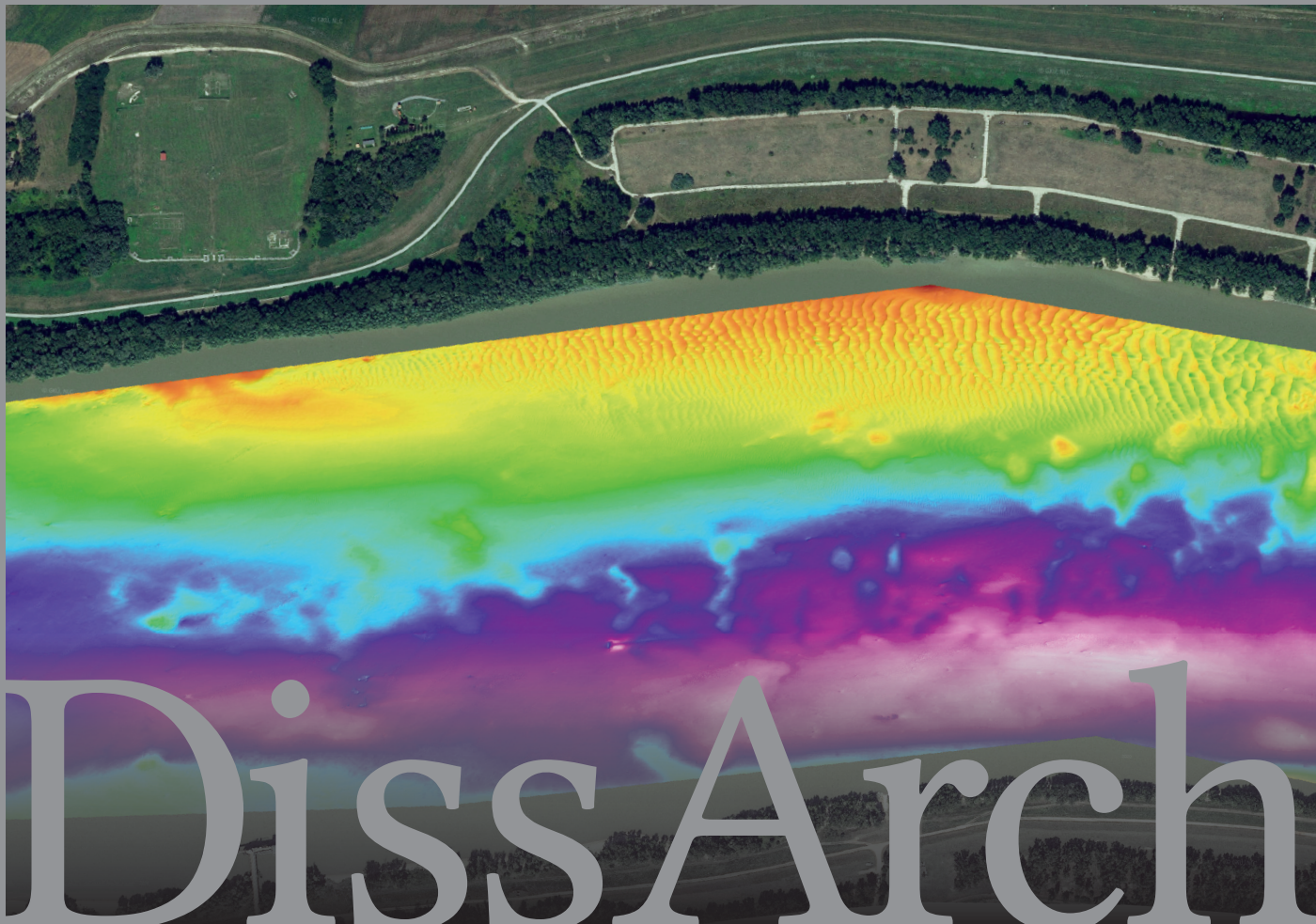


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ex Instituto Archaeologico

Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



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Trimammium

The Roman limes fortress and the necropolis

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Abstract: The Roman and Late Antique fortress of Trimammium lies roughly 3 km west–north-west of the village of Mechka, Ruse Region. Built on the right (south) bank of the Danube, the stronghold formed part of the Lower Danubian limes for some six centuries. The Egyptian geographer Claudius Ptolemy first recorded the name of the Roman military camp in the 2nd century AD; however, the ruins near Mechka were not associated with Trimammium until the early 20th century (by K. Shkorpil and M. Vankov). Systematic excavations began in 2006–2009 and resumed after a long pause in 2017, 2019, and 2022. Across seven seasons, parts of the fortified area, the defensive system and the necropolis were investigated.

Keywords: Trimammium, Roman, Medieval, fortress, necropolis

Location

Trimammium is one of the many Roman fortresses established on the right bank of the Danube. Today, the ruins occupy hilly terrain about 3 km west–north-west of the village of Mechka, Ruse Region (Fig. 1). At the beginning of the 20th century, K. Shkorpil¹ and M. Vankov² identified the remains as Trimammium, locating the ancient fort by combining information from written sources with calculations based on ancient itineraries, field observations, and archaeological³ evidence. According to their reconstruction, the fortress stood on a plateau naturally defended on the west, north, and east by the Danube and by the deep valley of the small Oreshe River; only the southern side was relatively flat and easily accessible. Part of the chain of Roman frontier forts, Trimammium lies between Scaidava (modern Batin, Ruse Region) and Mediolana (Pirgovo, Ruse Region) (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Location of Trimammium (aerial view).

1 SHKORPIL 1905, 454–455, 458.

2 VANKOV 1905, 557–559.

3 TORBATOV 2012, 431.

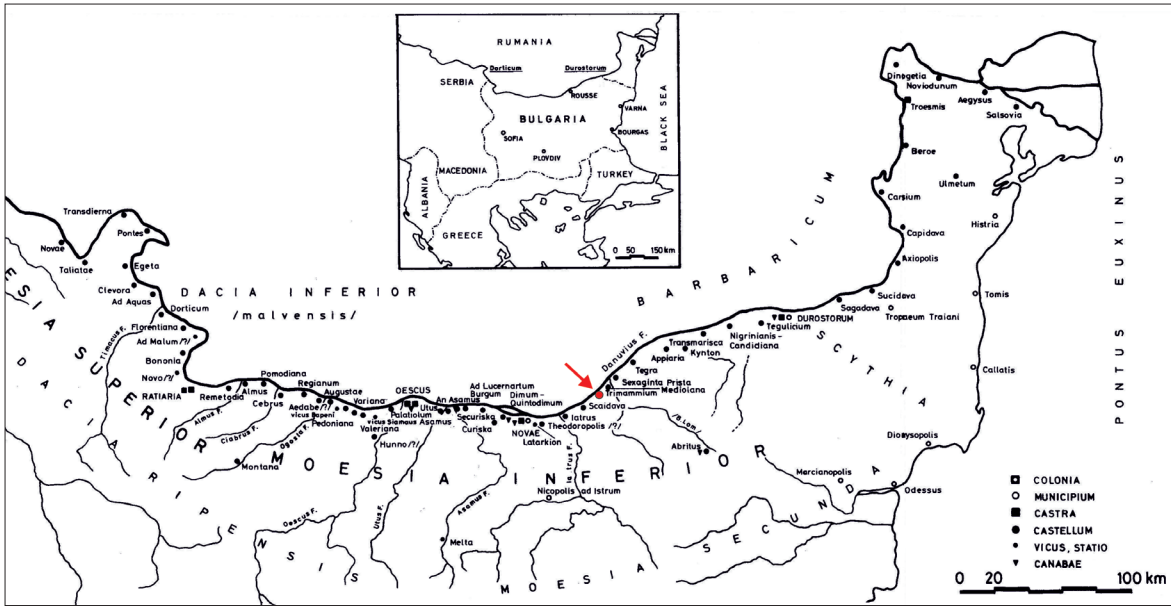


Fig. 2. Position of Trimammium in the Lower Danube Limes (after IVANOV 1999).

Historical and epigraphic sources

Trimammium is attested several times in ancient sources,⁴ four of which deal with the geography, location, and description of the Roman provinces. The earliest is Claudius Ptolemy’s fundamental work, *Geography*, compiled under Emperor Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–180). The fortress appears as *Τριμάμμιον*⁵ and *Τριμάμνιον* in the list of towns (πόλεις) of Lower Moesia on the Danube.⁶ In chronological order, the next two sources are the well-known Roman itineraries, the *Tabula Peutingeriana* and the *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti*. The former marks Trimammium as a station on the Danube road from Singidunum to Constantinople.⁷ This *tabula picta* reflects the regional situation in the second half of the 3rd to the initial third of the 4th century AD and refers to the place as Trimamio, 16 miles north-east of Iatrus (today Krivina, Ruse Region) and 12 miles south-west of Sexaginta Prista (Ruse). The road station also appears in the *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti* between Viminacium and Constantinople.⁸ Surviving medieval manuscripts variously name the place Trimam-



Fig. 3. Tombstone from Histria, erected for a circitor serving in the *vexillatio XII catafractariorum* encamped at Trimammium (after POPESCU 1976, 149, No. 110).

