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Studies on Disasters, Catastrophes and the Ends of the World in Sources

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Viminacium, Archaeological Park – Modern Code for Re-reading the Past of the Roman City and Legionary Camp*

History

As a military camp, Viminacium was founded at the first decades of the 1st century AD. Two Roman legions were stationed at the camp – IV Flavia Legion and VII Caudia Legion. Few years later civilian settlement was found, which got the status of Municipum in the 2nd century AD, and became colony in the 3rd during the reign of the Emperor Gordianus. Viminacium was the capital of the Roman province Moesia Superior or Upper Moesia (Moesia Prima) in late antiquity, with approximately 30,000 citizens. Position of the legionary camp at the northern bank of Danube, which was the limes of Roman Empire toward barbarian tribes, and fertile mouth of two rivers – Danube and Mlava, together with the perfect strategic position at the most important ancient cross roads, gained rich development to the city throughout the whole ancient period.¹

When Viminacium got the status of Colony, local mint started production of coins, which lasted sixteen years. Typical coin from Viminacium at the obverse side had the image of an Emperor, and at the reverse side there was a typical image (different only in details in every series) of a lady – personification of the province Moesia Superior whose hands rest upon heads of bull – symbol of the IV Flavia legion and lion – symbol of the VII Claudia legion. Acronym inscription PMS means Province Moesia Superior, COL-Colony, VIM-Viminacium, and at the bottom there is a year of mintage.²

Viminacium was destroyed with Hun attacks in 441/443. Later there were no rulers who have tried to rebuild the city of Viminacium, so remains of the city and the camp remained abandoned through whole Middle Ages period, and now traces of both can be visible in the configuration of the terrain. Today, remains of the Viminacim, are lying in fertile fields of grain and corn. Wider region of Viminacium was more than 450 hectares. From the whole site, only 3% are discovered till now. Interesting fact is that the Viminacium is one of the rear European sites, which is uncovered with the modern city. Its ruins lie under the loam and give an opportunity to the excavators to uncover the whole site. That is why some denominate Viminacium as Balkans Pompeii.³

^{*} The article results from the project: Viminacium, Roman city and military camp – research of material and non material culture of inhabitants by using the modern technologies of remote detection, geophysics, GIS, digitalization and 3D visualization (no. 47018), funded by The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

¹ More about Viminacium history and archaeological site at all in: Д. Спасит-Ђурић, Виминацијум главни град римске провинције Горње Мезије, Viminacium the capital of the Roman province of Upper Moesia, Пожаревац 2002 (www.viminacium.org.rs).

² More about Viminacium coinage in: B. Borić-Brešković, *Reversne predstave na novcu kolonije Viminacijum*, Beograd 1981; IDEM, *Novac kolonije Viminacijuma: u zbirci Svetozara St. Dušanića*, Beograd 1976.

More about site history, excavations and Project Viminacium at: www.viminacium.org.rs.

Excavations

Although known even from ancient maps, first written records about Viminacium were left by Felix Kanitz⁴ in the middle of the 19th century and first excavations started at the end of 19th century, with Mihailo Valtrovć,⁵ art historian and architect and Miloje Vasić,⁶ first Serbian archaeologist, German student. In the 70ties of 20th century, excavation works were held by Institue of Archaeology and State Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, mostly focused on Viminacium cemeteries.⁷

Owing to the new technologies, from the beginning of this century, new multidisciplinary team of Institute of Archaeology, started with protective field excavations of the city, military camp and necropolises. The team consists of archaeologists, geophysicists, mathematicians, conservators, architects, art historians, petrologists, electric engineers, etc. Modern technologies such as GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar), magnetometer or gradiometer and remote sensing and GIS, are helpful in detecting objects under the surface and thus represent the preparation for the future archaeological excavations. Objects discovered during these excavations are presented to the public within the Archaeological Park of Viminacium.

Archaeological Park of Viminacium

Within the area of the archaeological site Viminacium, Archaeological Park was established in only 6 years. During 2003 after field works, large city baths and northern gate of the military camp were protected with the construction made of laminated wood and the so-called French tents. Also, part of the Pirivoj necropolis, with the Mausoleum, was protected in the same way. Within this construction there is Viminacium underworld with the fresco painted tombs. After Viminacium was identified as touristic destination and Archaeological Park, all necessary facilities were established: infrastructure, staff, security etc. After opening of the Archaeological Park in 2006 tourist itinerary was defined with three protected objects: Porta praetoria, Thermae and Mausoleum with underground. Since then, every year Archaeological Park of Viminacium is visited by between 50,000 (in 2007)

⁴ D.S. Kostić, *Dunavski limes Feliksa Kanica*, Beograd 2011, pp. 70-86.

