

## Recollections of Romania (2005) – Part 2

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The three ladies left for Bucharest early the next morning so we also did not have the opportunity to say goodbye to them. Seems like people are getting away from us as if we had the plague. Anyway, we pack our bags, eat a hearty breakfast downstairs and load the Nissan for our next leg. Hotel Victoria is in the rear view mirror as we leave Mamaia at 9AM and head into Constanta City.

Monday morning and the city is awakened. We find a gas station where we fill up with diesel and do a little currency conversion nearby. The conversion rate is somewhere between 2.8 and 2.9 leu's per \$1 USD. Back in 2003, our last visit, it was 35,500 leus (old) or 3.5 leus (new) to the \$1. This approximate 25% reduction in value makes a trip to Romania more expensive for foreigners but far more expensive for the citizens of Romania. But, we're here and just have to watch our expenditures.



Finally ... we find the road north, E60. First stop on our eco-tour is a brief visit to the **Cheia Reservation**, a limestone cave system on the way to **Tulcea** and our Danube Delta exploration. The drive, when out of Constanta, is leisurely and unhurried. The roads are reasonably good and traffic free.

By 10AM we detour off of E60 onto country roads that have seen better days. Rough and bumpy, we make our way through terrain that is somewhat flat and grassy. View is long into the horizon and the sun is hot, air is cool and the weather promising. Soon we arrive at this 'preservation zone' where the Nissan is parked and we set out on foot towards the limestone cliffs nearby. We ford a stream and climb to the base of a limestone cliff where Laurentiu points out a cave system that

we enter. Not too deep was our foray, for the cave is long, dark and prone to rock falls. We discuss the ecology and topography and after a 10-minute look around headed back to the car. Stopped to look for vipers – found none to Dolores's delight.

Leaving Cheia, we head east on semi-primitive country roads, past small hamlets that seem to eke out a living on a hardscrabble land. Unfenced, the land offers many views of local farm animals that roam at will. Eventually we reach the main road (E87) and turn north. We proceed to the town of Istria, a few miles from the Black Sea itself. We divert to a local road, drive past small salt lakes, past many stands of reed grass that grow to immense heights. Our next stop would be at **Histria**.

The **Histria** fortress was the first Greek colony on the west shore of the Black Sea and the oldest city on Romanian territory. Milesian colonists have founded it in the middle of the 7th century B.C. The city had a non-interrupted development for 1,300 years starting with the Greek period up to the Roman-Byzantine period. At the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and during the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. the fortress was destroyed by the Avar-Slavic invasions that forced its inhabitants to desert the city. The fortress was first explored in 1914 and archeological diggings have brought to daylight numerous monuments. The main gate and defense towers are to be noted together with thermal edifices, public buildings, civilian basilicas, stores, residential districts and public market places.



Exploring Histria

It is almost noon when we get to Histria. Seems like we are the only visitors to the site. We pay 250,000 leus (\$9 USD) for entry and the right to photograph and video the site. We traverse the many excavated sites including Roman baths. Nothing is restored here ... only partially excavated. No I stand corrected. Restoration is minimal only to the extent of rebuilding some foundations and small sections of walls. The rest is left as found. Many remnants of Roman and Greek life are strewn about ... pillars, relief's in limestone, columns, plaques, huge storage pots and many, many carvings in Roman and Greek script. We're amazed to find many Roman arches still intact. Layout of the fortress is at a lake's edge for defense. Laurentiu photographs the site while I videotape the

same. We spend about 90 minutes at Histria exploring all the corners. After looking at ruins for a short time everything seems to blend together so we elect to leave as soon as I said "OK, I'm thirsty for a beer".

We return to the town of **Istria** and turn north towards Tulcea, the main city in the Danube Delta region. Highway E87 is adequate for making good time. Traffic is heavy but moves along at a good clip. The countryside is still rather flat but we can discern some high peaks up ahead – the Macin Mountains of the delta. With time to spare we opt to drive to the Town of Tulcea instead of heading straight for our destination village, **Murighol** in the delta itself.