4 IVANOV 1999, 36.

5 *Cl. Ptol. Geogr.*, III 10, 5. Translation and notes by KATSAROV – DECHEV 1915, 163.

6 TORBATOV 2012, 429.

7 *Tab. Peut.*, VIII, 2, ed. Weber Translation and notes by ТАРКОВА *et al.* 1958a, 16.

8 *Itin. Ant. Aug.* 222, 1–3. Translation and notes by ТАРКОВА *et al.* 1958a, 31.

mio or Triamo,⁹ situated between Scaidava (modern Batin, 7 miles to the south-west) and Sexaginta Prista (12 miles to the north-east). The fourth and latest source is the *Ravenna Cosmography*, compiled around AD 700 by an anonymous cleric, which lists places as *civitates* in its brief survey of Upper and Lower Moesia; there, Trimammion is set between Iaturus and Sexaginta Prista.¹⁰

The List of Offices (*Notitia Dignitatum*)—a key source for the administrative and military organisation of the Late Roman Period—presents Trimammium from a different angle. It is listed as a military camp (*castellum*) garrisoned by auxiliary troops called *milites Constantini*.¹¹ The fortress appears as Trimammio in the section covering Second Moesia, a province on the Lower Danube, and records the deployment of frontier units around AD 378.

A 4th-century AD epigraphic monument found at Histria (Istria, Romania) provides further, purely military, information. It is a fragmentary tombstone commemorating an unnamed *circitor*—an officer in a cavalry unit responsible for rounds of the sentries—who died on duty at the age of 33. He served in the *vexillatio XII catafractariorum* and, according to the Latin inscription, its camp was at Trimamio (Fig. 3).¹²

Historical maps

The name of the fortress appears in five atlases and maps published between the 16th and 18th centuries.¹³ The two earliest, both by Abraham Ortelius (1595), rely mainly on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*. In the *Daciarum Moesiarumque, Vetus Descriptio* Trimammium is placed between Scaidava and Sexaginta Pristis (Sexaginta Prista); in the second, entitled *Ελλάς. Graecia Sophiani. Abrahamo Ortelio descriptore*, it lies north-east of Noue (Novae).

In French cartographer Nicolas Sanson's *Illyricum Orientis. In quo partes: Moesia et Thracia*, published in 1650 or between 1664 and 1667, Trimammium is marked as part of the Lower Danubian limes, north-east of Novae and south-west of Tigra. It appears in a similar position in Johann Christoph Harenberg's 1741 map *Imperii Turcici Europaei terra*, where the fortress of Trimanium is shown between Novae and Appiaria.

9 TORBATOV 2012, 430.

10 *Rav. Anon. Cosmogr.* IV 7, 5. Translation and notes by ТАРКОВА *et al.* 1958b, 394.

11 *Not. Dign. Or.* XL 20. Translation and notes by VELKOV – LISHEV 1958, 244.

12 POPESCU 1976, 149, 110.

13 IVANOV 1999, 44–48, 50, 53, 61, 63.

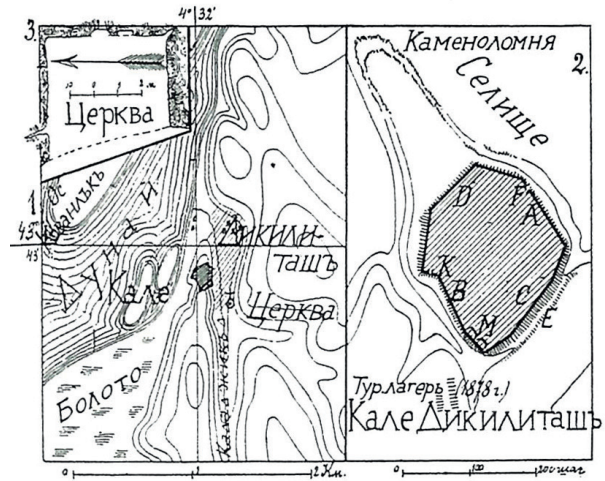


Fig. 4. Layout of Trimammium and its vicinity (after ШКОРПИЛ 1905, Tab. 99.b, 1–3).



Fig. 5. Rock relief of a horseman, found east of Trimammium (after KATSAROV 1933, Fig. 63).

The fifth and latest map, issued in 1744 under the title *Hungariae ampliori significatu et veteris vel Methodicae, complexae Regna* by the mathematician, geographer and cartographer Johann Matthias Haas, erroneously locates Trimammium on the left bank of the Danube, between Iatrum (Iatrus) and Pristis Hexantapristis (Sexaginta Prista).

Name of the fortress

Two hypotheses address the origin of the toponym Trimammium. W. Tomaschek and D. Dechev derive it from Thracian, while the more widely accepted interpretation by V. Beshevliev argues for a Latin formation. The name comprises *tri* (three) and *mamma* (breast), yielding ‘three-breasted’, most plausibly a reference to three adjacent uplands or hills.¹⁴

Archaeological data from before the excavations

At the dawn of the 20th century, the remains of Trimammium were still well preserved and visible. K. Shkorpil’s description is detailed and accompanied by a simplified survey plan of the fortress; M. Vankov’s account complements the picture of the archaeological landscape.¹⁵ Locals knew the stronghold as Kale, Kaletto, or Kale Dikilitaş.¹⁶ According to the sketch, the walls enclosed an irregular polygonal area approximately 700 m long and 500 m wide (Fig. 4). Sections of the main wall, built of stone blocks, mortar and crushed brick (A, B, C and D), and the deep ditch (E) to the south-east are shown. Shkorpil did not identify towers but conjectured two positions roughly opposite the gates (F and K). In the southern corner, he recorded two Ottoman redoubts and pit houses (M) dug in 1877 during the Russo–Turkish War of 1877–1878. The site of the Turkish camp, located south of Trimammium, also appears on the plan. Both Shkorpil and Vankov note that the Turkish adaptation of the defensive zone caused significant destruction.

The environs of the fortress are rich in sites and monuments of several periods. A settlement about 600 m north-east of the fort may be the predecessor of Roman Trimammium. It has been identified only through field observations and appears to have been occupied for a long span from the Early to the Late Iron Age (10th–1st centuries BC).¹⁷ A coin hoard of 419 silver imitation tetradrachms of Philip II of Macedon, Philip III Arrhidaeus, and Thasos (dating to the second period) was discovered by chance within its limits.¹⁸

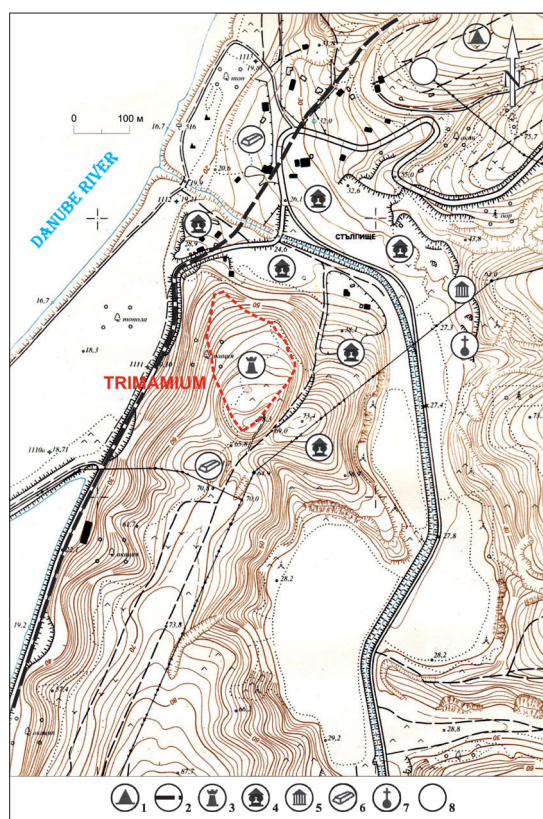


Fig. 6. Trimammium and its surroundings (after TORBATOV 2012, Fig. 3). 1 – Pre-Roman (Thracian) settlement, 2 – the Roman Danube road, 3 – the *castellum*, 4 – settlement remains, 5 – rock sanctuary, 6 – necropolis, 7 – rock church, 8 – find-spot of the coin hoard.

