

Pannonia Underground

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CONTENT INHALT

Vorwort.....	7
<i>Andrea Csapláros</i>	
Milestones in the research of Savaria.....	9
<i>Ottó Sosztarits</i>	
Excavation in the middle of Scarbantia.....	31
<i>Attila Mrenka – Dániel Kovács</i>	
Bratislava Castle, Excavation and Presentation of the Celto-Roman Acropolis.....	53
<i>Margaréta Musilová – Branislav Resutík</i>	
Stadtarchäologie in Wien 2022. Projektorganisation mit aktuellen Fallbeispielen.....	77
<i>Martin Mosser – Kristina Adler-Wölfl – Michaela Kronberger</i>	
Die Vorstädte der <i>colonia Septimia Aurelia Antoniniana</i> Carnuntum.....	89
<i>Christian Gugl – Silvia Radbauer – Mario Wallner – Eduard Pollhammer</i>	
Interpreting space. A case study of Arrabona (Győr, HU).....	121
<i>Szilvia Bíró</i>	
Living and working in Brigetio. The architectural frame of life in the Roman civil town.....	141
<i>Linda Dobosi</i>	
Late Roman earthquake in Brigetio?.....	179
<i>Linda Dobosi – Miklós Kázmér</i>	
Many a little makes a mickle. Unusual construction technologies with great archaeological results in the Aquincum Civil Town.....	209
<i>Orsolya Láng</i>	
A recently discovered road in the area of Aquincum's civil town.....	223
<i>Barbara Hajdu</i>	
Neue Daten zu den weißen Flecken der Topographie von Aquincum.....	237
<i>Gabriella Fényes</i>	
New results of excavations of the Imperial Palace in Sirmium.....	255
<i>Stefan Pop-Lazić – Bojan Popović</i>	
Lost & found in Raetia. Defining Roman archaeological heritage in Bregenz (Austria).....	279
<i>Karl Oberhofer – Andreas Picker</i>	
Der Domplatz von St. Pölten. Eines der herausforderndsten innerstädtischen Grabungsprojekte Österreichs.....	299
<i>Ronald Risy</i>	

Liebe Leserin, lieber Leser!

Die vorliegende Publikation dokumentiert die Beiträge der gleichnamigen Tagung des NKA Projektprogramms, die am 25. und 26. November 2021 in Iseum Savariense in Szombathely stattfand.

Archäologie ist ein wichtiges Thema in der integrierten Stadtentwicklung. Die aktuellen Grabungen in den antiken Städten, wie in Savaria, Scarbantia, Carnuntum, Arrabonna, Aquincum, Brigetio, Sirmium, Mursa, Aelium Cetium, Napoca etc. belegen dies eindrucksvoll. "Die Stadt unter der Stadt" stößt auf ein immer größer werdendes Interesse bei Bewohnern, aber auch bei Besuchern. Die Themen dieses Bandes beschäftigen sich mit den neuesten Grabungsergebnissen, methodischen Problemen rund um das Thema „Bewahren und Präsentieren“ in der Stadtarchäologie hauptsächlich in der Provinz Pannonien. Bei den Vorträgen geht es nicht nur um die Ergebnisse der archäologischen Ausgrabungen, sondern auch die Ausgrabungsmethodik und verschiedene Ausgrabungstechniken. In den letzten Jahren wurden großflächig geophysikalische Untersuchungen von antiken Siedlungen und deren Umgebung durchgeführt. Die Ergebnisse dieser Forschungen tragen dazu bei, die räumliche Struktur und Landnutzung antiker Städte besser zu verstehen.

Die archäologischen Relikte in den modernen Städten werden zunehmend Bestandteil von Umbau- und Neubaumaßnahmen und als "Fenster in die Vergangenheit" inszeniert. Im öffentlichen Raum weisen neue Wegführungen, archäologische Pfade, Pflasterungen und Informationstafeln auf das archäologische Erbe hin.

Der Weg dahin ist nach wie vor steinig: In der öffentlichen und vor allem in der Investorenwahrnehmung gelten Grabungen als schwer kalkulierbares Hemmnis. Die Integration der Funde in zukünftige Projekte gilt als wertmindernd. Das muss nicht sein: Auf der Basis der archäologischen Bestandserfassung können die Innenstädte planerisch und gestalterisch sinnvoll weiterentwickelt und Orts- und Stadtbilder erhalten werden. Entscheidend ist das gemeinsame Handeln!

Savaria – Szombathely, April 2022

*Andrea Csapláros
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New results of excavations of the Imperial Palace in Sirmium

Stefan Pop-Lazić*

Bojan Popović**

In the last few years a new evidence for existence of specific polygonal structure, building N in the north-eastern part of the Sirmium imperial complex was accomplished. This monumental structure was 16-sided with strong wall 6 feet wide. Inside a building a row of radially positioned column bases was found. Eastern parts of this building were already excavated during the late sixties but its characteristics remained unrecognized. Due to the recent research it could be stated that north-eastern entrance was positioned on that side. Besides this, an entrance from southern side, leading to central communication in the palace complex was supposed. Inside building N dated by the coins in the first decade of the 4th century numerous fragments of porphyry busts, and lead seals were found. There is a high probability that originally those busts stood along the walls in the building. Lead seals with different representations once sealed official documents which were probably stored in the same building. In that way we can assume that building N was an official building for documents storage in the central part of the Imperial Palace complex. It underwent serious, most probably intentional destruction, somewhere in the second half of the 4th century. On top of it new structures and smaller square were created.

