

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE ROMAN FORT TRIMAMMIUM (PRELIMINARY REPORT)

Abstract: At the end of 2005, within the territory of the Roman fortress Trimammium, near village Mechka, Rousse district, treasure-hunters have discovered some architectural details (fragments) and stone wall from a big building. That imposed the undertaking of a rescue archaeological excavation within this area. The building was investigated completely in the period between years 2006-2008. It is established, that the earliest structures (features) within the investigated area are the five pits and clay soldering wall from III rd century AD. Having in mind the discovered things in two of the pits, we must connect them with some rituals of the soldiers from the fortress. In the beginning of the IV th century AD a big building was erected in the investigated area. It was repaired in the middle or second half of the same century (IV AD). In the first half of the V c AD, within the building a big pit was digged. The last coins, found in it, are from the time of emperor Theodosius I. During the VI th c AD the building was rebuild and was used until the end of the same century (or until the beginning of VII c AD). After this the building was abandoned and destroyed by an earthquake. The place was located again in the IX-X th c AD and then above the remains of the antique building was erected medieval house with stone foundations. The last dated materials discovered in the excavated area are from the XIII th c AD.

Keywords: archaeological, Roman, fort, coins.

The Roman fort Trimammium is situated 3 km to the west from the village of Mechka, Ruse region, in the locality called Stulpishte, on a natural incline on the Danube bank (*fig. 1*). It is a component part of the chain of military sites along the Roman *limes* in Lower Moesia. The fort's name was mentioned for the first time by Claudius Ptolemaeus, and afterwards many times in a number of ancient maps (Иванов 1999).

A Thracian settlement, dated in the Early and Later Iron Age, has been registered nearby the fort. However, it has not been archaeologically investigated until now (Дремсизова, Иванов 1983, 47). An accidentally found hoard of 418 coins, which contains imitations of issues of Philippus II, Philippus III Arideus and

* Regional Museum – Ruse, ramonearhaeology@abv.bg.

** Historical Museum – Popovo.

*** Historical Museum – Popovo.

the Second period of Thassian coinage (Юркуова 1979, 60¹), might well be connected with that settlement.

The only known until present rock-cut relief of the Thracian Horseman in Bulgaria originates exactly from the locality called Stulpishte (*fig. 2*). It had been cut in a not very high rock rising in the dry valley of the Oreshe river, but was destroyed in the 30s of 20th century (Дремсизова, Иванов 1983, 47; Oppermann 2005, 118). Here was also found a Roman milestone from the time of Gordianus III and Constantinus I the Great, but it has recently been lost (Велков 1968, 6; Hollenstein 1975, 23-44). Two tombstones from the *necropolis* of Trimammium are kept now in the Regional History Museum in Ruse (Дремсизова, Иванов 1983, 47). The first one dates from the second half of the 2nd century (Велков 1968, 4-6). In 1984 this *necropolis* was precisely located in the locality called Dervisha (Станчев 1984, 90²). Graves have also been found close to the Danube bank, to the north from the fort (Дремсизова, Иванов 1983, 47).

In the Regional History Museum in Ruse are also kept lots of coins (including coin hoards), fibulae and other archaeological materials from Roman, Byzantine and Early Mediaeval times. The inventory books declare the fort of Trimammium as their place of finding, but considering the fact that they were bought from private persons, we could doubt about their real origin.

According to the available evidence, the fort already existed in the beginning of the 2nd century. However, until 2006 no archaeological investigations had been carried out at the site. In the end of the 20th century, especially in the years of 'transition' from socialism to democratic society, the fort became an object of large-scale treasure-hunters' interventions. During one of those interventions, in the winter of 2005, a solid wall of a building made of stones soldered with mortar was unearthed, together with a few architectural details (parts of columns and column bases). This fact provoked rescue archaeological excavations during the spring of 2006, which continued until the total investigation of the building in 2008. The shortage of money predetermined the methods of investigation – square by square, but not simultaneous removal of the chronological layers. A building, called building A in this paper, was entirely excavated. Parts of three other buildings (B, C and D) were also studied.

No traces of settlement life in pre-Roman times and during the Early Roman period were found in the excavated area. The earliest documented structures are pits and a part of a wall with mud soldering from the 3rd century (*fig. 3*). Five pits with different forms and diameters are fully or partially examined. All of them contain building ceramics and pottery, bones, stones, lumps of clay, charcoals, iron and bronze finds (and fragments of such) and different number of coins, which allow correct dating. The two found coins in pits № 1 and № 2 are small

¹ The finding place of this hoard is incorrectly pointed in the bulletin about the coin hoards in the periodical Archaeology as the area of the village of Pirgovo, Ruse region.

