# Trade, Conflict and Politics. Migrants from the North in the Upper Tisa Basin, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD

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Migrations of large groups of peoples were one of the most important factors shaping the economy of destination regions. Migration in prehistory can be identified if it led to significant changes, reflected among others by the economy of the given region. More often migrations are identified when leading to the collapse of older, well-functioning settlement structures. They could cause of the collapse of economic centres, although it is important to underline that they could also result in a period of economic development. The latter is usually related to a period of stabilisation of a centre of political power, for there is no doubt that the economic development of prehistoric communities was inextricably linked to the political success of the elites that controlled production and trade.<sup>1</sup>

In this article, an example of migration will be described that took place at the end of the Early Roman period, associated with the Przeworsk culture, which is commonly correlated with the migration of the Vandals<sup>2</sup> described by Cassius Dio in "Roman History".<sup>3</sup> This migration from the regions located to the north of the Carpathians<sup>4</sup> is confirmed both by historical sources<sup>5</sup> and archaeological material,<sup>6</sup> the latter additionally indicating the influence of newcomers on the economy of the region. In the decades before the appearance of the archaeological materials of the Przeworsk culture, the region of the Upper Tisa Basin did not play an essential role as an economic or cultural centre or at least no definitive archaeological evidence would support such a claim.<sup>7</sup>

This article aims at outlining the problem of the impact of the newcomers on the economics of the region in the context of a changing political situation. The important point raised in the paper will be the issue of the role of mutual relations between immigrants and the Roman Empire and how the changing political situation influenced trade and production in the region. The latter will be described by the example of pottery production in the Upper Tisa Basin in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

The economic importance of this region changed as a result of the migration of the above mentioned population of the Przeworsk culture. It led to a considerable growth of the demographic potential<sup>8</sup> of the region, which is indicated by a significant increase in the number of sites dated to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD.<sup>9</sup> Archaeological materials confirming the described migration come from settlements as well as from burial grounds, where they are attested in both male and female burials.<sup>10</sup>

In archaeological terms, the described migration led to a relatively rapid change, which is clearly demonstrated by the archaeological record. The typical patterns of the population inhabiting this region in the previous centuries fade, and at the same time the finds associated with the Early Roman period Przeworsk culture become more numerous.

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Moreover, during the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the material culture of the newcomers changed as well, and the cultural model typical for the Early Roman period in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century was replaced by the new one, represented among others by a new type of pottery.<sup>11</sup> The changes briefly described here led to the emergence of a new cultural situation which in archaeological terms cannot be linked to any other established cultural unit, and on the other hand the described cultural elements are not sufficient for allowing for the separation of a new archaeological unit.<sup>12</sup>

The 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD is a period of significant changes also in other regions of the Central European *Barbaricum*. What is important is the fact that in comparison with other regions neighbouring the Empire the changes that took place in the Upper Tisa region were to a greater extent caused by the migration of the large population. The Vandals took control over the new lands and changed the mutual cultural and political relations in the middle Danube borderland, resulting in the economic development of the controlled region.

One of the most important factors shaping the cultural situation in the Upper Tisa region was the intensification of various links of the newcomers with the Roman Empire. Several factors shaped the manner in which the influence of the Roman Empire affected the population living in the region of the Upper Tisza Basin. The first factor was politics. The described population, associated with the Hasdingi mentioned by Cassius Dio, was in a different situation than other neighbouring groups. According to the above mentioned historian, the Vandal warriors reached the borders of Rome with their entire households.<sup>13</sup> The need to be provided with land led to an agreement with the governor of the province of Dacia. As a result, Rome gained an unexpected supporter, on the other hand, the Vandals secured the support of the strongest possible ally in the region. It seems highly probable that, following a military alliance, also economic relations were established.

