PROCOPIUS’ PONTES:
ONE OR TWO TRAJAN’S BRIDGES?

Abstract. – Fortification protecting the Trajan’s bridge on the Danube near modern village of Kostol was registered as Pontes by the Byzantine historian Procopius in the 6th century. The first investigators of this site M. Garasani ng and M. Vasic explained its name as plural – Bridges, considering that plural form of the fortification name is a result of the existence of another smaller bridge over the Danube branch, used to divert the river course. In addition, there are also the hypotheses that original name of the site was Inter Pontes or Ad Pontem. According to our opinion, Pontes is a late, dialectal form of the original name Pons-Bridge, so it should not be understood as a proof of the existence of another, smaller Trajan’s bridge. There are many registered analogies for similar changes of monosyllabic nouns of III declension in the Late Antique Latin in the Balkans. The other possibility is that this toponym was from the very beginning Pontes, as it sometimes in the classical Latin means bridge with many arches. In any case, there was only one bridge.

Key words. – Trajan’s bridge, Procopius, Pontes, Latin dialects, Late Antiquity.

In the spring of AD 105 Roman emperor Trajan commenced his second campaign against the Dacians, in order to eliminate permanent threat of their raids across the Danube and to expand for the first time the territory of the Empire in new, almost unknown, areas on the other side of the river, which was a natural frontier between the Romans and barbarian tribes. In contrast to the previous campaign in AD 101, when Roman legions crossed the Danube using the pontoon bridge consisting of ships, this time the expedition was long and carefully prepared. The bridge with stone piers supporting timber structure had been constructed across the river. The construction works lasted from the spring of AD 103 to the spring of AD 105, and the task was entrusted to the Syrian architect Apollodorus, the greatest architect of that time. At the same time, in order to protect the bridge, two fortifications had been built – Drobeta on the left Danube bank and Transdribeta or Pontes on the right riverbank.

During the centuries the bridge had collapsed almost completely. The remains of the bridge on the right bank consisted only of the retaining pier, portal and two approaching columns. The systematic excavations of the bridge and castellum Pontes were undertaken for the first time in 1979, under the directorship of academician Milutin Garasani ng and Dr Miloje Vasic. In their excavation report they suggested the idea about the existence of another, smaller bridge, besides the one spanning the main course of the Danube. Namely, even today could be recognized the remains (like marshy terrain) of the river branch, which started from the main coarse upstream of modern Kladovo and joined the main course downstream, near the Mala Vrbica village. This branch, by all appearances, was used to divert the main Danube course during the construction of the main bridge and, according to the assumption of M. Garasani ng and M. Vasic, this branch was spanned by a smaller bridge. They found the confirmation of their hypothesis in the very name of the fortification Pontes, assuming that it means the plural – Bridges.

The idea about two Trajan’s bridges has not been confirmed by archaeological excavations. In addition to

1 Tudor, 1974, 76.
2 About Apollodorus see ibid., 54–58; Fabricius, 1894; Fabricius, 1903; Lepper - Freer, 1988, 187–193. Reconstruction of the bridge by Gasic, 1996.
4 Ibid., 27 and 30.
already presented arguments, this idea has its foundation in one artistic testimony – Trajan’s column in Rome.

The metope CI of the Trajan’s column in Rome (Fig. 1) depicts the beginning of the second war against the Dacians in AD 105.5 This metope, partially damaged and slightly unclear, according to academician M. Garašanin and M. Vasić confirms the existence of another bridge. Here is their explanation of the relief scene on the column:

«On voit ici les soldats romains sortant du Pont dont le portail est visible à l'arrière – plan et continuant leur marche sur la terre-ferme (représentée par une sorte de palissade accompagnant la voie suivie) et sur un second pont. Ceci indiquerait donc, outre le grand pont sur le Danube, l’existence d’une autre construction du même ordre ce qui expliquerait, comme l’on déjà remarqué certains auteurs, le nom de Pontes attribué au castellum de la rive droite du fleuve.»6

Indisputably, the relief allows also such explanation. The authors think that it proves that on the right Danube bank, besides the main bridge across the river, was also another, smaller bridge, spanning the river branch.

This assumption has not been confirmed by any other artistic representation, which could be accepted as authentic with certainty. The metopes XC VIII/XC IX of the Trajan’s column (Fig. 2) depict opening i.e. inauguration of the bridge.7 If the metope CI allows the discussion about the traces of representation of another smaller bridge, in this scene it is absolutely out of question. The relief depicts the emperor accompanied by his troops, preparing to make sacrifice on the right Danube bank. The bridge and fortification Drobeta on the left bank could be seen in the background, but not another smaller bridge.

