

URBAN PLANNING OF THE CANABAE LEGIONIS XI CLAUDIAE (MOESIA INFERIOR)

Abstract: On the basis of the risk archaeological excavations carried out by the museum in Silistra (Bulgaria) between 1972 and 1982 some of the problems concerning the topography of the site were solved. In this way the castra of Legio XI Claudia, its canabae and necropolises were located on the territory of the present day town of Silistra. This paper is an attempt to make an approximate reconstruction of the street grid of the canabae legionis, to indicate places of some public buildings and on this ground to show the likeness between such type of settlements and the real towns of the Roman empire.

Keywords: Silistra, castra, canabae, vicus, building.

It has been mentioned, although briefly, in a number of my publications concerning the Legionary fortress, the canabae Legionis XI Claudiae, the municipium Durostorum, the necropolis, and the topography of Durostorum that part of the street network, the adjoining drainage system and some of the more important public buildings have been discovered (P. Donevski 1989, pp. 277-80; P. Donevski 1990a, pp. 931-39; P. Donevski 1990b, pp. 236-45; P. Donevski, G. Milošević 2009a, pp. 51-8; P. Donevski, 2009b, pp. 104 -30; G. Milošević, P. Donevski 1999, pp. 245-58; I. Popovič, P. Donevski 1999, pp. 9-16; R. Ivanov, G. Atanasov, P. Donevski, 2007, pp. 166-262). Nevertheless, the issue of the urban planning has not been discussed in details.

Unfortunately, the canabae of the other castra in the Bulgarian part of the Roman Limes, namely Ratiaria, Oescus, and Novae, have not been discovered using archeological methods during excavation work. Despite this difficulty, imposed by circumstances, I will try to outline some of the issues of urban planning of canabae legionis XI Claudia. I will do this by analyzing the current condition of the excavations both in Silistra and other places along the Limes abroad.

I find it natural to mention first the topographical situation in Silistra and its surroundings when discussing this issue. There the legionary fortress is situated almost in the centre of a peninsular like part of the modern city and is approximately 800 – 1000 m away of the bank of the Danube river. The necropolises are generally south, east, and west of the fortress.

The canabae, with a supposed area of about 80-90 hectares, occupy the territory, generally speaking, north of the fortress. In their north – west part at the end of 3rd century or the beginning of 4th century was built a small fortification.

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Another civil settlement – vicus, and more probably later Municipium Aurelium Durostorum, is situated according to me and some other archeologists (P. Donevski 1990, pp. 236-45; C. Mușețeanu 1990, pp. 293-99; I. Piso 1991 pp. 149-51) approximately 2.5 km. east of castra, on Romanian territory on the way to the village of Ostrov(fig.1)

As it is known from the epigraphic and archeological material, in the development of these two types of settlements there were many common features. They can be found in their almost identical administrative organization, religious activities, planning, architecture, etc. It seems that the only main difference was the jurisdiction they belonged to. The canabae were on the territory of the legion and to a certain degree their development and status were in accordance with the military laws. On the other hand, the vicus and municipium had greater independence because they were outside the territory of the legion and were governed by the civil laws.

When we speak about the Canabae Legionis XI Claudiae we should mention the extremely valuable inscription from the time of Antoninus Pius discovered in Silistra which reads: "...cives romani et consistentes in cannabis Aeliis legionis XI Claudiae" (V. Parvan 1924, pp. 11-3; Y. Todorov 1927, pp. 17-23). The fact that the honorary name of Aeliae was given could be explained with at least two reasons. The first one is that this might have happened during one of the visits of the Emperor Hadrianus in the province of Moesia Inferior for a probable inspection of the legion. The second reason could be related to the obvious prosperity of this settlement in the second and third decade of 2nd century AD. It could be assumed that this flourishing was impressive enough to urge the Emperor to praise in this exceptional manner the zeal of the citizens of the settlement.

That this gesture of attention on behalf of the Emperor was fully deserved is proved by the number of stately buildings discovered north of the legionary fortress and dated at the first half of the 2nd century AD and forward. Obviously, the construction of the fortress and determining of the places that had to be occupied by the civil settlement and the necropolises was done simultaneously. In addition, data from the archeological excavation proves that the urban planning of the settlement has started as early as the beginning of its construction.

In an attempt to reconstruct the street network, we should consider a number of factors: first, the streets that have been discovered so far; second, the roads going out of the castra gates; third, the continuation of via angularis to the north; fourth, the positioning and the orientation of the buildings; and finally, the possibility that there might be streets not found till now between some of the buildings.