² The *necropolis* has not been archaeologically investigated and documented. Two limestone covers of *sarcophagi*, kept now in the museum in Ruse, but without inventory numbers, probably originate from there.

denominations of provincial bronze coinage from the time of Emperor Septimius Severus; in pit № 3 – two provincial bronze coins (the first one belongs to Emperor Philip I Arab, the second one is badly preserved and the ruler is not identified) and three *antoniniani* of Emperors Claudius II, Aurelianus and Probus; in pit № 4 – 39 *antoniniani* and their imitations, the latest one of which is chronologically connected with the rule of Emperor Diocletianus. Pit № 5 yielded eleven *antoniniani*, the latest one of which chronologically belongs to the time of Emperor Probus. Most of the coins are burnt. Fragments of *tegulae* and *imbrici* with stamps of Legio I Italica and cohorts I Bracaraugustanorum were also discovered in pits № 1, 2, 3 and 5 (**fig. 4 a, b, c**).

The functions and usage of the pits remain still unclear at the present stage of investigations. Pits № 1 and № 2 were initially interpreted as garbage ones (Върбанов, Драгоев, Русев 2007, 262). The analyses of the content of pits № 4 and № 5, which were excavated in 2008, lead however to different conclusions. They have comparatively smaller size and are *pithos*-shaped. Burnt armory was found in pit № 4 – bronze shield *umbo*, fragments of an iron helmet, a bronze belt buckle and other parts of bronze and iron artifacts. A burnt bronze statue of Venus (**fig. 4 d**) and an almost entirely preserved cup of well-purged clay were also discovered in the same pit. Pit № 5 contained one fragmented bowl, laid down with its bottom upwards over fish scales. There also were eight whole and six broken loom weights of not well-done clay, together with 38 analogical fragments. The quantity of bones and ceramic fragments of vessels made by means of a potter's wheel is different in the pits (fragments of hand-made pottery were found only in pits № 4 and № 5). It has to be noted that almost every coin, bronze and iron find, and every pottery fragment from the pits is burnt.

The practices of putting vessels over food, coins, bronze and iron fragments with traces of burning, not well-done loom weights, bones, stones, ceramics, coals and burnt lumps of clay in the pits are identical to those in the Thracian pit complex in Ruse (Varbanov, Dragoev 2006, 181-193). Considering all the facts we could suggest, with some reservations³, that the discovered pits are remains of the ritual practices, carried out by the local military garrison and population during the 3rd century (pits № 4 and № 5 confirm this assumption).

A wall with clay soldering also belongs to the earliest level (**fig. 3**). A very small part of it is preserved and according to the found pottery it dates to the 3rd century.

Buildings from the 2nd-3rd century are situated in the close proximity of the excavated area. The great amount of building ceramics and pottery, coins, fibulae and applications from later layers support this statement. At this stage of investigations buildings B and C are dated to the 3rd century. A part of an inscription, re-used as *spolium* in the repair of building A during the 6th century, dates from the beginning of the 3rd century (**fig. 4 e**).

³ At this stage of investigations secure conclusions are impossible because of the small area excavated within the fort.

The next chronological phase is represented by the construction of building A in the beginning of 4th century, probably during the reign of Constantinus I the Great. The edifice has irregular quadrangular shape and its northwest wall is in fact one of the re-used walls of the earlier building C (*fig. 3*). Unfortunately, the floor levels within building A were already destroyed in the antiquity. The first floor level was brick-paved, over a layer of mortar. A very small part of this mortar layer (only by the northeast long wall) is preserved. This part, together with the corrections of the northwest wall, testifies that the building was repaired in the middle or second half of the 4th century. Afterwards, in the end of the 4th /beginning of the 5th century, the building was temporarily abandoned. We came to this opinion on the base of a discovered big pit filled with 'reddish' soil, dug into its interior (*fig.3*). The content of the pit includes relatively small quantity of ceramics, bones, stones, bronze and iron fragments, and 16 coins – 5 dated in the 3rd century and the latest one belonging to Theodosius I. These finds date the pit to the beginning/first half of the 5th century. There is a possible connection of this pit with the lime-pit in the northern part of building A, which is also dated after the archaeological materials before the building's repairs in the 6th century (*fig. 3*).

