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ANCIENT HISTORY

REDISCOVERING SUCIDAVA MOESICA: INSIGHTS FROM RECENT LANDSCAPE ARCHAEOLOGY

Abstract: Recent landscape archaeological investigations at Sucidava Moesica have reconfirmed the location of this major Lower Danube frontier site, which had been largely unknown to both scholars and the public. These investigations document its spatial organisation and long-term development from the 2nd to the late 6th century AD. The combination of remote sensing, topographic analysis, and targeted field observations allows a refined understanding of the relationships between the fortification, the associated civil settlement, and the surrounding riverine landscape. The results highlight the strategic role of local topography, hydrology, and communication routes in shaping both the military and urban layouts of the site and in ensuring its continuity from the Roman to the Early Byzantine period. This study contributes new data to the understanding of the Lower Danube limes in Moesia and demonstrates the value of landscape-based approaches in frontier archaeology.

Keywords: *Sucidava Moesica; Lower Danube; landscape archaeology; Roman frontier; Moesia Inferior; Moesia Secunda; recent investigations.*

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INTRODUCTION

Located on the right bank of the Lower Danube, between the major Roman centres of Durostorum and Axiopolis, Sucidava Moesica represents one of the key frontier sites of Moesia Inferior. Known primarily from ancient written sources and stray finds, the site has long remained obscure. Recent research, however, has brought Sucidava Moesica back into focus as a major settlement that played an important role in the military, administrative, and cultural landscape of the Roman and Late Antique frontier (Fig. 1).

Although the name Sucidava appears in several ancient sources, its precise location and historical evolution have long been matters of debate¹. The toponym's duality, referring to distinct sites on the Danube from both Moesia and Dacia, contributed to this ambiguity.² Only through a combination of topographic analysis, aerial photography, geophysical prospecting and targeted excavation has it become possible to securely identify the site known today as Sucidava Moesica, corresponding to the settlement near modern-day Izvoarele, Constanța county, Romania (Fig. 2-3).

¹ OPRIȘ/MATEI-POPESCU/ȚENȚEA 2024, 158-163; OPRIȘ/MATEI-POPESCU/ȚENȚEA 2025, 158-163. For details, see n. 24-25, *infra*.

² For the latest thorough approach regarding the Sucidava (Celei, Olt County) on the north bank of the Danube, in Dacia Inferior and later Dacia Ripensis, see OPRIȘ *et alii* 2022.



Fig. 1. Map of the Roman frontier of the Lower Danube, indicating Sucidava (Izvoarele, formerly Pârjoaia).

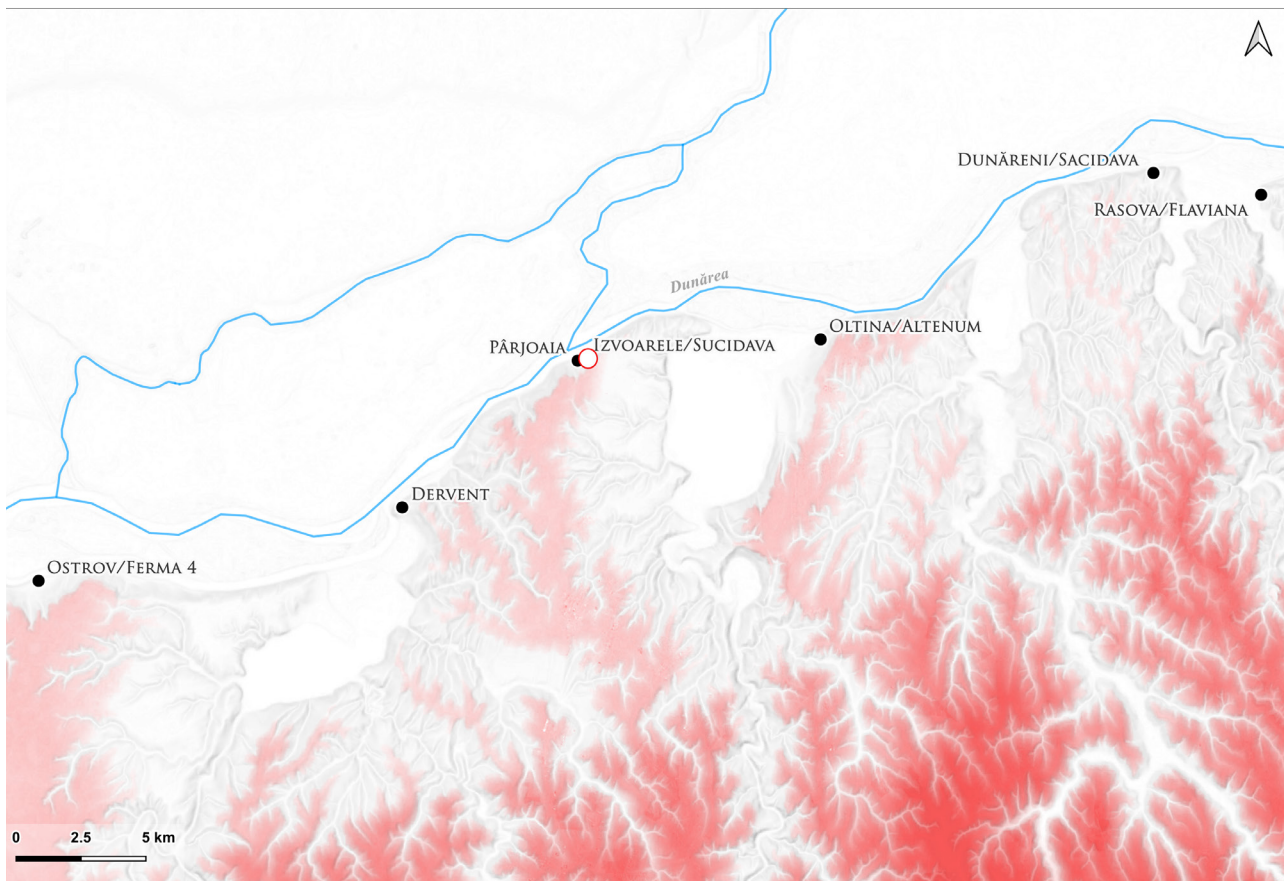


Fig. 2. Detailed map of the sites between Ostrov and Rasova.

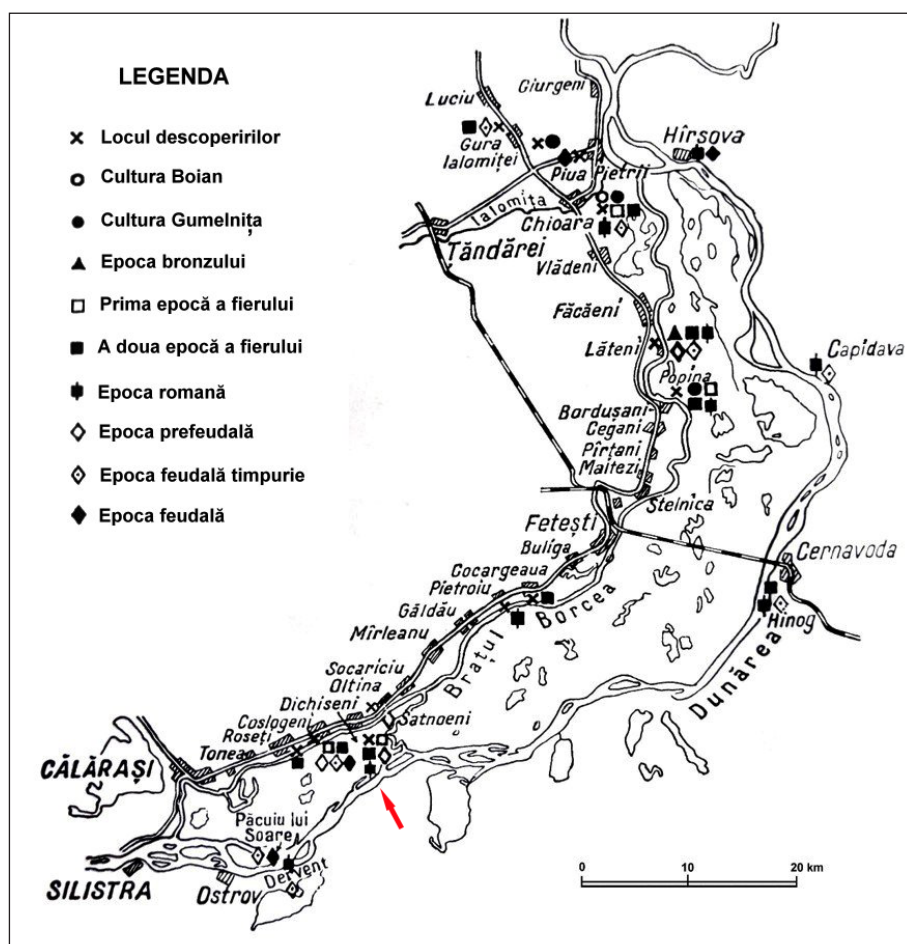


Fig. 3. Detailed map of the sites between Ostrov and Hârşova (after BARNEA 1966).

The renewed investigation at the site is part of broader research dedicated to the Lower Danube frontier system, which seeks to integrate military, civil, and environmental data into a comprehensive picture of frontier dynamics. This interdisciplinary approach—combining archaeological excavation, geophysical survey, GIS mapping, and material culture analysis—has proven crucial for reconstructing the urban layout, architectural evolution, and economic functions of Sucidava Moesica.

Preliminary results indicate that the site developed around a Roman military fort (*castellum*) possibly established in the early 2nd century AD, in connection with the general reorganisation of Lower Moesian *limes* initiated under Trajan and continued by Hadrian.³ An important civil settlement (*vicus*) must have flourished in its vicinity, benefiting from its strategic position at a crossing point of the Danube and from its role in regional trade networks. During the Late Roman and Early Byzantine periods, the site underwent significant transformation, including one *a fundamentis* reconstruction of the fortified area, the construction of new public buildings, and the adaptation of early structures to changing defensive and administrative needs.