What immediately attracts the attention is the fact that the road which goes out of Porta Pretoria of the legionary fortress to the north and the probable continuations of via angularis (the street that circles the fortress from the outside) to the north are not in one axis and do not form a right angle with the already discovered sections of the streets in the civil settlement(fig. 2) For example, the street that goes from north to south almost through the centre of the part of the

canabae, that I have researched, reaches a street that is about 140 m north of the fortress and goes from east to west. At the same time, the street that comes from Porta Pretoria reaches a point which is 20 m from the crossing of these two streets. At the continuations of via angularis to the north it is seen that after they cross at almost right angle with the mentioned most southern street of the settlement without overcoming any obstacles from the residence buildings they can continue to the north where they will cross the discovered most northern street (for the time being) of the canabae. If this imaginative reconstruction is true, then north of the fortress between the above mentioned streets there is a big square area with a length of 430 m from east to west and a width of 395 m from north to south (fig. 3). On the other hand, in the north end of this big square there are five smaller square areas – insulae which have conjectured dimensions from west to east: 88 x 88m; 88 x 65m; 88 x 73m; 88 x 108m and 88 x 67m. In the south – east end of the big square, where the east continuation of via angularis should go, there are densely situated private buildings and a big public baths. This suggests that the street can pass about 67 m to the west of the east continuation of via angularis between the above mentioned buildings and another similar group of buildings to the west of them. Thus, except for the one dimension of the insula, that is 67 m in the direction east – west, the other one still remains unknown. It is very probable that the area of this insula is different from what I assume because of the big public bath that is situated there.

When we compare the directions of the discovered streets and the positioning of the buildings in the canabae we clearly observe first, that some of the buildings are in one axis with the network of streets; second, the orientation of others coincides with the orientation of the legionary fortress; and finally, there is a third small group of buildings with a different orientation. This situation could appear confusing at first but it can be explained in a number of ways. First, if we accept the orientation of the buildings according to the walls of the fortress as important and defining, we can assume that the buildings built according to it are the oldest, while the discovered streets and buildings that are in one axis are from later periods. In addition, we can assume that the orientation of buildings in one insula is not so important and this leads to the conclusion that the discovered network of streets, despite the slight diversion from the orientation of the fortress – about 10 degrees, can be dated back to the initial planning of the settlement.

The streets that have been discovered so far differ mainly in their covering, not in other characteristics. Most of them, together with the passages between some of the buildings in one insula are covered with small stones and under them there are canals built of stone and bricks. There is only one street for now that is an exception. It is orientated north – south and is west of the area of the canabae that I researched. This street is covered with big stone plates. Without considering the 3 – 4 meter wide passages between the buildings in one insula (fig. 4), the streets are limited by curb stones and are 2 -3 m away from the buildings (fig. 5). There has not been found any prove about the existence of pavements or colonnades.

If we compare the street grid of Canabae Legionis XI Claudiae with these of the Canabae of Aquincum (fig. 6) and of Carnuntum (fig. 7), for example, we can notice that there are also streets (fig. 8) orientated to the legionary fortress and others that are not (Kl. Poczy 1976 p. 100, fig.4a,4b; Kl. Poszy 1983, p. 254, (fig. 2).

Another key element in the planning of similar settlements is the position of emblematic public buildings such as the Forum, the Amphitheatre, Temples of Gods, Baths, etc. In Silistra archeologists have not found traces of an Amphitheatre so far. Numerous inscriptions dedicated to various Gods that have been found prove that there must have been temples but unfortunately their locations are still unknown. There are also no indications where the Forum must have been. A sun clock was discovered in the area of the excavation I did but it can not be considered a solid proof of the location of the Forum although there are similar cases. On the other hand, this clock can be connected with some of the temples or a public bath because there is such a practice. Luckily, as a compensation for this uncertainty and incompleteness of the research findings came the unearthing of two public baths from the beginning of the 2nd century AD. They are situated about 200 m north of the legionary fortress and 300 m away from each other. One of them has rather impressive measures (70 x 40 m) and is very close to the border with Romania (fig. 9). Both of the baths were reconstructed many times and were also use after 4th century AD. What is more, there are doubts some of the parts of other buildings also belong to public baths (fig. 10).

On the basis of what we have said we can summarize that during 2nd – 3rd century Canabae Legionis XI Claudiae developed very intensely and their planning and architecture are very close to these of the municipiums and colonies.