⁵ М. Валтровић, Откопавања у Костолцу, *Старинар* 1 (1884), pp. 3-14; прем, Откопавања у Костолцу, *Старинар* 4 (1884), pp. 121-142.

⁶ М. Васић, Неколике гробне конструкције из Виминациума, *Старинар* н.р. II (1907), pp. 67-98; прем, Колонија Виминацијум-археолошка студија, *Старинар* XII (1895), pp. 1-61.

M. Korać, V. Stojanović, N. Mrdić, Primena georadara u istraživanjima rimskog akvedukta na Viminacijumu (Application of Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) During Excavations of Roman Aqueduct in Viminacium), Archaeology and Science I (2006), pp. 37-46; S. Redžić, A. Raičković, V. Miletić, Arheološka istraživanja lokaliteta Stig na osnovu georadarskih ispitivanja (Archaeological Research at Site "Stig" Based on GPR Survey), Archaeology and Science I (2006), pp. 47-56.

M. Mikić, V. Stojanović, N. Mrdić, Primena gradiometra za potrebe zaštitnih arheoloških istraživanja na Viminacijumu – lokalitet Rit (Use of Gradiometer During Protective Archaeological Research at Viminacium – Site Rit), Archaeology and Science II (2006), pp. 21-26.

¹⁰ M. Korać, R. Pavlović, N. Mrđić, Viminacijum-daljinska detekcija i GIS (Viminacium – Remote Sensing and GIS), *Archaeology and Science* I (2006), pp. 21-36.

M. Maksin, M. Pucar, S. Milljić, M. Korać, Održivi razvoj turizma u Evropskoj Uniji i Srbiji, Beograd 2011, pp. 331-339.

and 75,000 (in 2011) visitors. The numerous are child excursions, than senior group visits, individual visitors or travelers on cruises.¹²

Besides the importance of archaeological remains, in Archaeological Park Viminacium, special attention is dedicated to the additional activities which are of great importance for experience and visitor's emotions. That is why action presentations are always present at introduction of all objects included in visitor itinerary.¹³

Although the Porta Praetoria is only discovered from the Viminacium castrum, with its remains of two entrances with streets pavements, basements of two towers and sour system, together with the guide introduction it is enough for a visitor to imagine an ideal reconstruction of the Northern Gate once opened toward the Danube. Knowing that typical form of the military camp was rectangular, with two streets intersecting in the middle (in the Viminacium case at the two-thirds) and four gates on each side, basic contours of walls of the fortress and streets are detected with the GPR and geomagnetism. Thus the remains portray only a fair image of a previous glory of the legionary campus and are at the beginning of the Viminacium tour.

Termae – Roman baths are second in Viminacium visit. Here the visitor's emotions are reinforced by larger remains, which are preserved in several levels from different periods between 1st and 4th century. There are visible remains of hypocaust, floor heating, together with four pools for warm or hot water, and the fifth pool for cold water. Baths were luxury furnished with mosaics and fresco decoration. Since the baths combine beauty of the preserved remains and interesting guide's story about the rite of taking the bath in ancient times, from here, as a medium point, visitors proceed at the third and the last object in the tour.

The main idea is to present all integral parts of Viminacium to the public, Northern Gate as a part of military camp, public baths as a part of the city and at the end there is the visit to the tombs, part of the necropolis Pirivoj. ¹⁵ Here is the Mausoleum, the so-called tomb of Roman emperor Hostilian, for, who is thought to have died at Viminacium. ¹⁶

There are other grave constructions in ancient level and with original skeletons preserved in original spot for presentation. In lower level of Pirivoj site, at the depth of five metres three fresco painted tombs are located. Since in dark and under the surface, it was suitable to apply the legend about ancient world of death, with the ferryman of Hades, Charon, who is so-called guide to the Viminacium underworld. Again pointing out to importance not only of archaeological remains themselves, but of reinforcing visitors' imagination, interest and emotions.