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Archaeological investigation of Sirmium started in the 19th century, continues in the last 70 years almost without interruption. In the course of the research, more than 85 sites have been investigated. Excavations in the modern city of Sremska Mitrovica had mainly rescue character, although parallel systematic research was also conducted. Due to the nature of the research some of the main urban elements are still missing. It mainly concerns the identification of the position of the city center – the forum. Some of the city blocks and streets do not resemble the typical rectangular scheme (**Fig. 1**). It is quite obvious in the southern part of the city

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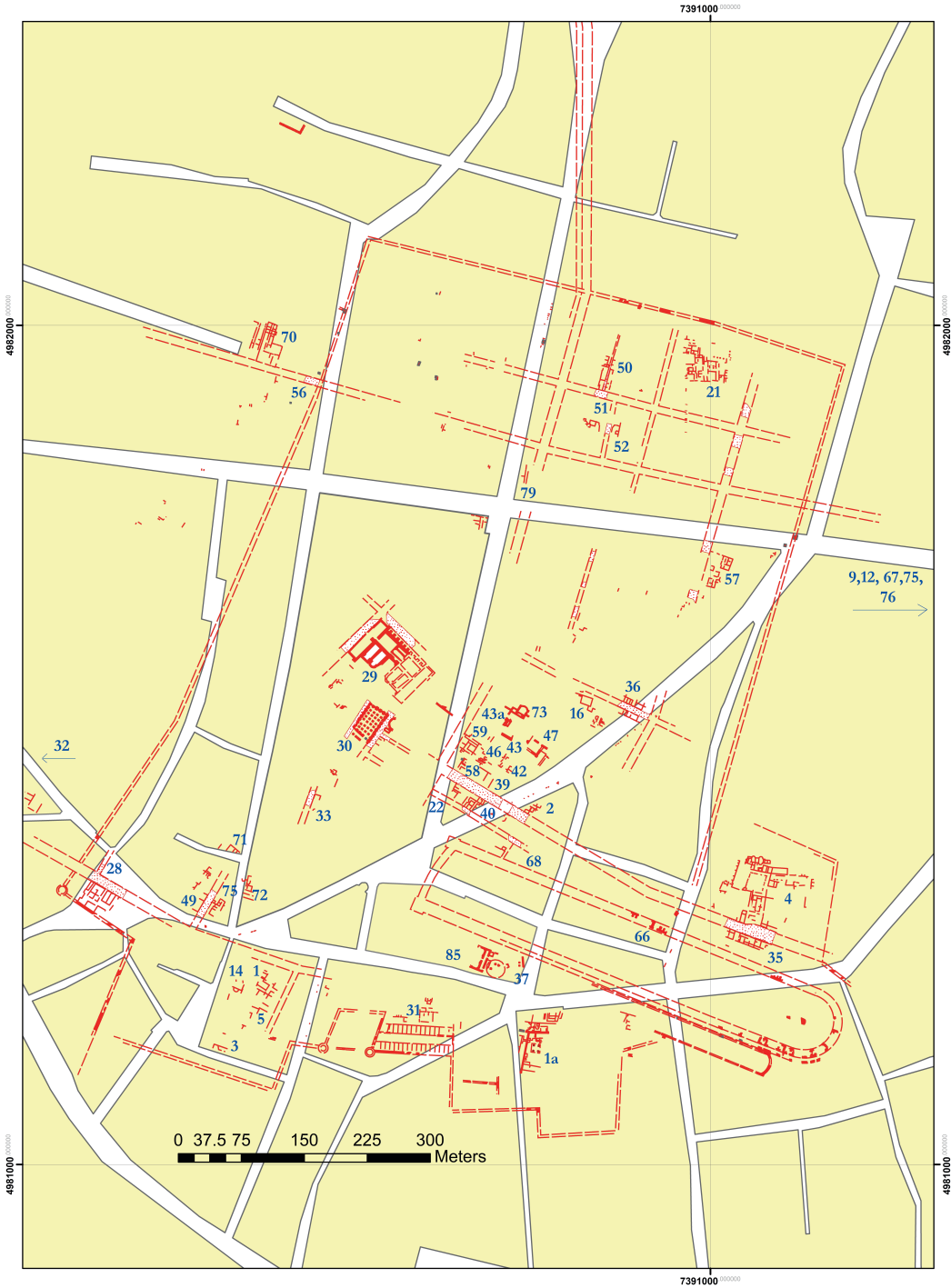


Fig. 1.

Late Roman Sirmium plan of excavated sites within city raster (© Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

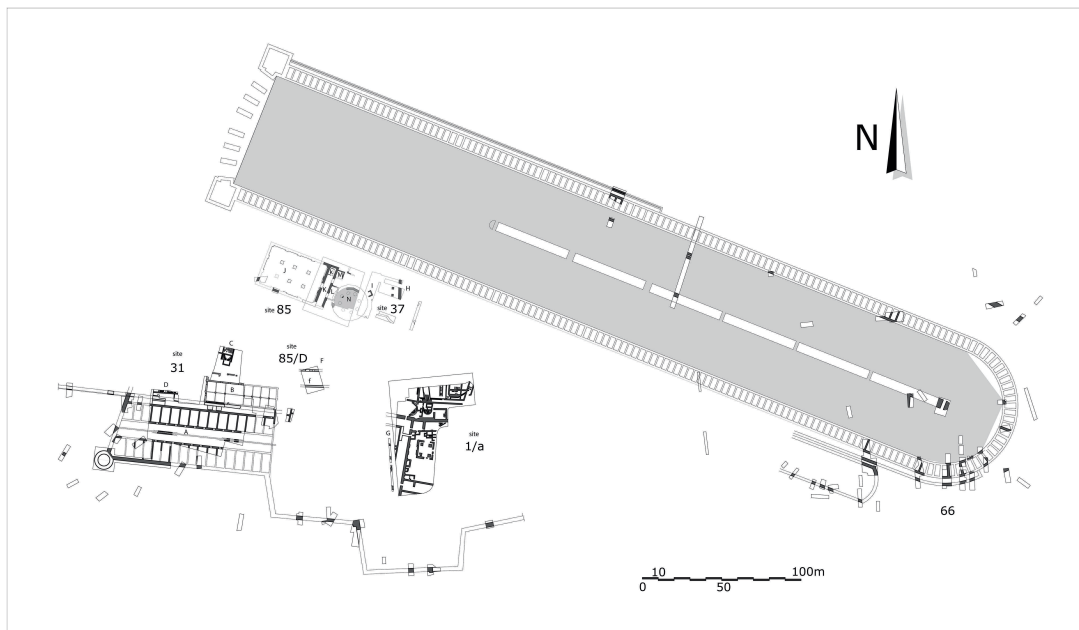


Fig. 2.