What happened to this settlement after the Gothic invasion in the middle of the 3rd century AD and during the time of Diocletianus and Constantin the Great, though? Observations show that despite the fires and distructions of that time some buildings were reconstructed while many others were built again. Nevertheless, there are indications that the area of the settlement diminishes. This can be proved both by the construction of a new fortification in the north- west part of the canabae and the appearance of some late ancient tombs on their territory.

In addition to this from the excavations of the castra it can be seen that it, together with many others on the limes during 5th – 6th century AD, gradually turned into an Early Byzantine city and in the region of the old canabae continued to exist many public and private buildings. At this time they were included in the territory of the city surrounded by a new fortress wall as shows the research done east of the small fortress on the bank of the Danube River.

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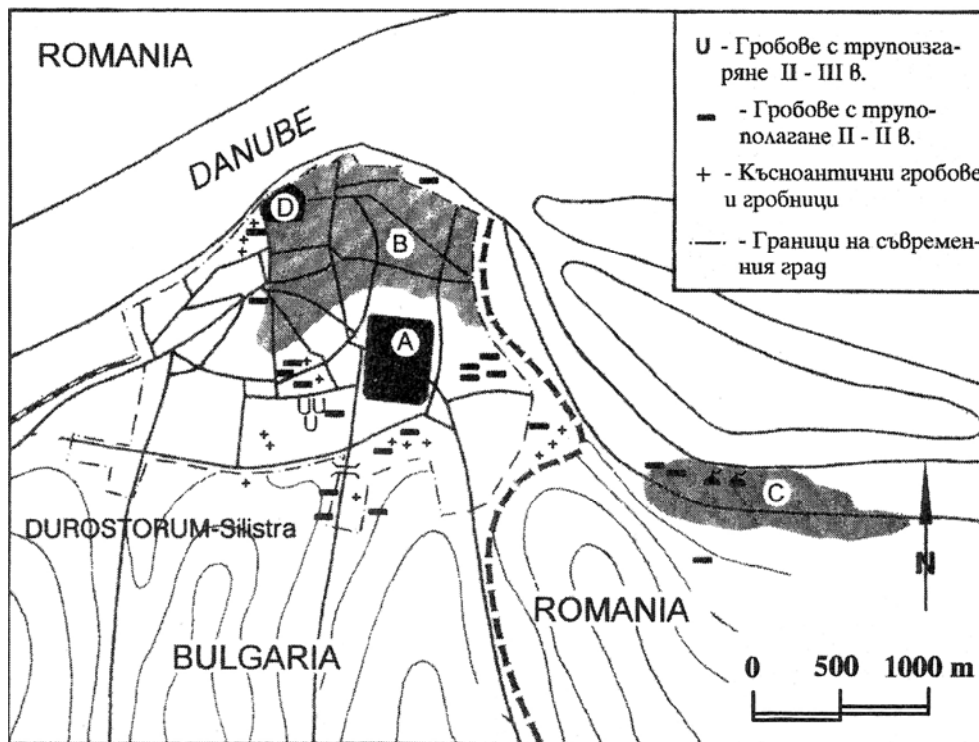


Fig. 1. Silistra and its surroundings. A. Roman Castra; B. Canabae; C. Vicus and Municipium Durostorum; D. Late Roman Fort. (After P. Donevski)

