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A REVIEW OF SEVERAL GRAVES BETWEEN THE CITY AND THE MILITARY CAMP

ABSTRACT

During exploration of the area east of the amphitheatre, four brick built graves were discovered. One structure with a saddle roof stands out among them. An adult female with an artificially deformed skull was buried there. The graves are located between the amphitheatre and the military camp and dated to the Late Antiquity period.

KEYWORDS: VIMINACIUM, GRAVE, STRUCTURE, SKELETON, ARTIFICIALLY DEFORMED SKULL.

Recent archaeological excavations of Viminacium, apart from the exploration of the necropolises and suburban settlements, were mainly focused on the northeastern part of the city (thermae, amphitheatre and surrounding area) as well as on the northwestern segment of the military camp.¹

During the ten year excavation of the amphitheatre,² besides the structure and units related to its function, several structures built and used in different periods were found in the area around the amphitheatre. In addition to several structures with different architectural contexts and purposes, parts of the city fortification – sections of the northern and eastern rampart, with defensive trenches, the eastern city gate, and the street

that led from the gate to the west - were also explored. Two structures with apses, oriented north-east-southwest, built east of the amphitheatre – *extra muros*, parallel to the eastern city rampart, which forms part of a wall of the amphitheatre, are significant for this paper. The structures are built in the same area (the older is located inside the younger one), with a similar base, but they belong to different periods – the older one dating back to the 2nd century, and the younger to the third quarter of the 3rd century. According to their location and the distance from the amphitheatre, as well as the time of their use, we can conclude that they had the same function and that rituals performed there were associated with events in the amphitheatre³ (Fig. 1).

Above the amphitheatre, after the cessation of its use for spectacles, a late antique necropolis was formed. Over 60 skeletal inhumations have been explored there. Most of the graves were concentrated above the southwestern part of the

¹ The article is a result of 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.

² Systematic research in the amphitheatre area was carried out from the end of 2007, until mid 2017.

³ Nikolić *et al.* 2015, 64 - 65.



Fig. 1 The position of the graves between the city and the military camp.

stands, then above the northern part of the stands and arena, while only a few were in the area above the eastern part of the amphitheatre.

Southeast of the amphitheatre, at a distance of about 60 m, there is a military camp. During 2002 and 2003, the camp's north gate was explored, and since 2016 its northwestern corner has been explored. Over the course of the excavations of the western rampart, 30 graves have been discovered so far, located along the rampart. Most of them are brick built graves in which children were buried. The graves are dated to the Late Antiquity period.

The aim of this paper is to present four brick built graves, found at 0.30/0.40 m below the arable layer. Based on results to this point, the graves

cannot be associated with a necropolis built above the amphitheatre, nor with the graves discovered along the western rampart of the camp.

The graves were discovered east of the aforementioned structures with apses, and are oriented west - east, with smaller deviations of the western part toward the north. The grave structures are devastated to a greater or lesser degree,⁴ and the

⁴ Most of the graves were discovered during landscaping of collapsed soil from the eastern profile, and parts of some graves entered into the profile (G-63/2, G-64/5). Considering that the area east of the amphitheatre was explored within a square network of the amphitheatre, although the newly discovered graves do not belong to a necropolis formed by an amphitheatre, for technical reasons, they follow the numbering of this necropolis.