Imperial Palace complex in Sirmium (© Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

where in the beginning of the 4th century a new building complex was erected. Based on the specific architecture and building arrangement it was interpreted as Imperial Palace. Finding of the hippodrome typical for the Late Roman palaces helped the researchers in this positive identification.

The researches of the south-eastern part of the urban nucleus of Sirmium started at the end of the 6th decade of the previous century, and, with some interruptions, they are still going on. The excavations at the site 1a resulted in discovering of a part of the structure interpreted as the Imperial Palace. The researches to the north on the site 37 lead to the discovery of a bigger luxurious building with a portico, unfortunately only of its most western part. Already during 1969, the researches were pointing that the space of the sites 1a and 37 belonged to some significant structure.¹ An important turning point in further investigations was the discovery of hippodrome. The spatial relation of the position of hippodrome and site 1a enabled the identification of the site 1a as the south-eastern part of the Imperial Palace (*Fig. 2*). In contrast to the previous opinions that the complex of the Imperial Palace should be searched for to the right from the *carceres* of the hippodrome, in Sirmium it was confirmed that in certain cases the palace is to the left from it.² In later works this hypothesis was further confirmed by the results of the excavations at the site 31, where the granaries and *thermae* were discovered.³ The western rampart, discovered in the trenches JB/73, 84, 89, bears witness to the fact

¹ MILOŠEVIĆ 1969, 197.

² POPOVIĆ 1971, 126; POPOVIĆ – OCHSENSCHLAGER 1975, 70.

³ DUVAL – POPOVIĆ 1977, 101–102.



Fig. 3.

Ground plan of the site 85 (© Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

that the civilian area of the city was separated from the imperial complex by the rampart. The systematic research in this part of Sirmium was not continued before 2002, when the excavations on the site 85 had started (*Fig. 3*).⁴

The site 85 is in fact the western part of the site 37, and it covers area of 1300 m² between Museum of Srem and site 37. Since 2002 there have been eleven excavation campaigns. The exceptional state of preservation of the architecture from different periods, as well as the existence of the medieval necropolis with more than 300 graves explored up to now, have conditioned the slow pace of excavations.

The dominant architecture at the site consists of the eastern part of the monumental building (J) with the annexes (31 × 39 m) and the remains of the church complex with a necropolis. During the campaigns between 2002 and 2006, focused on the researches of the middle and southern part of the site, more architectural horizons were noticed. The youngest phases at the site represent the buildings from the 18th century, whose foundations had damaged the remains of the church complex and of the necropolis of medieval Mitrovica.⁵ In the walls of the structures built during the 14th–16th century numerous ancient spolia were discovered. The walls of this phase are dug into the mighty layer of ruins from the 4th century. From the period of the 5th–6th century several huts were discovered, just as several walls made of brick connected by mud.⁶ The dwellings from this period are dug into the destruction layer of the buildings dated to the second half of the 4th century. In that period the eastern part of the site was an open space between the annexes of the building J at the site 85 and the building H at the site 37.

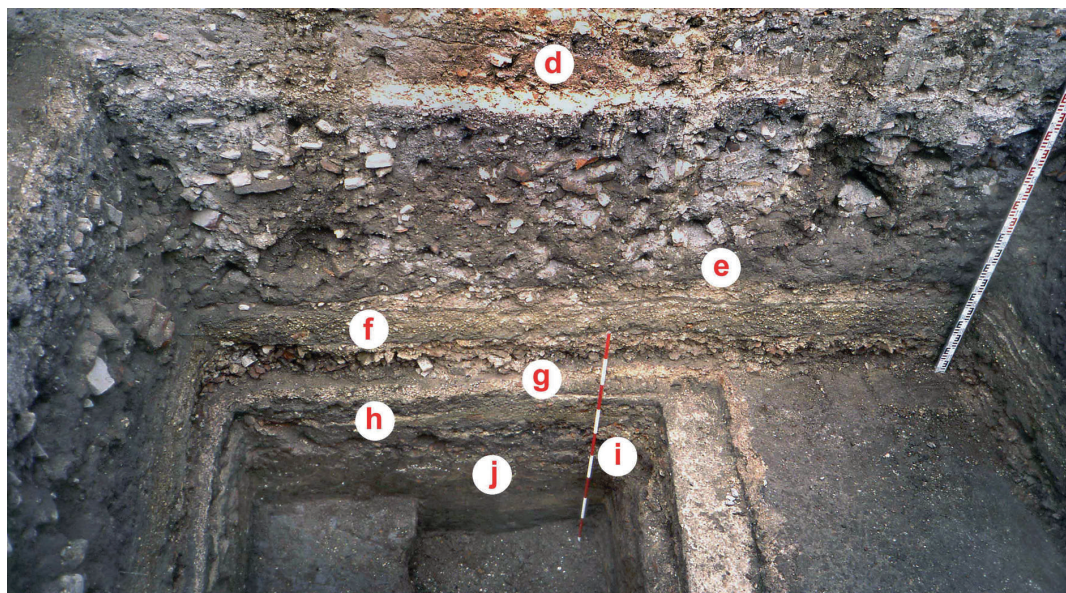


Fig. 4.

Western profile in the trench 1/2002 (© Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

⁴ JEREMIĆ – POPOVIĆ 2004, 284–287; HEIJMANS – JEREMIĆ 2004, 687–690.

⁵ JEREMIĆ 2006, 149–151.

⁶ POP-LAZIĆ 2017, 28–32.

Prior to second half of the 4th century this area was occupied by polygonal building N which will be discussed later.

In somewhat greater measure an insight into the stratigraphy which predates the 4th century provided a trench from 2002, placed in the eastern part of the site (*Fig. 4*). Under the floor G, dated by coins into the first decade of the 4th century, two floors were discovered. The first one, floor (h), is a leveling with the limestone mortar for placing the floor G. Under this floor the older one was discovered (i), dated by the find of coins into the 2nd century. Under the oldest floor made of mortar, the coins of the emperor Claudius I were discovered. The oldest horizon in the trench represents the remains of the settlement of La Tène culture from the 1st century B.C. and the 1st century A.D. The similar stratigraphy and the appearance of the floors rendered the excavations in the control trenches in the eastern annex of the building J.