³ One should nevertheless mention that no direct material proof of a Trajanic phase was found so far at Sucidava. Regarding the early 2nd century archaeological evidence from other sites in Dobruđa and the rest of Lower Moesian *limes*, in the context of the Dacian War efforts, see OPRIŞ 2006; OPRIŞ 2018.

significance of Sucidava Moesica as a major rediscovered settlement on the Lower Danube frontier.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The Roman site is situated within the administrative boundaries of the village Izvoarele (former Pârjoaia, commune Lipniţa, Constanţa county). During the Early Roman period, Sucidava was mentioned in the most important literary sources of the 2nd-3rd centuries AD: Claudius Ptolemaeus, in *Geographia*, III, 10.5; *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti* 224, 1. Later, it also appears on *Tabula Peutingeriana* (VIII, 3), at XVIII m.p. (i.e. more than 26.5 km) from Durostorum, under the corrupt name *Sagadava* and again, in *Notitia Dignitatum*, Or. XL, 17 (Fig. 4) or finally in *Cosmographia* by the Geographer of Ravenna (IV, 7, 16), in the 7th century. The distance between Durostorum and Sucidava, measured along the Danube line in Google Earth, is almost identical to the indications in *Tabula Peutingeriana* (about 28 km).

Archaeological finds outline that at Sucidava existed and developed one of the most important pre-urban structures in south-west Dobruđa since the Early Imperial period,⁴

⁴ References to Sucidava are vague or almost missing in the most important syntheses (VULPE 1968; BARNEA 1968; SUCEVEANU 1977; SUCEVEANU 1991; BARNEA 1991), given the fact that practically all publications tackling the site referred to stray finds, mostly collected from the bank of

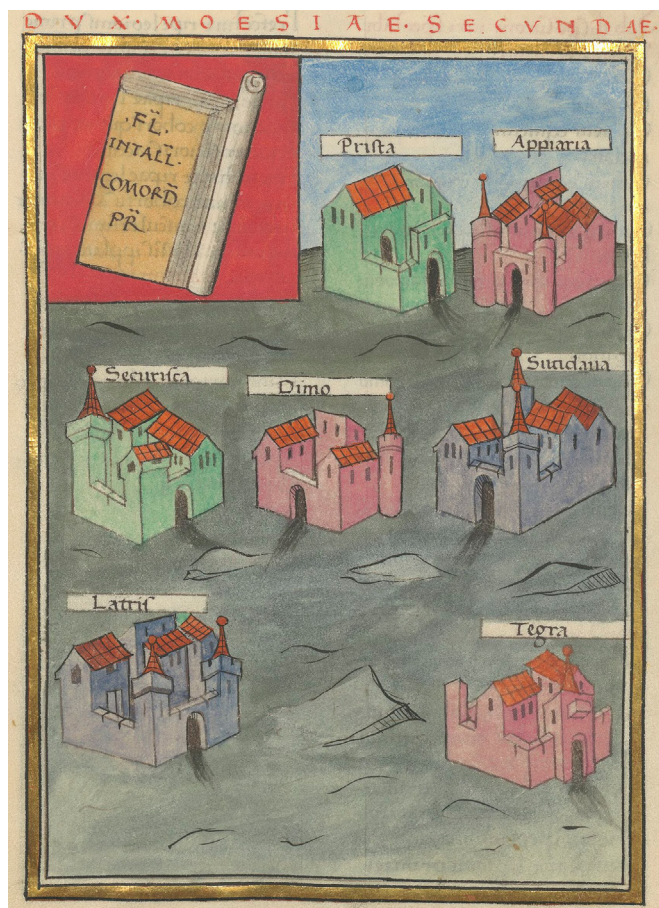


Fig. 4. *Dux Moesiae Secundae. Notitia Dignitatum Imperii romani* (Basel? cca 1436). Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. Latin 9661 (fol. 102 verso).

but its *floruit* covers the Dominate era (4th-6th centuries AD), starting already under Constantine and Licinius, as several archaeological finds suggest.⁵ A few decades earlier, the toponym appeared in an honorary inscription dedicated to emperor Aurelian at Durostorum (CIL III 12456 = ISM IV 88), which details his victorious battles *inter Carsium et Sucidavam*.⁶ We find Sykidaba (Συκιδάβα) in the 6th century AD in Procopius's of Caesarea *De aedificiis*, IV, 7.10-11, referred to as *ὀχύρωμα* (= fortified settlement) on the list of forts and fortresses restored by Justinian. The more than 150 lead seals,⁷ respectively the most numerous within the territory of Dobrudja,⁸ represent the paramount category of artefacts discovered at Sucidava. Among these, the majority is dated to the 4th century AD, some with a commercial character, being used for sealing goods, while others have Christian monograms or inscriptions.⁹ Both

the Danube. For 1st-3rd century coins found at Sucidava, see n. 37 *infra*.

⁵ See the imperial trade seals of these emperors, used to authenticate goods, at PARASCHIV-GRIGORE 2020, 68.

⁶ OPRIȘ 2021.

⁷ PARASCHIV-GRIGORE 2020, 95.

⁸ Over half of the known pieces for the entire territory of Dobrudja were discovered at Sucidava: 152 out of a total of 242 pieces.

⁹ Some of the private trade seals (137 out of a total of 190) bear inscriptions with the names of wealthy persons from cities of Asia Minor, among which Smyrna and Ephesus are distinguished. See PARASCHIV-GRIGORE 2020, 75-90, from Asia (Smyrna, Ephesus, Metropolis, Klazomenai, Sionia, Magnesia, Antandros); Lydia (Hypaipa, Dios Hieron, Tralleis); Mysia (Adramytteion and Pergamon), but also from Phrygia Pacatiana (Laodicea

their number and chronological focus in the second half of the 4th century¹⁰ led to the hypothesis that Pârjoaia fortress was one of the only two strongholds in the final section of the Lower Danube (along with Noviodunum) where the Goths were allowed to trade with the Empire, following the peace concluded between emperor Valens and Athanaric in AD 369.¹¹ A stamped brick, with the inscription *RUMORID(US)* or *RUMORID(I)*¹² is dated during the reign of the same emperor. Flavius Rumoridus, at that time military commander (*dux*) of Moesia Secunda,¹³ province of which Sucidava was part, supervised certain building activities. That piece of material evidence can be plausibly explained by the very designation of Sucidava as the sole centre of trade in the south of Dobrudja, following the peace agreements from Noviodunum. Themistius' Oration 10, 135d is the main reliable source regarding the only two emporia settled for trade between the Roman Empire and Athanaric's Goths on that occasion. The fort enjoyed great economic flourishing during the 5th century under Arcadius, Theodosius II, Marcianus and Leo I, Zeno and Anastasius, with an abundant presence of smallest bronze coinage (AE4), until the monetary reform of AD 498, at a time when many of the forts on the limes were destroyed by the Huns.¹⁴

The remains of the harbour that supported the intense commercial operations can be in the beach area, silted with alluvial deposits and which is the place of origin of the numerous materials harvested over time from field surveys.¹⁵ An extensive vertical stratigraphy can be documented in this area, in a collapsed bank (Fig. 18/a-b).

For the time being, it is impossible to specify precisely whether Sucidava was the fortified city mentioned under the name of *Σεκέδεπον* in *Notitiae Episcopatumum* (Darrouzès, Not. episc. 1 448 *Σεκέδέσπον*; 2 516 *Σεκέδεπον*, 3 730 *Σεκέδεπον*, 4 466 *Σεκέδεπον*) as an episcopal seat, subordinated to the Diocese of Marcianopolis (today Devnya, Bulgaria) until AD 536, when the rank of ecclesiastical Metropolis would be taken over by the Odessos.¹⁶ Ionuț Holubeanu leans rather towards the establishment of this new Sucidava bishopric in the period 536-586/7. If this were the case, then the episcopal see would have functioned for only half a century, until, following the Slavic-Avar invasions, the suffragan bishoprics in the destroyed and depopulated cities fell into dissolution.¹⁷ Given its strategic importance and its role as a major economic centre, demonstrated by the abundance

ad Lycum) or Pamphylia. For the whole discussion, see PARASCHIV-GRIGORE 2020, 71-94 (including a graph and a table, at p. 91).

¹⁰ CULICĂ 1976, 130.

¹¹ THOMPSON 1966, 13-14; WOLFRAM 1988, 68; HEATHER/MATTHEWS 1991, 17-18. For the Romanian literature, see BARNEA 1968, 501; BARNEA 1991, 165.

¹² The inscription refers to Flavius Rumoridus, *magister militum* under Valentinian II (384) and consul in 403, under Theodosius II. He had been *dux Moesiae Secundae* at the beginning of his career, under emperor Valens. For the stamped tile found at Sucidava, see IRIMIA 2002-2003, 164 (nr. 4), 169, 171 (Fig. 2/4), 173 (= Fig. 4/a, b); OPRIȘ 2020, 14-15 and Fig. 12/1-2; ISM IV 162.

¹³ SARNOWSKI 1985, 124-125, Abb. 6.

¹⁴ CULICĂ 1975, 222; TALMAȚCHI 1998, 27, 29.

¹⁵ MATEI 1991, 148.

¹⁶ HOLUBEANU 2017, 72, particularly 90; HOLUBEANU 2018, 155-162.

¹⁷ HOLUBEANU 2017, 107-108; HOLUBEANU 2018, 181-182, 201, 203.

of numismatic and sigillography finds, the hypothesis of a bishopric established here even earlier (between 474–484), during the reign of Emperor Zeno¹⁸ (Codex Justinianus, 1, 3, 35.2), also remains plausible, in accordance with a law that regulated the organisation of new ecclesiastical districts.