14 TOMASCHEK 1894, 76; BESHEVLIEV 1955, 287; TORBATOV 2012, 430.

15 SHKORPIL 1905, 454; VANKOV 1905, 557.

16 Dikilitaş means ‘standing stone’ in Turkish. The area’s name originates from two natural rock formations located north of Trimammium, on the right bank of the Oreshe River.

17 DREMSIZOVA *et al.* 1983, 47.

18 YURUKOVA 1979, 4, 60. The publication mentions 418 coins, but their actual number is 419. The coin hoard ►

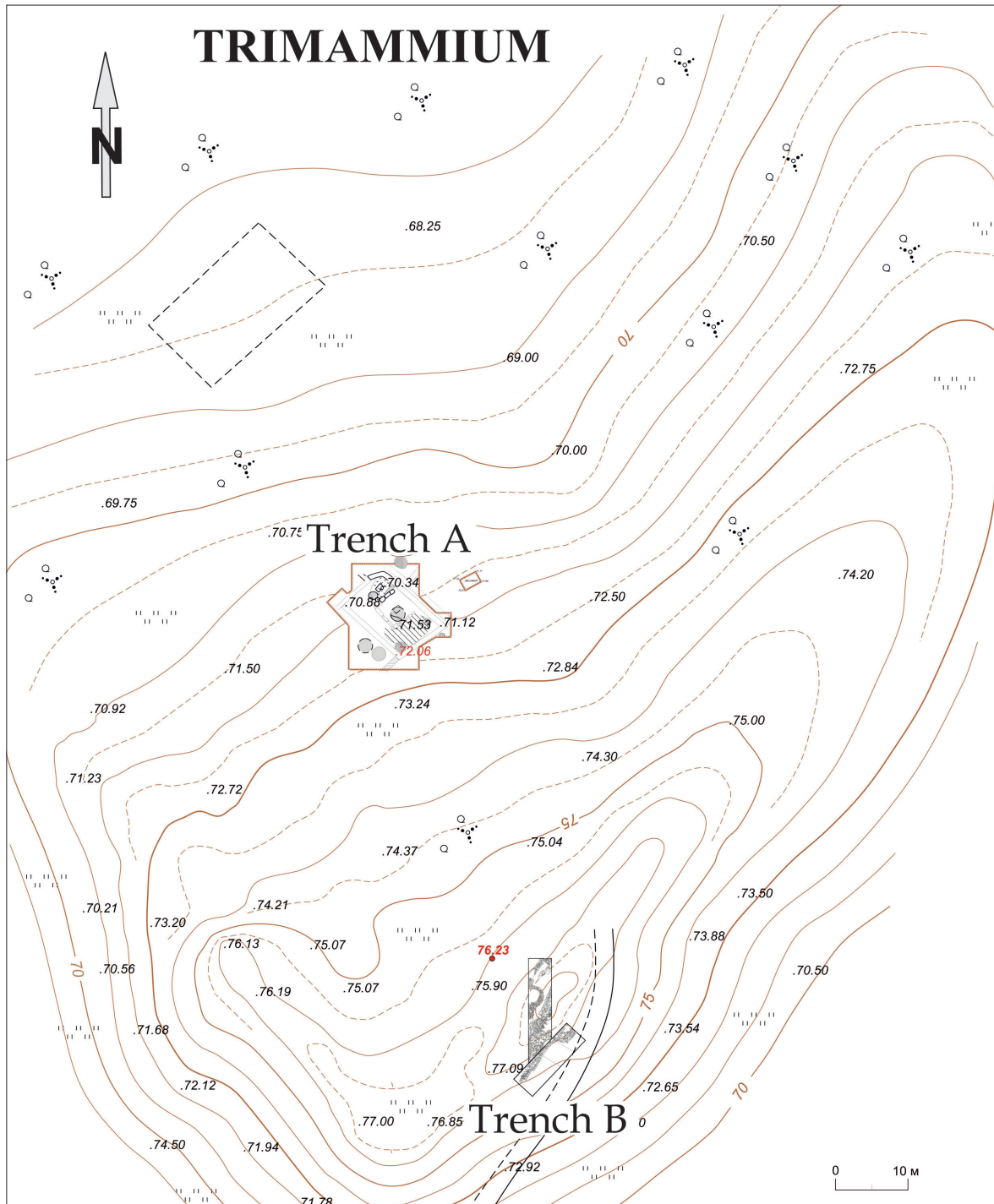


Fig. 7. Excavations at Trimammium in 2006–2009 and 2017.

An open settlement spread along the lower slopes of both banks of the Oreshe River to the south-east, east and north-east of the fortress. Shkorpil did not discuss it in his text, but he hatched it in his survey map (Fig. 4). Some 80 years later, an archaeological field survey at the river mouth detected numerous fragments of architectural ceramics and pieces of stone columns and capitals on the surface. On this basis, together with information from local inhabitants, N. Stanev tentatively

► is housed in the Ruse Regional Museum of History and has not yet been fully published. It consists of 416 imitations of Philip II and Philip III and three coins of Thasos. I am grateful to my colleague V. Varbanov for the information.

identified the site of the Roman road-station there.¹⁹ Further surface finds were discovered in the spring of 1999; this time, the remains were associated with a Roman *vicus* and villas.²⁰

Remains of a large fountain were reportedly found on the northern outskirts of the site. The fountain is known only from a brief note published by V. Marinov in two newspapers in 1932, unfortunately without any illustration.²¹ It is said to have been cut into rock on high ground and loosely dated to the Roman Period, although no supporting evidence was given.

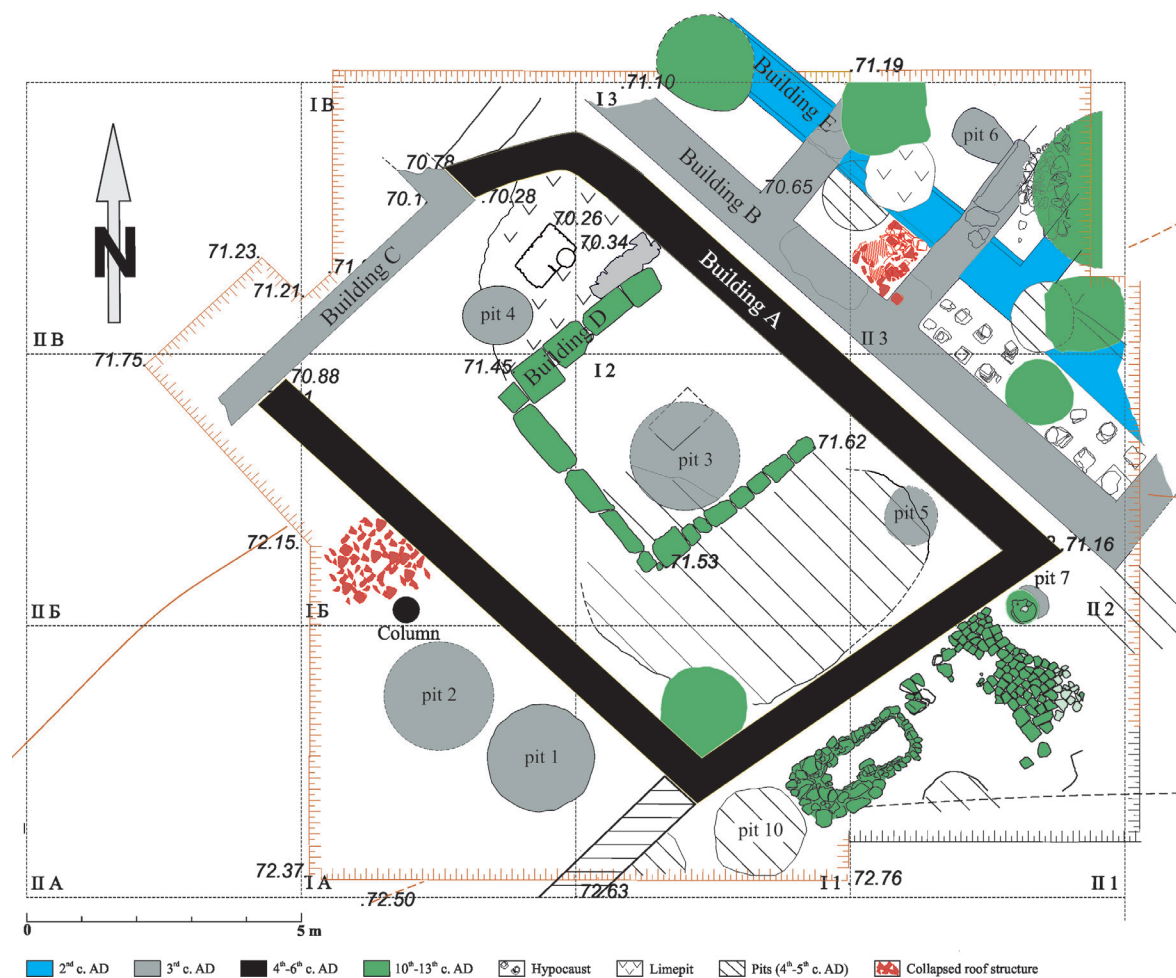


Fig. 8. Trench A in Trimammium (after TORBATOV 2012, Fig. 4).