5 Cichorius, 1900, 153 sq; Lepper – Frere, 1988, 155–157, pl. 74.
7 Cichorius, 1900, 135 sq; Lepper – Frere, 1988, 148–151, pl. LXXII.
On the occasion of bridge construction and beginning of the campaign against the Dacians, Trajan in the same year (AD 105) issued the coin with Apollodorus’ bridge on reverse (Fig. 3). The structure was represented in a highly stylized manner, as a sketch, but it is clear that only one bridge is depicted.

For the confirmation of the thesis about two Trajan’s bridges M. Garašanin and M. Vasić turned to the written sources. Few antique and Byzantine writers speak about the bridge. Unfortunately, the texts that perhaps could provide more complete explanation of this theme are lost. This is first of all the work of architect Apollodorus himself about bridge construction, then Trajan’s De bello Dacico, Getica of certain physician Crito, Appian’s History of the Dacian Wars (Dacica) as well as some other texts, all irretrievably lost. However, there are mentions of the bridge in the works of few Greek authors.

The description of the bridge of the historian Dio Cassius (2nd–3rd c) is preserved in the excerpts of John Xiphilinos. Dio Cassius provides the detailed description and dimensions of the bridge, naming it the most important structure of the Trajan’s time. Already in his time only the piers of the bridge had remained.

John Tzetzes (12th c) dedicated to the emperor Trajan one complete poem in his work Chiliaides. He repeats the data about the bridge mentioned by Dio Cassius. He also quotes as his source certain proconsul Theophilos Patrikios, the prefect of Constantinople in the 4th century.

Certainly, the most interesting for our discourse is Procopius, the historian of the Justinian’s epoch. He is the only writer who quotes the name of the castellum

8 RIC II, 284, no. 569–570 (pl. X, 188).
9 Crito was a physician escorting Trajan during the campaign against the Dacians. Cf. Kind, 1922.
10 Todor, 1974, 67.
11 Dio, LXVIII.13.1; 14.1.
12 Tzetzes, Chiliaides, II, 61–94.
on the right Danube bank, in the Greek transcription, Πόντες (Pontes). Procopius in his work De aedificiis provides main data on the construction of bridge and castellum and also mentions the channel for diverting the Danube course. Talking about the channel, Procopius says that it has been made to provide the safe navigation, as the ruins of the bridge in the riverbed hindered the passage of the ships. Unfortunately, he does not say who and when constructed the channel. As all other writers, he also did not mention any other bridge.

We must mention here that in Procopius also the variant of the toponym Πότες (Potes) is recorded. Such phonetic change, that is omitting of -n in front of -t is difficult to explain. V. Besevliev in his study about the names of fortifications in Procopius only registered the name Πότες as the example of the consonant loss, but did not try to explain this change. He suggests the possibility that it was the mistake of the transcriber. It could have been the mistake of Procopius himself. It is even more probable as this form is encountered in the list of fortifications, but not in Procopius’ commentary. Namely, it is assumed that Procopius made the lists of Justinian’s fortifications on the basis of various sources, first of all geographical maps and official reports of the imperial office. It should be added that the doublets i.e. different phonetic forms for the same toponym are not rare in the work of Procopius.

There was certainly some smaller wooden bridge across the channel. It is possible that it was not mentioned in the sources, because it looked insignificant in comparison with main structure spanning the Danube. The idea about the existence of another bridge made D. Tudor, author of the most exhaustive study on Trajan’s bridge so far, to suggest the hypothesis that original name of the fortification had been Inter Pontes – Between bridges.

The only seeming indubitable, sound argument about the existence of two bridges is this last one, based on the Procopius’ description, but even M. Vasić recently became suspicious about it. He expressed the opinion that the name recorded by Procopius was corrupted and that original name of fortification was Ad Pontem – By the bridge. In order to avoid any perplexity, Vasić decided to use for the castellum the name Transdrobeta, recorded in Notitia Dignitatum, and confirmed also on the fragment of tegula with stamp unearthed at the site in 1985.

The conclusion of M. Vasić is, in our opinion, correct to some extent. The name of castellum Pontes is really the corrupt form of the original name. It was, by all appearances, simply Pons – Bridge, and not Ad Pontem. We are going to try to show that corrupt Procopius’ name Pontes is the result of elements different than those suggested by Vasić.

The Latin language in the Balkans experienced many and specific changes during the Late Antique period. Certain regularities of the language changes could be noticed on the basis of epigraphic monuments. The name Ad Pontem suggested by M. Vasić really has numerous parallels in Balkan toponyms in the Roman times. However, these toponyms mostly relate to the places for the overnight stay (mansiones) or post stations for changing horses (mutationes), located along the main roads. Such toponyms are, for instance, Ad Sextum (modern Mali Mokri Lug), Ad Sextum Miliarem (Grocka), Ad Octavum (Glogovac). These are only few of many similar names of places registered in our region.

