing the “Capital of the last Dacian king – Decebalus”. The “ancient city up in the mountains” just entered into historiography and the monuments and the artifacts, no matter what - gold coins or pottery shards, turned into objects of real study.