A rock carving was found east of the fortress, on the right bank of the Oreshe River. It was first described by M. Vankov in 1905; K. Shkorpil published similar information in the same year.²² The relief, 30 cm high by 40 cm wide, depicts two horses galloping to the right; one has a bridle, the other has a raised tail, and a dog runs at their feet.²³ Next to them, the letters *UVL[...]* were read from a poorly preserved Latin inscription.

Less than three decades later, V. Marinov reported a rock relief of a single horseman in a trapezoid frame, 50 cm high, 75 cm wide at the base and 60 cm at the top.²⁴ Cut into the rock at a height of 3 m,

19 STANEV 1988, 39.

20 VAGALINSKI *et al.* 2001, 79; CONRAD 2006, 316, Fig. 8; CONRAD 2008, 71, Abb. 2.

21 MARINOV 1932a, 8; MARINOV 1932b.

22 VANKOV 1905, 558; SHKORPIL 1905, 454, footnote 3.

23 Instead of horses, K. Shkorpil mentions horsemen.

24 MARINOV 1932a, 8; MARINOV 1932b.

the scene shows a rider advancing to the right; below, a dog runs against an animal—perhaps a lion—and a damaged figure entwined by a serpent is also present. In 1933, G. Kazarov, using a photograph sent by Marinov, produced what is probably the most accurate description of this sculptural work. He gives the relief as 1 m high and 85 cm wide: the horseman rides to the right, wearing a short *chiton* and raising his right hand to cast a spear.²⁵ A rectangular altar appears beneath the horse's right forehoof; before the animal stands a tree coiled by a serpent and below runs a dog chasing a doe (Fig. 5). The iconography closely matches Type B stone votive tablets of the Thracian Horseman, featuring a galloping rider hunting game.²⁶ Finds of such images are widespread in present-day Bulgaria and are usually dated to the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries AD. The discrepancies between the two descriptions—two horses versus a single rider—and the large difference in size led S. Torbatov to propose that two separate monuments existed,²⁷ possibly forming part of a local rock sanctuary that was actively used in the Roman Period. Research to confirm or refute this remains outstanding.

Publications from the first half of the 20th century also mention a rock-hewn church on the right



Fig. 9. Deposit of over 350 iron arrowheads from Building E (photo by V. Varbanov).



Fig. 10. *Denarius* of Emperor Trajan from Building E (after VARBANOV 2017, Tab. 17.4).



Fig. 11. Bronze statuette of Aphrodite/Venus from Pit 4 (after RUSEV – VARBANOV 2015, Tab. 2.20).

25 KATSAROV 1933, 147.

26 KAZAROV 1938, 6; OPPERMAN 2006, 31–67.

27 TORBATOV 2012, 433.

bank of the Oreshe, about 100 paces west of the relief(s).²⁸ According to Vankov, it was already partly collapsed, with rubble at the foot of the cliff. The west-facing entrance was 5 m high and 4 m wide; the roughly square chamber measured 5 × 5 m, and the altar with two niches and incised crosses stood in its eastern part (Fig. 4). The only surviving photograph, taken by V. Marinov, shows a triangular pediment above the half-buried façade. S. Torbatov assigned the building to the Middle Ages, although the pediment may suggest an earlier date and later reuse.

By the start of the 21st century, a substantial body of information had been amassed on the site even before excavation began. This corpus comprised numerous field observations made during agricultural work and construction, as well as the findings of several field surveys. It is clear that the military camp of Trimammium and its immediate surroundings formed an extensive settlement complex (Fig. 6). For a prolonged period, the site belonged to the fortification system of the Roman limes—initially in the province of Lower Moesia and, from the late 3rd to early 4th century AD, in Second Moesia. Trimammium was a *castellum*, the base of several military units.



Fig. 12. Iron helmet cheek piece from Pit 4 (after RUSEV – VARBANOV 2015, Tab. 2, 22).

Field investigation of the fortress

Excavations took place in 2006–2009 and again in 2017, prompted by the growing threat of illicit metal detecting. The work, directed by V. Varbanov of the Ruse Regional Museum of History,²⁹ concentrated in five seasons on two principal areas (Fig. 7): within the fort (Trench A), where several buildings and other structures were examined, and the defensive system (Trench B), parts of which were exposed.

Current scholarship holds that the territory east of the Yantra (Iatrus) River was annexed to the Roman Empire under the Flavians.³⁰ If so, Trimammium cannot have been built before the last quarter of the 1st century AD. The site chronology and stratigraphy, reconstructed mainly from data gleaned in Trench A, however, present a more complex picture. Five buildings, several pits, and other features were identified (Fig. 8). The earliest, Building E, occupies the north-eastern corner of Trench A and was only partly excavated. The remains are poorly preserved, and much of its fill was removed during later construction. At least two rooms could be recognised. A 2nd-century AD date is suggested by stratigraphy and a small assemblage of finds; however, the available evidence is insufficient for specifying the chronological position of the building. The most notable finds comprise a deposit of more than 350 iron arrowheads (Fig. 9), a *denarius* of Emperor Trajan minted in Rome in AD 114–117 (Fig. 10),³¹ and two *tegula* fragments stamped by *legio I Italica*.³²

28 VANKOV 1905, 558; SHKORPIL 1905, 454; MARINOV 1932a, 8; MARINOV 1932b.

29 VARBANOV *et al.* 2008, 160–165.

30 TORBATOV 2012, 438.

31 VARBANOV 2017, 87.

32 TORBATOV 2010, 52.



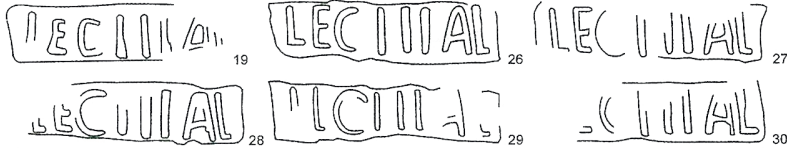
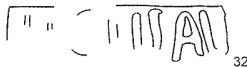




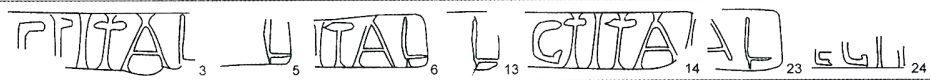

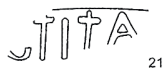

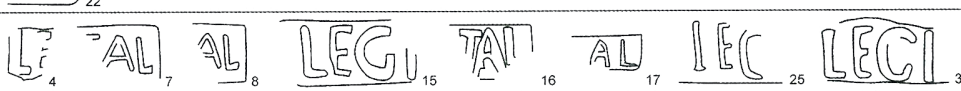

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	Type VI-66/a (VI 106)
	Type VI-70/b
	Type VI-70/c
	Type VI-70/f (VI 110)
	Type VI-70/i (VI 112)
	Type VI-70 (a new subvariety)
	Type VI-71/a (VI 113)
	Type VI-72/a (VI 114)
	Type VI-73/a (VI 115)
	? Type VI-54/a (VI 90)
	?
Legio I Italica	

Fig. 13. Stamps of the First Italian Legion (*Legio I Italica*) (after TORBATOV 2010, Fig. 4).