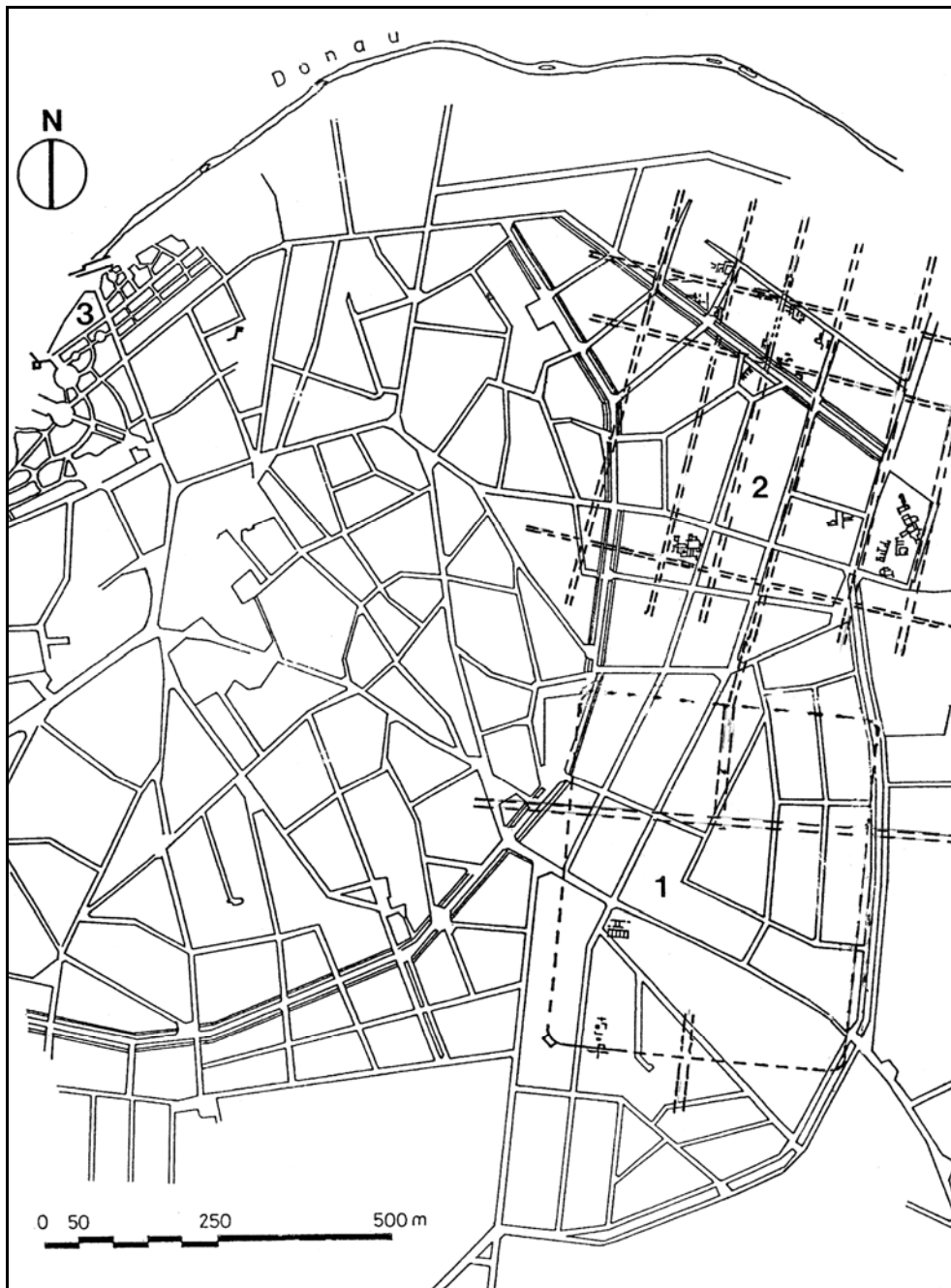


Fig. 2. Silistra. Situation plan. 1. Roman Castra; 2. Canabae; 3. Late Roman Fort. (After P. Donevski)