In 1984, an eucharistic hoard of 17 silver pieces was accidentally discovered in a break in the Danube riverbank; the hoard is datable to the second half of the 4th century - the first half of the 5th century AD.¹⁹ According to information provided by its local discoverers, the respective point (“Curgani”) was about 1 km downstream from the late Roman and Early Byzantine fortress, where a bank, called by the locals “Malul Roşu”, broke from the terraces of the area, moving towards the Danube river bed.²⁰ Composed of 6 spoons, 6 bowls, a strainer (sieve), a larger jug and a small oenochoe with trefoil mouth, a patera and an eucharistic box or *reliquarium*, all decorated and carrying indications of the owners or workshops where they were made (BIKT(ΩP), NAZ(APENOΣ), HC[Y]XIOY, EYCEBIOY, KΩCTANTINOY). It constitutes the most complete Early Christian eucharistic set discovered until today on the territory of Romania.

Traces of the outline of a basilica of the 5th-6th century AD, from the walls of which the locals removed the stone for their own needs, were recorded several decades ago *extra muros*, but they have never been object of systematic research. Canonically oriented (*ad orientem*), the edifice must have been a *basilica coemeterialis*. According to Petre Diaconu, who first signalled the church, it measured on the outside 25.50 m long and 11.35 wide, with a semicircular apse, a single nave and narthex.²¹ During the field surveys from the 2022 and 2023 campaigns we identified the outline of the ditches made by the locals when removing the walls. It was documented through photogrammetry (Fig. 15-16) and LiDAR (Fig. 13-14). The direct connection with the fortified area was accomplished through a (secondary) gate located on the east side.

According to the numismatic evidence, we can assume that the fort was destroyed around 586/587, during the great Avar-Slav invasions.²² The last known coins at Sucidava are issues by Mauricius Tiberius (582-583), following the devastating attack of 586/87, when Tropaeum Traiani and Zaldapa, Durostorum, Abritus and Marcianopolis were brought to a complete end or close to that.²³

TOPOGRAPHIC DATA

Pamfil Polonic recorded in his notes that immediately to the west of Pârjoaia village, on the slope of the hill near the road, the remains of a Roman earthen fortress, square, with

ditches and double ramparts, were visible. Further, 2.5 km east of the village of the same name, he noted the location of the ancient *Sagadava*,²⁴ on the left side of Pârjoaia Valley. Subsequently, it was almost unanimously identified as *Sucidava*.²⁵ It is still surrounded by dense forest, as in the time of Pamfil Polonic, at the end of the 19th century. The locals gave this point the name “Cale Gherghi” or “Valea cu Tei”.²⁶ Buildings made of stone masonry were reported in the surroundings of Pârjoaia (Izvoarele) fort in the description sent by Pamfil Polonic (Fig. 5). The water supply was ensured by the springs on the neighbouring hill (through Valea cu Tei or Valea Cuții, west of the fortification). An early map drawn up by the Military Geographic Institute (1908), and later the Firing Master Plan of the Romanian Army,²⁷ recorded the continued operation of the Caraul Fountain in modern times. The latter is now ruined but still visible in the field (Fig. 7). We identified the springs, mentioned on the map, and traces of an aqueduct, respectively ceramic tubes. Also noticed by Mihai Irimia (in the years 1980-1990, when he carried out archaeological research in the Getic *dava* from Satu Nou – Valea lui Voicu), those *tubuli* brought the water on the western side of the fort using the natural gravity.

Throughout the modern period, and even into the recent past, the area was afforested, which significantly obscured the topography and reduced the fort's location to a merely approximate indication, occasionally leading to misidentifications in the scholarly literature. Through a series of systematic field survey campaigns, combined with archival research and integrated photogrammetric and LiDAR analyses, we succeeded in securely identifying the fort, its main access road, and elements of the associated civil settlement, including a church, the port-related area, and secondary access routes. In 2022, two field survey campaigns were conducted, accompanied by drone-based photogrammetric documentation. In 2023, three additional field surveys were carried out, together with topographic measurements and LiDAR drone prospecting. These efforts were further complemented by an expansion of the methodological framework using drones equipped with multispectral sensors.

Analysis of the most recent photographic data indicates that the dimensions of the fort are significantly larger than previously recorded and should be verified through forthcoming archaeological excavations. In the spring of 2024, a new field reconnaissance was undertaken together with Marcel Colesniuc (Museum of National History and Archaeology in Constanța) to collect the necessary data for the initiation of a systematic archaeological field project.

²⁴ POLONIC 1935, 19.

²⁵ VULPE 1968, 205, 274, BARNEA 1968, 499, 501; ARICESCU 1970; BARNEA/ȘTEFAN, 1974, 17-18; SUCEVEANU 1991; BARNEA 1991; ZAHARIADE/GUDEA 1997, 77; GUDEA 2005, 441-442. Petre Diaconu's hypothesis, which considered that in the 4th century AD the fortification would have been named *Daphne*, based on the information offered by Ammianus Marcellinus (XXVII, 5, 2) remains singular and lacking further arguments, see DIACONU 1971, 311-318.

²⁶ POLONIC mss, 37-38; POLONIC 1935, 19; IRIMIA 1985, 141.

²⁷ Map “Călărășii și Ostrovul”, series XIII / column L (1908); Firing Master Plan no. 5041 for Satu Nou (dated 1929).

¹⁸ RĂDULESCU/LUNGU 1989, 2613-2614.

¹⁹ RĂDULESCU/CLIANTE 1986; RĂDULESCU/LUNGU 1989, 2593-2614. See recently the description of the hoard in ISM IV, 164.

²⁰ RĂDULESCU/CLIANTE 1986, 127, n. 1.

²¹ DIACONU 1963, 546-548, Fig. 1; BARNEA 1977, 161, Fig. 55/1.

²² CULICĂ 1975, 216; MADGEARU 2006, 153; MADGEARU 2010, 146-148, 150; MADGEARU 2024, 309-314; CUSTUREA 2019, 16.

²³ CULICĂ 1972, 268; CUSTUREA 2012, 624; CUSTUREA 2019, 33; MADGEARU 2024, 309.

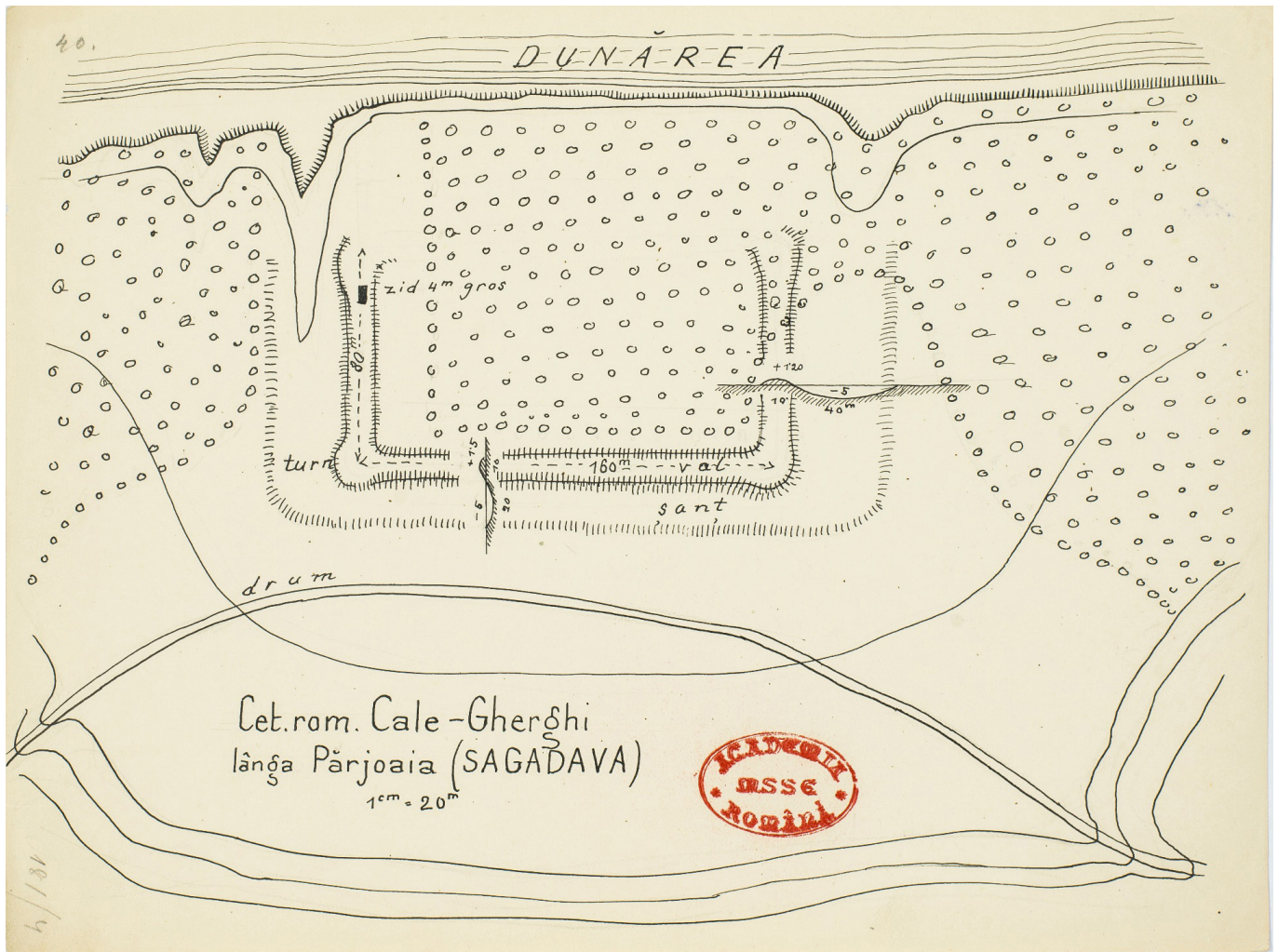


Fig. 5. Layout plan of the Roman fort Cale-Gherghi, after Pamfil Polonic (Biblioteca Academiei Române. Map Pamfil Polonic Varia I, drawing 181).