**Tulcea** is the port city for the Danube Delta, built on the ruins of the Roman fortress of **Aegisus**. Located on the right bank of the Danube, Tulcea marks the start of the division of the Danube river into three branches to form the Danube Delta, a precious biosphere area classified as third in the world in ecological importance. Tulcea is the gate of the Delta, the administrative centre of the county, a tourist place, as well. The city has 110,000 inhabitants.



On Tulcea's waterfront

We enter the town proper and it seems to be a typical country town with high rises that need repair, many small shops dotting both sides of the road and the din and hum that says, "people are living here and preoccupied with daily life".

We manage to find our way to the city center that abuts the Danube River. Finding free parking was a challenge so we drove to a hotel parking lot that appeared 'friendly' and parked. Taking solace that our Nissan was safe we decided to walk the long promenade that fronted the river.

Tall and derelict buildings scraped the sky on one side. Laundry hung from virtually every balcony (it was a Monday). Small shops at their bases were mostly deserted except for a

few that offered beer ... and they were doing a brisk business. Small watercrafts, boats and houseboats were tied to the promenade pier offering tours of the Delta. Some of the boats were pharmacies; one was a post office. Some were official government offices with official sounding placards. In all, Tulcea was not a place where one can do any eco-touring. For that we have to go to any village in the Delta. After 30 minutes and no beer break we head out of town towards Murighol. Incidentally, Murighol means "**Indigo Lake**", a Turkish name.

The road is narrow and winding, passing through a number of small villages. Cows and goats and sheep, and a few horses and donkeys, greet us along the way grazing by the roadside. Hate to see what would happen if our Nissan had a confrontation with any of these. Laurentiu maneuvers his way, at a fast clip, towards Murighol because it's getting late. We have to find our **Morena Spa** before nightfall and it's 25 miles ahead. As we enter the village we are in luck because a big sign points to Morena on the left. We turn onto an empty lot, follow a dirt road; pass a few homes that include cow pens in the front yard and see a big wooden gate up ahead. It's Morena.



Morena Spa

We enter the long driveway and are greeted by three huge dogs in their holding pen barking incessantly at our arrival. (These dogs will be let loose at night to guard the spa. Hope we do not come in late otherwise we may have to sleep in the car.) Anyway, we've arrived and survey the complex before seeking out the people responsible for checking in. Our reservations are OK and because it's out-of-season time readily available. Hear this place is popular with Romanians with money. I'll be the judge of that. We're signed in, told that credit card is acceptable and are given our room keys. Second floor for all of us ... Laurentiu in #5 and us in #7. We unload the Nissan and prepare ourselves for (hopefully) four full days and five nights of relaxation and exploration.

Morena complex is only one year old. Rooms are clean, appear comfortable and the décor is all wood. We have our own porch. View is of the adjacent homeowner and his large garden. In the distance we can see **Lacul Murighol**. Place is air-conditioned and the bathroom is orderly and functional. Yes ... there is plenty of hot water but one has to draw the water for a full five minutes before the hot water arrives. It is solar heated. Tank is 50 yards away. Hello ... no shower curtain and the shower hand wand is hanging precariously on its holder. This will be interesting ... reminds me of the apartment in Bucharest. TV is working but reception is only 2 channels – both Romanian. And this is a 5-daisy complex? Oh well, I did want to get away from the city.

After unpacking and washing up we head downstairs and walk the grounds. Tried not to irritate the guard dogs. The grounds are OK and the exterior of the complex appears classy but I'm not so sure that the price we were quoted is warranted. They have a donkey tied up ... used as a lawn mower. Name is Olgutza ... whatever that means. A huge but friendly dog ambles up to us and sniffs my shoes. Did I step into anything? Dog is named Bălan (meaning "white"), which is appropriate ... the dog has a white coat. The owner asks what we want for supper. Although supper is not included in the daily rate it is available for guests for convenience. Since we're the only guests the kitchen will cook for us exclusively. How charming (until we get the news later). In less than an hour the meal is ready and the table is set on the back porch ... tablecloth, full plate setting and a pitcher of a local wine ready for tasting. Because this is the Delta we opted for fish (Laurentiu and I) with boiled potatoes while Dolores opted for pork served with fries. Complemented with a fresh salad the supper was tasty and eagerly consumed. The wine was replenished at our request and a mellow mood descended upon us. For dessert I was offered crepes with raspberries. Doesn't get any better than this folks. I wonder what the poor people were doing right now?