From underworld darkness they are able to see lightness and freshness of fresco colours within the tombs. All three tombs belong to common type, typical for constructed-fresco

J. Andelković Grašar, M. Tapavički-Ilić, Senior visitors, junior enthusiasm, [in:] M. Korać, S. Perić (eds), Book of abstracts, Symposium: "Archaeological Heritage – its Role in Education, Presentation and Popularization of Science", Belgrade-Viminacium 2012, p. 33.

¹³ More about Archaeological park in theory and practice in: E. Nikolić, J. Anđelković, D. Rogić, Archaeological Park as a Product of Emotional Design: Design and Organization of a Park Based on the Exploration of Visitors' Emotions, *Archaeology and Science* VI (2010), pp. 259-268.

Б. Миловановић, Извештај са систематских археолошких ископавања на локалитету терме – Виминацијум 2004. године (Report on systematic archaeological excavations ate the site terme – Viminacium in 2004), Археолошки преглед н.с. (Archaeological Reports n.s.) 2/3 (2004/5), pp. 51-54; D. Rogić, D. Despotović, B. Milovanović, Fragmenti zidnog slikarstva sa termi iz Viminacijuma (Fragments of wall paintings discovered in thermae from Viminacium), Archaeology and Science III (2007), pp. 75-82.

¹⁵ С. Реџић, Извештај о археолошким истраживањима локалитета Пиривој, Виминацијум, у 2005. години (Report on the archaeological rescue excavations on the site Pirivoj, Viminacium, season 2005), *Археолошки преглед* н.с. (*Archaeological Reports* n.s.) 2/3 (2004/5), 2008, pp. 59-61.

A. Jovanović, Tlo Srbije: Zavičaj rimskih careva, Beograd 2006, p. 39; M. Korać, S. Golubović, N. Mrbić, Itinerarivm Romanum Serbiae, Belgrade 2009, pp. 98-99.

painted tombs, in characteristic trapezial cut, so the frontal walls are in trapezial shape and side long walls are rectangular and inclined.¹⁷ First tomb in underground contains original frescoes from the beginning of the 4th century. The tomb marked as G 160, popularly named "Tomb with cupids"¹⁸ was discovered in 2003. It contains usual repertoire of late antique scenes and motifs subordinated to the idea of afterlife and apotheosis of the buried persons: servants – male and female, birds with the vase, peacocks, each on every wall and grape vines on the upper friezes. The tomb is named after the two cupids depicted with the basket or cornu copia on the eastern wall. Frescoes in the tomb are conserved, without restoration works and protected with anti-reflective glass and security cameras.

The two other tombs are not on their original location and inside can be seen replicas of original frescoes now kept in National Museum in Požarevac.

Replicas of frescoes from the "Christian tomb" marked as G 5517¹⁹ can be seen arranged as they stood in the original tomb, so that scenes can be read as a story in a clockwise direction. First scene is with the earthly horseman followed by lion, who with their movement suggest continuing of the reading of a narrative on the right side where the paradise scene with peacocks and tree of life is. Turned head of a right peacock towards the next scene on the right, lead a visitor to the heavenly horseman followed by a dog, and in front of which is leopard. Main scene, focus of the story is the Christ monogram which is set at the end of the narrative.

Third and the last tomb in underworld is tomb G 2624, known as "Pagan tomb", 20 today popularly named tomb with the portrait of Viminacium Mona Lisa, which is actually the portrait of a deceased young woman on the west wall, to whom the whole programme²¹ is subordinated. This portrait is one of the most important images in Viminacium fresco gallery, and for art history it represents the highest level of artistic craft for the 4th century. To make this portrait closeness for contemporary viewer this divine Roman lady is tendentiously named Viminacium's Mona Lisa. Thanks to this, visitors mostly remember her popular name, and agree with similarity of her smile and beauty to Mona Lisa's ones.