Geography was another factor influencing the importance of these relations. The Upper Tisa region, after the conquest of Dacia, was located between two Roman Provinces, on the shortest route north to the Vistula Basin and the Baltic coast (fig. 1). Traders choosing the route through Upper Tisa had an advantage in crossing the Carpathians through the lowest passes beside the Moravian Gate. It is likely that the growing importance of the routes leading through the Upper Tisa Basin was due to the change of the mutual relations between Rome and the Marcomanni and Quadi in the aftermath of the Marcomannic Wars. The routes crossing the lands controlled by the above mentioned groups may have become too dangerous, and the road through the Upper Tisa region was at least a good alternative if not a preferable option. Control over those trade routes must have been an advantageous economic element allowing for the development of interregional contacts, as well as for the development of cross-border contacts between the indigenous population inhabiting the regions north of the limes and the merchants from the Roman provinces.<sup>14</sup> This control was, as usually, possible due to political factors resulting from the events of the Marcomannic Wars.<sup>15</sup>

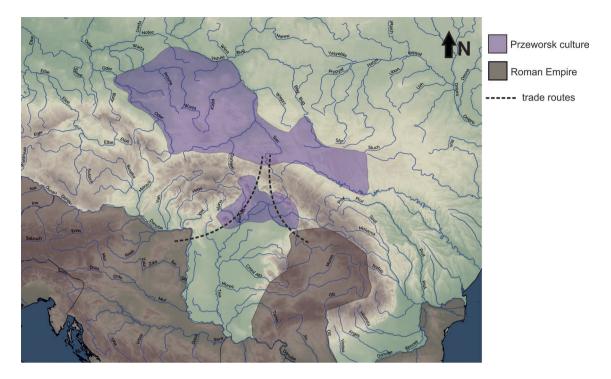


Fig. 1: Map of the Przeworsk culture with the possible trade routes at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

Those two factors, politics and geography, shaped the economic potential of the region. The evidence for short and long-distance trade can be traced in the settlements.<sup>16</sup> While there is direct evidence demonstrating short distance trade, it is difficult to demonstrate long-distance exchange. However, the numerous Roman finds from the southern part of Poland as well as the known demand for amber<sup>17</sup> or slaves<sup>18</sup> in the Roman Empire can be perceived as indirect proof for such long distance contacts.

The appearance of large quantities of Roman *denarii* on the territory controlled by the Germanic groups is another phenomenon that may have had a significant impact on the economy of the region under analysis and also other parts of Central European *Barbaricum*. The reasons for the influx of such a massive amount of coins on the far side of the limes as well as their function for the indigenous societies are still a subject of the debate.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the economic impact of such a large influx of Roman money must have been significant.

As has already mentioned above, the invaluable source for the study of the role of the Vandal migration for the shaping of the economies of this region is the "Roman History" by Cassius Dio. He describes peace conditions imposed on barbarians during both the reign of Marcus Aurelius<sup>20</sup> and his son Commodus,<sup>21</sup> among which the issue of access to trade markets was an important part.<sup>22</sup> Access to the markets continued to be part of the peace negotiations in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, as confirmed by

the much less preserved work of Dexippus,<sup>23</sup> describing the peace treaty concluded between the Vandals and Emperor Aurelian, in which, apart from military matters, also issues related to access to commercial markets were included.

In the course of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD distinct archaeological materials of the Przeworsk culture disappear in this area, although no hiatus is observed when it comes to the settlement continuity in that period.<sup>24</sup> Cross-cultural interactions, undoubtedly including trade, contributed to rapid changes observed for the material culture. The most apparent example is the production of pottery. Specialised wheel-made pottery production replaced the old ceramic tradition of the Przeworsk culture, based on the characteristic hand-made pottery. During the first two centuries AD simple forms were common, most of all bowls and pots.<sup>25</sup> The most characteristic feature of the pottery of the Early Roman period Przeworsk culture was the black, polished surfaces of the tableware. This tradition of pottery production, including vessel forms and ornamentation, started to give way to the new fashion of pottery making, approximately around the turn from the 2nd to the 3rd century, and correlates well with the described migration (fig. 2).<sup>26</sup> The new population inhabiting the Upper Tisa Basin in this period started to produce wheel-turned pottery usually with grey surfaces.