The toponyms that include word pons are not infrequent in the Balkans. Judging by the name Pons

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13 Procopius, De aedificiis, IV,6,8–18.
14 Ibid., IV,4.
16 Ibid., 115.
17 There are different opinions today about this question. The official lists were possibly in Latin, making Procopius’ mistake more plausible. Cf. Besevliev, 1970, 74–77.
18 Tudor, 1974, 78–79.
19 Vasić, 1999, 27.
21 On this tegula see Vasić, 1997, 149–184.
23 Ibid., 16: Pons Alati, Pons Augusti, Pons Mansuetiana etc.
Mansuetiana listed in the Itinerarium Antoninianum, this word transformed from masculine gender, as it was in classical Latin, into the feminine gender.\textsuperscript{24} Some other nouns of masculine gender of III declension also suffered this change.\textsuperscript{25} In addition, there is another irregularity with word pons confirmed by many analogous examples. Namely, as Romanian philologist Mihăescu noticed, among the nouns of III declension, the change of nominative with inflected cases happens very often. This is the consequence of an intention for uniformity and simplification of the language. Hence, the nominative got the same number of syllables as the inflected cases. This particularly concerns the monosyllabic nouns as pons.\textsuperscript{26} According to this regularity in language changes it could be concluded that syllable -is was initially added to the nominative singular of the word pons, i.e. the basis of the word pont-, so the nominative became equal in the number of syllables with other cases. The form Pontis could have easily be changed into Pontes, as it is a common phonetic change.\textsuperscript{27} Consequently, the Procopius’ name of the castellum Póvteț, as transcribed form of Latin Pontes, probably was just Pons – Bridge, as Mihăescu has already concluded.

There is a possibility that toponym was Pontes from the very beginning, although only one bridge was in question. Namely, in the classical Latin there are registered two instances when name pontes was used to denote bridge with many arches. For the first time we can find this in Cicero\textsuperscript{28} and then also in Tacitus.\textsuperscript{29} In both cases there is no doubt that only one bridge was concerned.\textsuperscript{30} If this assumption is correct, this would be, as far as we know, the only toponym with word pontes preserved in this meaning.

Therefore, on the basis of careful examination of all the arguments – archaeological finds, artistic works and literary sources – speaking in favor of the thesis about two Trajan’s bridges near the fortification Pontes or Transdierna on the Danube, we think that it is not sufficiently confirmed. The name of the site Pontes, as recorded in Procopius, means indeed in classical Latin Bridges in plural. That would be the conclusive evidence that there were two bridges – one across the Danube and other across the channel. Nevertheless, we should regard Latin diachronically, as any other language, that means we should bear in mind that it developed and changed in the course of centuries. Besides, in this case it was the toponym on the limes, i.e. in the distant periphery of the Empire. There the language changes, i.e. irregularities in comparison to the normative Latin recorded by writers in the city of Rome, capital of the Empire, in the classical period had been much more radical than in the central regions of the Empire. We have already mentioned that in those, so to say «irregularities», could be noticed certain consistencies. Against that background, as we have seen, it is easy to prove on the basis of philological analysis that Pontes in the dialect of Balkan provinces in the 6\textsuperscript{th} century is not a plural, but means the same as classical Pons – Bridge. It is also possible that toponym from the very beginning was Pontes, in plural, as such form was sometimes used for the bridge with many arches.

To put it briefly, not a single one of previously suggested assumptions about the real character of the name of fortification by the Trajan’s bridge has strong philological background. The authors overlooked the historical development of the Latin language and its dialectal varieties on the Balkan frontier of the Roman Empire. Pontes, in our opinion, is simply a dialectal variant in the 6\textsuperscript{th} century, and possibly even earlier, for the classical Pons and concerns only one, well-known bridge of the architect Apollodorus, whose meager remains even today emerge from the dark waters of the Danube.

\textsuperscript{24} Itinerarium Antonini, 267.6 (ed. Miller, Roma 1964, LXI).
\textsuperscript{25} E. g. flos – flower, frons – forehead. Mihăescu, 1978, 216.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 222–223.
\textsuperscript{27} Form Pontis is supposed also by Beșeleviț, 1970, 33, 76 and 115. About changing of -i into -e cf. Mihăescu, 1978, 174–176.
\textsuperscript{28} Cicero, Epistulae ad familiares, X,23,3.
\textsuperscript{29} Tacitus, Annales, II,8 et 11.
\textsuperscript{30} We are grateful to academician Slobodan Đurasić for suggesting this possibility to us.
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ПРОКОПИЈЕВ PONTES: ЈЕДАН ИЛИ ДВА ТРАЈАНОВА МОСТА?