DESCRIPTION

The site consists of a rectangular stone-built fortification, naturally delimited to the west and east by two deep valleys opening towards the Danube. The fort occupies a strategic position on a high terrace, where erosion channels and torrent-cut ditches accentuate the natural defensibility of the terrain, located shortly upstream of the river's bifurcation, where one branch diverges towards the Bărăgan Plain (Fig. 6-7). Analysis of satellite imagery indicates clear line-of-sight (co-visibility) to the southwest, towards Durostorum, situated approximately 23 km away in a straight line, with no intervening higher landforms obstructing visibility. Moreover, next to the Sucidava, slightly downstream, there is still today a meandering arm (Riul, Răul/ Bala),²⁸ which connects with the Borcea arm and the shore of the Romanian Plain. In the marshland area between the Borcea and the old Danube, the prehistoric Grădiștea Coslogeni developed on an erosion remnant; one should note that the latter site shows traces from the Neolithic, the Bronze Age, the First and Second Iron Ages, and the Migration Period (4th-5th centuries), finally from the early medieval era and even more

recent.²⁹ A field survey conducted in November 1957 by Ion Barnea revealed along the connecting arm, near Dichiseni, several traces from the first and second Iron Ages, Roman ones (4th century) and of Slavic burials (Fig. 3).³⁰ Hellenistic amphorae brought from Thasos (3rd century BC) and Sinope (dated in the 2nd century BC) and found in the so-called "Baltă" (floodplain between the main arms of the Danube), next to Coslogeni, outline an important degree of anthropic occupation and commercial relations of pre-Roman era. Also, several Sântana de Mureș-Chernyakhov finds and Roman shards, placed on the map during the respective field surveys or some decades later, contribute to a better image of the communities that populated the two banks and that were involved over time in important trade relations.³¹

²⁹ See The National Archaeological Repertoire (RAN), <https://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?codran=93343.02> (but other sites are also known in "Baltă", such as Măgura Trâmșani, Modelu – Grădiștea Mare, Coslogeni – Popina lui Ilie, Grădiștea Dichiseni).

³⁰ BARNEA 1966, 156-157 and Fig. 1.

³¹ For the left bank habitation model (*Ripa Gothica*) and the right one (Roman) of the Danube, in the 4th century AD, see OPRÎȘ/RAȚIU 2016 and Pl. VIII-IX. In addition to the map provided by PETRESCU 2002, see a few other points with SMC finds in the area, obtained during field surveys and incorporated in the RAN: the settlement at Unirea – at the confluence of

²⁸ See Map "Călărășii și Ostrovul", series XIII / column L (1908).



Fig. 6. Map "Călărășii și Ostrovul", series XIII / column L (1908).



Fig. 7. Firing Master Plan no. 5041 for Satu Nou (dated 1929).

There is little doubt that Sucidava controlled one of the most significant Danube fords downstream of Durostorum, facilitating a direct connection with the Bărăgan Plain. From the high terrace above Sucidava, the Bărăgan (or Wallachian) Plain is visible in depth, over a long distance (up to 30 km).³²

On the Danube's bank, between the Late Roman and Roman-Byzantine Sucidava and the Turkish border fortress Boba Paşa,³³ also visited by Pamfil Polonic (Fig. 5; 8), Hallstatian traces (2 horizons) were discovered and, more importantly, a pre-Roman Getic *dava*, dated in the 3rd century BC - 1st century AD (Satu Nou, Valea lui Voicu). It was researched from the late 1980s until 2003 by Mihai Irimia, along with Nicolae Conovici, Cătălin Dobrinescu and Anca Ganciu.³⁴ Its continuous development from as early as the 3rd century BC is archaeologically attested by numerous stamped Hellenistic amphorae originating from Sinope, Rhodes, Heraclea Pontica, Chersonesus, and Thasos. The Acropolis was protected by a stone fortification wall reinforced by an external moat, while the triangular area outside the enceinte— with its apex oriented towards the Danube—was delimited to the south by an earthen rampart and an accompanying ditch. This geomorphological unit measures approximately 300 m in length and up to 100 m in width. The promontory, heavily affected by fluvial erosion along the riverfront, comprises two gently sloping terraces separated by a vertical difference of roughly 6 m.

The western side of the Roman fort at Sucidava measures approximately 80 m in length and terminates in a deep ravine. A comparable stretch, also around 80 m long, is preserved on the eastern side, where it is fronted by a defensive trench approximately 5 m deep. The defensive system is best preserved along the southern side, which extends for roughly 160 m; in this sector, the location of a main gate can be clearly identified. The entire northern

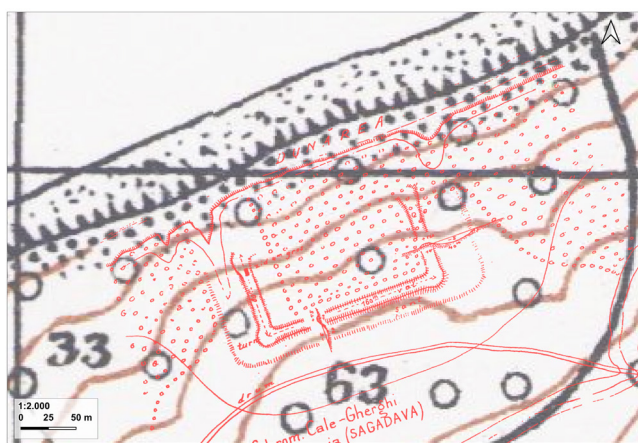


Fig. 8. Pamfil Polonic's layout plan superimposed on the map of the Firing Master Plan no. 5041 for Satu Nou (dated 1929).

the Rău branch with <https://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?codran=94660.04><https://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?codran=93842.17> the Borcea (<https://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?codran=94660.04>); at Iezeru - Lutărie (<https://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?codran=93842.17>) and Găldău Cheson (<https://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?codran=93833.01>).

³² CULICĂ 1975, 221.

³³ <https://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?codran=62510.01>

³⁴ <https://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?codran=62510.02>. See, also BUZOIANU 2007, 659-670. It is located about 2-2.5 km downstream from the Roman Sucidava.

side of the fort has been lost, having been destroyed by prolonged fluvial erosion caused by the Danube. The surrounding fortification wall was of substantial construction, exceeding 4 m in thickness, as documented on the western side.³⁵ Until after World War II (1950), one could still discern the traces of this wall made of brick and small stones bound with mortar, subsequently demolished by the locals to obtain the building material.³⁶

The numismatic discoveries from the time of Augustus, Vespasian, Trajan, Antoninus Pius, Caracalla and Severus Alexander, possibly indicative of the Roman presence at Sucidava as early as the 1st century AD.³⁷ It should be emphasised that the fort area and especially the Danube bank are extremely rich in finds, with abundant ceramics, metal objects (such as lead frames for mirrors), and above all the exceptional concentration of lead seals (commercial) mentioned above³⁸.

Stamped bricks of the legions of Moesia Inferior have been identified on the bank facing the Danube – *LEGXIPONT* and *LEGVMAC*³⁹. The XI Claudia Legion had its garrison nearby, and what draws attention in the case of the stamp is the agnomen *Pontica*, expression of its strategic responsibility, that is, the defence of the western Pontic coastline during the 3rd century.⁴⁰ The building material with the Legion V Macedonica stamp does not imply control so far upstream, but rather the mere result of a transport of building material/ presence of a construction detachment in the first half of the 2nd century, but no later than AD 168⁴¹. The situation of the auxiliary troops stationed at Sucidava in the 2nd-3rd centuries AD remains unclear. The hypothesis, according to which, in the mid-2nd century, a detachment of the *cohors I Claudia Sugamborum veterana equitata* had its garrison at Sucidava before being sent to Syria, seems unlikely, given that the COCVS stamp does not resemble those known from Montana.⁴² The situation of another auxiliary unit, *cohors II Chalcidenorum sagittariorum*, remains equally unclear, based on the stamps COHIIC-type found at Sucidava (which may have also belonged to *cohors II Gallorum*).⁴³ In the 4th and subsequent centuries, Sucidava was part of Moesia Secunda and garrisoned a cavalry unit – *cuneus equitum II stablesianorum*⁴⁴, attested in *Notitia Dignitatum*. It is one of many units of *Stablesiani*⁴⁵ listed in the *Notitia Dignitatum* (Or. XL, 17). A funerary inscription from the first half of the 4th century was dedicated to a soldier of that unit.⁴⁶

³⁵ Description of the situation in the field and dimensions in POLONIC mss, 37-38; POLONIC 1935, 19.

³⁶ CULICĂ 1975, 215.

³⁷ CULICĂ 1975, 216.

³⁸ A systematic presentation of the bibliography thematically grouped (local population, military units, port, numismatics and the possible existence of a customs *statio*, various artefacts - crosses, harness pieces, ornaments - found at Sucidava) at ELEFTERESCU 2016, 99-100 and n. 3.

³⁹ ISM IV 159-160.

⁴⁰ IRIMIA 1985, 149.

⁴¹ MATEI POPESCU 2010, 76, 135-136.

⁴² MATEI POPESCU 2010, 230.

⁴³ MATEI POPESCU 2010, 200, 208; ISM IV 161a-c.

⁴⁴ ARICESCU 1977, 114 (no. 3); BARNEA 1991, 212; ZAHARIADE/GUDEA 1977, 77 (no. 33); ISM IV 159-167.

⁴⁵ SPEIDEL 1974.

⁴⁶ BARNEA, BĂRBULESCU 2018; AÉ 2018, 1403.

INVESTIGATIONS

Following the identification of the forest-covered fortification through field survey and photogrammetric methods (Fig. 9-12), a detailed LiDAR survey was carried out, enabling the recognition of constructional details of the fortification, the main access road, elements of the associated civilian settlement, and additional anthropogenic features (Fig. 13-17). To delineate the limits of the civilian settlement and the necropolis situated on the upper terrace—areas currently under agricultural use—further investigations were undertaken using a drone equipped with multispectral and RGB sensors, specifically suited for high-resolution monitoring and rapid assessment of cultivated land (Fig. 19-20).

