

Dobri Dyal: a Late Roman fortress on the lower Danube

Andrew Graham Poulter

On August 9, A.D. 378, on the Thracian plain, north of Adrianople, the army of the eastern empire was almost annihilated, losing perhaps as many as 20,000-26,000 men, two-thirds of its total strength; in this catastrophic defeat the emperor Valens also lost his life.¹ Estimates as to the numbers of Goths who remained in Thrace vary, but the total, if we include men, women and children, may have been as many as 200,000.² The consequences for the lower Danube and, in particular, the riparian provinces of *Dacia Ripensis* (E Illyricum), *Moesia II* and *Scythia* (Thrace) remain uncertain (fig. 1). The new settlers certainly received land in the region, but attempts to determine the nature of the arrangement remain speculative. Even more problematic is the question as to what happened in the region during the first half of the 5th c., before the arrival of Attila's Huns in the 440s.

The excavations at Dobri Dyal, a hill-top fortress in the N Danubian plain, were designed to contribute to our understanding of this complex but decisive period in the history of the eastern empire.³ They form part of an Anglo-Bulgarian research initiative which commenced with the excavation of the Roman and Early Byzantine city of *Nicopolis ad Istrum* and was followed by the excavation of the Late Roman fort of Dichin, each being designed to cast new light upon the period of economic and social change (4th-7th c.) which separates the Late Roman period from the rise of Early Mediaeval Bulgaria.⁴

Dobri Dyal, a newly-identified fortress on the lower Danube

The village of Dobri Dyal lies 15 km east of Veliko Turnovo in north-central Bulgaria, c.100 km south of the Danube (fig. 1). To the southwest of the village rises a small hill, only 20 m in height but dominating the skyline and affording a clear view of the surrounding region, particularly to the north (fig. 2). Its sides are precipitous and difficult to climb, except for the S slope where the ascent, though steep, is the easiest access to the summit (fig. 3 in colour on p. 373).

1 Lenski 2002, 339. A more conservative view (Heather 1991, 147) sees losses at c.10,000-12,000. Whatever the exact number, the remnants of the army inherited by Theodosius were insufficient to defeat the Goths, despite frenzied measures to levy new recruits. I thank J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz whose advice and comments have contributed greatly to my understanding of this period.

2 Eunapius (*Hist. fr.* 42) claims that the number of Goths who crossed the Danube was as many as 200,000, but whether warriors or the total number (men, women and children) is unclear. This might be simply a rough estimate of the total number of new arrivals since it could hardly be the number of fighting men; Lenski 2002, 354-55. As to the number of Gothic warriors who faced Valens at Adrianople, a figure of 20,000 seems a reasonable guess: Heather 1991, 139, n.44.

3 My fellow director, V. Dinchev, and I worked together during two 5-week seasons (2010-11), ably assisted by I. Turov and P. Vladkova (Historical Museum of Veliko Turnovo) and with Bulgarian and British students of archaeology, supervised by the field and research staff, all of whom contributed to the results summarized here.

4 For the full reports on Nicopolis, see Poulter 1995, 1999 and 2007d. Final reports on Dichin are in preparation; the main results have been published in a comparative context, elucidating the changes which mark the end of late antiquity: Poulter 2007b, 1-50.