In the research of the site prior to 2011, floor (g) was interpreted as part of the central heating system, mostly due to finds of shallow channels embedded in mortar of this floor. But parts of the building discovered from the 2011 onwards pointed to the conclusion that on this site a rather unusual Roman structure existed for rather short period of time.

Due to the circumstances, only little more than one quarter of polygonal building N were excavated, but even with this considered, it was possible to deduce some of the characteristics of the building itself. The remains of polygonal external wall (LXIV), inner also polygonal wall (LXXIV), the floor (g) in the interior of the structure, as well as four radially arranged foundation platforms (B1–B4) with the remains of the marble bases of columns inside the structure, were investigated.



Fig. 5.

Corner of the polygonal wall LXIV above the ground (© Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

The ground plan of the structure measured 21.3 m which corresponds with roman measuring system (72 feet \times 29.6 cm) where *pes monetalis* was used.⁷ The external wall (LXIV) 1.80 m wide (6 feet \times 29.6 cm), was surrounding the interior of the structure, i.e. of the floor (g). Due to the thorough destruction that took place in the second half of the 4th century, only two smaller parts of the upper zone of the wall remained (**Fig. 5**). In the south-western side one of the corners with two sides connected at the angle of 157.5 degrees was found, which is one of the arguments for interpretation of the whole building as 16-sided (hexadecagon). Its inner parallel face was discovered in the trench 3/2011 in the foundation zone. On the ground of the positions of these two parts it can be concluded that the wall was 1.80 m wide. It was explored to the depth of 77.20 m, so it can be concluded that it was founded very deeply, over 2.50 m. At the preserved north-western part of the same wall (under the southern annex k), building of the outer face with stone-plates connected by limestone mortar, 0.85 m wide, can be noticed, while the rest of the width of the wall towards the floor (g) has been taken out (**Fig. 6**).⁸ By construction of deeply founded external wall a specific polygonal ring was created, which gave the strong support to the structure on the unstable terrain.⁹

In 2021 the excavations focused on deducing the characteristics of building element which waits for its interpretation. In the northern end of the building N foundation parts of the wall LXIV project inside the building for 1.50 m in a form of specific buttresses. Between them, at a floor level, a structure made of bricks that could have served as a podium was created. This specific podium was built in a form of shallow wall with corner in the center whose angle measures 157.50 degrees. The width of the podium is 1.20 m in the upper part while in the lower one it has widening of 1.40 m towards the interior. In the negative of the wall LXIV there was a possibility to observe the outer foundation parts of the structure which was built of horizontally arranged bricks in 5 levels and the lowest one arranged in sloping order (**Fig. 7**). The length of the podium structure from corner to the buttresses slightly differs, while from the angle to the eastern buttress there is a length of 3.10, from the western buttress a length of 2.95 m could be measured. This structure was preserved at the floor level so we cannot deduce if it had original height in higher level. Based on rather shallow foundation in comparison to deeply founded buttresses, we could assume that this structure haven't had structural purpose in building, but it could have been used for placing some objects in it, a form of podium.

Inside the building an inner colonnade-remains of four column bases was found (**Fig. 8**). They were radially positioned roughly 2.30 m from each other, and 4.80 m away from the center of the building. Remains of marble base 2 and 4 were

7 DUNCAN-JONES 1980, 127.

8 Popović supposes that coins found in destruction layer within the ghost wall resemble the moment of reparation of this wall, although there are no indications for existence of two building phases in building N. (POPOVIĆ 2016, 374; POPOVIĆ 2020, 153).

9 We assume that the successive layers from the La Tène period to the late 3th century, about 3 m thick, represented a problem of its kind for the builders of this structure. Consequently, we assume that they chose the solution with the polygonal foundation, combined with the bases of the columns in the shape of a cube, as the best building-solution for the unstable terrain.



Fig. 6.
Southern annex L on top of the wall LXIV (© Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)



Fig. 7.
Building N. View from the north (© Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)



Fig. 8.

Building N. View from the west (© Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)



Fig. 9.

Foundation zone of the base 1 (© Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

found *in situ* while in marble base 3 just the dispersed marble dust was found. In the area of base 1 there were no traces of marble, one of the reasons for it is the position of later pit that was dug on the northern side. Marble bases were positioned on top of huge rectangular foundation platforms which measured 2.10×1.90 m. The circumstances enabled investigation of foundation part of base 1 to the depth of 2.30 m, where the underground waters appeared. In the lower zone the platform was built in the paving layer of solid limestone mortar, sand, crushed bricks and stone, and on the ground of the fact that the lateral sides are flat, it can be concluded that the lower zone was cast in the wooden frame. The upper zone (0.35 m) consists of the paving layers of stones and bricks while the final, flattening layer consists of fragmented bricks connected with mortar (**Fig. 9**). The best preserved part is the marble base above the platform 2 ($1.35 \times 0.60 \times 0.20$ m), in whose interior (side towards its center) the recesses for joints were found. Since this we could assume that marble bases were created from joining parts. Based on the shape of the preserved remains of the marble base 2 we can assume that it had specific 8 sided shapes with curved side towards the building center. Also, it can only be supposed, that the marble basis had eight angles, with concave and diagonal opposite sides. Based on dimensions of marble bases remains and foundation platforms we could assume that original column shafts were rather huge, with diameter of 1.50 m. The only reason for placement of such huge columns could be their support of also monumental roof. Polygonal eight-sided roof could have stood on eight columns.¹⁰

Remains of floor g were found inside the building almost entirely, except in the area of the column base 1 where later pit destroyed it. It was made of limestone mortar mixed with the river pebbles and crushed bricks of different granulation. The floor is between 0.15 and 0.17 m thick. In some places it is noticeable that it was cast at the moment when the marble bases were placed on the platforms, considering that the floor is stretching to the very edges of the bases. In the western part of the building three parallel sunken grooves were found in the floor, at the mutual distance of 1.15 m, each about 0.20 m wide, which are stretching from the western edge to the bases of the columns 1 and 2. The surface in the sunken parts is polished just like the rest of the floor (**Fig. 10**). Similar grooves were found stretching from the north to center of the building as two parallel lines, at the spacing of 0.90 m between two stripes. The floor (g) was in some parts damaged by the digging of the Late Roman pits, and in that places, same as in the trench 1/2002, it was possible to state that directly under the floor (g) there is a floor made of limestone mortar (h), while in some places the floor (g) lies on the layer of brown soil, which, in its turn, covers the floor (h). It is possible that the floor h represented the leveling layer before the casting of floor g.