The fortification is positioned between two ravines oriented perpendicular to the Danube. The northern side appears to have been destroyed due to the continuous river erosion process, although the north-western corner may have survived. Elevation values are significantly higher along the western side, particularly in the south-western sector (Fig. 13-17).

The perimeter of the fortification is discernible through the alignment of wall remains exposed by local stone extraction activities, during which both facings and the *emplecton* were removed for construction material (Fig. 15-17; 21).⁴⁷ The area enclosed by strong walls measures about 2.85 ha and was divided in two different parts – upper and lower city. The southern side is clearly defined by right angles formed with the western and eastern sides and measures more than 150 m in length. Approximately one third of the distance from the south-western tower, a discontinuity of about 20 m is visible, corresponding to a major gate. Irregular depressions flanking this opening likely mark the locations where the gate towers were systematically dismantled. The south-western corner displays a slightly rounded plan, possibly indicating the presence of foundation remains from a rounded corner tower, in contrast to the south-eastern corner, where rectangular outlines may reflect extensive interventions associated with the removal of the curtain wall and corner tower.

The western and eastern sides originate at right angles from the southern curtain wall, extending for approximately 50 m before adjusting their trajectory to the natural morphology of the terrain; in general terms, both sides trend northwards, towards the Danube. The western side, over 200 m long, defines the edge of the fortification along a very steep slope with a marked elevation difference (Fig. 13-17; 21).

The eastern side follows a more regular course, extending for over 175 m. After an initial segment perpendicular to the southern wall, the curtain continues along its longest stretch on an oblique north–north-east axis, closely following the

margins of the terrace. These two segments are separated by a gate. At least two circular features are visible along this side, suggesting the presence of multiple towers. Based on the configuration of the terrain, the gate associated with the eastern side can be tentatively located approximately 50 m north of the south-eastern corner of the fortification. The access route leading to this gate appears to penetrate c. 50 m into the interior of the fortification and most likely overlies one of the principal internal streets; externally, it takes the form of a ramp curving southwards along the enclosure. This gate provided access to the *extra muros* church and its surrounding funerary area, as well as to other possible habitation structures situated on the plateau east of the fortification.

The western curtain wall initially runs perpendicular to the southern side for a length of c. 50 m, after which it turns inward for approximately 80 m. From this point, it follows a straight alignment defined by an obtuse angle, oriented towards the Danube, where it terminates in a tower. The northern side of the fortification appears to have been partially destroyed by landslides affecting the lower terrace.

Within the fortification, particularly in the higher southern sector, rectilinear linear traces are discernible, likely corresponding to the remains of abandoned buildings or street alignments. Similar features are observable near the eastern curtain wall and within the northern interior area. Nevertheless, given the current limits of the available data, more detailed planimetric reconstructions cannot yet be proposed.

In the northern third of the fortification, a modest rampart following an irregular course can be observed. A central interruption along its river-facing edge may indicate the presence of an access ramp leading towards a *statio* of the fleet, corresponding to a local river installation (wharf) associated with the *classis* during both the Early Imperial and Late Roman periods (Fig. 15-16; 21).

Approximately 70–80 m east of the midpoint of the eastern curtain wall, the negative imprints of walls removed along the outline of the extra-mural church reported by Petre Diaconu were identified.⁴⁸ According to our measurements, the external dimensions of the structure are 24.80 × 12.20 m, while the apse has a radius of approximately 3.50 m (Fig. 22). Beyond this structure, little additional information is currently available regarding the organisation of the civilian settlement in the immediate vicinity of the fortress, except for a curving connecting road descending from the upper terrace towards the south-western end of the fortified area and the main gate of Sucidava. Before reaching the south-eastern corner of the fortification, this route ascends again to connect with the upper plateau and the main strategic road running along the Danube (Fig. 5; 17).

On the upper terrace, approximately 20 tumuli can be identified along the main road (Fig. 19; 23), the best-preserved examples being located on the western side.

⁴⁷ Analogous situations were documented in modern times at Gârliciu (*Cius*) (ȚENȚEA *et alii* 2019, 34-35, Fig. 8/3-4; OPRIȘ 2020, 9, Fig. 5-6); Luncavița (ȚENȚEA 2015, 272, Fig. 6a-b; ȚENȚEA 2018, 110, fig. 7c; ȚENȚEA *et alii* 2019, 55 Fig. 16/4-5), and Mahmudia (*Salsovia*) (ȚENȚEA *et alii* 2019, 63, fig. 20/2-3, 64, figs. 20/4-5).

⁴⁸ DIACONU 1963, 547, Fig. 1.



Fig. 9. U.S. satellite image. Geological Survey (USGS), Entity ID: D3C1203-300415F007_k, Acquisition date: 1972/08/08, Mission: 1203-3, KH-9 (Hexagon), <https://earthexplorer.usgs.gov>.



Fig. 10. U.S. satellite image. Geological Survey (USGS), Entity ID: DZB1210-500086L009001_a, Acquisition date: 1975/06/29, Mission: 1210-5, KH-9 (Hexagon), <https://earthexplorer.usgs.gov>.



Fig. 11. Oblique drone photo (2022), MNIR.



Fig. 12. Oblique drone photo 2022, MNIR.

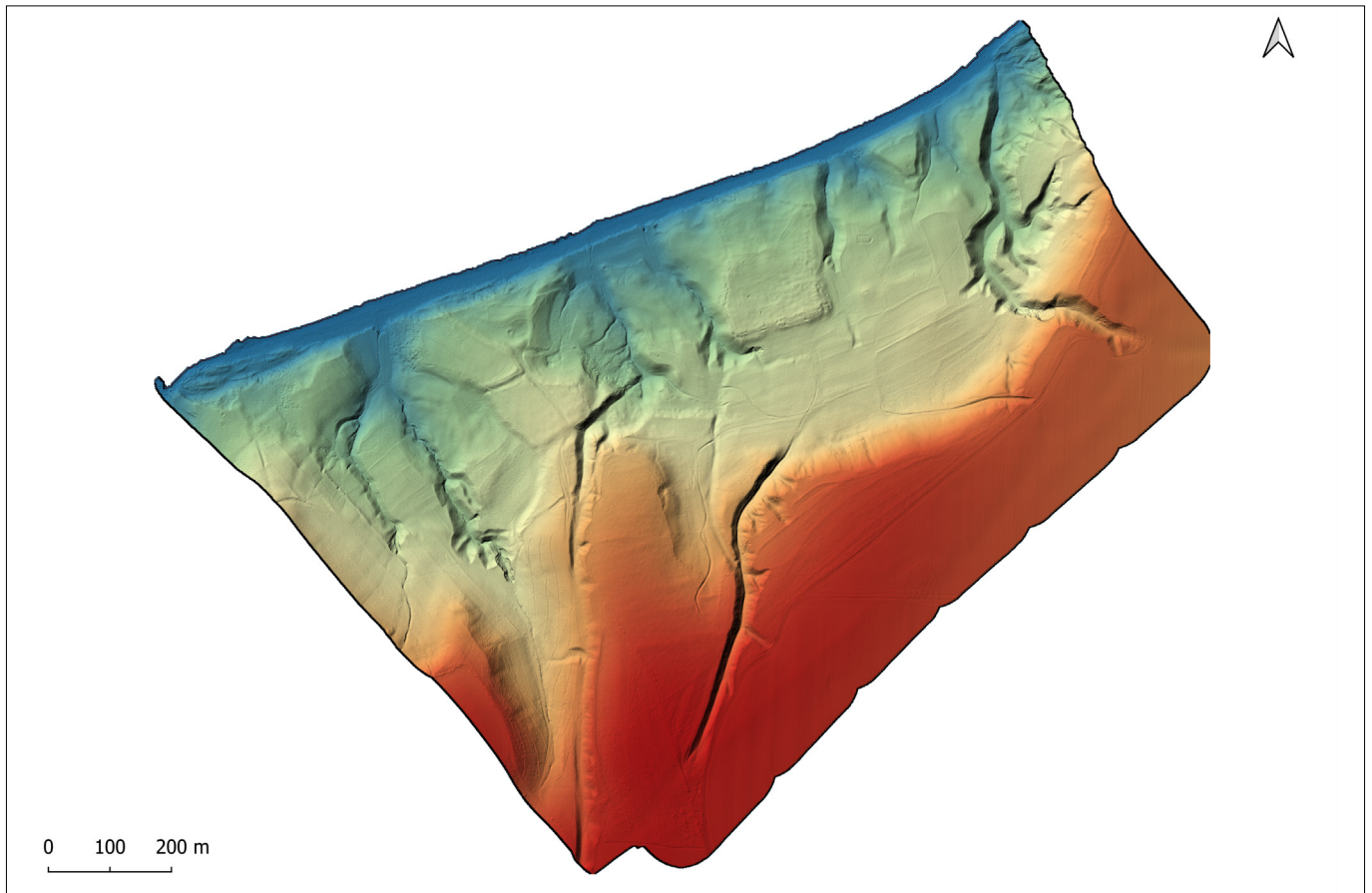


Fig. 13. Digital terrain model of the area obtained from LiDAR 2024.

