

# INTERIM REPORT ON TWO SEASONS OF EXCAVATIONS OF A BURIAL ENCLOSURE IN THE EAST CEMETERY OF ULPIA TRAIANA SARMIZEGETUSA, ROMANIA, 1982—1984

This work was carried out for the Museum and University of Cluj-Napoca as a result of an archaeological exchange with the Oxford Archaeological Unit. I would like to express my thanks of Professor Hadrian Daicoviciu and to Dorin Alicu, director of excavations at Sarmizegetusa, for providing this opportunity. I would also like to thank Liz MacRobert, who supervised in 1983 and is preparing the pottery report, and all the Romanian supervisors, students and local people who assisted on the excavation.

The trench was located in a strip left uncultivated between fields of maize some 400 m east of the Roman colonia and 40 m south-west of the mausoleum of the Aurelii (Daicoviciu-Floca 1952). In 1982 an area 5 m by 12 m was opened up running north-south, and this was extended to 90 m by 12 m in 1983. Part of the 1982 trench was initially excavated by Madelaine Mouron; her discoveries are not described in this report, but the location of two urned cremations is shown on the site plan.

The area including the trench was very stony, and below topsoil a cobbled road was revealed running north-east across the middle. Locals said that the road was still being used within living memory. This road has generally been considered to be Roman but included Medieval sherds in its make-up, and overlay both walls of the burial enclosure and fill of the robbing holes of several of the tombs.

Below this the first season's work uncovered two parallel walls F16 and F13, between which were found the capstones of two substantial tombs, F17 and F25. F17 was orientated north-south, F25 east-west. Both tombs had been robbed in antiquity, the capstones were broken and the backfill of the robbing holes was visible in plan at a higher level than that at which the tombs themselves became apparent. This latter fact suggested that there might have been above-ground markers at one end of the graves. Neither tomb was fully excavated in 1982, but a gold earring found in the backfill of the robbing of F17 indicated that the tombs had been those of wealthy people. The sides of the gravecut of both tombs were burnt above the level of the capstone. The two parallel walls were thought to have been contemporary parts of the enceinte wall of a family burial enclosure, and the more southerly of these, F13, had been interrupted at its east end by a north-south mortared wall F23, possibly belonging to another tomb.

The main objectives of the second season were to establish whether the walls were indeed part of one enclosure, to excavate the two known tombs and see if there were any others in the area between the walls, and to investigate the supposed third masonry tomb F23. The western extension revealed the robber trench of a north-south wall F41, which proved to be the western limit of the enclosure, linking walls F13 and F16. Its foundations were contemporary with those of both other walls. However F13 continued westwards beyond this junction, suggesting that there may be further walled enclosure in this direction. Pottery from the wall foundations has not yet been analysed in detail, but appears to be mid-late second century AD.

Excavation of the two tombs with capstones revealed that in both cases the sides of the grave-cut had been burnt right to the top. There was however no appreciable burning on top of the capstones. When the stones were lifted the tombs below were both constructed of walls of tile bricks laid horizontally, six and seven layers deep. On top of the tile walls and beneath the capstone was up to 10 cms of burnt soil and charcoal, in which were found several coffin nails, and in tomb F25 a gold bracelet. Inside the tombs differed. F25 had been emptied completely, and had only a thin layer of burnt and unburnt soil trodden into the natural clay bottom. The other tomb, F17, contained a thin layer of clean silt below the robber fill, and beneath that a thick deposit of burnt wood, together with a little umburnt soil at the north end. In and on this layer were the smashed fragments of a mirror and quantities of walnuts. At the very south-vest corner a pottery lamp remained in situ on top of the burnt layer. Much cremated bone and further coffin nails were found mixed in with the burnt wood on the tomb floor, which in this case consisted of a single layer of tiles.

The north-east corner of tomb F25 overlay the south-west corner of tomb F17. The west wall of 25 had been re-used as part of the east wall of a third tile-built tomb, long axis north-south, sandwiched between F25 and the west wall of the enclosure F41. Whereas both F17 and F25 had been large enough to contain an adult lying down, this tomb, F36, was small. It had no capstone, but on the top of the tile walls were tegulae, both inverted and the right way up, which projected out a little over the interior of the tomb. Further tegulae were found both in the robber fill inside the tomb and in a large robbing hole dug just south of it, and it seems likely that F36 had a tiled roof. There was no sign of burning, and the tomb had been robbed right down to its bottom, which was constructed of large but broken bricks. Several coffin nails did survive around the edges on the floor, but there were no other finds.