On the western side outside the building N, a level of fragmented bricks connected by strong limestone mortar was found (79.60 m ASL). This level was damaged by construction of drainage canal, which stretches west from the struc-

¹⁰ Popović mentions six-sided dome although the 3D reconstruction shows eight-sided (POPOVIĆ 2020, 150, Fig. 6).



Fig. 10.
Grooves in the floor g
 (© Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

ture N, along the axis north–south. In one trench the stratigraphy under the floor of the vestibule (of the eastern annex K) was researched, where the existence of six floorings was stated, between the elevations 79.01 and 80.11 m. The floor number 3, at the elevation 79.59 m which is similar to the level of socle of wall XXVI could be contemporaneous with the structure N.

Eastern part of the building N at the site 37

East from the site 85 in 1968 and 1969 the excavations at the site 37 took place. This space is often mentioned in literature as a part of the Imperial Palace. On the ground of the summary reports and georeferenced¹¹ ground-plan of the site, it can be concluded that in the western side of the site 37 the part of the building N was discovered, more precisely, its eastern part, although it was not described as polygonal structure (*Fig. 11*). In the report in several places „...the mortar floor, few canals under and above the floor”, as well as “the walls of the building made

¹¹ The georeferences of the architecture discovered at the site 37 have been done in GIS application, on the ground of the schematic basis published in Sirmium I (Plan I) and of the basis of the square net which can be found in the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade.

of several bigger and smaller stone blocks, with quite shallow foundations, and three stone blocks (one with the groove for the door), above the floor level" were mentioned. The building made of bigger and smaller stone-blocks with three stone-blocks above the floor level represents in fact the entrance into some structure, while "the floor with pinkish coating"¹² is in fact floor (g), as it was named in the excavations of the site 85. This is suggested by the horizontally placed marble beams, which formed the threshold and door frame with door slot preserved in one of them. They were discovered at the elevation 79.81 m, while the elevation of the mortar floor on which they are laid is 79.54 m. A. Milošević has, on the basis of the finds of the painted arch made of sinter, assumed that there existed a temple at this place. On the other hand M. Jeremić interpreted this structure as a fountain.¹³ In our opinion, there are no reasons for this, considering that there were no remains of the water-supply installations that would suggest the existence of such structure. The canal discovered in the immediate vicinity negates the south-eastern wall, and due to its position it represents a latter installation. Based on the aforementioned we presume that the structure mentioned in the previous literature as fountain is in fact the entrance to the polygonal building N from north-eastern side. This would also suggest, beside the above-mentioned facts, the elevation of the mortar floor at the site 37 (79.54 m), for which we assume that it represents the eastern end of the floor (g).¹⁴ While the immediate vicinity of the building N has on the northern side the hippodrome as its border, on the eastern one the building with a portico (H), and in the west the public structure (J), in the east can be noticed the extension of the level of limestone mortar towards the building with a portico (79.71–79.73 m), and to the north the extension of the level made in the technique *opus caementitum*, so it can be supposed that on this side the space was open towards the hippodrome and the building with a portico (H). On the opposite side towards the public building (J), there are no clear indications for the original look of this space at the beginning of the 4th century. In this place some bigger building interventions were done in the middle and during the second half of the 4th century, when the vestibule (K eastern annex), northern and southern annex (L and M) and the accompanying infrastructure (drainage canal and pavement) were built. By their construction the remains of the structures from the age of Tetrarchy were devastated.

As neither for the building J, nor for the building H we don't have clear indications that they are synchronous with the building N, do they precede it or they are later. We cannot say with certainty if this polygonal structure was positioned in the framework of a bigger square, or of a somewhat bigger courtyard, bordered by the structures J and H. The space between the hippodrome and these buildings covers around 1200 m². When we observe the position of the building N in the

¹² MILOŠEVIĆ 1968, 141.

¹³ JEREMIĆ 2009, 488; Due to the fact that our late colleague dr Miroslav Jeremić due to his physical condition in his late days was unable to revise his opinions on existence of building N in his monograph on architecture and urbanization of Sirmium – „Sirmium city on water“, structure I was published as fountain (JEREMIĆ 2016, 271, figs 191, 193).

¹⁴ On the eastern most side of the site 85 floor G is on slope from north to the south (N79.82 – S79.43 m ASL).