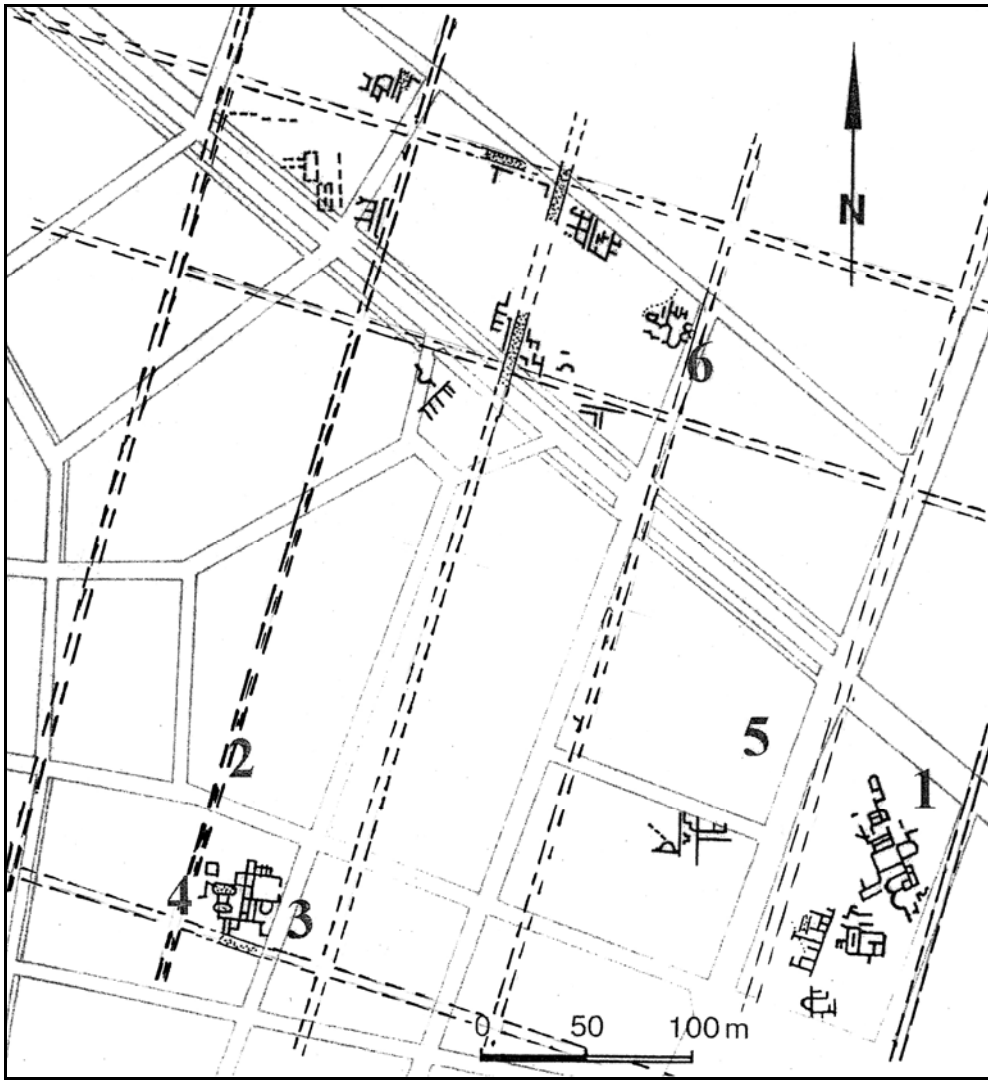


Fig. 3. Silistra. Reconstructed Street Network of Canabae Legionis with marked places of Public and Private Baths. (After P. Donevski)