After supper and with 1 hour of daylight left the three of us decide to walk the ½ mile to the village center. Trek was interesting in that finally we get a chance to look at village life up close and personal. We stroll the only street to town. It is caked with cow dung and dog poop. Have to watch where we step. Chickens and geese are everywhere. People are sitting by their front gates just staring into space or watching the passing traffic ... that in this case was us. Guess



**Murighol shopping**

few can afford TV or only 2 channels is a waste. We eventually wind up in village center, which is an oxymoron because 'center' is meaningless here. Found a 'market store' and made a few light purchases just to improve the local economy ... mainly sandwich items, soft drinks, and 'apa' (water). Oh yes ... a few extra rolls of the famous European toilet paper (a cross between cardboard and grocery bags). The walk back to the Morena was in pitch-black darkness and made for some interesting moves as we tried to avoid the mess on the road, which we smelled better than saw. In short order we were back in our complex and happily the dogs were still in their kennel. The complex had Internet access free for guests and we made use of that before crashing for the night.

No surprise here ... taking a shower in the morning was tedious and frustrating. One would think with the daily rate these clowns charge they would fix the wand holder. No ... I had to hold the shower wand in one hand and squeeze the shampoo bottle and apply the shampoo with the other hand. Can't be done graciously ... I washed the walls with the wand, the floor was flooded and the toilet paper 10 feet away was wet. Asked the owner later to fix it and he just looked at me with a grin. Dolores had less of luck. She is not ambidextrous. Have to do this four more times before we leave. Anyway, we clean up; catch Romanian news and head down for breakfast. Served on the porch again, we had an omelet, toast with honey and a single small cup of coffee, no refills here.



**Morena breakfast**

Yesterday we made arrangements for a couple of boat trips into the delta in the next two days but today we're off to explore some more medieval and Greek ruins. After breakfast we head off to the nearby town of **Mahmudia**, 5 miles away, for some diesel gas (Murighol does not have a station).

Mahmudia station is just now getting its weekly delivery of diesel and we will have to wait about an hour. So we hop in the Nissan and head into Mahmudia on the Danube to wait out the delay. Town is nondescript and decaying but active with all manner of construction and the buzz of people going about their business. We find a place on the shore of the Danube River and park. Nearby some middle age folks are washing their clothes in the river and laying them out on the nearby

concrete pads to dry. Above them a man in a business suit is washing his large carpet that is slung over a bench. He fetches buckets of water from the river, carries them up the little rise and nonchalantly scrubs down his carpet. Only in Eastern Europe are sights like this common. I walk to a nearby 3\*\*\* hotel on the riverbank and observe that it is vacant. It's end of season in the delta. One thing that I notice ... people are selling and buying watermelons everywhere. By the roadside ... on street corners ... on makeshift stands ... in front of their homes ... everywhere. Either it's a seasonal commodity and is becoming a glut on the market or the Romanians truly love this fruit.



Romanian ingenuity

The time passes and we return to the gas station and the diesel still has not been transferred. We will have to wait. While we wait we observe typical Romanian inefficiency. The tanker maneuvers to the back of the station and manages to line up with the underground holding tanks ... separated by a picket fence. A fellow climbs to the top of the tanker, opens up every hatch do the compartmentalized tank and inserts a long stick and smells the contents. The driver does not know which compartment holds diesel and which regular gas. Finally he concludes where the diesel is located. Next they have to remove 4 or 5 pickets from the adjoining picket fence so that the short delivery hose may reach the underground tank. Now there is a problem ... the delivery hose is larger in diameter