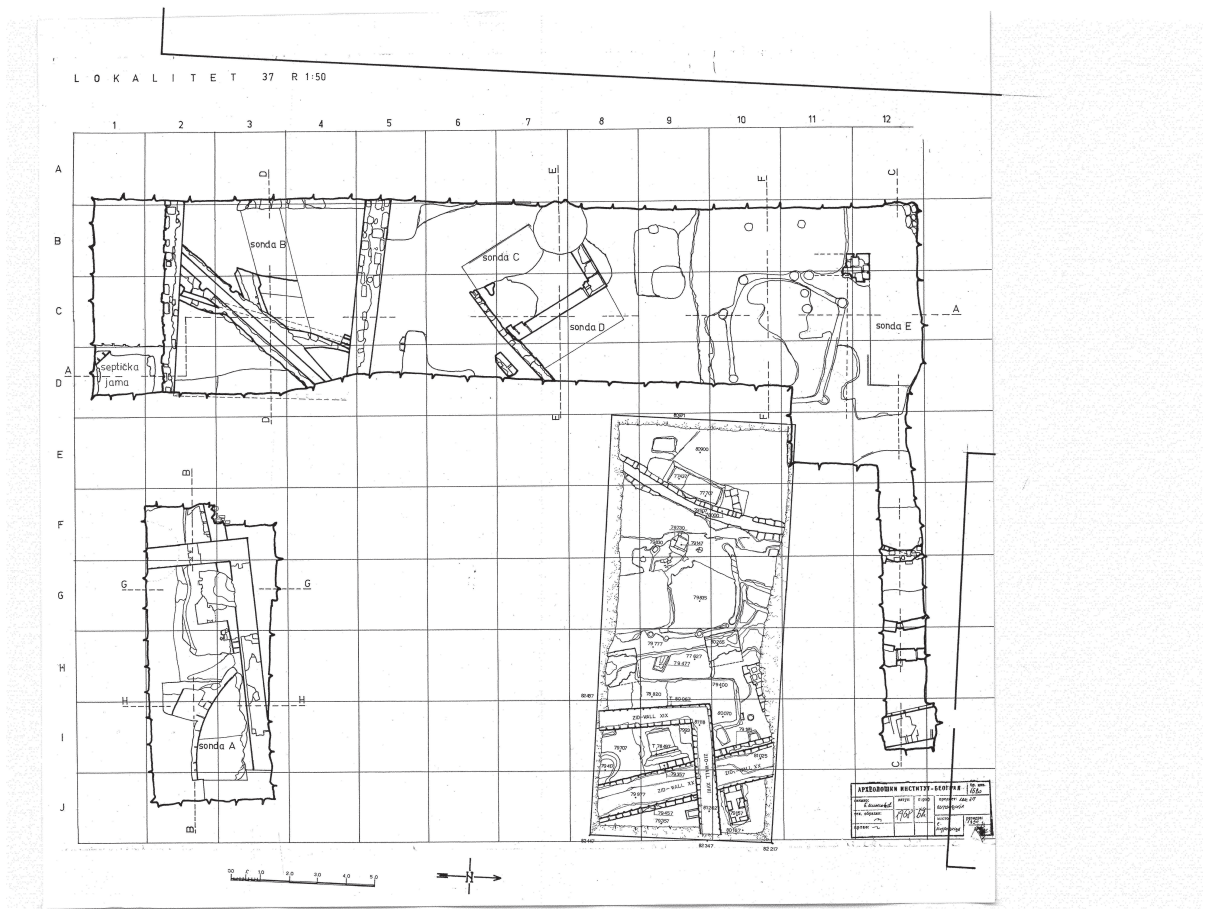


Fig. 11.
Ground plan of the site 37 (© Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

framework of the above-mentioned space, we notice that it does not have the central position, but that it is moved more to the south-west, towards the building J. In relation to this building, i.e. to the longitudinal axis of symmetry of its entrance, the building N was moved to the south. Such position was, maybe, influenced by the existence of another structure, placed south-eastwards. This is the remnant of the apse of the structure discovered in 1968, during the excavations at the site 37. The 1.20 m thick wall and the diameter of 6.00 m bear witness that the apse, oriented towards south, belonged to some bigger structure.¹⁵ Unfortunately, its look and purpose, as also the time of its origin, are entirely unknown. Above this structure a room with a mosaic was built, probably during the second half of the 4th century.

The centre of the structure N between eight columns represents the space 75 m² big, in which took place the main purpose of this building. In its northern part the space between the columns and the interior wall is not large, less than 1.50 m.

¹⁵ North from the trench F from 1968 at the site 37, in which the apse was discovered, there is a space 11 m long and 18 m wide, which is not explored. It is possible that there exist the remains of the structure, whose southern end is the apse.

Neither is it in the south-western part much bigger, around 2.50 m. It can be presumed that the main activity took place in the central space between the columns, 72 m² large, and while in the part of the building between the columns and the interior and the external wall there was a passage, leading to all its parts. It is possible that the interior wall represented some sort of podium or platform, on which the busts stood. Two sides of this podium, placed under the angle, would not be opposed to such interpretation, if we imagine the installing of two, or more, busts and smaller sculptures. As we do not know the reliable position of the main entrance, it is difficult to comprehend the primary communication inside the building. The structure I, discovered on the northeastern side, could resemble the position of one of the side entrances. It would be orientated towards the portico of the building H,¹⁶ or some, until now undiscovered, entrance into the hippodrome on its southern side. Indirectly, we could come to the hypothesis that in the immediate vicinity of the site 37 there was an entrance into the hippodrome. Namely, already in 1986 Humphrey¹⁷ pointed out that the length of the hippodrome could be bigger than the one supposed by Popović and Ochsenschlager. He also presumed that *spina* was longer, which would move the position of *meta secunda* further to the northwest. On the ground of the most recent reconstruction which was offered by M. Jeremić¹⁸ and of the supposed length of *spina* of 326 m, it can be calculated that the position of *meta secunda* could be north from the site 37, at the intersection of the streets Masarikova and Svetog Save. Opposite to *meta secunda*, to the left and right, could be the positions of two gates, to the north, towards the city, and to the south, towards the palace. The entrance on the south side would be in the immediate vicinity of the site 37.

Regardless of the fact if our identification of the structure I at the site 37 is correct, there is a possibility that there could have been also one entrance on the southern, entirely unexplored side of the building N. The position of the entrance in the south could be in accordance with the hypothesis about the existence of the communication in the direction east–west in the immediate vicinity.¹⁹ Although it was not discovered up to now, it would be logical to conclude that there existed a street which would connect the city with the palace through the gate in the western city-wall. In that way the buildings J and N would be separated by their communication from the buildings discovered at the sites 31, 85/D and 1a. According to the most recent results of the researches, the position of *carceres* of the hippodrome was placed at the point around 120 m northwest from the building N.²⁰ consequently; the hippodrome would entirely limit the space of the palatial complex towards the north. Only the building J is parallel to the longitudinal axis of the hippodrome. Its position would limit the palatial complex in the northwest di-

16 The very small explored surface of the building H (less than few square meters) did not yield any finds that would determine with precision the time of its origin. There is a possibility that it is longer than the hippodrome and the building N. To this would also point the orientation of the wall, which is under the angle of 75 degrees directed toward the southern wall of the hippodrome.