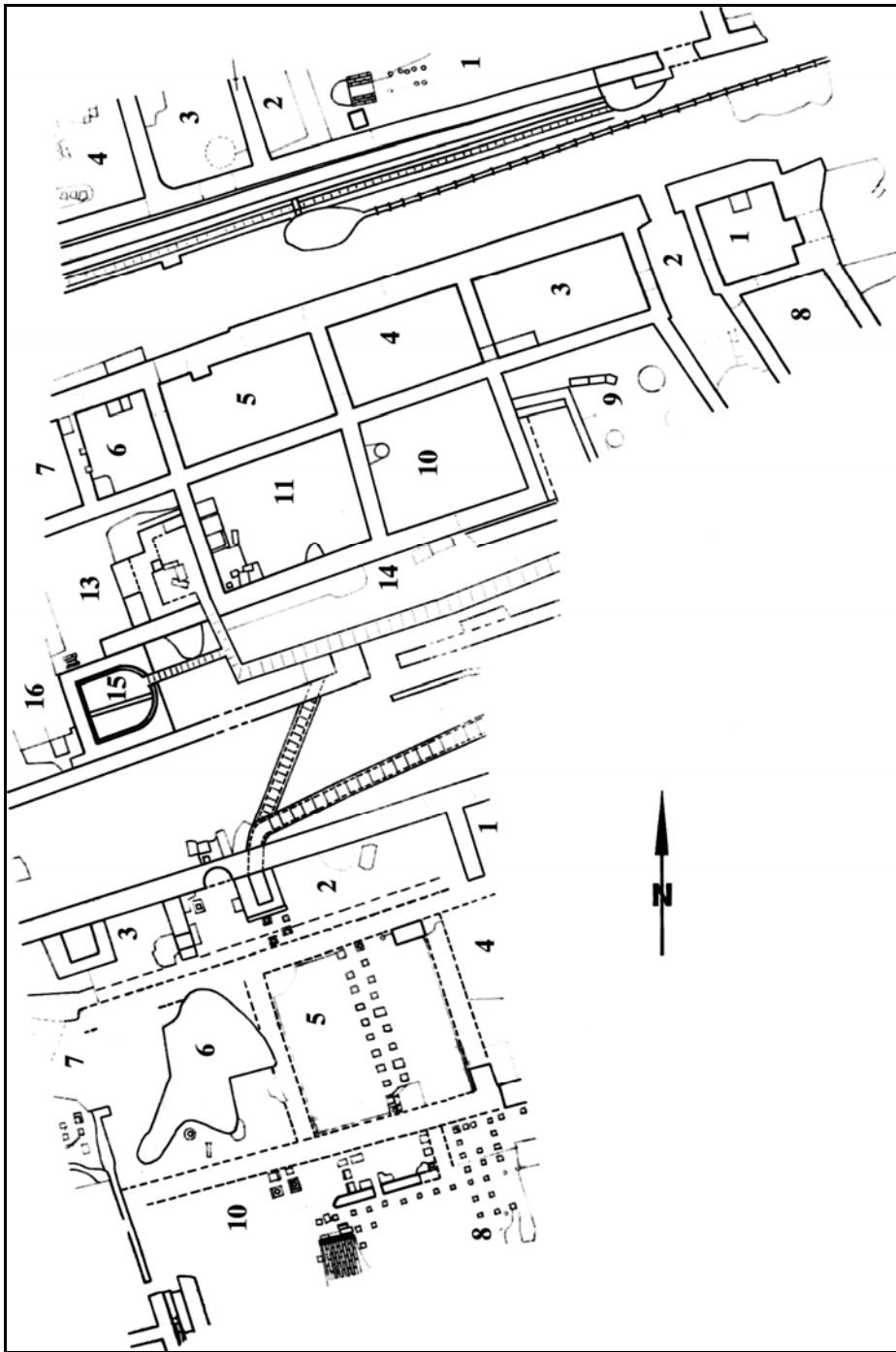


Fig. 4. Silistra. Passages between Three Buildings in the Canabae. (After P. Donevski)

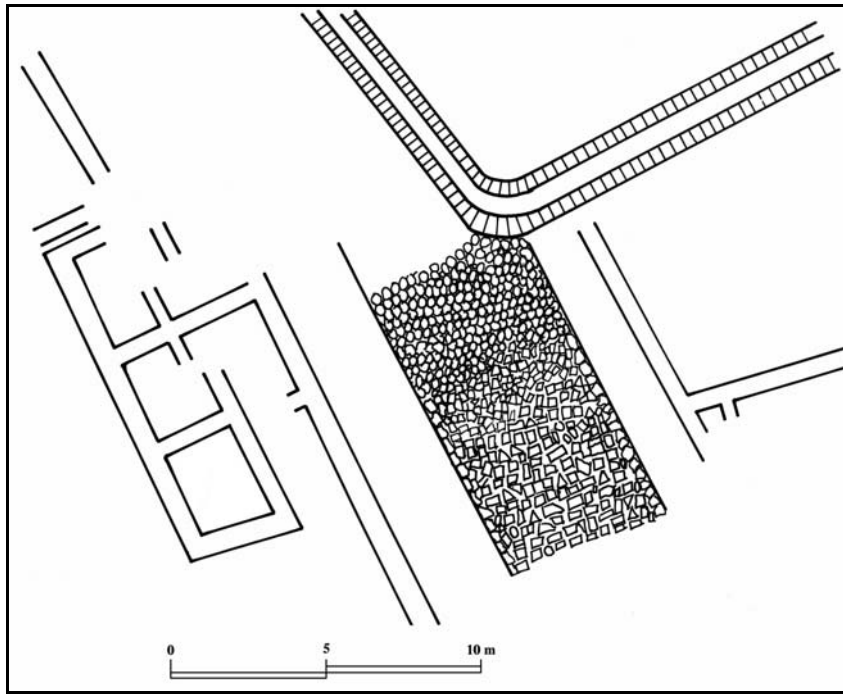


Fig. 5. Silistra. A Street between two Insulae in the Canabae. (After P. Donevski)

