

SOME NOTES ON THE TOPOGRAPHY OF RATIARIA

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Summary. *The present paper deals with the preliminary results of the stratigraphic studies made on three trenches in the central part of Late Antique Ratiaria, viz. in the vicinity of the so-called 'Praetorium' in 2013. They show how far deep modern penetration reached in those areas, but it also reveals some features of the Late antique city. They confirm the extension of Late antique city in that direction, but put the question where the original Roman colony was since no remains of the latter were discovered. It may be, however, due to the limited area of excavation.*

Keywords: *Late antique, topography, Roman colony, stratigraphy, Lower Moesia.*

One of the main problems concerning the development of the Roman and Late Antique Ratiaria is its topographic development and urbanization. This is in line with the transfer from the military camp to colonia Ulpia Traiana Ratiaria¹, but also from the colonia to the provincial capital of Dacia Ripensis in late 3rd c. and eventually to *Anastasiana Ratiaria*. Its urbanization and topographic development through all these different periods is beyond doubt connected also with the development of certain characteristic infrastructure – roads, villas, settlements, castles etc. In this sense, the archaeological site of Ratiaria could be regarded as one of the emblematic for the Roman provincial archaeology revealing most of the features of Roman provincial urban structure. Sadly, the Bulgarian officials abdicated from their commitments and the archaeological site was almost completely destroyed in the last ten years by treasure-hunters. That is why, having in mind the limited area of excavation within the city², many important problems are still away of being solved including the topographical continuity between the different cities³. Among these problems, despite the discovery of the curtain wall and respectively the main western gate of Roman and Late Antique, is the topographical continuity between these two cities and the territorial expansion of the new provincial capital. On the one hand, it is the opinion of D. Giorgetti who advanced the theory that initially the fortified Roman city was in square shape and subsequently was extended southward reaching 426/284 m⁴.

On the other hand, it is the thesis advanced by V. Dinchev. He is inclined to believe that the territory of Ratiaria with its proclamation as a provincial capital was extended rather eastward than southward and reached up to 30+/-5 ha. It is possible that later the area of *Anastasiana Ratiaria* in 6th c. was reduced⁵.

The main arguments for the latter are various sectors of the curtain wall of the fortress of the city discovered or observed on the terrain⁶. It may be assumed that they show only the fortified area of the provincial capital, and some quarters remained outside the curtain walls, but nonetheless they prove that the area of the city initially was extended to that direction.

Another argument can be obtained by analysing the architectural decoration of the *thermae* located in the southern part of the city, i. e. the part attributed to the Roman city, according to D. Giorgetti. This complex has never been excavated or studied, and probably having in mind the vast destruction after the treasure-hunters' invasions, it will never be researched in a proper archaeological way, but some information may be obtained by studying its architectural decoration. Accordingly, it is clear that we are dealing with a lavishly decorated complex built in the time of Hadrian (117-138) (fig. 2)⁷. It is highly improbable that this complex remained outside the curtain walls.

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¹ See the full name mentioned in CIL 3. 14499. In most inscriptions, however, including the praetorians it is mentioned simply as Ulpia Ratiaria.

² The excavations carried out within the limit of the city were concentrated in Late antique city. The only exception is the excavation of western curtain wall of the city whose early period dates from the Roman period.

³ The topographical continuity has been recently discussed in В. Динчев. Ратиария, in R. Ivanov (ed.), *Roman and Early Byzantine cities in Bulgaria. Vol. 1. Studies in memory of Prof. Teofil Ivanov*, Sofia, 2002, 13-28; V. Dinchev, *RATIARIA. From Colonia Ulpia Traiana Ratiaria to Anastasiana Ratiaria*, in R. Ivanov (ed.) (forthcoming)

⁴ D. Giorgetti. *Res ad topographiam veteris urbis Ratiariae perinentes. Prelegomeni all' urbanistica della citta romana*, Ratiariensia, 3-4, 1987. pp. 40-42.