than the underground tank's filling adapter. They spend the next 15 minutes looking around the gas station for something to connect the oversize delivery hose to the smaller filling adapter. They manage to find something and, with great effort and struggle, manage to adapt the two. They're ready to transfer the fuel ... but another problem arises. There is no grounding wire between the tanker and the tank to be filled. That is a MUST ... otherwise a spark or static could create a blast that would send us all to our maker. Another 15 minutes to find a suitable piece of wire. When all is done we waited nearly 2 hours before we could fill up our Nissan and be on our way. Does this sound like a repeat of Mexico?

We fill up ... 800,000 leu (\$29) for 24 liters (6 gal.) or \$4.80/gal. We're ready to leave and the Nissan refuses to start ... I guess it was tired of waiting. Laurentiu reaches into his tool bag, whips out a screwdriver, open the hood, reaches in and shorts the starter ... and the Nissan jumps to life. I suppose this is a frequent occurrence and he knows how to solve the problem. Finally we're on our way having wasted precious time with a goofy fill up. We head back to **Murighol**, shoot through the town, find the road south and try to make up for lost time. We pass little hamlets like **Piopol**, **Colina**, **Valea Nucarilor**, **Agighol** and **Sarachioi** over roads that have been ignored for decades. Deeply rutted and requiring carefully looking ahead we sway from one edge of the road to the other trying to avoid these ruts which are axle deep and capable of dislodging hubcaps (which we did not have). We miss a turn, wind up on the main highway and have to backtrack to the village of Enisala that is our first destination.



Enisala Fortress

**Cetatae Enisala** (often referred to as **Heracleea**) is a 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century medieval fortress sitting high on a hill overlooking **Lake Razim** and a vast field of reed grass and water channels. Village of **Enisala** is a mile away. We take a gravel road through cornfields that eventually opens up on a rocky plateau with majestic views in all directions. In front of us is the fortress ... high and imposing.

We park as close as possible to the fortress but still hundreds of yards away. There are other visitors but they are leaving as we arrive. The place is all to ourselves. Cameras in hand we start to clamber up the steep and rocky grade to the fortress before we realize there is a gravel road we could take to the fortress. We alter our path and within 10 minutes are at the

base of the monument. Our work was only beginning ... now you had to become a mountain goat to scamper up a rough rocky boulder field to the fortress itself. The day was hot and humid and sweat was pouring from our heads as we finally managed to clear all obstacles and set foot at the top.

Exhausted ... we were greeted by the lone caretaker responsible for overseeing this monument. There was no fee to enter the ruins because the ruins were "as is" and undergoing some sort of a remedial restoration to the lone defense tower still standing. This fortress was essentially the lone tower with a perimeter wall enclosing a large courtyard. That's it ... there was nothing else to see. Except ... the majestic views from atop this hill. As far as the eye could see, and one could see for miles in all directions (unobstructed 360 degrees), the Romanian countryside ... its lakes, reed beds, grazing herds of cows and goats and the many small villages dotting the landscape ... opened up before us as a feast for the eyes. The dreaded exhausting climb up was rewarded by views "to die for". The blue of the lakes coupled with the lush greenery of the reed beds was reason enough to concentrate on filming as much as possible. We lingered some then walked to other vantage points atop the ruins. The sweeping countryside made us feel like eagles soaring above the plains for we were that high. But caution had to prevail because on some vantage points the fortress was situated on sheer cliffs with a long, long fall to the bottom.

Spending an hour atop **Cetatae Enisala** was enough to satisfy our sense of adventure and it was time to leave. Getting down from atop the fortress was as punishing as getting up. This is no place to twist an ankle or slip. We managed to work our way back to the Nissan and, with one last glance at the fortress, boogie on down to the main road and head farther south.