The next horizon includes two contemporary buildings (B and C) and seven pits, all dating to the Severan Period, no later than the early decades of the 3rd century AD. Building B, in the north-eastern corner of Trench A, overlies the foundations of Building E, which had already been demolished when B was erected. Building B had at least three rooms and two phases (construction and re-building). The refurbishment included adding a heating system (*hypocaustum*) in the eastern room and walling up its northern entrance. Beneath the collapsed hypocaust roof lay a coin deposit of nineteen *antoniniani*: the earliest dates to Gallienus and the latest, minted in AD 283, to Carus.³³ Building C, west of B and at the edge of Trench A, was only marginally exposed at its south-eastern corner. Its stratigraphic position and the few finds from its fill indicate contemporaneity with Building B. South of Building C lay the remains of a collapsed roof (fragments of *tegulae* and *imbrices*) and a fragmentary column, again consistent with a Severan date. Finds include a *denarius* of Commodus (minted in Rome in AD 191–192) and an *antoninianus* of Probus (mint uncertain).³⁴

33 VARBANOV 2011, 271–274; VARBANOV 2017, 88.

34 VARBANOV 2017, Fig. 3, 92, 110.

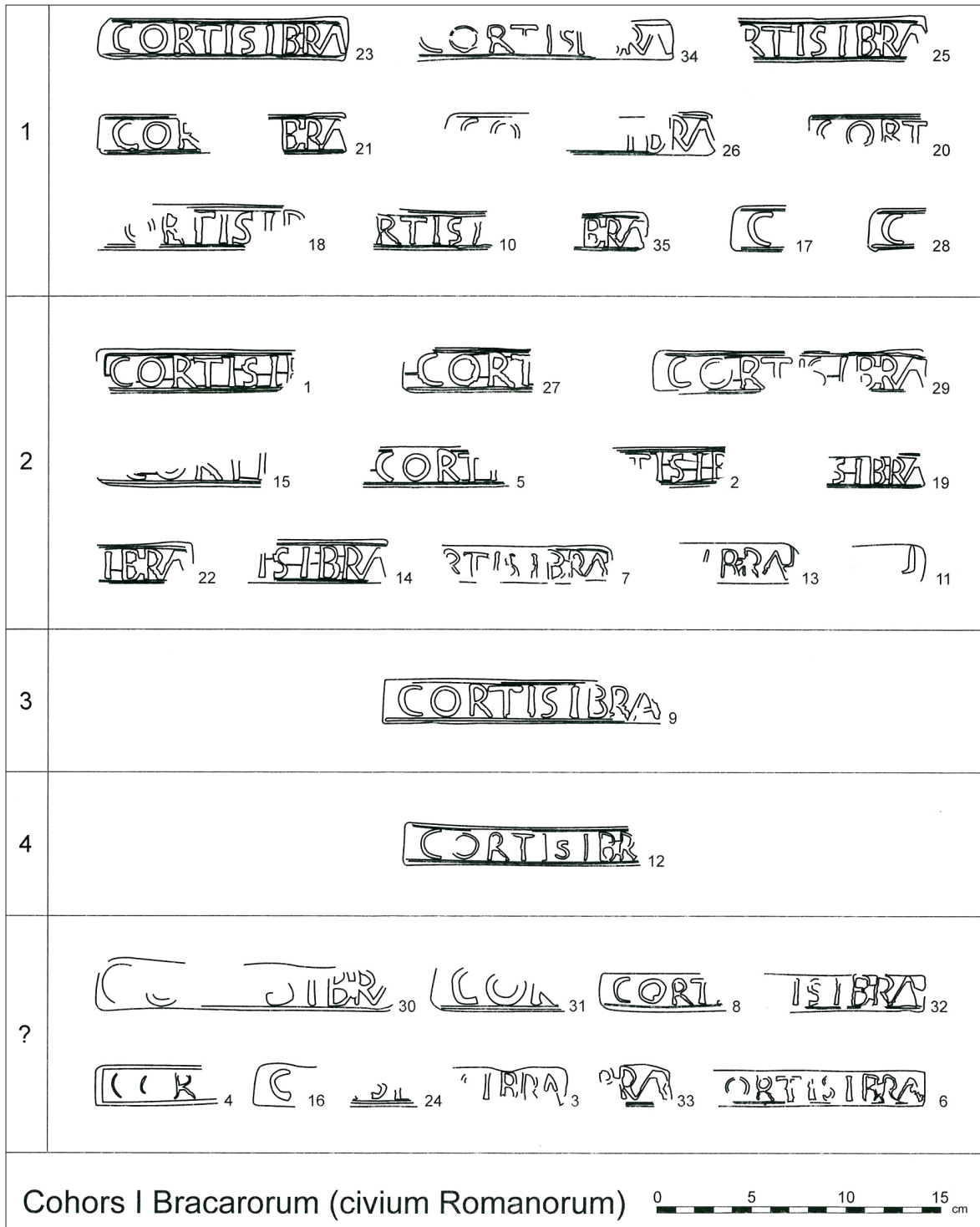


Fig. 14. Stamps of the *cohors I Bracarorum civium Romanorum* (after TORBATOV 2011a, Fig. 4).

Seven pits occupied the open area between Buildings B and C; only Pit 6 cut into Building B. Most are well dated by coins and small finds.³⁵ Pits 1 and 2 yielded provincial bronzes of Septimius Severus struck at Nicopolis ad Istrum, while the five coins from Pit 3 run from Philip I to Probus. Varbanov interpreted Pits 1–3 as domestic features. The remaining pits (4–7) appear to differ. Pit 4 contained 39 *antoniniani* from Gallienus to Diocletian, the latest minted in AD 285–286, as well as a

35 VARBANOV 2009, 102–107; RUSEV – VARBANOV 2015, 237–240; VARBANOV 2018, 71–73.

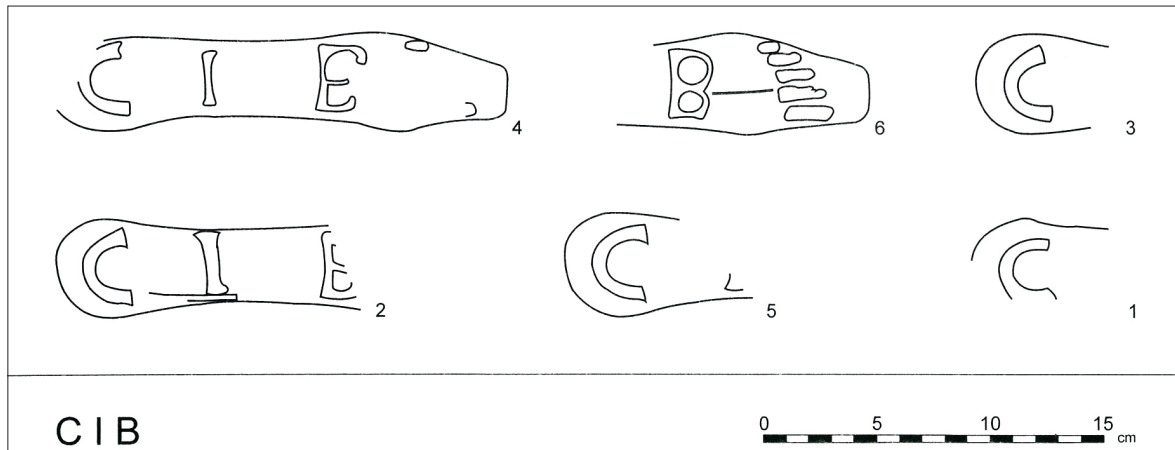


Fig. 15. *CIB* stamps from Trimammium (after TORBATOV 2011a, Fig. 10).

bronze statuette of Aphrodite/Venus (Fig. 11), an iron cheek-piece from a Niederbieber-type helmet (Fig. 12), a bronze shield boss (*umbo*), a bronze belt buckle, a bronze bracelet, pottery vessels and other bronze and iron objects.³⁶ The contents of Pit 5 are similar: eleven *antoniniani* (Gallienus to Probus), bronze and ceramic vessels, loom-weights, a whetstone, iron nails, and other items. These four pits, along with the coin hoard found under the hypocaust in Building B, have been interpreted as votive deposits—remnants of ritual practices within the fortress.³⁷

Stamped bricks and roof tiles (*tegulae* and *imbrices*) are essential to understanding the site. Most architectural ceramics from Severan Period contexts were produced by two military brick and tile workshops (*figlinae*) and a private one. One workshop marked its products with the stamp of *legio I Italica*; its products were found in Pits 1, 2, 3 and 6, in Building B, and in the debris of the collapsed roof south of Building C (Fig. 13). S. Torbatov has offered a detailed evaluation of the stamped material, building on the studies of T. Sarnowski and M. Matuszewska.³⁸

The presence of products stamped by the legion based at Novae, about 35 km south-west of Trimammium, has been linked to a *vexillatio* sent specifically to undertake construction work, probably related to the building of the fortress in the early 3rd century AD. These bricks and tiles were fired in kilns near Trimammium.³⁹

Equally noteworthy is evidence for a second brick and tile workshop, indicated by numerous fragments stamped 'CORTISIBRA' and 'CIB'. The earliest pieces were found in Pits 1, 3 and 5, in Building C and in the collapsed roof south of it; most, however, came from Building B.⁴⁰ Within the frame-

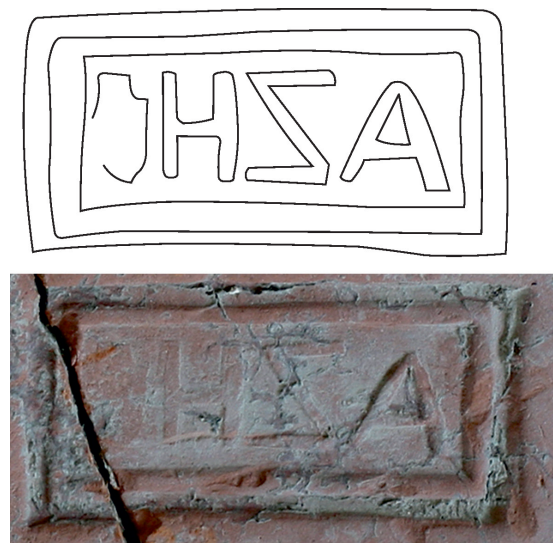


Fig. 16. *HZA* stamp from Trimammium (after TORBATOV 2012, Fig. 7.1).