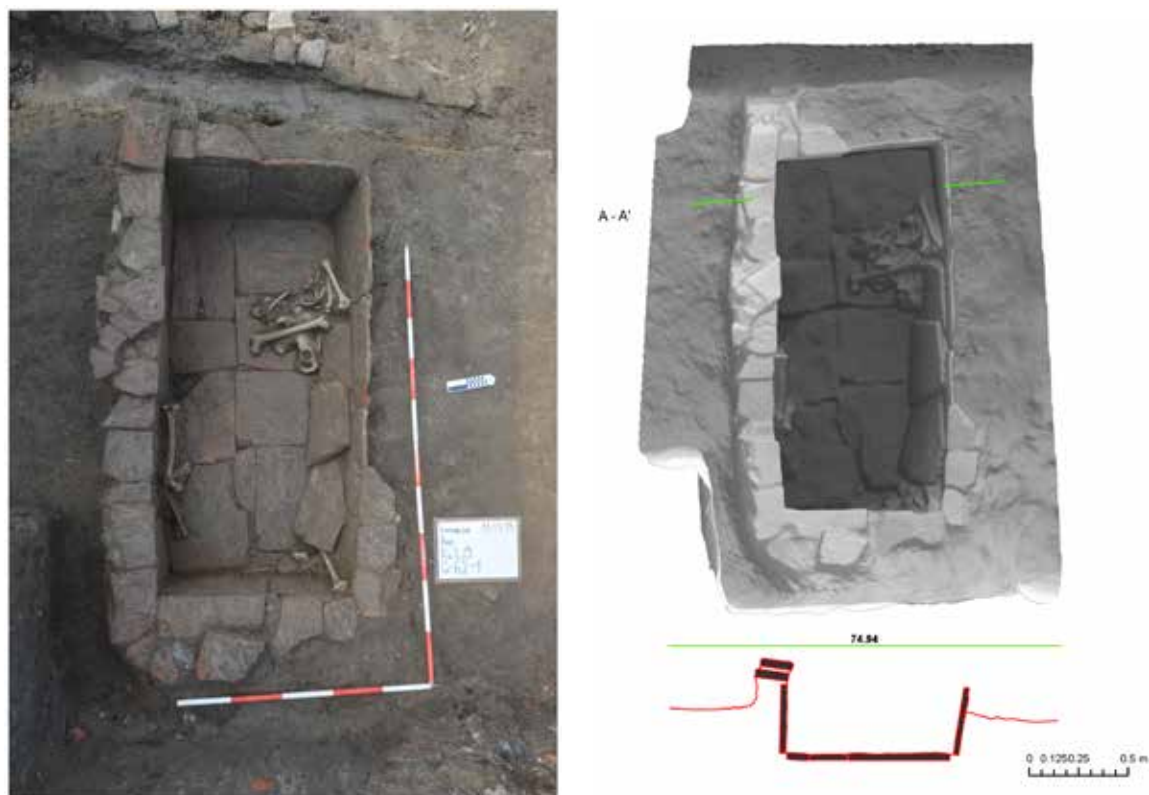


Fig. 2 Grave G-62/1 (digital model by Ž. Jovanović)

skeleton bones poorly preserved. Three graves in rectangular structures are parallel and directed vertically towards the structure. The fourth grave, with a saddle roof, was located in the eastern profile, northeast of the aforementioned graves. In the area between the southern part of the structure with an apse and the eastern profile, scattered human bones were found in the vicinity of the graves, as were several segments with horizontally or vertically laid bricks and tegulae, probably the remains of the destroyed grave constructions. We can therefore assume that there were more graves in this area.

Grave G-62/1 is oriented west-east, with a deviation of 23° of the western end towards the north. The construction of the grave has the following dimensions: 1.90 x 0.90 x 0.45 m (Fig. 2). It consists of vertically laid tegulae with the dimensions 0.52 x 0.34 x 0.03 m. On the north and south sides there are four tegulae, and two tegulae of different dimensions are on the lateral sides. The bottom of the grave is made of whole tegulae,

with the dimensions of 0.57 x 0.44 m x 0.03 m and 0.52 x 0.40 x 0.03 m, or from large tegulae shards. Rows of horizontally laid, mostly damaged tegulae, preserved mainly along the southern and eastern sides, indicate the existence of a cover, most likely made of three rows of tegulae. This is the grave of a male, aged between 16 and 20 years. The grave was robbed, and the skeleton bones were scattered. Parts of a skull and a mandible were found in the western part of the grave.