We thought we could make good time but the road held a big surprise for us ... it was so badly rutted and deteriorated that all we could manage was 5mph in most cases. We dubbed it "the road to hell". Between Enisala fortress and the village of **Sălcioara**, a distance of 7 miles, it took over 35 minutes to travel that short distance. Our Nissan danced all over the road ... tires grinding the loose asphalt ... shock absorbers begging for relief ... and our butts and seat belts getting the ride of a lifetime. We learned from Laurentiu why the road was so badly damaged: the nearby US military base (I believe since closed). No wonder some cars had to stop and recover parts that were jarred off their vehicles. But we survived this experience and soon made our way to the village of **Jurilovca**.

**Jurilovca** is a small fishing village on the shore of **Lake Golovița** (Go-lo-vitz) that was established in the 18th century and is inhabited by **Lipovani**. We are here to visit **Capul Dolosman**, to the east, where there are ruins of a Greek citadel, probably **Arganum** (Orgame), the oldest ancient habitation on Romanian territory, mentioned for the first time by **Hecateus** from **Milet** (6th -5th centuries BC). Nearby **Lake Razim** is popular for bird watching, especially in November when thousands of Red-Breasted Geese arrive from the Arctic.



To find **Capul Dolosman** we take some back roads through Jurilovca, drive through two trash dumps (not a pretty picture) consisting primarily of plastic garbage, over terrain best suited for horses, by multiple reed beds hugging the estuaries and eventually winding up dead-ended at Lake Razim, a distance of perhaps two miles.

We park the Nissan and, for a change, just stand there and admire the quaint scenery and the absolute quietness except for the water lapping the shoreline. Laurentiu leads the way up a small rise and we pass some remnants of ruins. We continue upward and forward until we reached the top of the bluff overlooking the lake.



There, spread before us, was the Greek colony. It was a large complex from what we could see. There were a dozen or so people doing basic debris cleanup with some restoration work in progress. I suppose they were as surprised to see us, as we were to encounter people in such a remote place.

The site, as compared to other historic sites, was not that impressive or offered much to look at other than foundations and pit holes. But from a historic viewpoint this is an important site to Romania, that's the reason for the ongoing cleanup.

We walk about the site trying not to interfere with the workers but still taking as many photos as possible, eliciting a strange query from one of them who asked, "Why are you taking photos. This is not important". So much for local awareness.

Anyway, we wander all over the place and wonder why such a community was built so high up on a cliff overlooking the lake. But Laurentiu indicated that in its glory days Dolosman was lower, closer to the lake, than it is now. We spent enough time here to appreciate its importance but decide that its getting late and we have to get back to Murighol.

We reverse course, pass the trash dumps, enter Jurilovca and head for the main road to Tulcea and Murighol. We try to take a few shortcut roads but apparently what is shown on a map does not exist ... there are no such roads.

Frustrated, we opt to stop by a roadside café for an early supper. The restaurant was **Doi iepurași** (Do-i Je-pu-rash), meaning two small rabbits. We order stroganoff for Dolores, fish for Laurentiu and schnitzel for myself; fresh salads, beer and, of course, papanashi for me. Within 30 minutes we were back in Murighol. It is early evening.



**Schnitzel**



**Stroganoff**

We relax on the Morena porch, play with the donkey and are joined by the white dog. Local wine is offered and we accept. Time to check on e-mail, do some Internet searches for hotels and generally not do anything tiring ... for tomorrow we take a boat trip into the interior of the delta. The evening wears on and by 8PM Laurentiu says that something to eat would be right. I agree ... so we order a late light supper that, in this case, is **Ciorba Pește** (a sour fish soup with a variety of fishes).



**Boiled fish from soup**



**Ciorba Pește**

Holy cow ... within 15 minutes the table is set and we sit down only to be presented with a large, I mean LARGE, plate of boiled fish. All manner of fish is layered on the plate ... carp (our carp), pan fish, trout (I believe), perch, catfish, and other varieties unfamiliar to me. Heads and tails, the fish were large and small but whole. Laurentiu and I dug in and, I must admit, the fish were good but bony. We managed to make a dent in the pile but could not finish it all. The plate was removed and the soup portion was presented; with fresh bread. The soup had a particularly 'sour' aspect to it but was tasty and filling. Couple with the local wine it was a good (but expensive as we will find out later) meal. Dolores

passed ... she is not a fish person. Meal finished we played with the computer a little more before heading to our room for much needed rest. Sleep was OK ... the night was quiet ... and the air conditioner hum was like a lullaby.