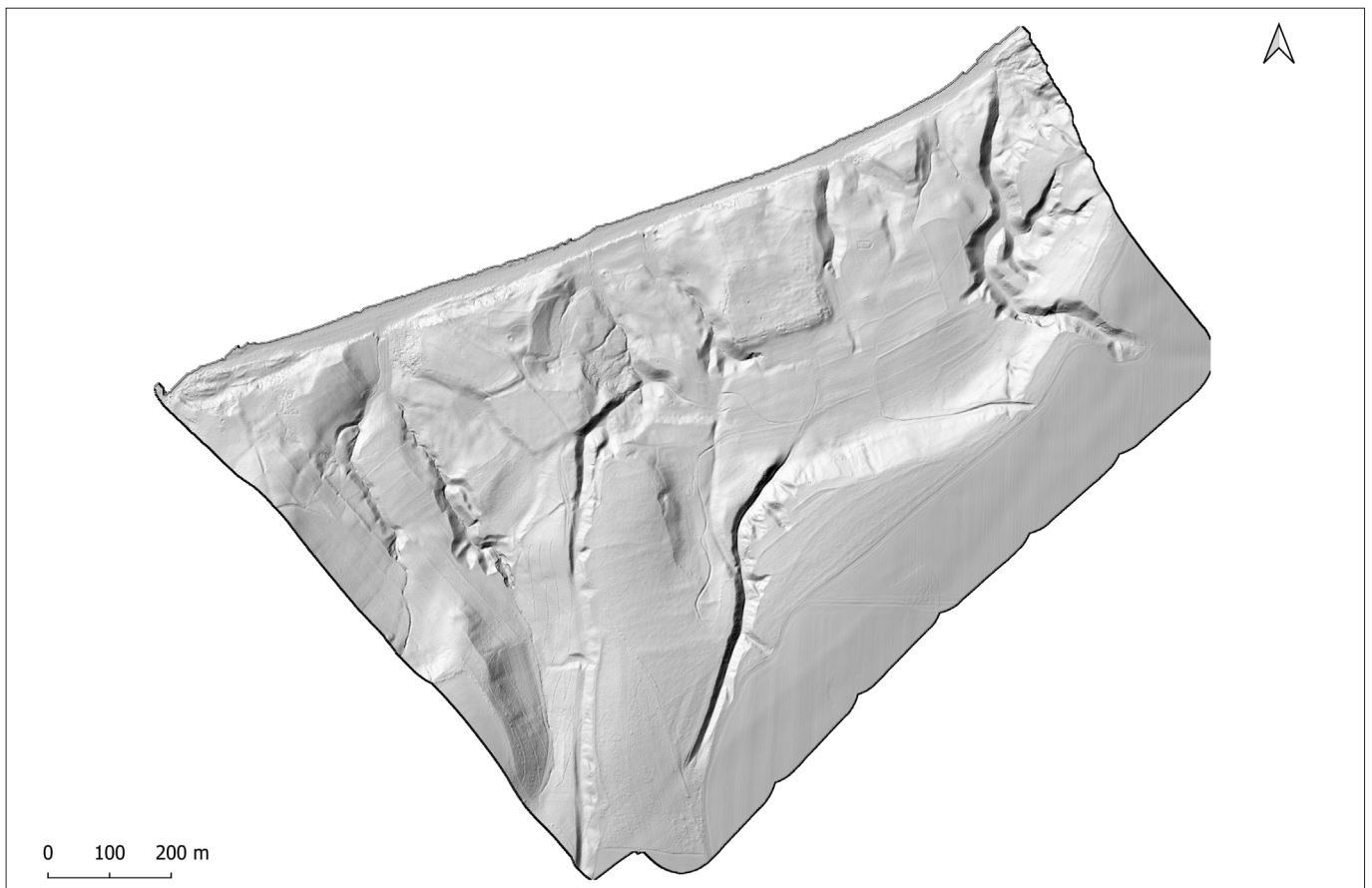


Fig. 14. Hillshade model obtained from LiDAR 2024.

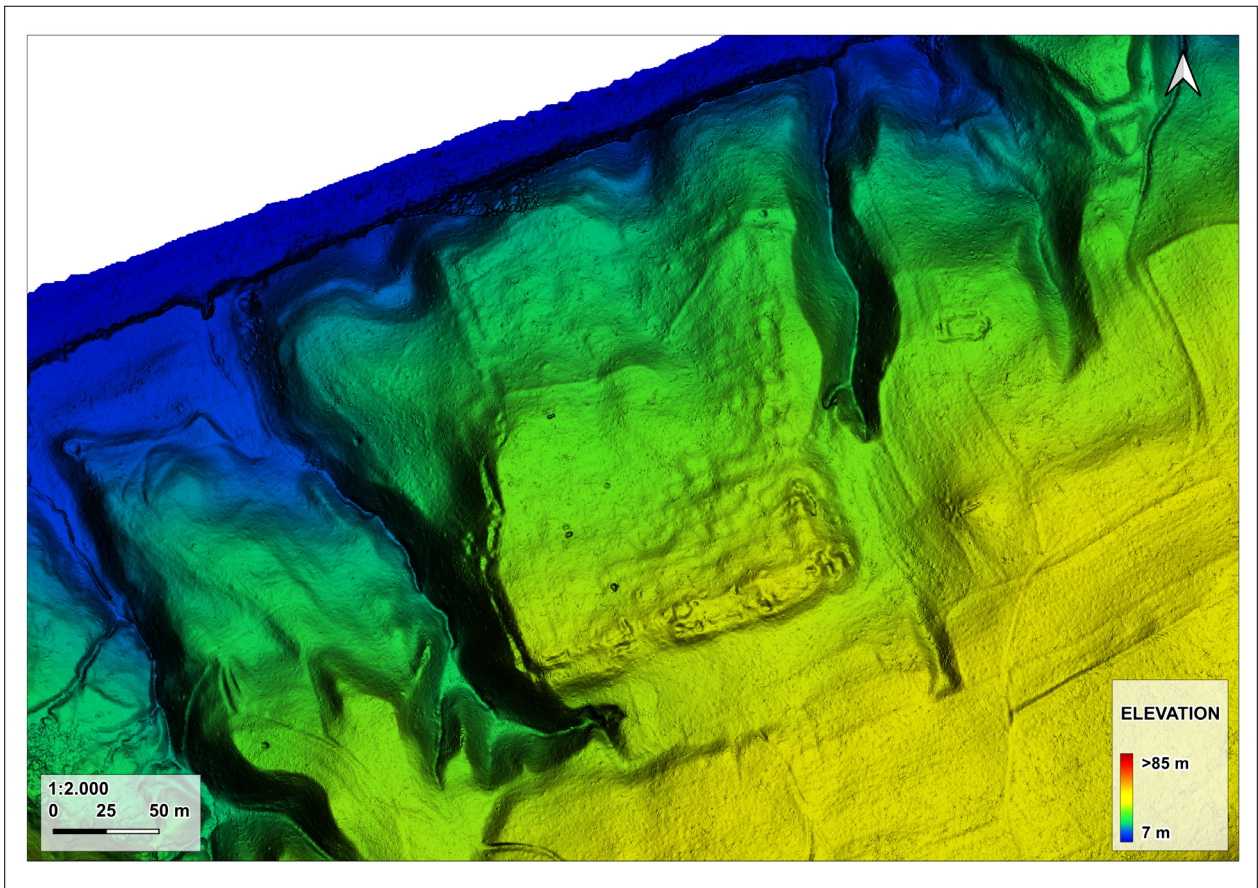


Fig. 15. Drone photogrammetry digital terrain model 2023.

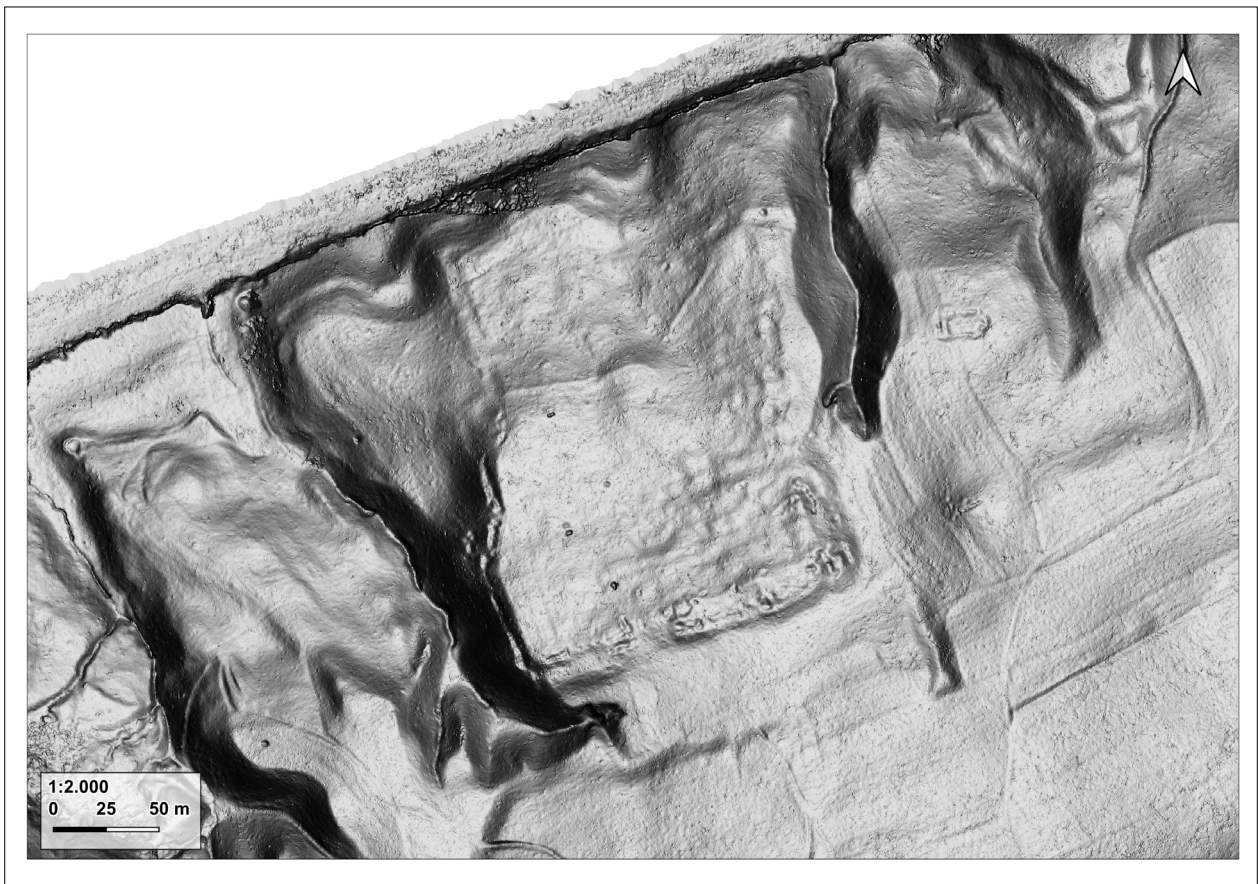


Fig. 16. Drone photogrammetry hillshade model obtained 2023.