Године 1979. по први пут су предузета систематска искона- вања Трајановог моста на Дунаву, код данашњег Костола, као и кастела Pontes, под руководством академика Микути- на Грашанина и др Милоја Васића. У овом извештају овак вих исконања су изнели идеју о постојању још јед- ног, мањег моста, осим оног који је премошћивао главни ток Дунава и који је био дела славног архитекте Аполодора из Дамаска. Овај мост је, по његовој претпоставци, премо- шћивао рукаоџа којим је, како изгледа, скренут ток Дунава приликом градње главног моста. Потврду ове хипотезе они су видели у самом називу утврђења Pontes, за који су сматрали да означава множину – Мостови.

Идеја о постојању два Трајанова моста није потврђена археолошким налазима. Метопа СГ Трајановог стуба у Ри- му, према помало нејасна, допушта претпоставку да је на њој приказан још један мост. На метопама XCVIII и XCIX Трајановог стуба, као и на нове из 105. године представ- љен је само један мост. Ни један сачуван писани извор (Дион Касије, Прокопије, Јован Цеце) не спомиње други, мањи мост.

Историчар Јустинијанове епохи, Прокопије, је један писац који добио назив кастрала на десној обали Дунава, у грчкој транскрипцији, Потез (Pontes). У списа О градеви- њама (De aedificiis, IV,6,8–18) он даје основне податке о градњи моста и кастрала, при чему спомиње и канал којим је скренут ток Дунава. На жалост, не говори ко је и када прокопао канал. Као ни остали сачувани писци, ни он не спо- миње никакви други мост. Код Прокопије је забележена и варијанта Потез (Potes) (De aedif., IV,4). За овуку фонети- ску промену, то јест, исплања –испред – i, нема забележе- них паралела, па се може претпоставити да је у питању гре- цка претписвачка, или, пак, самог Прокопија.

Претпоставка о постојању другог моста навела је Д. Тудора, аутора до данас најпопуларније студије о Трајановом мосту, да изнесе хипотезу да је првобитни назив утврђења Интер Понтес – Између мостова. М. Васић је у скори- шће време изнео становиште да је првобитно име утврђења било Ad Pontem – Код моста.

Топоними који у себи садрже реч Pons нису речи на Балкану. Судећи по називу Pons Mansuetiana, забележеном у Itinerarium Antoniniiana (276,6), ова реч је из мушког ро- да, коме припада у класичном латинском, праше у женском роду. Ту промену је доживело још неколико именица мушког рода III делиминате. Осим овога, код речи Pons јавља се још једна неправилност, посредована са више аналогоних примера. Наиме, како је запазио руски филолог Михае- ску, код именика III делиминате долази до замене номинатив- ног и номинатив после вајања именица. Сходно томе, номинатив је добио исти број слогова као и коси падеж. Ово наручи- то важи за једнословне именине као што је реч Pons. Може се закључити, на основу ове законитости у латинским прогла- ма, да је номинатив јединке речи Pons, то јест основ речи Pontes, превидно долат слог –is, чиме се он по броју слогова изјашнише са осталим номинативима. Облик Pontes је лако могући прећи у Pontes, што је уобичајена фонетска промена. Дакле, Прокопијев назив кастрала Потез, транскрибован облик латинског Pontes, вероватно је превидно гласно, на- просто, Pons – Mост.

Постоји могућност да је топоним од самог почетка глас- но Pontes, иако је био у питању само један мост. Наиме, у класичном латинском је на два места забележен облик Pontes, као реч која означава мост са више лукова. По први пут то можемо прочитати код Цицерона (Epistulae ad familiares, X, 23,3), а затим и код Тацита (Annales, II,8 et 11). Уколико је ова претпоставка тачна, ово би било, колико нам је познато, је- дино топоним у коме је река Pontes сачувана у овом значењу.

Назив самог локалитета, Pontes, како нам је забележен код Прокопија, у класичном латинском заиста има значење множине – Мостови. То би био крушки доказ да је река о два места – једном преко самог Дунава и другом преко канала. Међутим, латински, као и сваки други језик, морамо посмат- рати дијахронски, односе, имати на уму да се он разви- јао и менео током његова. Осим тога, у овом случају ради се о топоними на линеус, дакле, на самој периферији Царства. Ту су прене у језику, то јест неправилности у односу на нормативне латинске, дакле, онај који су нам забележили писци у самом граду Риму, сепшипу империје, у класичном периоду, много драстичније него у централним областима Царства. Њих смо напоменули да се у овим условима, речено, "неправилости" могу изузети везане законитости. На основу њих, филолошком анализом се лако може доказати да Pontes у VI веку н. е. у дијалекту балканских пропиција није множина, већ значи исто што и класично Pons – Mост.

Било да прихватимо ову могућност, или ону да је Pontes, у значењу моста са више лукова, био првобитни назив, у свак- ком случају реч је о само једном, чврством Трајановом мо- сту који је био дело Аполодора из Дамаска.