The evidence for repairs and usage of the building in the 6th century is enough to make steady conclusions. At first place, the two well-preserved stylobates could be mentioned, one of which even with a column base *in situ* (*fig. 3*). The floor level from this period is rammed down loam, containing many fragments of comb-like ornamented amphorae, and it is dated by a coin of Justinus II and Sophia. There is a layer of destructions (from the building's walls) above this level, which is connected with the abandonment of the building in the end of the 6th – beginning of the 7th century. A fibula with pseudo-wire decoration, cast in a mould, is among the well-dated materials (Генчева 2004, 172, табл. XVIII, 1-10). The walls of building A fell down during some big earthquake after its final abandonment.

The next stage of dwelling in the investigated area relates to the period of the First and Second Bulgarian kingdom. The earliest well datable finds are from the 9-10th century and the last (coins) – from the 13th century. Building D, quadrangular in plan and erected over the remains of building A, also belongs to the described period (*fig. 3*). Within the context of this structure, on its floor level from rammed down loam, a lead cross and many fragments of pottery with incised decoration typical for 10-11th century period were found. Currently, we put the building's construction into this period, but a little later data is not excluded too. Unfortunately, the most compromised by treasure-hunters' invasions is exactly the uppermost, mediaeval layer (the bases of building D are approximately 50 cm under the contemporary surface). Two pits, one of which situated in the southern corner of building A, also belong to the period 10-13th century (*fig. 3*). The pits' filling contains a small amount of ceramic fragments (easy datable), bones and iron pieces. A kiln, probably for baking pottery, whose investigation is forthcoming, dates from the same time (Върбанов, Драгоев, Русев 2008, 347-348).

It is difficult to firmly define the functions of building A because of its compromised interior. At this stage of excavations they are interpreted as social-

administrative. Since buildings B and C are partially investigated, their dating and interpretation are still uncertain. According to the archaeological materials building B could be dated to the second half of the 3rd century. After its stratigraphic position, Building C is earlier, i.e. it was built before the beginning of the 4th century. However, the materials (mainly pottery) from the small investigated part of this building are from later times (the 6th century), which points to a possible re-use.

The full analysis of the artifacts, found in 2006-2008, will make it possible to specify the chronology of the discovered buildings and structures in the investigated area.

Finally, the 255 coins, found in the period of 2006-2008, are presented chronologically in tables.

I. Early Roman Coins

	Rome	Nikopolis Ad Istrum	Marcia- nopolis	Medio- lanum	Vimi- nacum	Siscia	Antioch	Tripolis	Cyzi- cus	Sevica	Philipo- polis	Anchialo	Incerta	Total
Trajan	1												1	2
Antoninus Pius	1													1
Marcus Aurelius	1													1
Commodus	1													1
Septimius Severus		3												3
Julia Domna		1												1
Caracalla		2												2
Plautilla		1												1
Severus Alexander			1											1
Gordian III		1			1									2
Philip I					1									1
Gallienus	5												6	11
Salonina	1												2	3
Claudius II				2									22	24
After death of Claudius II													7	7
Aurelian	3			3		2		2	1	1			9	21
Severina							1							1
Tacitus	1						1						1	3
Probus	1					1				2			1	5
1 st – 2 nd century AD													3	3
2 nd – 3 rd century AD	1										1	1	3	6
Second half of the 3 rd century AD													10	10
Total	16	8	1	5	2	3	2	2	1	3	1	1	65	110

Table 1

II. Late Roman Coins

	Constantinople	Cyzicus	Nicomedia	Trier	Heraclea	Thessalonica	Aquileia	Sirmium	Siscia	Antioch	Ticinum	Alexandria	Rome	Incerta	Total
Diocletian					1						1		2	1	5
Maximianus I					3										3
After death of Maximianus I														1	1
Licinius I			1		2				1	1		1		1	7
Licinius II				1	1					1					3
Constantine I					1	1		1	2					2	7
After death of Constantine I														3	3
VLPP Imitative Type														1	1
Vrbs Roma					2										2
Crispus														1	1
Delmatius		1													1
Constantine II caesar							1		1					1	3
Constantine II						1									1
Constantius II caesar	1														1
Constantius II	1	2	2		4	3		3		1				16	32
Constans caesar		1													1
Constans			1			1								2	4
Constantius II/Constans										1				5	6
Constantius Gallus			1											3	4
The family of Constantine I														5	5
Julian caesar						1									1
Valentinian I		1	1			1			2						5
Valens	1	1							2					4	8
Procopius	1														1
Valentinian II	2														2
Theodosius I														2	2
Arcadius		1												4	5
Arcadius/Honorius														3	3
Eudoxia														1	1
Honorius														1	1
Honorius/Theodosius II					1									1	2
Theodosius II		1													1
4 th century														5	5
End of 4 th – 5 th century														3	3
5 th century				1	15	8	1	4	8	4	1	1	2	1	1
Total	6	8	6	1	15	8	1	4	8	4	1	1	2	67	132