Grave G-63/2 is situated 3.65 m south of the G-62/1 grave and oriented east-west, with a deviation of 14° of the western end towards the north (Fig. 3). The construction of the grave has the following dimensions: 1.83 x 0.43 x 0.35 m. It has a cover of five horizontally laid tegulae, measuring 0.49 x 0.39 x 0.04 m. The coffin is made of vertically laid tegulae measuring 0.48 x 0.35 x 0.04 m. The longitudinal sides consist of four tegulae, and the lateral sides of one whole tegula. The bottom of the grave is paved with longitudinally laid tegulae.



Fig. 3 Grave G-63/2 (digital model by Ž. Jovanović)

Even though the grave hasn't been looted, the skeleton is only partly preserved, to a length of 1.33 m. Leg bones and a partial vertebrae were found *in situ*. Other bones are scattered, and parts of the skull were in the western part of the grave.

It is the grave of an adult person, but due to the condition of the skeleton it is not possible to determine the gender.

Two coins, minted in 346/361 AD, as well as part of a bronze bracelet, were found in the grave infills.

Grave G-64/3 is located 1.25 m south of the G-63/2 grave, above the wall of the structure with an apse (Fig. 4). The major part of the structure made of vertically arranged tegulae was devastated, only its western part, with a dimension of

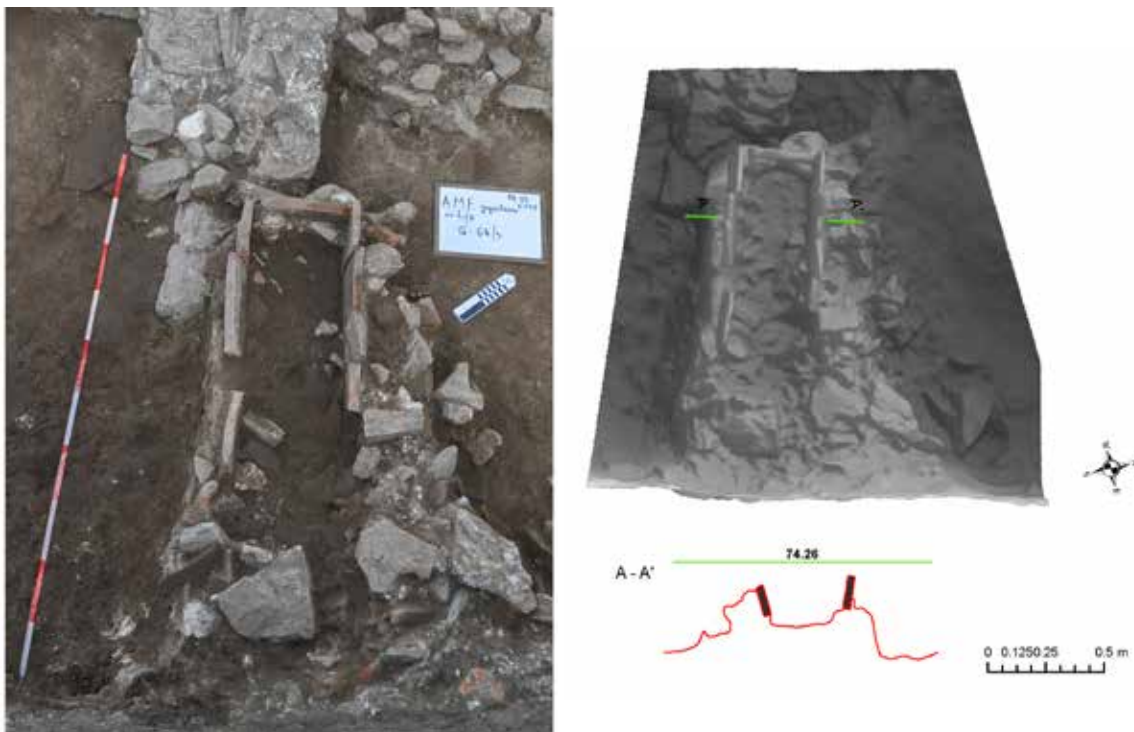


Fig. 4 Grave G-64/3 (digital model by Ž. Jovanović)

0.86/0.70 x 0.38 m, was preserved. The grave has a west-east orientation, with a deviation of 18° of the western end towards the north. Only a small amount of fragmented bones were preserved and several pieces of skull were found in the western part of the grave. In the eastern, devastated part of the grave, as well as along the northern edge of the structure, there is a lot of debris, mostly of broken slate and brick fragments.