36 RUSEV – VARBANOV 2015, 240–247, Tabs 1–2.

37 VARBANOV 2017, 90.

38 TORBATOV 2010, 41–57; SARNOWSKI 1985, 17–61; MATUSZEWSKA 2006, 45–63.

39 TORBATOV 2010, 54.

40 TORBATOV 2011a, 79.



Fig. 17. Altar fragment with a Latin inscription associated with the *cohors I Bracarorum* (after TORBATOV 2012, Figs 12–13).

work established for the *legio I Italica* stamps, Torbatov distinguished four variants of a single type (Fig. 14), resolving the abbreviated legend with a high degree of confidence and associating these products with the *cohors I Bracarorum civium Romanorum*. The unit's earlier history is well known, and the stamped material indicates its garrison at Trimammium in the 3rd century AD.⁴¹ A further *CIB* stamp variant was identified on only six objects from Pit 1 and from the collapsed roof south of Building C, where the abbreviation appears within a *planta caligaris* frame (Fig. 15). Its chronology is straightforward, as the specimens were found with items bearing 'LEGITAL' and 'CORTISIBRA' stamps in Pit 1, and the collapsed roof also dates to the 3rd century AD. Torbatov cautioned that the *CIB* stamps cannot be read with absolute certainty, and their attribution to *cohors I Bracarorum* remains unproven;⁴² even so, the link is persuasive, and the hypothesis of a second stamp-type must remain tentative pending further evidence.

Only one product of a private brick and tile workshop has been recorded, from Building B, bearing a three-letter *HZA* stamp (Fig. 16). With no parallels known from other Bulgarian sites, the stamp remains unique.⁴³

The third main horizon of the site represents the beginning of Late Antiquity. In Trench A, traces of further construction and a new building, A, can be assigned to this phase (Fig. 8). Building A was erected at the start of the 4th century AD in the open space west of Building B; the already-demolished southern wall of Building C was incorporated into the new structure.⁴⁴ Building A remained in use until the late 6th century AD. Bricks stamped *RVMORID*, dated to the 360s AD, attest to repairs in the later 4th century AD.⁴⁵ These observations correspond with Shkorpil's and Vankov's early-20th-century reports of identical stamps among the ruins of Trimammium.⁴⁶

41 MATEI-POPESCU 2010, 195; TORBATOV 2011a, 85.

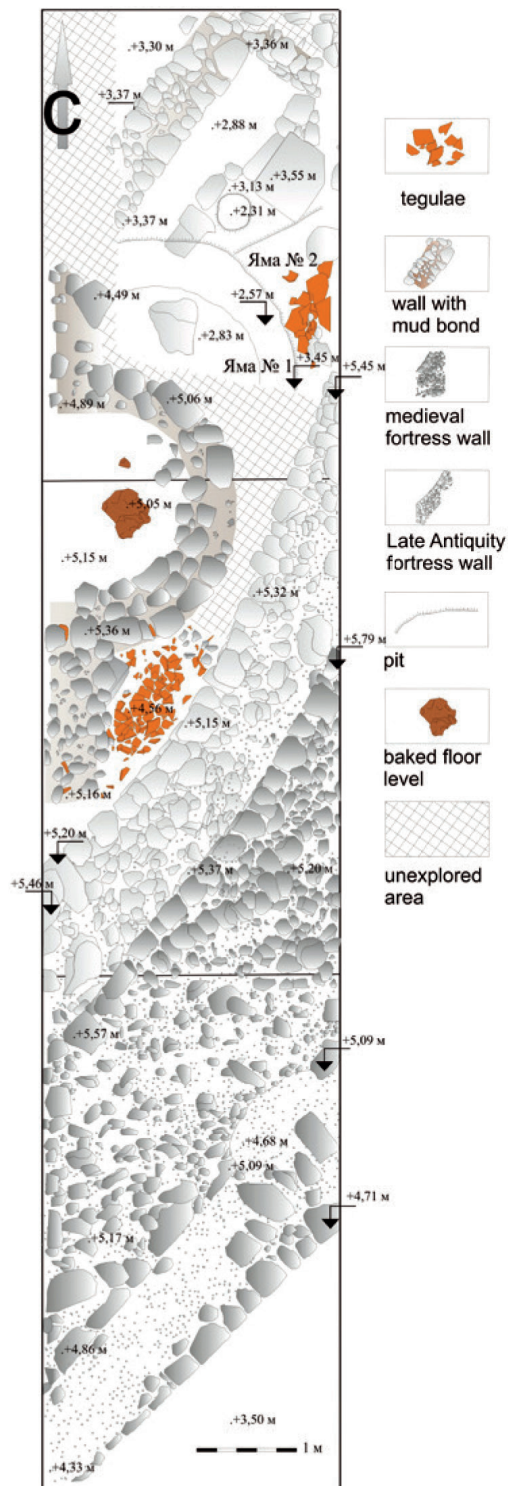
42 TORBATOV 2011a, 92.

43 TORBATOV 2012, 441.

44 VARBANOV *et al.* 2008, 162.

45 TORBATOV 2012, 443–444. The stamps are associated with Flavius Rumoridus, dux of the province of Second Moesia at the time of emperor Valens (AD 364–378).

46 VANKOV 1905, 558; SHKORPIL 1905, 455.



A fragmentary limestone altar bearing a Latin inscription, reused as *spolia*, was discovered among the remains of Building A in 2006 (Fig. 17).⁴⁷ Six lines survived on one of its faces. As published by S. Torbatov, the dedication was addressed either to Emperor Severus Alexander or to a deity in AD 224, when Lucius Annius Italicus governed Lower Moesia and the *cohors I Bracarorum* was encamped at Trimammium.⁴⁸

Pit 10, south of the south-western corner of Building A, also belongs to the Late Roman horizon (Fig. 8). Varbanov interpreted the negative feature as a receptacle for wastewater and human refuse.⁴⁹ Its fill yielded a rich and varied assemblage: numerous fragments of different ceramic forms; *tegulae* stamped by *legio I Italica* and *cohors I Bracarorum*, brooches and other bronze items, fifteen coins, and more. The numismatic evidence suggests use at least into the AD 330s: the latest coin, issued by Constantius II, was minted in Heraclea between AD 330 and 333.⁵⁰

The latest horizon corresponds to the Middle Ages. After a hiatus of roughly four centuries, a fortified settlement was established atop the ruins of Late Antique Trimammium. Finds of tools, household equipment, military gear, and jewellery indicate an occupation in the late 10th to early 11th century AD.⁵¹ Features attributed to this period include Building D, at least six pits, a kiln, and a grain-storage pit (Fig. 8). The earliest coins are anonymous *folles* of Type A3 (AD 1025–1028), plausibly marking the start of re-occupation.⁵² The medieval reuse of Roman fortresses along the Lower Danube limes is a characteristic phenomenon in the Ruse Region; broadly comparable situations are documented at the nearby *castellan*, Sexaginta Prista and Iatrus.⁵³ Available evidence suggests that the fortified settlement at Trimammium was abandoned around AD 1242–1243, before mid-13th-century incursions by

Fig. 18. The fortress wall of Trimammium in Trench B (after TORBATOV 2012, Fig. 5).

47 VARBANOV *et al.* 2008, 161.

48 TORBATOV 2011b, 242; TORBATOV 2012, 451.

49 RUSEV – VARBANOV 2019, 240–241.

50 The coin hoard consists of two provincial bronzes (Septimius Severus and Elagabalus), ten *antoniniani* (Gordian III, Gallienus, Quintillus, Tacitus, and Florian), and three *folles* (Licinius I, Crispus, and Constantius II).