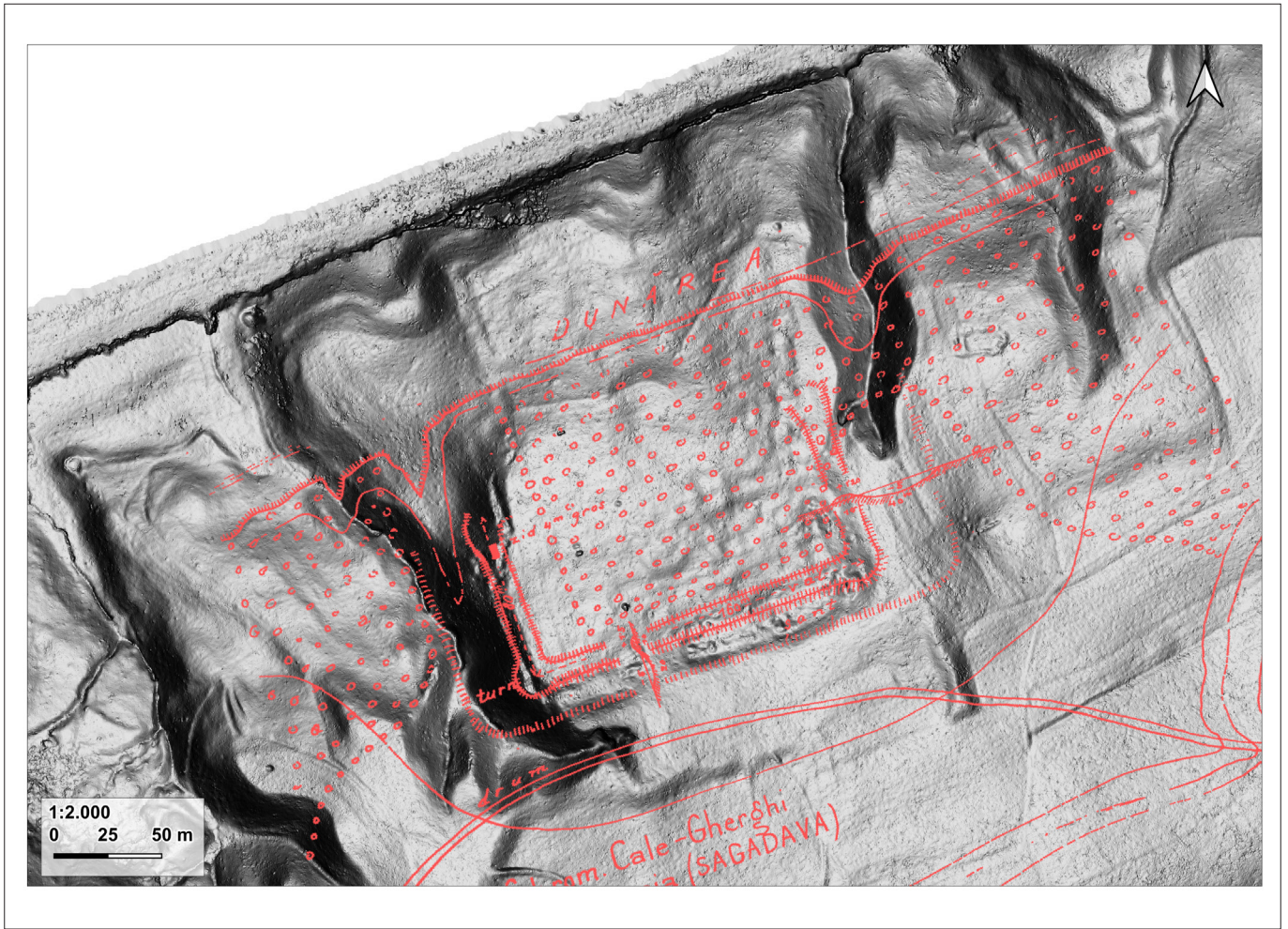


Fig. 17. Polonic’s plan superimposed on the hillshade model.



Fig. 18.a-b. Images from one of the field reconnaissance surveys (March 2, 2024).

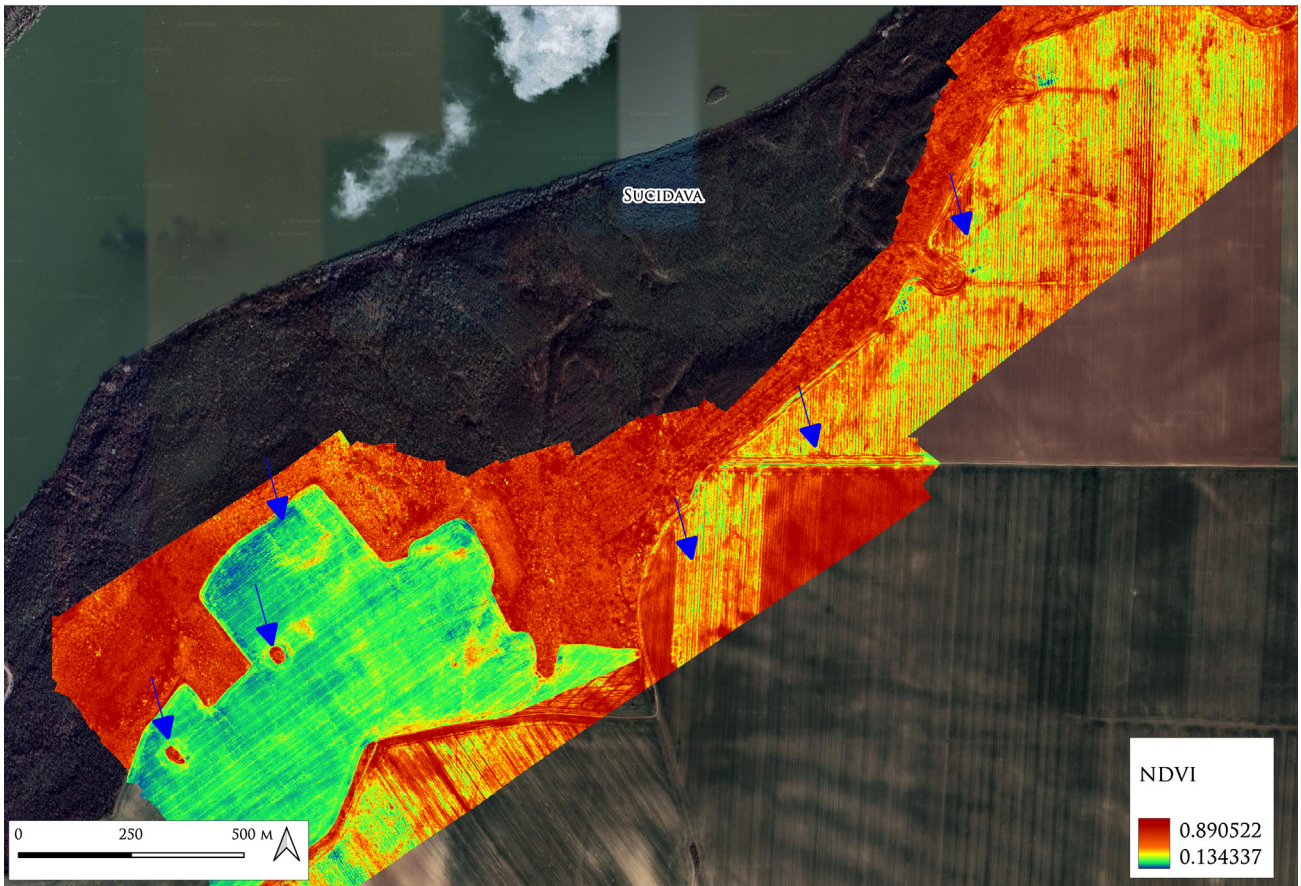


Fig. 19. Normalized Difference Vegetation Index/Multispectral Drone Camera. Southern side of Sucidava fortification 2024.