⁵ В. Динчев. *op. cit.*, p. 17, fig. 1.

⁶ *Ibidem*, *loc. cit.*

⁷ Z. Dimitrov. *Architectural Decoration in the Colony of Ulpia Ratiaria* in L. Vagalinski (ed.), *Proceedings of the XXII Limes congress. Rousse, Bulgaria*, forthcoming.

The results of the archaeological excavation in 2013 may provide additional arguments.

In 2013 the official archaeological excavation at Ulpia Ratiaria funded by the Bulgarian government started. Accordingly, three stratigraphic trenches were set up in order, firstly, to follow the cultural layers in depth to the virgin soil and set the stratigraphic sequence of the layers as it has never been done so far despite decades of ordinary archaeological excavations, and secondly, to determine to what extent the cultural layers were infected in depth by the illegal digging work.

The archaeological trenches were made in what is said to be the central part of Late Antique Ratiaria, in the vicinity of the so-called Praetorium of the provincial governor (fig. 3). The places were believed not to suffer in such a great extent by illegal activities.

Trench № 1 which in fact provided more information is situated between the Residence and the newly discovered bath, undoubtedly part of a rich private residential complex⁸. It has rectangular shape, orientated north-south (5/2 m). The excavation reveals that the modern penetration reached down to 3, 5 m of about 3, 70 m cultural layer (fig. 4). So, it is logical to find the remains of the structures quite fragmented, and in some cases only a small piece is preserved. Thus, only in the south-west corner the remains of a wall were found, orientated east-west, built in crushed stones bounded by white mortar. To the north of it remains of street pavement were discovered made by rubble stones and crushed pieces of pottery tamped in the earth. Above, the layer consisted of grey clay mixed with small boulders and a number of small finds, including a coin. The pavement lay on a rammed grey clay layer (fig. 5) under which virgin soil was found. The pavement itself runs in the east (fig. 6), west and north direction out of the limit of the trench (fig. 7, fig. 8). It seems that in this case we are dealing with pavement remains of decumanus, parallel to the so-called 'second northern decumanus' which runs alongside the Praetorium.

The pottery found within the limit of the excavation in the trench belongs mostly to Late Antique period when the shreds from amphorae prevailed (168 of 338 fragments). In comparison, the Roman pottery fragments were up to 62, but some fragments of terra sigillata were also found. The statistic results are presented in table 1⁹. It is to be noted that in the layer above the street pavements, the Late Antique pottery prevailed in huge quantity.

Trench № 2 also has a rectangular shape, orientated north-south (4/2 m), and it was set on the bottom of the already existing trench of the robbers near a fragment of a wall made of bricks (fig.9). Unfortunately, the illegal invasion reached down almost to the virgin soil, and a very thin undisturbed archaeological layer was studied, 0, 40 m thick. It is on the virgin soil that the only one preserved clay floor was found. In the middle of the trench the floor was cut by a wall of which only the substruction was preserved (fig.10) made of crushed stones of small and middle size bounded by white mortar which also include pieces of 'pink' mortar (fig. 11). It became clear that the wall fragment of bricks was not *in situ*.

Trench № 3 also has a rectangular shape, orientated in the north-south direction (2/ 1, 5 m) (fig. 12). The cultural layers here were disturbed down to the virgin soil of 1, 4 m by machine work. In the course of illegal digging a wall of crushed stones bounded by white mortar was destroyed (fig. 13, fig. 14).

The small finds as well as the numismatic material found in the course of the excavation dated the cultural layers to the second half of 3rd-6th c., i. e. in the so-called 'capital' period of Ratiaria. The results arise the following questions:

1). The results of these limited archaeological excavations confirm the extension of the territory of Ratiaria, when proclaimed as the capital of Dacia Ripensis, in the eastern direction as proposed by V. Dinchev rather than south. Despite the quantity of Roman pottery found, no clear layer that can be attributed for sure to the Roman city was found.