51 VELIKOVA 2012, 404–408.

52 VARBANOV *et al.* 2008, 165, Tab. 4.

53 See the study by S. Velikova in this journal (VELIKOVA 2025).

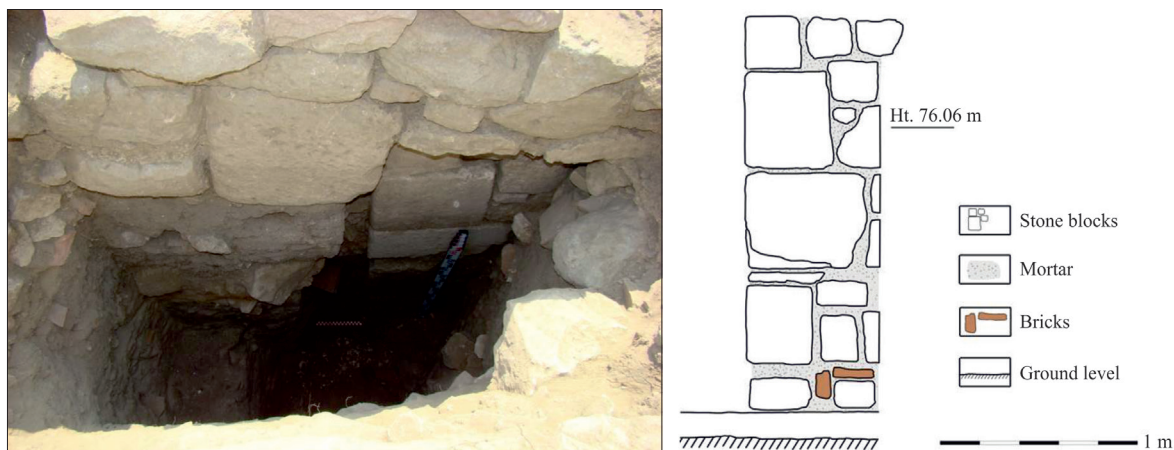


Fig. 19. The inner face of the late antique defensive wall of Trimammium (photo and drawing by D. Dragoev).

Tatar forces, which destroyed it. The latest coins recovered so far are four Latin imitation *tracheas* from the first half of the 13th century AD.⁵⁴

To date, only the southern sector of the Trimammium defences has been excavated. In 2009 and 2017, Trench B was opened south of Trench A.⁵⁵ At that time, the line of the fortress wall was still clearly visible as an earthen bank (*vallum*) with stones protruding above the surrounding terrain. In 2009, Trench B cut a north–south section across the defences, providing information on construction, dimensions, stratigraphy, and phasing. Excavation was limited in the southern part of the trench but produced more data in the northern part. The features unearthed were interpreted as short segments of three walls with a broadly similar south-west–north-east alignment, representing different phases (Fig. 18).⁵⁶ The earliest defensive system, built in *opus emplectum*—with faces of worked stone blocks bedded in mortar and a wall core of rubble and mortar—dates to the late 3rd or early 4th century AD. A small, 2 m-high stretch was identified as the jamb of a doorway (Fig. 19). Crude repairs and heightening were carried out at the very end of the 6th century, not before AD 585. The last reinforcement works took place in the Middle Ages, when a new, 2.25 m thick wall was built of coarsely carved stones and poor-quality mortar. Two to three courses survive, with an external plinth 0.90–1.10 m wide (Fig. 20).



Fig. 20. The medieval wall of Trimammium (photo by D. Dragoev).

The 2017 season aimed to extend the investigation of the fortress wall, including the section already examined in 2009. The newly excavated 50 m² area exposed the outer face of the curtain wall south of Trench B and revealed two main phases, Late Antique and medieval (Fig. 21). The Antique wall, built in *opus vittatum*, consists of parallel horizontal courses of limestone blocks bedded in mortar. The best-preserved part stands 2.64 m high (ten courses). The substructure is wider and includes a two-course plinth between the foundation and the rising wall (Fig. 22). The southern side of a tower was recognised in the eastern half of the trench (Fig. 23). Its face was built like the curtain wall but also incorporates brick fragments (Fig. 24). It can be confirmed that the jamb of the entrance recorded in 2009 belongs to this tower.

54 VARBANOV *et al.* 2008, 165, Tab. 4.

55 VARBANOV – RUSEV 2019, 31, 33.

56 DRAGOEV 2009, 54–57.

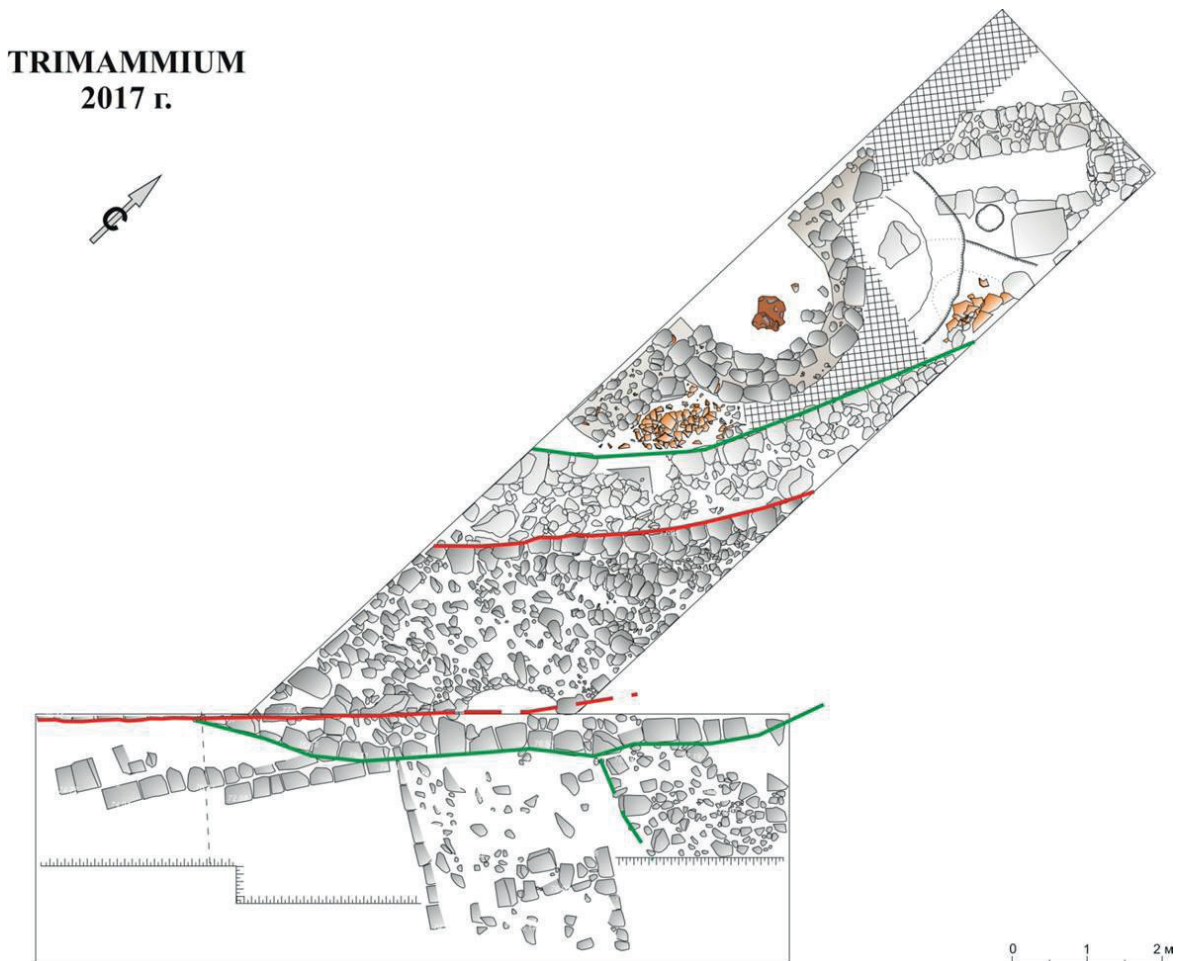


Fig. 21. The remains of the late antique and the medieval fortress wall of Trimammium (drawing by A. Kamenarov).