North of F36 and F25 and west of F17 was a fourth tomb, F50. This lay east-west and was of similar size to F17 and F25. Its capstone had been broken at both ends, as if two attempts had been made to rob it, but the larger and more successful hole was at the east end. Here two lamps with face-masks on the top and the maker's stamp APRIO were found in the robber fill. These probably derived from the tomb itself, and date to the latter half of the second century AD. Beneath the capstone the top of the tile walls, again 7 courses deep, were covered with burnt soil and charcoal, and again a few nails were found as in tomb F17, silt below the robber fill overlying a thick deposit of burnt wood. A small flagon was found almost complete in the silt layer and on top of the burnt layer, and this had probably been displaced from the tomb. Much cremated was bone found in the burnt layer, but no other finds. In this tomb the burnt layer rested upon a natural clay floor, and as in tombs F17 and 25, there was no sign that the floor itself had been burnt by heat, nor the inner faces of the tile walls.

It would appear from the combined evidence of tombs F17, F25 and F50 that the bodies were placed in a coffin and then cremated. Burning around the edges of the grave-cuts and on top of the tile walls, though not on the floors or on the inner faces of the tomb, would suggest that the bodies were placed on a pyre of wood constructed on top of the walls, and the wood cremated remains allowed to collapse into the tomb bottom, after which the offerings were placed on top of the burnt layer, and the capstones put on to seal them. Burnt charcoal and soil on the top of the tiles suggests that no effort was made to clean up after the fire; this would also explain how the gold bracelet, which had presumably fallen to the side in the fire and was obscured by burnt wood, remained on top of the walls rather than in the bottom of the tomb. Tomb F36 showed no evidence of having held a cremation, and was probably the inhumation burial of a small

child in a coffin. A fifth tomb, lying east-west and with burning on the sides of the grave-cut, was indentified east of F17, but could not be excavated for lack of time.

There are no parallels known to the writer for cremation on top of a tile tomb. However, in situ cremation was common in simple graves at Alba Iulia in Roman Dacia, and one rectangular grave was lined with clay and provided with a shelf halfway up the grave cut, possibly providing a base for the pyre as did these tile walls (Protase, 1958).

The eastern extension, dug to investigate the mortared structure F23, revealed a rectangular platform c. 3 metres by 2 metres, long axis east-west, and about 1 metre deep. It was constructed of large stones interspersed with layers of sandy mortar, and contained the shattered remains of two amphorae. These have not yet been examined. The enclosure wall continued east of the platform, and ran a little way into it on both the east and west sides. The surface of the platform was covered with a thin pink mortar, but this only survived at the edges, as a shallow cut and removed it and the top few centimetres of the platform make-up over the whole of the middle, an area c. 2.4 metres by 1.5 metres. On the west side this cut had gone down into the make-up of the platform for some 60 cms.

However, an attractive explanation would see the platform as the base of a funerary monument abutted by the enclosed wall, and the hollow in its top as created when removing the monument. There are other rectilinear funerary enclosures containing similar platforms in Dacia, notably the enclosure of Draşcovului in the cemetery just north-west of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa itself (Daicoviciu pp. 229—232) and the mausoleum at Cinciş (Floca). At Cinciş the platform was interpreted as the base of a funerary monument, and two statues found close by were said to be part of the monument. Funerary monuments on similar platforms have survived in situ inside a series of adjacent walled enclosures at Aquileia (Brusin, 1941, *passim*). Possibly fragments of marble found in the backfill of the robbing holes of the tombs derive from such a monument.

The walled family enclosure is the third to be found at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa. The other two appear to be single discrete enclosures, like that at Shorden Brae (Toynbee, 1971, pp. 92—94). In this case, the continuation of wall F13 west of the linking wall F41 may indicate that this was only one of a series of linked enclosures, as was the case at Aquileia (Brusin, 1941). However it may simply be an enclosure with two compartments, like that excavated at Cinciş in Dacia.

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COLONIA ULPIA TRAIANA AUGUSTA  
DACICA SARMIZEGETUSA

EAST CEMETERY—EXCAVATIONS 1982 & 3



Tomb?

C Later Cremation

Mortar Spread

Rubble Foundation

Tiles of Tomb

Capstone

Burnt Soil

Pink Mortar—  
Platform Surface

Tomb?

C

C