Wednesday dawned with a promising bright sky. Breakfast on the porch was delightful and we enjoyed the freshly cooked entrée which including, as the meat portion, ... a hot dog. How charming!

Still wish they would learn to offer coffee refills as the sole cup we were given was hardly filling.

Today we tour the **Delta Dunării, Parcul Național**.



**Morena breakfast**



The tour boat

Packing our camera bags carefully, we load the Nissan and through Murighol to the **Brațul Sfântu Gheorghe** (Arm St. George, one of the three Danube channels. This is the southernmost). The other two channels are called **Brațul Chilia** (northernmost) and **Brațul Sulina** (center and navigatable by ocean going cargo liners). We meet Mihail, our driver, at the river and we load up the boat for our adventure. Boat is not what I expected (here we go again). It is a small runabout ... seats three people up front and Mihail would be at the back, steering the thing. I expected a large, multi-passenger boat large enough to feel safe in. Here we would be sitting literally at the water line. Another thing ... not sure if life preservers on

board would be of any use. We would not be wearing them when we are moving. So, with some apprehension but a little excitement, we push off, steer the little Titanic onto the St. George channel and begin the exploration. I was told that this trip would be at least 4 hours in duration and already I felt some discomfort. Our seat was no more than a wooden board with no padding or backrest. As soon as we enter the channel the motor is revved up, the boat rises a little out of the water and we're speeding at roughly 30 mph down the channel. My anxiety eases and I watch the passing scenery but immediately felt my head cold ... lost my New Mexico hat to the wind. A quick turn around to retrieve it saved the day. Now my hat has not been officially blessed by the Danube.



A Delta channel

Unless I review the video of this trip the entire day is one big blur. I was videotaping and Laurentiu was taking stills. We zigged in and out of so many natural and manmade channels that I was not sure where we were. The Delta is comprised of literally thousands of little natural water channels and perhaps hundreds of man-made channels with lakes of every imaginable size ... 1 acre to thousands of acres. The 3 main channels are rather deep because the Danube current makes them deep ... Sulina must be for ships ... but the rest of the channels and the lakes are no more than a meter (3 feet) or so deep. We observe native plants like water hyacinths of several colors, many varieties of trees and shrubs, and reed grasses tall as 10 feet.



Delta birdlife

Observed birds of all manners from herons to cormorants to egrets to seagulls to pelicans; as well as common fish dippers and kingfishers. Nature observation towers (for bird watching) dot the shorelines. We see local fishermen ply their trade as well as sport fishermen trying their luck. Mihail stops a few times to cast for fish and I try my hand as well but the fish do not cooperate. Early morning is the best time and its nearly noon by now. Nonetheless we carry on ... move from lake to lake ... channel to channel ... watching this waterlogged landscape at 30 mph.



Uzlina Spa

At times, when we enter a "no wake zone" in a channel, we slow down to a crawl and just delight in watching the shoreline, only feet away. In a channel the wind is dead calm and the water surface shines like a mirror ... not a ripple in front of us, and a small wake behind us. Solitude, sheer calm; with only the songs of nearby birds being heard. This is eco-touring at its best. Between the fast paced sweep across a lake to the calm of a float in a channel the day passed just nicely. The sun cooperated and a little windburn is all we got. By 2PM we approached the fishing village of **Uzlina**, just off the St. George channel. Our boat driver was born here and related stories of how the original Uzlina flooded in the past and had to be relocated to higher ground some way away from the

Danube. We maneuver the boat ashore near a hotel and disembark for some cool refreshments. Beer for all ... including Dolores. Laurentiu and Mihail hold a lively conversation while I explore the surroundings. This is a resort area with a couple of 3\*\*\* hotels and many large and elegant family cabins. New hotels are under construction so it seems business in the Delta is booming. The fact that there is no road in Uzlina (only personal boat ferries) does not stop progress.