17 HUMPHREY 1986, 608.

18 JEREMIĆ 2004, fig. 11.

19 JEREMIĆ 2005, 94, Plan II; JEREMIĆ 2009, 471–499.

20 JEREMIĆ 2004, fig. 11.

rection. The direction of the western rampart discovered at the site 31 stretches at the right angle in relation to the longitudinal axis of the hippodrome. Other buildings of the palatial complex, at the sites 1a, 37 and 85/D, have different orientations in relation to the hippodrome and the building J. The transversal walls of the buildings A, B and D at the site 31 are oriented in the direction north–south, with an inclination of about 3 degrees of their northern part towards the east. They are parallel only with the very remote wall XX at the site 37, while the walls orientated in the direction east–west are parallel only with the southern rampart and with the walls of the building F at the site 85/D. On the walls at the site 1a is also noticed the different orientation of the transversal and longitudinal walls in relation to the architecture at the site 31, as also in relation to the architecture northwest from it, at the sites 37 and 85. We assume that the reason for this is the existence of two larger communications, which divided the complex of the Imperial Palace in Sirmium into few separated wholes. One block would form the whole at the sites 37 and 85, separated from the sites 31 and 85/D by the communication orientated in the direction northwest–southeast. The other part would consist of buildings at the sites 31 and 85/D, on the northern side separated by the above-mentioned communication, and on the eastern side by the communication oriented in the direction north–south, which would at the same time separate the granaries at the site 31 from the residential architecture at the site 1a. In the north, this communication would end in the immediate vicinity of the building N at the site 85, while on the southern side its end would be defined by the position of the southern rampart. It would not be illogical that there existed a gate in the direction of this street, which would enable the direct communication from the complex of the Imperial Palace to the south, towards the river Sava. If we assume that the original beginning of building the palatial complex as a new city of its kind²¹ was based on the planned arrangement of buildings in the framework of the entity surrounded by the ramparts and the hippodrome, it would be logical that the surveyors and builders first conceived the blocks with the buildings having various purposes. The blocks had to be separated by communications, and at least by two of them. As the natural communication is limited from the north by the hippodrome, there remains the south side as the primary one in the communication with the river. The communication with the southern, at the moment just supposed, gate, would be the logical organization of space and of residential part of the imperial complex at the site 1a. While the contact with the hippodrome would satisfy only one, ceremonial aspect²² of the imperial residence in the isolated building-complex, the connection with the river-communication would enable more other aspects, in the first place the possibility of evacuation in the case of trouble. More access points to the palace have shown the analyses of the imperial palatial complex in Thessalonike, which was by communication connected with the port in the south, sacral space in the north²³ and the city in the west.²⁴

21 ĆURČIĆ 1993, 72.

22 WULF-RHEIDT 2007 63–64; WULF-RHEIDT 2011, 16–17.

23 MEYER 2002, 46; STEFANIDOU-TIVERIOU 2009, 408; SPIESERE 2015, 20–21.

24 MENTZOS 2010, 343.

It seems that the building-solution applied in erecting the building N is quite unusual. Namely, there are no direct analogies for the building with the sixteen-sided external wall with eight separately founded columns in the middle. Similarity with *Baptisterium Lateranense*, could be stated only conditionally if we take into account the polygonality of the ground plan and the existence of radially arranged eight columns inside.²⁵ Unlike the whole series of polygonal buildings with a central plan, from the period of Tetrarchy, like the Octagon in Thessalonike²⁶ or Mausoleums in the Diocletian's palace in Split and San Vittore in Milan,²⁷ which have mighty external walls, strengthened by inner pilasters, the Lateran baptistery had a ring-like external wall. It is possible that the solutions applied in Sirmium and in the *Baptisterium Lateranense* are partly connected with the terrain on top of which the building was erected. In both cases there exists the older architecture, which precedes the building of polygonal structures.

Chronology and purpose of building N

The chronology and function of the building N could be established through the analysis of the small finds discovered in the destruction layer which covered floor "g" and rubble filling of the foundation part of the wall LXIV.

Few finds of coins embedded inside and directly on top of floor "g" give us rather confident conclusion that they stem from the period of construction of building N. All finds of coins belong to the very end of the 3rd and to the 4th century.²⁸ Consequently, it could be supposed with some certainty that the first decade of the 4th century is the period when the structure N was built. The written sources point that at that time few emperors have stayed for a longer period of time in Sirmium.²⁹ Consequently, also the beginning of the first building-phase of the palatial complex in Sirmium could be brought into connection with the longer stays of the emperors Diocletian, Licinius and Galerius. Above the floor (g) a destruction layer was formed which contained big quantities of fragmented bricks, mortar, frescoes, fragments of marble architecture and plastic (parts of capitals, console), dripstone (with colored motifs) and limestone. In this layer of rubble the dozens of fragments of porphyry sculptures, concentrated in the north-western

25 According to the most recent studies of the structure of the Lateran baptisterium it is evident that octagonal brick building stood on circular foundation wall. On the inside the circular shape continues only for a few bricks height to the floor level, above which the polygonal shape resumes (BRANDT 2020, 224).

26 Mentzos mentions the foundations of the Octagon as a perfect ring, with an outer diameter of 100 roman feet (32.50 m), and since that it is circular he thinks that probably older, centrally planned building of circular form existed upon the foundation (MENTZOS 2010, 340–342).

27 JOHNSON 2009, 60–61, 72.

28 In several cases the coins were stuck to the floor, probably under the influence of the high temperature. On top of the floor itself, and under the rubble, there was a thin layer of soot, about one centimeter thick, while in the rubble itself there were bigger remains of carbonized beams. Consequently, there is a possibility that the building N was destroyed by fire.

29 MIRKOVIĆ 1971, 36–38; KOVÁCS 2011, 144–145.



Fig. 12.