The pottery produced in this area, the vessel forms and the way of their ornamentation started to imitate the ceramics produced in the province of Dacia. This is perhaps an example of one of the most accurate imitations of Roman products in the *Barbaricum* (fig. 3). It was a process on a mass scale, which is confirmed by numerous pottery centres producing ceramics decorated with stamped ornaments.<sup>27</sup> All these pottery production centres were located on the territory which had been taken over by the Przeworsk culture population in the previous decades.<sup>28</sup> In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the copying of Roman products became more common, also outside the Tisa Basin. Recently it has been reliably demonstrated that in the *Barbaricum* not only Roman glass vessels<sup>29</sup> were copied but even coins.<sup>30</sup>

All this evidence demonstrates Rome's substantial influence on the economy of the population of the Upper Tisa Basin in the aftermath of the Marcomannic Wars. It is plausible that the development of the local production was triggered by the migration of the new population which was able to win over a land enabling for the control of the trade routes leading north towards the Vistula basin. It is essential to underline the role of the mutual relations between the Vandals and the Empire, with politics playing a critical role. Perhaps the described example of Roman policy is consistent with the *"divide et impera"* principle so commonly implemented towards neighbouring groups. It is obvious to state that always, according to this approach, there must be a group that benefits from maintaining peaceful contacts with the Romans. While it is more than plausible that mutual relations between the two sides did not remain peaceful through the whole 3<sup>rd</sup> century, it seems that during this period conflicts between the two sides were scarce and did not affect the economic stability of the Upper Tisa region. The described migration of the Przeworsk culture population may be an example demon-

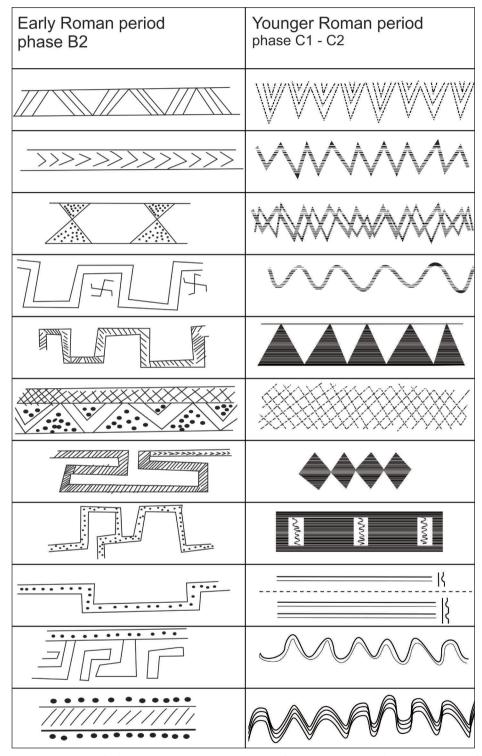


Fig. 2: Comparison of the selected ornaments of Przeworsk culture pottery from the Early Roman period (left) and the Younger Roman period (right).

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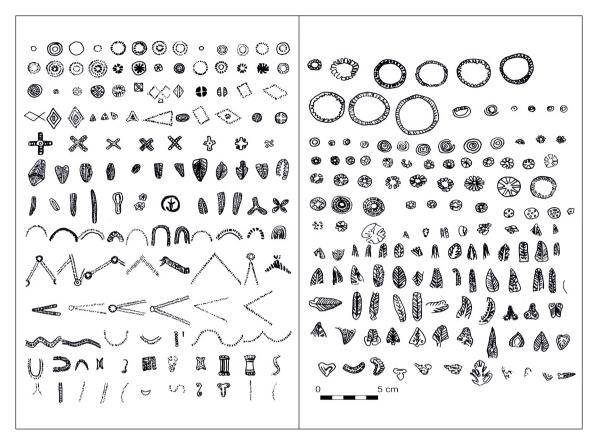


Fig. 3: Comparison of the stamp ornaments from the pottery produced in Upper Tisa Basin and in Roman Dacia.

strating how a new population can initiate a growth of the economic potential of a given region and of how the absorbance and transformation of outside influences can significantly change the original material culture of migrants. The movement of the Przeworsk culture influenced not only the migrants but also the population north of the Carpathians. Through the control of the Upper Tisa Basin, the Przeworsk culture population opened the "doors" through which, at least in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, not only goods but also technologies and perhaps even ideas came to the North.

#### Notes

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Oka – Kusimba 2008, 345; Earle 2011, 34.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Godłowski 1982, 48; Godłowski 1993, 71; Istvánovits – Kulcsár 1993, 32; Gindele 2005, 132; Prohászka 2006, 91–96; Ardeleanu 2009; Madyda-Legutko et al. 2013, 416; Istvánovits – Kulcsár 2017, 258–307.
<sup>3</sup> Dio. LXXI, 12, 1.