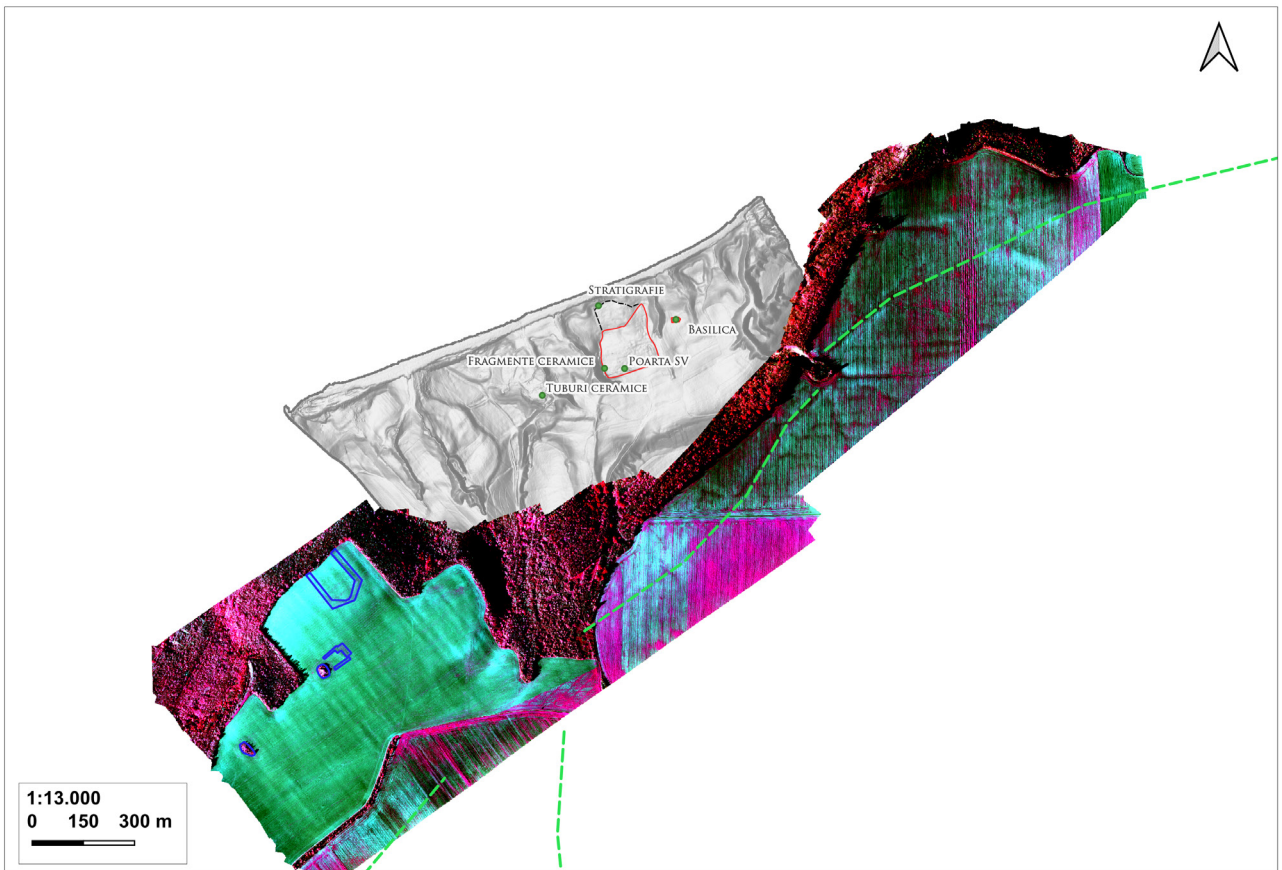


Fig. 20. Near Infrared/Multispectral Drone Camera. Southern side of Sucidava fortification 2024.

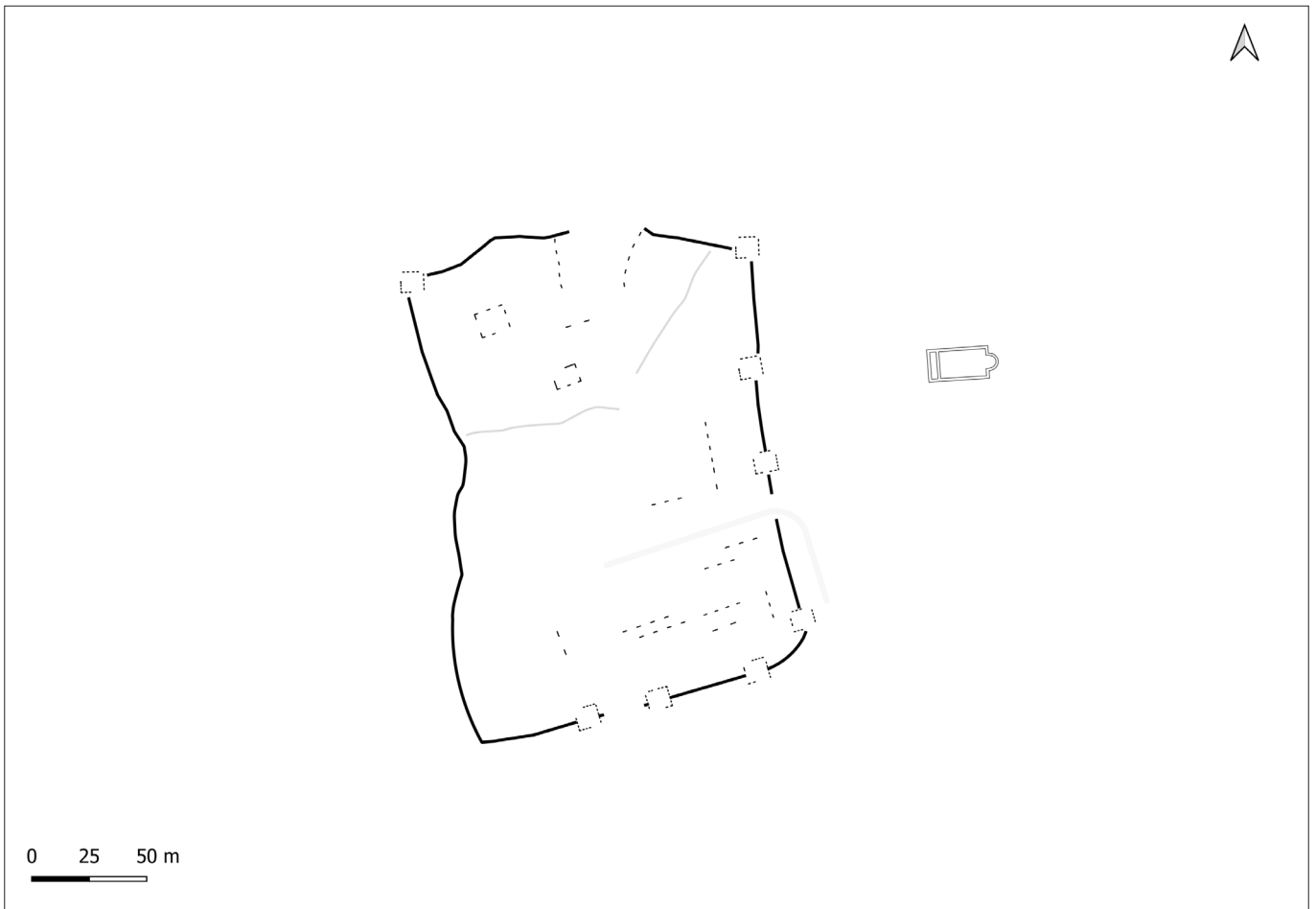


Fig. 21. The layout plan of the Sucidava fortification and the location of the Basilica on the eastern terrace.

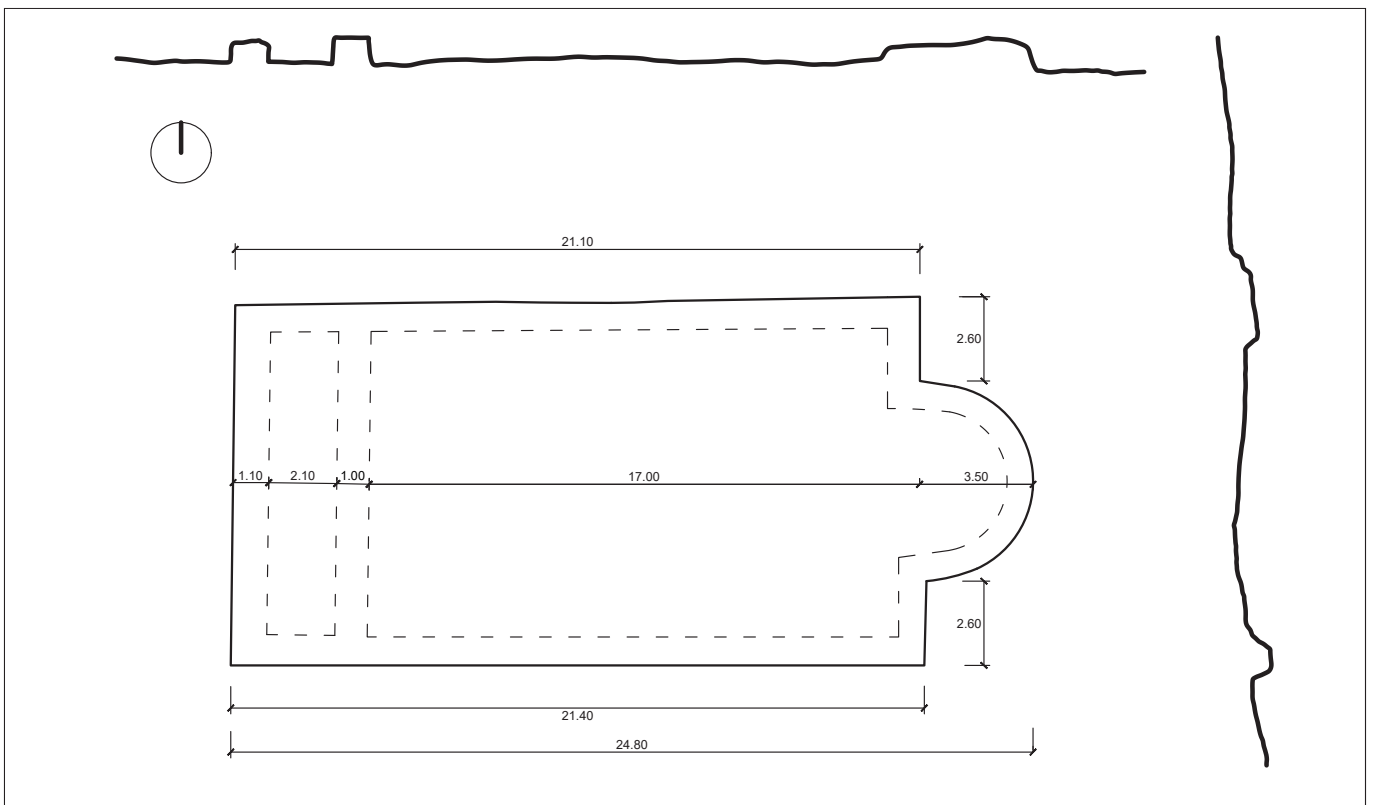


Fig. 22. The plan of the Basilica in Sucidava, on the eastern terrace (redrawn after DIACONU 1963).



Fig. 23. Integrated layout plan of the the Sucidava area.

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