Imperial porphyry heads (© Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

part of the building were discovered. Except this, also the greater number of coins was found which stretch chronologically from the second to the seventh decade of the 4th century. The similar contents are also noticed in ditch created by pulling out the wall LXIV. The contents of the destruction layer could point that the rubble originates from the parts of the structure N above the ground. Some of the marble sculptures and the pieces of the architectural plastic were discovered inside the walls of the medieval structures at the site, so it wouldn't be impossible to assume that the explored contents of the layer are not complete. It seems strange that above the hydraulic mortar of the floor G a decorative cover in the form of mosaics or decorative plates (*opus sectile*) was never placed.³⁰ The polished surface of the floor G, researched in the space of over 130 m², as the lack of the prints on the floor, point to such conclusion. For the purpose of long and narrow, parallel prints, discovered in the western, middle and northern part of the building, at this moment there is no reliable explanation. It could only be assumed that they were made during the installing of some light construction (made of wood?), which would be in function of building the structure (scaffolding?) or of transporting some bigger and heavier object, like a sculpture of natural size.

Coins found in the destruction layer of the building N, marked by rubble, charcoal and fragments of architectural decoration (marble fragments of column shafts, capitals and wall decoration), belong to the period widely dated in the 2nd–6th decade of the 4th century. In that sense latest coins dates should mark the moment of destruction of the building itself.

³⁰ At the site a lesser amount of *opus sectile* fragments made of *porfido rosso* and *porfido verde antico* was found as also the mosaic *tesselae*, some of them having the golden foil.



Fig. 13.
Imperial porphyry head of Constantius II
(© Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

Due to the severe destruction of southern and northern annexes by structures from the Great Migration and later periods (Early Byzantine and medieval) it was rather hard to establish *terminus post quem* for their creation, based on coins found on top of them. The moment of their creation is important for the date of the destruction since that they lay on top of destruction layer of building N. Based on some coin finds we could say that the northern and southern annex were erected somewhere at the end of the 4th century, which should be the *terminus post quem*, not the existence of the building N.

Finds of porphyry fragments of imperial busts from the same destruction layer also give some insight into the moment of the destruction of the building N. We can suppose based on surviving fragments that there are two periods to which they belong to. One is the period of the first tetrarchy marked by at least two imperial busts found in the area of building N. Latest finds of porphyry fragments which give us strong argument to identify so-called Egyptians priests head, as head of an Emperor from the period of tetrarchy, which corresponds chronologically to the first decade of the 4th century (Fig. 12).³¹ The second one is marked by fragments of emperor's head with double pearly diadem representation. Taking into account mostly the imperial representations on coins, it could be assumed that this image belonged to the wider period from third decade till the late 4th century (Fig. 13). It was proposed earlier that the fragment of porphyry with double pearly diadem could represent emperor Constantius II, which still remains a possibility.³² If we suppose that these imperial busts were originally standing in building N, then the period of Constantius II marks the period which could be the *terminus post quem* for the building destruction.

³¹ In the moment of writing this article different parts of porphyry sculptures are in the process of reconsevation with newly found parts. Final oppinion on their attribution will be published after the conservation.

³² POPOVIĆ 2016, 376.



Fig. 14.

Lead seals (© Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

Aside from porphyry busts, second group of finds could point to the presumption on original purpose of the building N. These are lead seals which were found in the destruction layers of the wall LXIV. A group of seals with representation of the four heads³³ have very specific back side with small ridge which point to the conclusion that these seals were cast in the two part molds (*Fig. 14*). All of the specimens belonging to this group of seals have hollow extensions on two sides. We suppose that these hollows resemble the existence of the leather stripe/cord which was used for wrapping some object. Supposedly the objects

33 POPOVIĆ 2019, 277.

which were wrapped were leather codicils and the wooden boxes where they were laid were sealed with lead seals. Taking into account the number of lead seals found so far, which exceeds one hundred, we can assume that there was much higher number of documents that they sealed. Also we can only assume that these were laid in structure N. If we think about the purpose of the building N based on lead seal finds and porphyry sculptures we can suppose that this was official building for documents storage and as such it had imperial images placed inside.

A specific enigma represents the fact that the building N and the imperial porphyry representations are devastated to such level that *damnatio memoriae* of its kind has been applied on them, by the very act of negating the architecture and by building the new structures above it. According to the conditions of the finds dated by coins, this happened most probably during the seventh/eighth decade of the 4th century. Unlike the heads of three sculptures (Venus, Tyche and deified Faustina the Younger),³⁴ on which the through devastation is not being noticed, the faces of the emperors are thoroughly broken into smaller pieces. On the break-points were noticed the traces of the strokes with the blunt objects.³⁵ On such context reminds the find from Šarkamen, where the sitting sculpture of the emperor was analogously devastated up to the smallest parts.³⁶ Historical sources mention the destruction of imperial portraits by Constantine in much earlier period.³⁷ But, the devastation of the representation of Constantius II and the structure in which his image was exhibited represents the specific chronological problem. Although the connection could be found between the Christians of the Nicaean Creed, who would destroy the images of the rulers, the persecutors of Christians and of the rulers inclined to Arianism, the whole context of events in the framework of the imperial complex points at cautiousness. It would be implicit that the whole act was done with the permission of the highest authorities, most probably even of the ruler himself, in whose palace the event takes place. It is possible that the whole event could be brought into connection with the stay of Theodosius in Sirmium.³⁸ In any case, this would be one of the more rare reliably dated examples of devastation of the imperial images from the period of Tetrarchy,³⁹ and, what is especially important, of the very structure in which they were originally exhibited.

34 POPOVIĆ 2006, 153–163; POPOVIĆ 2014, 84.

35 POPOVIĆ 2020, 153.

36 TOMOVIĆ 2003.

37 VARNER 2004, 214–215; ICKS 2012, 465–467; MARCOS 2013, 14; SMITH 1997, 173, 188–189; MONTGOMERY 2000, 132.

38 MIRKOVIĆ 1971, 40–41.

39 As the earliest period of devastation of sculptures of Tetrarchs from Phyladelpheion, Niewöhner quotes the time of the rule of Theodosius I. (NIEWÖHNER – PESCHLOW 2012, 365).

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