Due to the very poor and incomplete preservation, it is not possible to determine gender or age.

Grave G-65/4 is located in the eastern profile, i.e., under the modern road, and it was possible to investigate only by excavating under the profile (Fig. 5). The grave is located northeast of the above-mentioned graves, at 0.70 m from grave G-63/2 and 2.50 m from grave G-62/1. The structure is slightly inclined to the south, probably due to the pressure of the earth. For these reasons, the construction of the grave has not been fully disclosed, and only provisional dimensions have been determined: 1.70 x 0.40 m. The grave is oriented west-east with a deviation of 20° of the west-

ern end towards the north. The grave structure has a saddle roof consisting of six tegulae, measuring 0.49 x 0.39 m. The bottom is not paved, it consists of a layer of brown–yellow soil with debris. The skeleton bones are partly preserved: the skull is artificially deformed, the pelvis and leg bones were found *in situ*, while in the middle part the bones were dislocated. The length is 1.60. It is the grave of an adult female.

Based on the stratigraphy and finds, the graves are dated to the second half of the 4th century. In addition to the small number of grave goods found in grave G-63/2 (coins minted in 346/361 AD and part of a bronze bracelet), in the eastern, devastated part of grave G-64/3, a frame of a lead mirror was also found. Similar frames, but with different ornaments, have been found, both at the amphitheatre, and at other locations in Viminacium. In the area surrounding the graves, several coins, also dated to the third quarter of the 4th century, were also found, as were numerous ceramic and glass vessel fragments, dated to the second half of the 4th century.