All these additional activities at the Archaeological Park, such as costumed Charon, staff dressed as Roman hosts, interesting and suitable explanations of the expert guides, are designed here to improve visit initially based on ancient ruins and archaeological remains. Also, Archaeological Park of Viminacium contains all necessary facilities important for the dialogue with the public. After the tour, there is a Roman tavern, where tourists are able to taste Roman food and wine, from the dishes and cups designed as replicas of Roman's ones. Next to the restaurant, there is a souvenir shop with the vast number of souvenirs, which are mostly made as replicas of finds discovered during the excavations. Among the youngest, very popular game is "Mystery of the emperor's death", which is designed by archaeologist and combine learning of history and archaeology with the detective investigation, where child should find the cause of the emperor Hostilianus death at Viminacium. This is only one type of educational methods used in everyday relation with children, weather they come with their parents or with schools excursions.

¹⁷ М. Васић, Неколике гробне конструкције из Виминациума, *Старинар* н.р. II (1907), pp. 67-98; J. Анђелковић, Е. Николић, Д. Рогић, Трапезни пресек гробних конструкција на Виминацијуму и могући утицаји на његов настанак, [in:] *Српско археолошко друштво XXXV скупштина и годишњи* скуп, Ваљево, 24-26. мај 2012. године, Програм, извештаји и апстракти, Ваљево 2012, pp. 61-62.

M. Korać, Slikarstvo Viminacijuma, Beograd 2007, pp. 186-188; J. Andelković Grašar, E. Nikolić, D. Rogić, "Tomb with Cupids" from Viminacium: a Contribution to Research of Construction, Iconography and Style, Starinar 63 (2013), pp. 73-100.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 157-168.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 168-185.

There is a servant, peacocks and vegetative motifs alluding to afterlife and apotheosis.

Since Viminacium identifies itself not only as archaeological site, but as Archaeological Park and one of the most important touristic destinations in Serbia, in 2008 was started the project of Scientific, Research and Visitors Center, called Domus Scientiarium. Today it is already a finished complex in the design of Roman villa. Entire spatial composition of the building is oriented towards inner spaces, resembling ancient peristyle, with atriums, containing rooms for excavators, professors and students, volunteers and visitors, as well as laboratories for anthropologists and conservators, offices for archaeologists and geophysicists, library, conference hall, gallery and museum space and other facilities necessary for comfortable stay in the building. Usage of local materials, which were available even in Roman times, as well as house creation in simple and unobtrusive forms, contribute to wholeness of Viminacium spirit and space. Thus, this building becomes inherent part of the Archaeological Park.²²

In 2009 Archaeological Park of Viminacium, became enriched with the discovery of the mammoth named Vika. Latest excavation at the site, during summer 2012, detected new mammoth remains, thus Viminacium was again in focus of media. Future plan is to extend the region and sphere of the park to the Archeo-palaeolontological park, first of that type in Serbia.

Numerous festivals are held at Viminacium, where all visitors are able to participate, dressed up in Roman costumes, tasting Roman food, riding chariots etc.

Today Viminacium is the only Archaeological Park in Serbia, open twelve months a year for all visits. It is the project of Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Science of the Republic of Serbia, and we participate in two European Culture Programs – OpenArch²³ and T Pas,²⁴ as well as in SEE Project DANUBE LIMES BRAND which aim at preparation of archaeological sites along the Danube limes for UNESCO World Haritage List, and their promotion and popularisation.²⁵

E. Nikolić, Putevima razvoja jednog arheološkog parka: Građevina Domvs Scientiarvm Viminaciuvm, [in:] *Rezultati istraživanja Arheološkog instituta u 2011. godini, Apstrakti*, Viminacium 2012.

M. Tapavički-Ilić, J. Anđelković Grašar, OpenArch, European Project of Popularizing Archaeology, *Archaeology and Science* 8 (2012), 2013, pp. 97-100.

S. Golubović, N. Mrdić, T-PAS – Project on touristic promotion of Aquileia, Emona and Viminacium, [in:] Book of abstracts, Symposium: "Archaeological Heritage – its Role in Education, Presentation and Popularization of Science, Belgrade-Viminacium, 2012, p. 34.

²⁵ Central Europe, "Nomination For the Central European Part of the Roman Danube Limes Within the International UNESCO World Heritage Framework "Frontiers of the Roman Empire"" (http://www.central2013.eu/nc/central-projects/approved-projects/funded-projects/?tx_fundedprojects_pi1%5Bproject%5D=17 (accessed 22 October, 2012)); UNESCO, "Frontiers of the Roman Empire – Ripa Pannonica in Hungary" (http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5452/(accessed 22 October, 2012)).