After a relaxing layover at Uzlina, we push off again and head down the St. George channel to our original point of departure. On the way we passed the compound where the former Romanian dictator had a villa (he did not allow any people within a few miles of his villa when he visited; no wonder he was wiped out.) Anyway, in short order we finished our tour, thanked Mihail (we will see him again tomorrow) and pointed the Nissan towards Morena.



Morena chicken

We're back at Morena and order our first supper ... it was a tiring day with no lunch. Baked chicken with fries, a salad of tomatoes and cucumber complemented with the local wine satisfied our hunger. Cool watermelon ended the meal.

Sated, we wondered what to do next as there was still a lot of daylight left.

Laurentiu recommended that we drive to a nearby archeological dig.

So we hop in the Nissan again, drive through Murighol and head east. In 10 minutes time we are at the **Halmyris** site.

**Halmyris, Tulcea, Romania**— Where the Danube River empties into the Black Sea lays the historic Roman fort and military supply depot at Halmyris. It took the Roman Emperor Trajan two wars to win this vital strategic location from the Dacians, giving the Romans undisputed domination over the fertile Danube Delta and control over a gateway to Asia. For the next 600 years, Halmyris served as a legionary base, naval port, and critical supply depot for Roman colonization and cultural exchange. In all, Halmyris was occupied for 1,100 years, from the Iron Age to the Byzantine period, an astounding sweep of colorful history.



Halmyris dig

We park nearby and walk the short distance to the dig. We encounter two men working the dig and Laurentiu engages them in a conversation. Dolores and I elect to walk the ruins and see what it has to offer. Of course nothing makes sense without a guidebook so we just poke our noses everywhere.

Soon we are approached by one of them who introduces himself in English (I forgot his name) and begins to relate the history of Halmyris. Must tell you, without his briefing we would not begin to appreciate this site. He points out that Halmyris used to be on the Danube River at its peak. The river has since moved its flow northward so Halmyris is on high ground. He points out the harbor gate where the customs tower was located. The stone gate is 25 meters long and 2½ meters high; nicely restored. He points out the perimeter walls, partially excavated, which clearly shows how large this complex was (2½ hectares).

Next we move to the bathhouse and he points out how the water was heated, how it was circulated and how this house was constructed. It has been well excavated and some artifacts have been recovered but it remains unrestored. It lays under a makeshift cover for protection. Even so, the ruins are imposing and magnificent.

We next move to the other dig that is also under cover ... a 4<sup>th</sup> century basilica. We are given some information about the two saints who used to be buried here but have since been moved to Constanta. The burial vaults are sealed but visible. We can



Halmyris bath house



make out the various components that make up a church, including pillar bases and altars. Dr. Alexandra Madgearu, a scientific researcher, with the Institute for Political Studies of Defense and Military History (Bucharest) is the principal scientist here. He also engages us in a little history of the place and his English is halting but excellent. He said that he used to get army soldiers to help him dig but the military has since backed off and, with limited volunteers, progress is slow. We dally a little more; take a few pictures and bid goodbye to the men. We then drive the short distance to the end of the road at **Dunanățu de Jos** just to see what life at the edge of the delta looks like. Abject poverty, crumbling infrastructure and dirt roads is all we saw. We returned to Morena.



It was nearly dark when we returned and ordered our second supper ... pork is all I remember ... and the wine, of course. After checking our e-mails it was time to crash.

We heard that new customers checked in so we knew that in the morning it would be hectic. In the middle of the night I heard the new customers ... or at least their snoring, next door to us.

Snoring was so heavy that the pictures shook on the wall. I took the risk of pounding on the common wall to get his (her) attention but to no avail. Snoring continued. I had to resort to my ever-popular earplugs. Rest of night was OK ... although ears hurt from the plugs.

In Part 3 we continue our **Delta** exploration with monastic visits.