Table 2

III. Early Byzantine Coins

	Constantinople	Thessalonica	Incerta	Period	Value	Total
Anastasius I			1	491-498	nummus	1
Justin I	1			?	$\frac{1}{4}$ follies (I)	1
Justinian I	1			541/42	1 follis (M)	1
			1	542/43	$\frac{1}{2}$ follies (K)	1
			1	550/51	$\frac{1}{2}$ follies (K)	1
Justin II (and Sophia)		1		568/69	$\frac{1}{2}$ follies (K)	1
Total	2	1	3			6

Table 3

IV. Medieval Coins

Anonymous Byzantine Follis Class A2
Anonymous Byzantine Follis Class A3
Latin Imitative Trachea, large modul, series A, Constantinople (from 1204 to the end of 30-s of 13 th).
Latin Imitative Trachea, small modul, series A, Constantinople (from 1210 to the middle of 13 th).
Latin Imitative Trachea, small modul, series A, Constantinople (from 1210 to the middle of 13 th).
Latin Imitative Trachea, small modul, series B, Constantinople (from 1210 to the middle of 13 th).
Latin Imitative Trachea – firs half of 13 th century AD

Table 4

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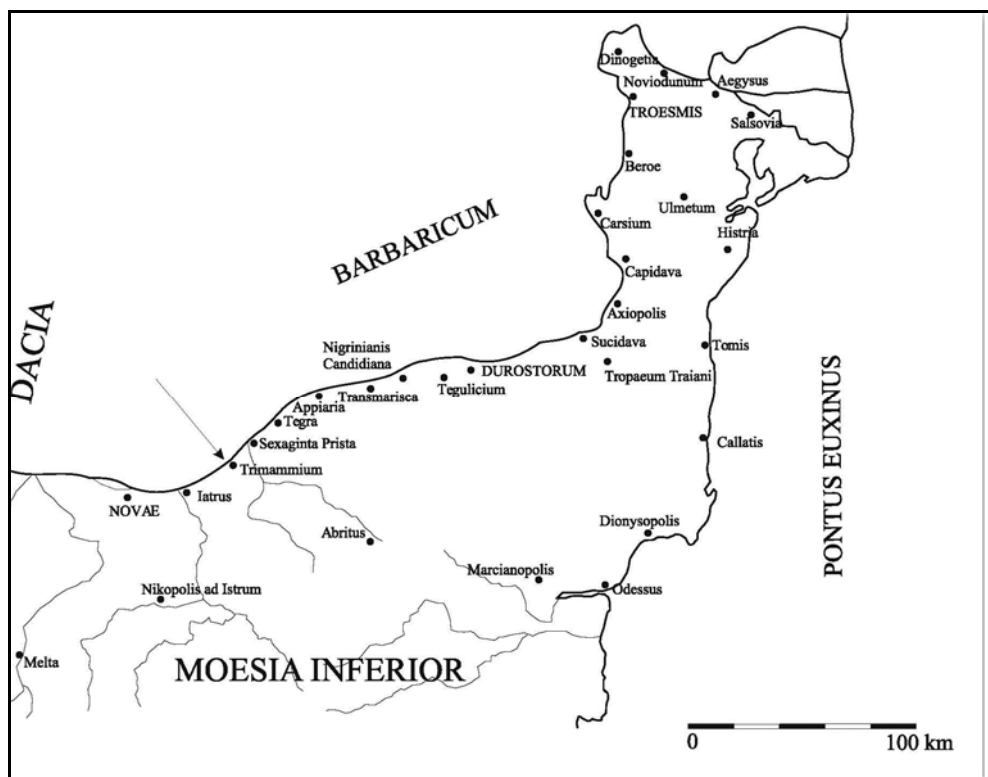


Fig. 1: Lower Danube roman limes.