2). It is logical to assume yet that the Roman city never reach this area and therefore the Roman city should be searched in other area. It is located only 150 m eastward of the west curtain wall dated from the late 1st till end of 6th c. with various rebuilding periods. Otherwise, the Roman city should be very narrow and unprofitable. The explanation may be that an open area existed within the limit of the fortified city or when the city was remodelled after being proclaimed as a provincial capital a vast levelling of the terrain was carried out. It also included removal of earlier destruction. It is possible as well that the place where the trenches were made was in fact courtyard space or the Roman city never reached this area and therefore should be searched in other area.

⁸ For the preliminary report of the excavation – see Здр. Димитров. И. Топалилов. И. Цветков. 'Редовни археологически проучвания на Ратиария'. Археологически открития и проучвания през 2013 г., София, 2014, pp. 303-306.

⁹ My sincere thanks go to Nikolai Rusev who made the statistics.

3). It is clear that the trenches provide more information about the Late Antique city. For example, the excavation in trench № 1 reveals a new street which is not in accordance with what is accepted to be the street grid of Late Antique city, and mostly in the area on the north of the so-called 'second northern decumanus' which runs alongside the Praetorium. Having in mind the date of other similar street pavements in 6th c. it seems that the inner space of the fortified city was in fact reorganized in a way, and the new insula did not match the older, initial ones.

The structure of the new street pavements which consists of small rubble stones rammed in an earlier layer of destruction or earth is to be found also in other parts of the city, mostly to the east and north of the Praetorium, but also to the western gate of the city and near the so-called 'building with Treasuries' in the north-eastern corner of the city¹⁰. It should be noted that in some cases the new pavements lay above the old ones as it is for example the case with the decumanus which runs alongside the Praetorium. The excavation in trench № 1 reveals, however, that this is not the case everywhere and especially in the northern part of the city it seems that this practice was not followed; the old grid seems to be partly abandoned and new streets regardless of the existing grid were paved.

As for the southern part of the city, where almost no excavations were carried out, it still remains unclear. When, however, decumanus maximus in the eastern part was excavated, no such pavement is reported to have been discovered¹¹.

The results presented here are preliminary since the excavated area is limited within only three trenches. Having been devastated by looters the condition of the site itself is not of much help either. Despite this, however, I think that the results should not be neglected when studying the topographical development and urbanization of Late Antique Ratiaria. The question about Roman Ratiaria still remains open.

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¹⁰ В. Динчев. *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹¹ See *Ratiaria Semper Floreat* (cur. R. Ivanov), vol. 1., Sofia, 2014.