 $^4$  On the literary sources about the Vandals and the correlation with the Przeworsk culture s. Kolendo 2004, 11–23.

<sup>5</sup> Nagy 1993, 157–184; Ardeleanu 2009; Ardeleanu 2011, 116.

<sup>6</sup> Gindele 2010; Gindele 2013; Gašaj – Rákoš 2015; Soós 2016.

<sup>7</sup> In the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD this region was settled by a population whose material culture corresponds with Dacian cultures (Ioniță 1997), however also other elements, particularly La Téne, are traceable (Almássy 2006, 263; Ardeleanu 2011). The cultural relations changed after the Roman conquest of the later province of Dacia in the years 101–105 AD, and the fall of the power centres located there.

<sup>8</sup> For the research on estimating demography in prehistory see: Chamberlain 2006, 127.

<sup>9</sup> Kotigoroško 1995, 292 fig. 73; 330 fig. 122; Gindele 2013, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Horedt 1973, 83–89; Kotigoroško 1987; Budinsky-Krička – Lamiova-Schmiedlova 1990; Lamiova-Schmiedlova – Mačala 1991; Lamiova-Schmiedlova 1992; 75–79; Kobal 1997; Gašaj – Rákoš 2015.

<sup>11</sup> A similar change took place north of the Carpathians, where the Przeworsk culture continued to develop. However, it is important to underline that there are differences in the material culture of the Upper Tisa Basin and of the Upper Vistula Basin that resulted in many attempts to classify archaeological materials found on different sides of the Carpathians into different archaeological entities – cultures (Csallany 1966, 87 f.; Olędzki 1999a, 45–74; Olędzki 1999b; Olędzki 2007, 357–381).

<sup>12</sup> The attempts to establish a new culture in the Upper Tisa region were almost exclusively based on the analysis of pottery, and they lack in-depth analysis of the other elements of the archaeological culture.

<sup>13</sup> The fragment of "Roman History" revealing the agreement between Vandals and a Clemens, governor of Dacia, reveals a very unusual, as it seems, treaty between the Hasdingi and the Romans. According to Cassius Dio, the Vandals left their women and children under the protection of the Romans, while they themselves waged war upon the Costoboci (Dio LXXI, 12, 1).

<sup>14</sup> Nagy 1997.

<sup>15</sup> Voß – Wigg-Wolf 2017, 111. 117.

<sup>16</sup> Opreanu 2011, 126–128; Tóth 2014, 159–182; Gindele 2014, 337–343; Ardeleanu 2016, 111–129.

<sup>17</sup> Kolendo 1996, 225 f.

<sup>18</sup> Kolendo 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Bursche 1994, 472–475; Hunter 2009, 1625–1627; Dymowski – Myzgin 2014, 42–44; Voß – Wigg-Wolf 2017, 111–120.

<sup>20</sup> Dio. LXXI, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Dio. LXXII, 2, 3.

<sup>22</sup> As a conclusion by analogy, the fact that these fragments do not list the Vandals but mention other groups may be understood as indirect proof for the role of cross-border trade.

<sup>23</sup> Millar 1969, 12–29.

<sup>24</sup> Gindele 2010, 131–134; Soós 2016, 456–460.

<sup>25</sup> Liana 1970, 438–440.

<sup>26</sup> On the debate about the introduction and dating of wheel-turned pottery in the Przeworsk culture s. Rodzińska-Nowak 2011; Rodzińska-Nowak 2018

<sup>27</sup> Pastor 1961; Jurečko 1981, 169–206; Kotigoroško 1995, 135–154; Kotigoroško 1997; Gudea – Filip 1997; Gindele 2011, 434.

<sup>28</sup> While it is not certain when the production of stamped pottery in the Upper Tisa begun, it seems plausible that it happened during the first half of 3rd century (Gindele 2011, 434).

<sup>29</sup> Rau 1972, 116; Petrauskas 2018, 537.

<sup>30</sup> Horsnaes 2011, 142–148; Bursche 2013, 163; Bursche – Myzgin 2015, 249; Bursche – Myzgin 2017; Myzgin et al. 2018.

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Fig. 1: after Andrzejowski 2010 – Fig. 2: by Jan Bulas, Magdalena Okońska-Bulas – Fig. 3: left, after Kotigoroško 1995; right, after Rusu-Bolindeț 2007.

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