Fig. 2: Rock – cut relief of the Thracian horseman.

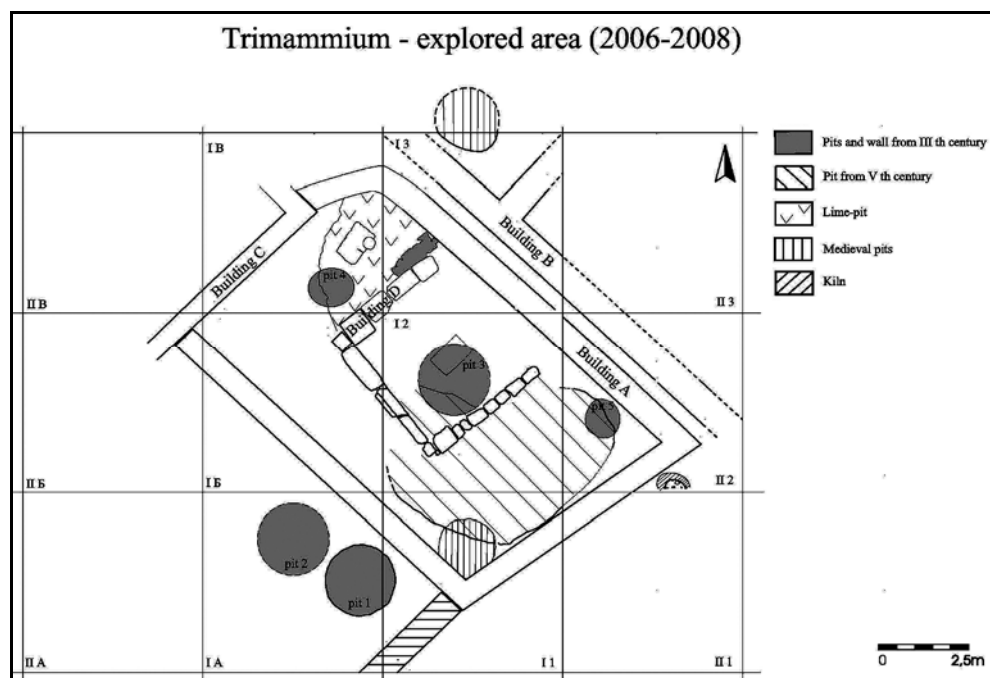


Fig. 3: Trimammium – explored area (2006-2008).

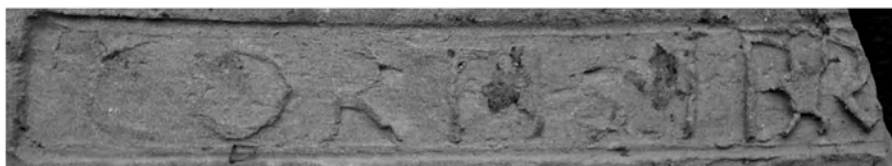


fig.4 a



fig.4 b



fig.4 c



fig.4 d

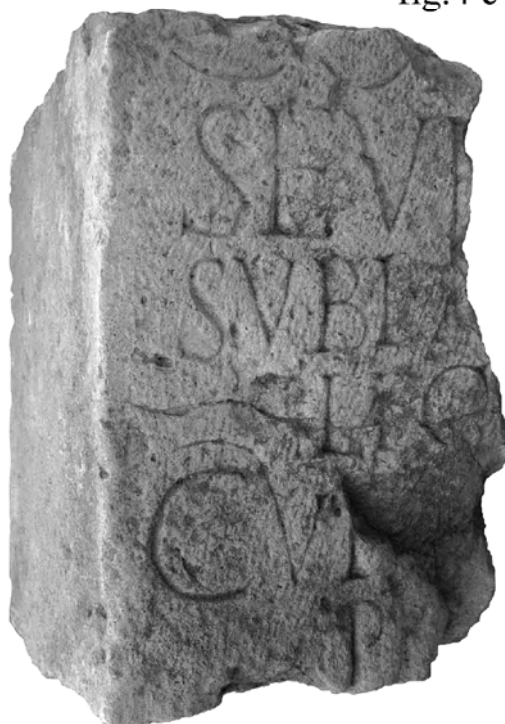


fig.4 e

Fig. 4: a-c. Tegulae and imbrici with stamps; d. Statue of Venus; e. Fragment of stone with inscription.