Figures

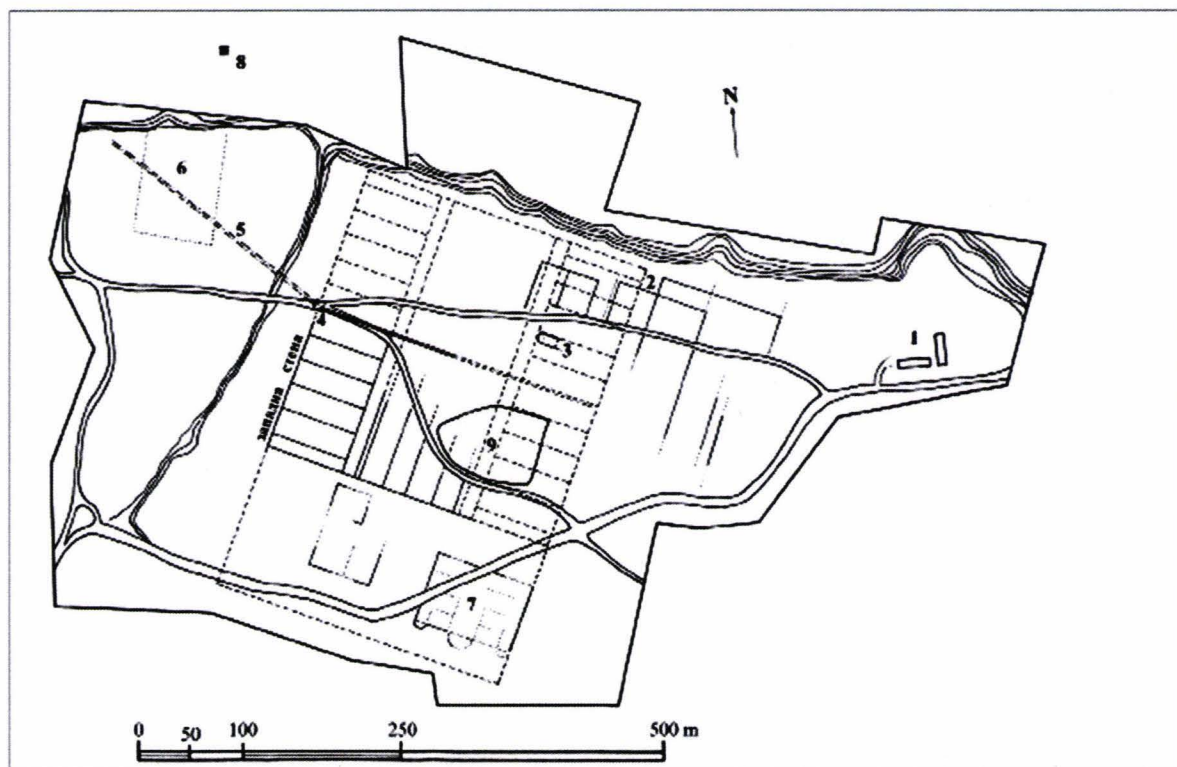


Fig. 1. Topographical hypothetical map of Ratiaria (after D. Giorgetti, *Res ad topographiam veteris urbis Ratiariae perinentes. Prelegomeni all' urbanistica della città romana*, Ratiariensia, 3-4, 1987, 33-84, tav. V-XXII, A).



Fig. 2. Corinthian capital from south thermae.