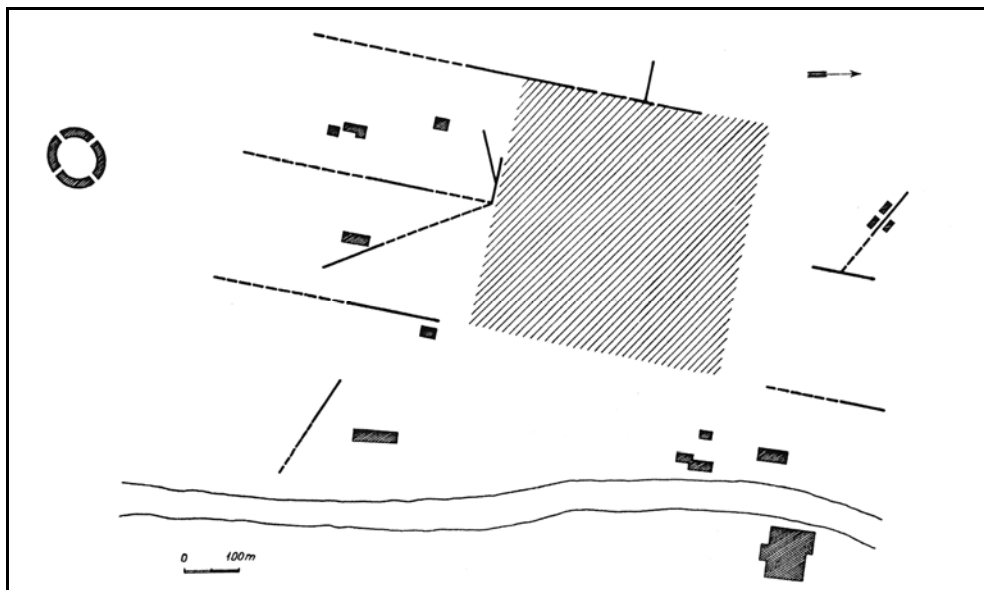


Fig. 6. Aquincum. Situation plan of Canabae legionis. (After Kl. Poczy)

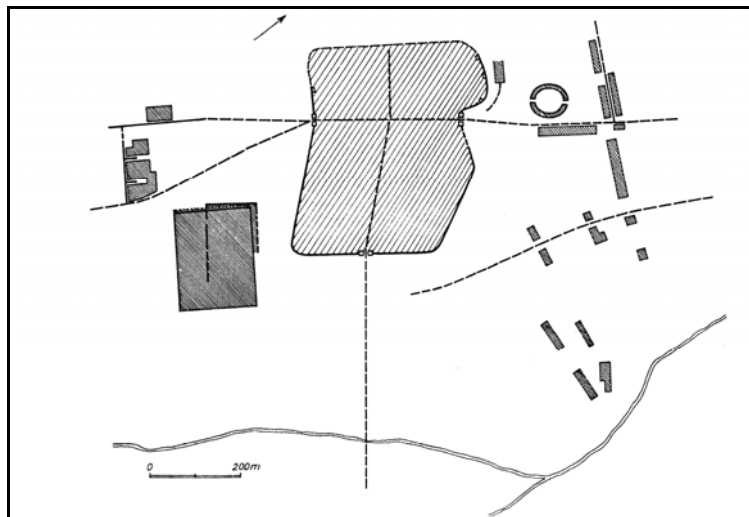


Fig. 7. Carnuntum. Situation plan of Canabae legionis. (After Kl. Poczy)