Fig. 5 Grave G-65/4

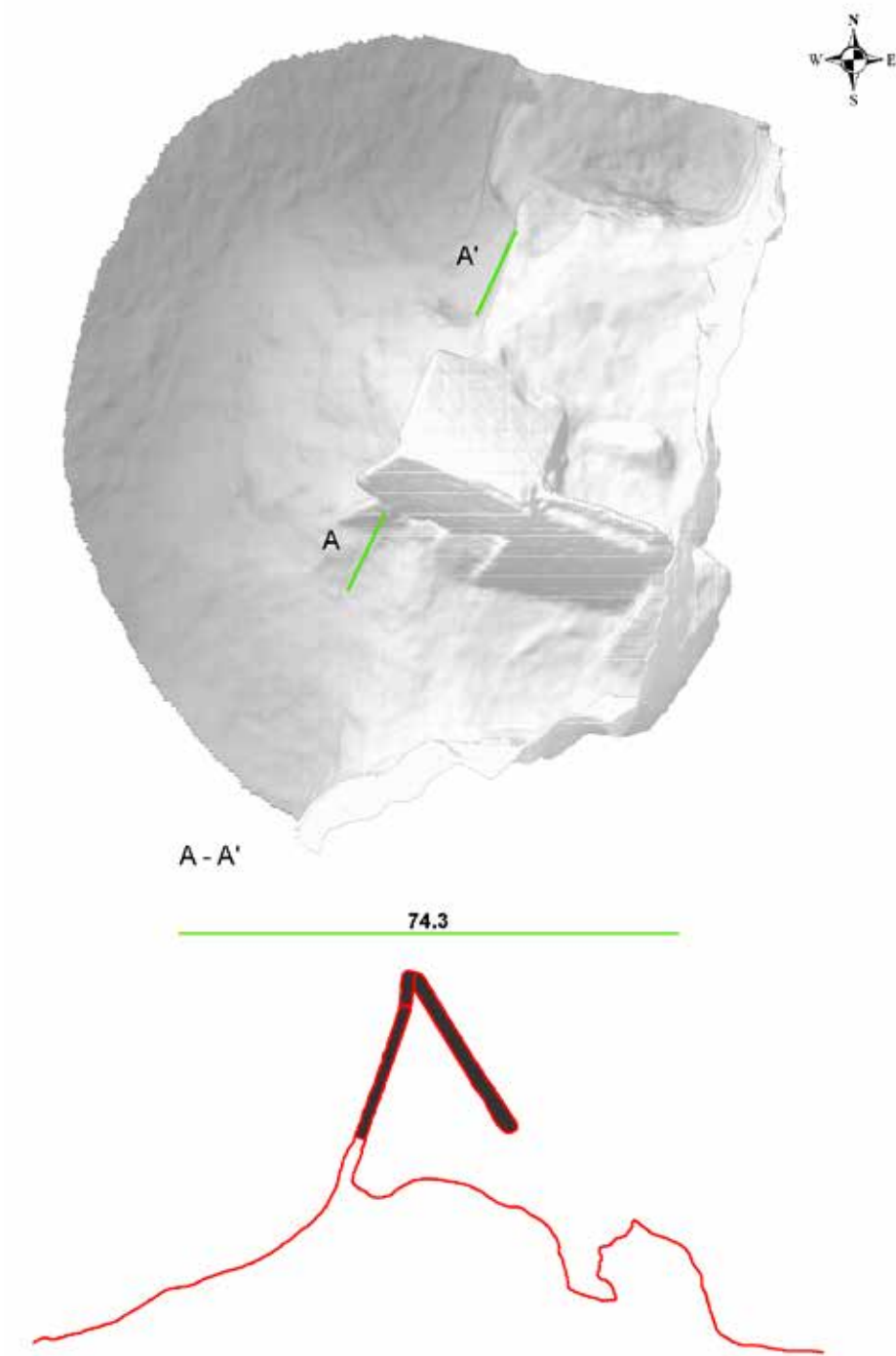


Fig. 5 Grave G-65/4 (digital model by Ž. Jovanović)

Two adults, one male and one female, were buried in the graves, while in one grave, due to devastation and poorly preserved skeletons, the gender and age of the individuals could not be determined, and in the other only the age was determined.

The grave structures consist of simple rectangular brick coffins, with a flat lid, except for one with a saddle roof.

Rectangular grave structures with a flat lid are often dated to the Roman period, and they are the

most common type in the necropolis above the amphitheatre as well. In contrast, constructions with a saddle roof are considerably less common. At the necropolis above the amphitheatre, nine graves had similar, but somewhat more complex constructions: besides the saddle roof, tegulae were vertically laid at the front sides, and the floor was paved, also with tegulae. The most common orientation of these graves was northwest-southeast.

The G-65/4 grave deserves particular attention, with a saddle roof, in which an adult female was buried, on whose skull an artificial deformation was detected.

During exploration of the “Više Grobalja” necropolis at Viminacium, over 30 individuals with artificially deformed skulls dated to the 5th and 6th centuries were discovered (Mikić 2008, 45). Thus, grave G-65/4 would represent one of the older graves with artificial skull deformation in the territory of Serbia. The second half of the 4th century was marked by economic decline in the Roman Empire, religious conflicts and constant fighting with barbarian tribes. The neighbouring Sarmatian tribes were a constant threat to the northern border of Upper Moesia, while battles with the Goths resumed in the east. On several occasions Roman emperors settled members of barbarian tribes in Roman cities, for example Constantine did so in 322 AD (Mirković, 1981, 96).

In the area of the Eastern Roman Empire, the earliest appearance of artificially deformed skulls was discovered in necropolises in Romania and Hungary and was chronologically defined to the 2nd-3rd century, with the deceased mostly attributed to the Sarmatians (Hakenbeck 2009, 69). The lack of grave goods in the grave of the deceased woman from Viminacium certainly makes ethnic definition more difficult, but without a doubt that person was not of Roman origin. Burial of an adult female of foreign origin in a brick built grave, with a west-east orientation, indicates the acceptance of Roman customs.