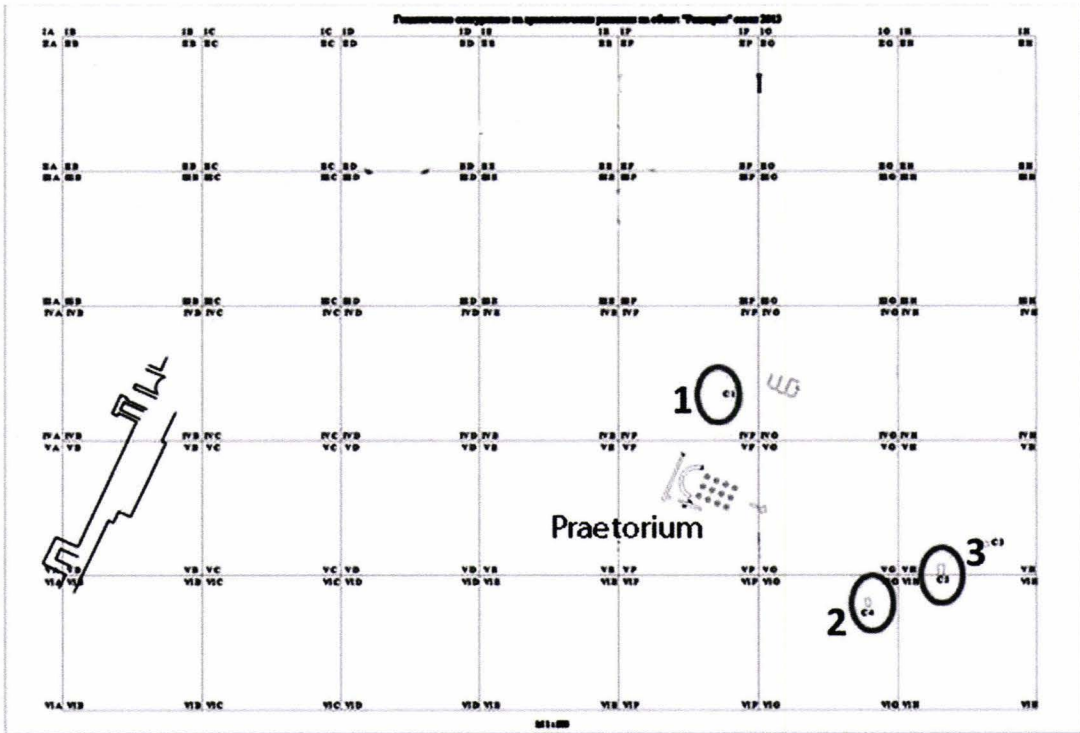


Fig. 3. Location of the trenches.



Fig. 4. Trench № 1 – view from north.



Fig. 5. The remains of street pavement in Trench № 1.

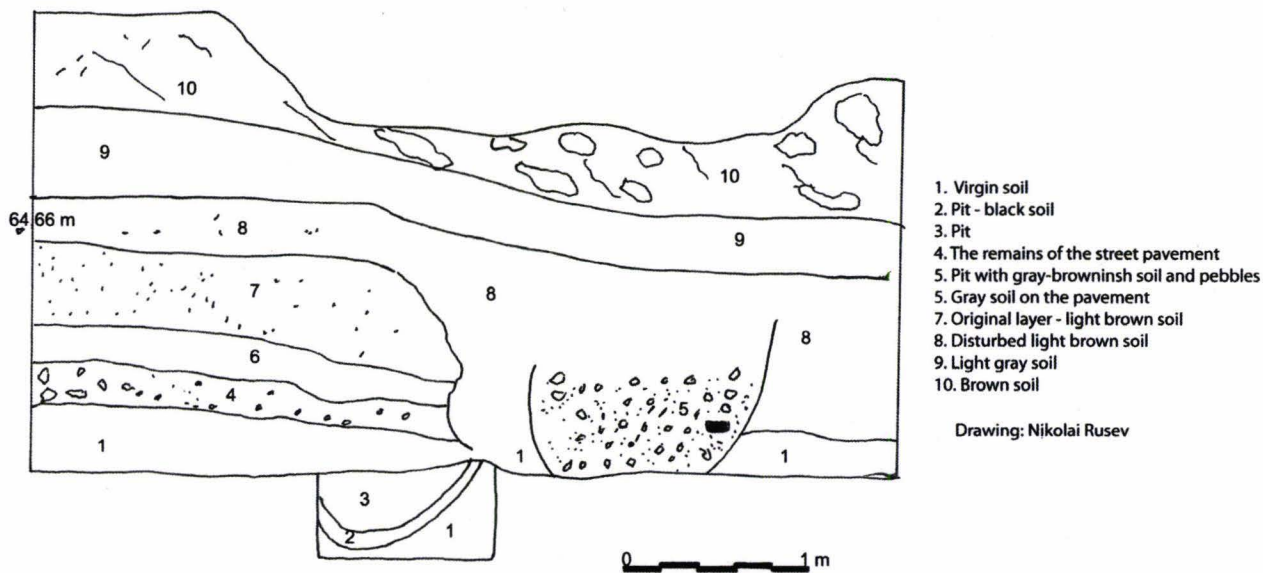


Fig. 6. Trench № 1 – eastern profile.