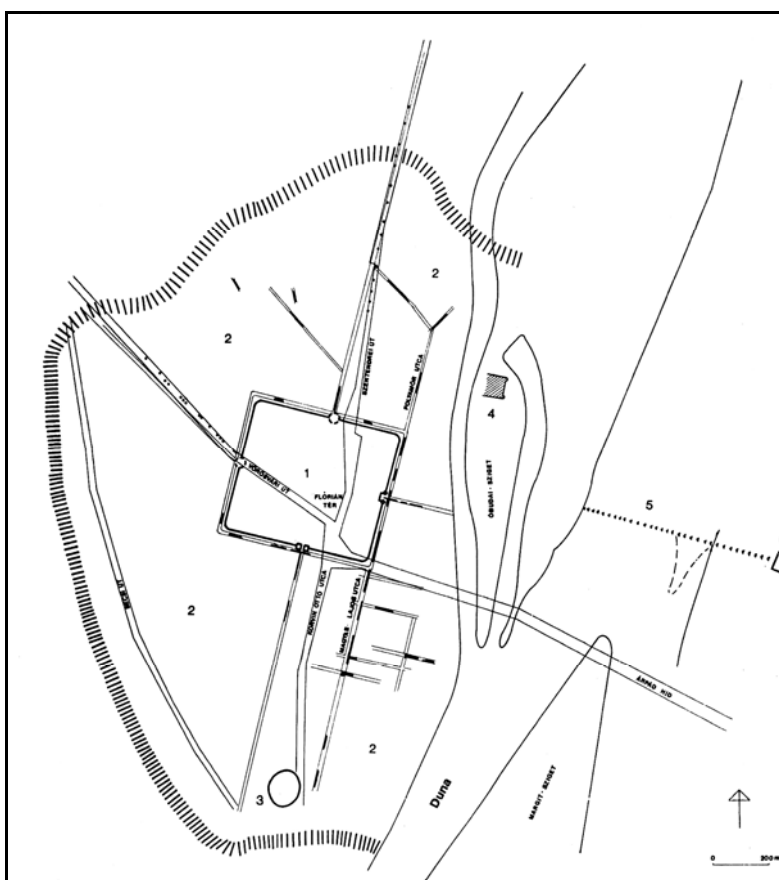


Fig. 8. Aquincum. Dimensiones and boundaries of the Canabae. (After Kl. Poczy)

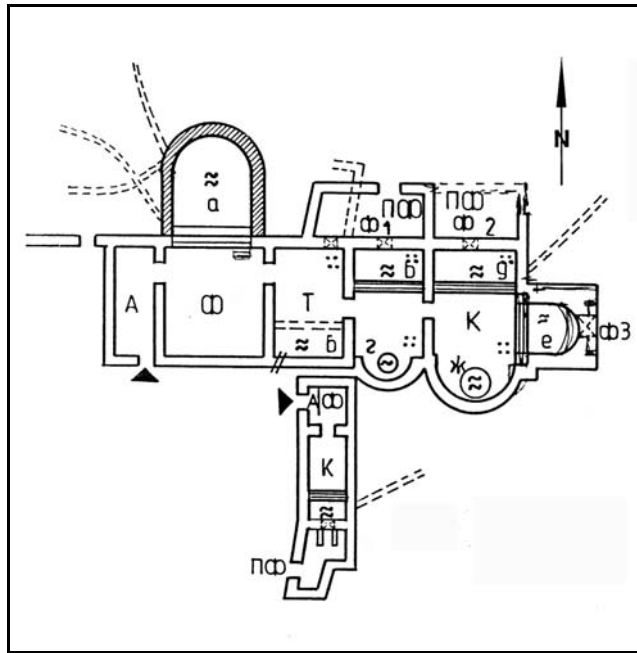


Fig. 9. Silistra. Public Baths in the South-east part of Canabae legionis. (After P. Donevski)

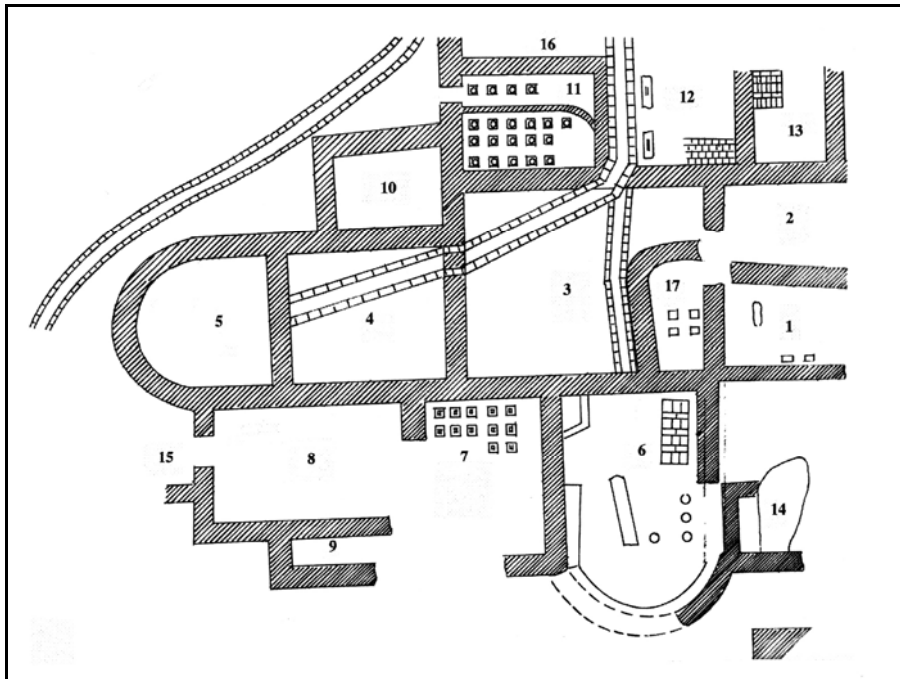


Fig.10. Silistra. Presumed Public Baths in the north part of the canabae. (After P. Donevski)