The area east of the amphitheatre had a sacred character, and in the aforementioned structures

with apses, rituals related to events in the amphitheatre were performed.

The investigated area with graves,⁵ as well as the number of graves, are not sufficient for making relevant conclusions. Namely, the question arises as to whether these are individual graves or if they represent the western border of the new necropolis. Bearing in mind the proximity of the necropolis above the amphitheatre, as well as the graves along the western rampart of the camp, the assumption of the existence of another late antique necropolis does not seem plausible. As already mentioned, the area east of the amphitheatre had a sacral character and, in the structures with apses, rituals related to events in the amphitheatre were performed. However, it is certain that the structure in its youngest stage, which is dated to the second half of the 4th century, is not related to the amphitheatre. In addition to the fact that the amphitheatre was no longer used for spectacles, the construction technique also points to a different function of the reconstructed object. Namely, in its youngest stage, the structure was built using the dry stone technique, and in addition to bricks and stone, parts of marble sculptures, most of which are related to Roman deities, were used as spolia. Therefore, the question arises as to whether the structure with apses in its very latest stage could have been used for the purposes of a cult that was associated with these graves.

It will be possible to resolve these issues after exploring the area east of the graves, stretching below the modern road.⁶

5 In the area investigated east of the structure with apses, the graves appear only in the southern part, in the vicinity of the apses, while there were none in the other parts.

6 Exploration of the area east of the graves is not possible in the near future due to unresolved property/legal issues.

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REZIME

OSVRT NA NEKOLIKO GROBOVA IZMEĐU GRADA I LOGORA

KLJUČNE REČI: VIMINACIJUM, GROB, KONSTRUKCIJA, SKELET, VEŠTAČKI DEFORMISANA LOBANJA.

Novija arheološka iskopavanja Viminacijuma, pored istraživanja nekropole i prigradskih naselja, bila su usmerena na severoistočni deo grada i severozapadni segment vojnog logora.

U toku iskopavanja amfiteatra i površine oko njega, pored samog objekta i celina vezanih za njegovu funkciju, istraženo je nekoliko objekata koji su izgrađeni i korišćeni u različitim periodima. Otkriveni su i delovi gradske fortifikacije – segmenti severnog i istočnog bedema, istočna kapija grada, kao i ulica koja je vodila od kapije prema zapadu. Za ovaj rad su značajna dva objekta

sa apsidama, podignuta na istom prostoru - istočno od amfiteatra (*extra muros*). Objekti su slične osnove, ali pripadaju različitim periodima (stariji je datovan u II vek, a mlađi u treću četvrtinu III veka) i korišćeni su za održavanje rituala vezanih za događanja u samom amfiteatru.

U kasnoantičkom periodu, iznad amfiteatra je formirana nekropola u okviru koje je istraženo preko 60 skeletno sahranjenih pokojnika. Najveći broj grobova bio je skoncentrisan iznad jugozapadnog dela tribina.

Na udaljenosti od oko 60 m jugoistočno od amfiteatra nalazi se vojni logor, čije istraživanje je u toku. Između zapadnog bedema logora i odbrambenog rova, otkriveno je 30 grobova, datovanih u kasnoantički period.

Na prostoru između amfiteatra i logora, a pored objekata sa apsidama, otkrivena su četiri groba sa konstrukcijama od opeka, datovana u drugu polovinu IV veka. Među njima se izdvaja grob sa konstrukcijom koju čini pokrivač na dve vode, u kome je bila sahranjena odrasla ženska osoba, sa veštački deformisanom lobanjom.

S obzirom da grobovi ka istoku zalaze pod neistraženu površinu, postavlja se pitanje da li se radi o pojedinačnim grobovima ili oni predstavljaju zapadnu granicu nove nekropole. Imajući u vidu blizinu nekropole iznad amfiteatra, kao i grobova duž zapadnog bedema logora, pretpostavka o postojanju još jedne kasnoantičke nekropole ne čini se verovatnom.

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