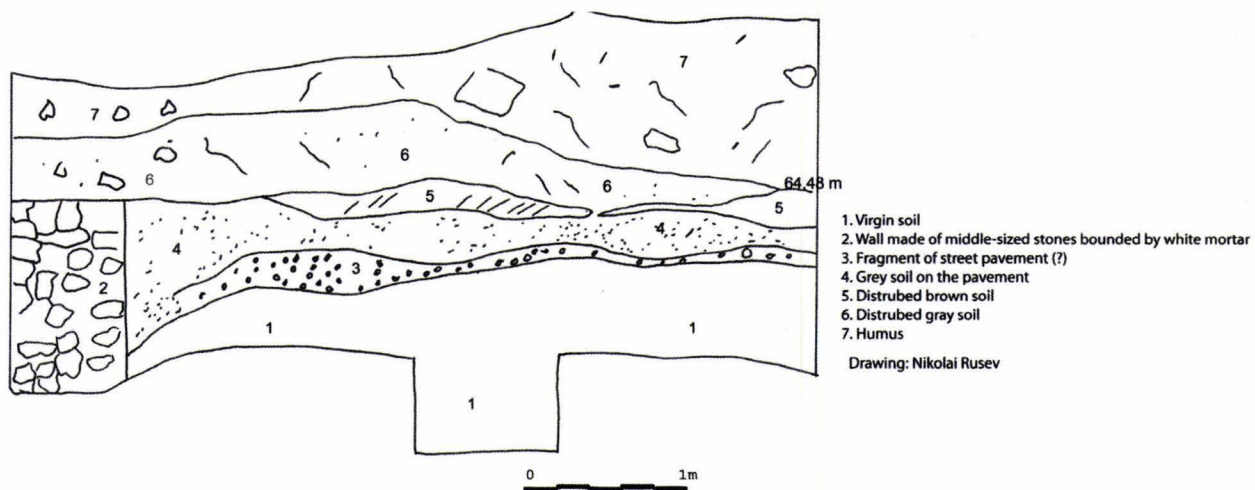


Fig. 7. Trench № 1 – western profile.

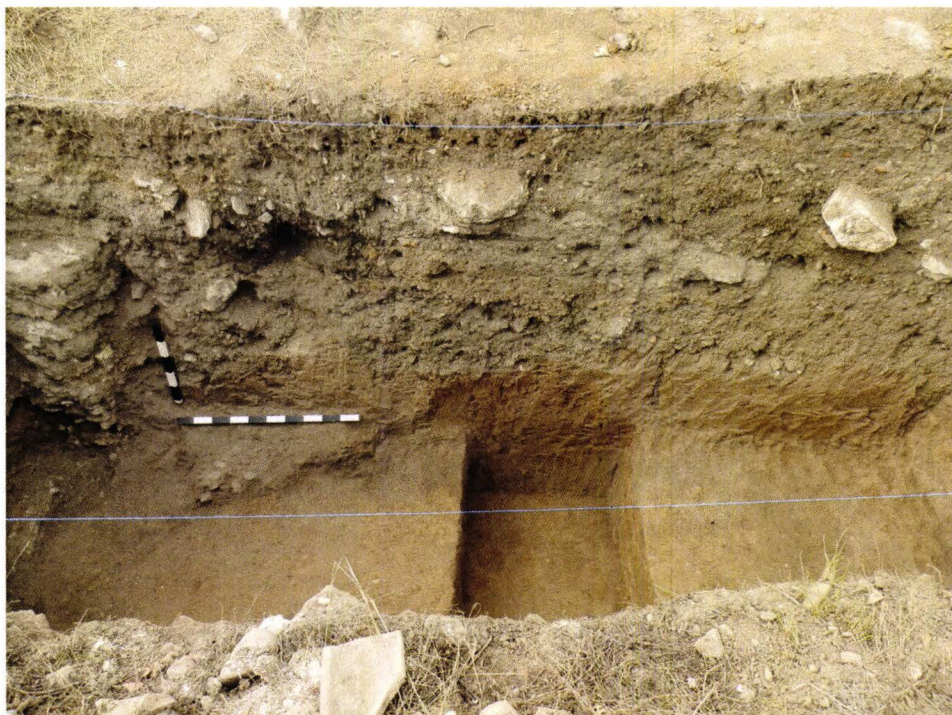


Fig. 8. Trench № 1 – view from east.



Fig. 9. Trench № 2 – the beginning.



Fig. 10. Trench № 2 – view from south.



Fig. 11. Trench № 2 – fragment of the wall.



Fig. 12. Trench № 3 – view from east.



Fig. 13. Trench № 3 – view from north.



Fig. 14. Trench № 3 – view from west.