A medieval wall overlies the ruins of the Roman fortification (Fig. 25). A thick layer of demolition debris separates the two, indicating a lengthy interval between the destruction of the older wall and the construction of its successor (Fig. 26). The combined height of the two curtain walls is 4 m. Finds from within the fort and around the defences indicate abandonment at the end of the 6th century AD: the latest coin so far is a *decanummium* of Tiberius II Constantine minted in Constantinople. One of the more intriguing finds from in front of the fortress wall is the upper part of an amphora bearing *dipinti* in red on both sides (Fig. 27). The vessel form is characteristic of the 6th and first half of the 7th century AD. The principal Greek text is an early Christian formula, while the final sequence indicates that the amphora contained oil.⁵⁷

Χ(ριστὸν) Μ(αρία) γ(εννῆ) – Mary gives birth to Christ
 Θεοῦ χάρις – God's grace (is) gain
 κέρ + δος – (Church/monastery?)
 ἁγί(ασ) Μαρίας – of St Mary
 Θε(ο)ῦ σώζοντος – of God the Saviour (?)
 ΥΡΙΝΕΛΕ.[–](?) – amphora of sweet oil (?)

The exact date of the construction of the Roman wall remains uncertain. A date no later than the beginning of the 4th century seems likely, but conclusive evidence is lacking. If this hypothesis is

57 SHARANKOV – VARBANOV 2018, 336–339.

correct, the question arises: where was the 2nd- and 3rd-century AD fortification that protected the site's infrastructure during the High Roman Empire?

Investigations in the cemeteries

A comprehensive account of Trimammium must also address the cemeteries. The first, early-20th-century reference to burial grounds in the vicinity of the fortress did not specify their locations. It merely reports that earthworks in the valley of the Oreshe to the east or north of the fort revealed a variety of graves. Some were cut into the bedrock and covered with slabs; others were stone cists built of stone slabs or *tegulae* or chambers of brickwork.⁵⁸ Erosion by the Danube also



Fig. 22. The outer face of the late antique defensive wall of Trimammium (photo by V. Varbanov).



Fig. 23. Tower in the late antique defensive wall of Trimammium (photo by I. Velikov).

exposed graves, probably north of Trimammium, on the right bank. The graves were discovered at two different levels; however, this is all the information available on their stratigraphic positions.⁵⁹ In 1965, a further funerary monument was discovered in the area by chance (Fig. 28): the tombstone of the soldier Aurelius Mucianus, who died at the age of 26 while serving as a *ensor* (land surveyor) in *legio I Italica*.⁶⁰ The stone has been discussed in several studies; the latest opinion dates it to the



Fig. 24. Outer face of the late antique tower (photo by V. Varbanov).

58 SHKORPIL 1905, 455; MARINOV 1932a, 8; MARINOV 1932b.

59 DREMSIZOVA-NELCHINOVA – IVANOV 1983, 47.

60 VELKOV 1968, 4–6.

early 3rd century AD, but not before AD 212.⁶¹ In 1983, D. Stanchev excavated west of Mechka village but found only scattered human bones and fragments of stone sarcophagi, concluding that the necropolis had already been destroyed.⁶²

In 2019, cemetery research entered a new phase. Based on topographical observations, attention turned to the area south of the fortress.⁶³ On S. Torbatov's survey map (Fig. 6), the Roman cemetery is marked on a low rise immediately south of the fortified area—a logical choice; however, dense woodland (the area is currently part of a nature conservation territory) prevents excavation there. Work therefore shifted to more distant, relatively flat terrain with no such vegetation. Excavations continued in 2022 in two zones south (Area 1) and south-east (Area 2) of Trimammium, covering a total of 198 m² (Fig. 29). In all, 34 graves representing three historical eras—the Roman Imperial Period (2nd–3rd centuries AD), Late Antiquity (4th–6th centuries AD), and the Middle Ages (12th–13th centuries AD)—were uncovered and fully excavated (Fig. 30).



Fig. 25. Superposition of the late antique and medieval defensive walls (photo by V. Varbanov).

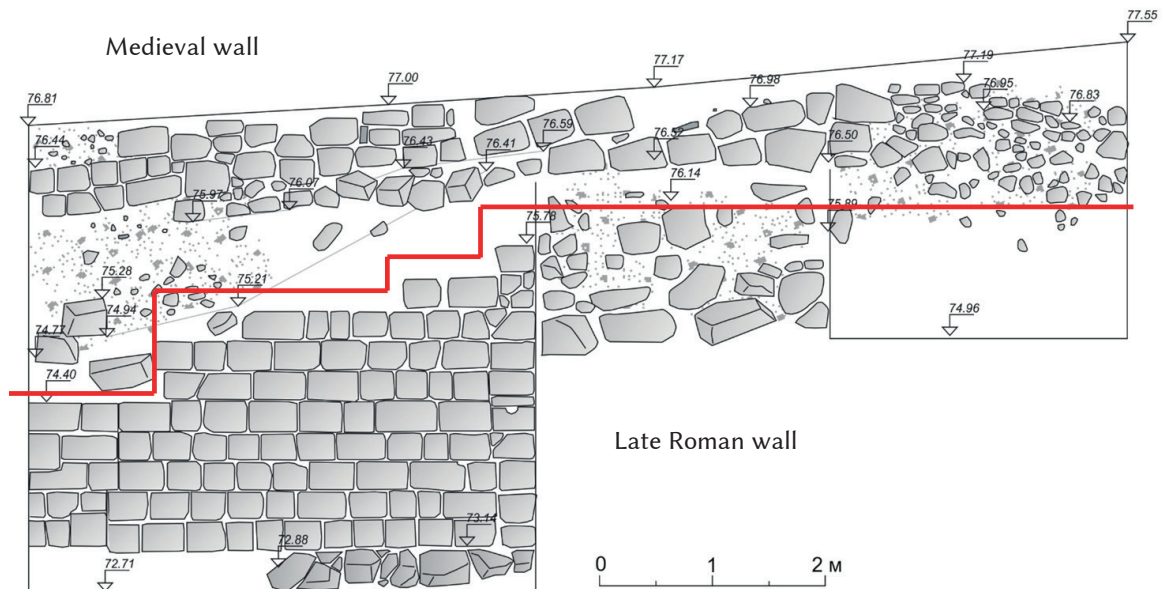


Fig. 26. Superposition of the late antique and medieval defensive walls (drawing by A. Kamenarov).

Two burials are certainly Roman. Both are simple pit graves with largely rectangular pits with vertical sides and flat bottoms. Each contained the skeletal remains of a single body laid to rest in a supine position with outstretched arms and legs (Fig. 31). Sparse grave goods comprised a small glass bottle with a spherical body, a silver torque, a bronze brooch, and a provincial bronze coin of Elagabalus minted at Marcianopolis (Fig. 33).

Twelve Late Antique burials were likewise simple inhumations in approximately rectangular pits, with vertical or stepped sides, aligned west–east with occasional deviation. Each held the skeletal remains of a single individual, laid with the head to the west (Fig. 34). Upon excavation, the bones were found

61 CONRAD 2004, 225, No. 368, Taf. 104.4; SHARANKOV – VENEDIKOVA 2023, 29, No. 38.

62 STANCHEV 1984, 90.

63 RUSEV – YORDANOVA 2020, 1049–1053.



Fig. 27. Amphora with *dipinti* (after SHARANKOV – VARBANOV 2018, Fig. 5).



Fig. 28. Tombstone of Aurelius Mucianus (after CONRAD 2004, Taf. 104.4).

scattered, rather than in anatomical order, attesting to the widespread custom of grave reopening at the time. Grave goods—mainly of ornaments and belt buckles—were not abundant and included types characteristic of the period (Fig. 35). Bronze coins issued in the first half of the 4th century AD from the fills of three graves provide a *terminus post quem* for the end of cemetery use. A further eight poorly preserved burials, without grave goods, probably date back to the Roman or Late Roman periods.

The youngest grave horizon is represented by a total of twelve medieval graves from the two excavation areas. These are easily identified: all had simple, shallow, mostly irregular grave pits (save for a trapezoidal and one with a curved western side). Two cut earlier Late Antique graves. They reflected a strict burial rite: each grave contained a single individual lying supine with the arms folded on the chest (Fig. 36), usually without grave goods. The only three grave finds are a bronze bracelet, a bronze finger ring and a copper coin (Bulgarian imitation coinage, Type C) of the first quarter of the 13th century AD (Fig. 37).

During the excavation of the necropolis, numerous stray finds were recovered from the topsoil. Most are coins struck between the first half of the 2nd and the second half of the 5th century AD; this assemblage includes two Bulgarian imitation *trachea* minted in the first half of the 13th century AD (Fig. 38). Non-numismatic stray finds include gold and silver jewellery and metal fittings from military and civilian dress (Fig. 32). These items corroborate the established chronology of Trimammium as a site occupied in the Roman Imperial period, Late Antiquity, and the Middle Ages.

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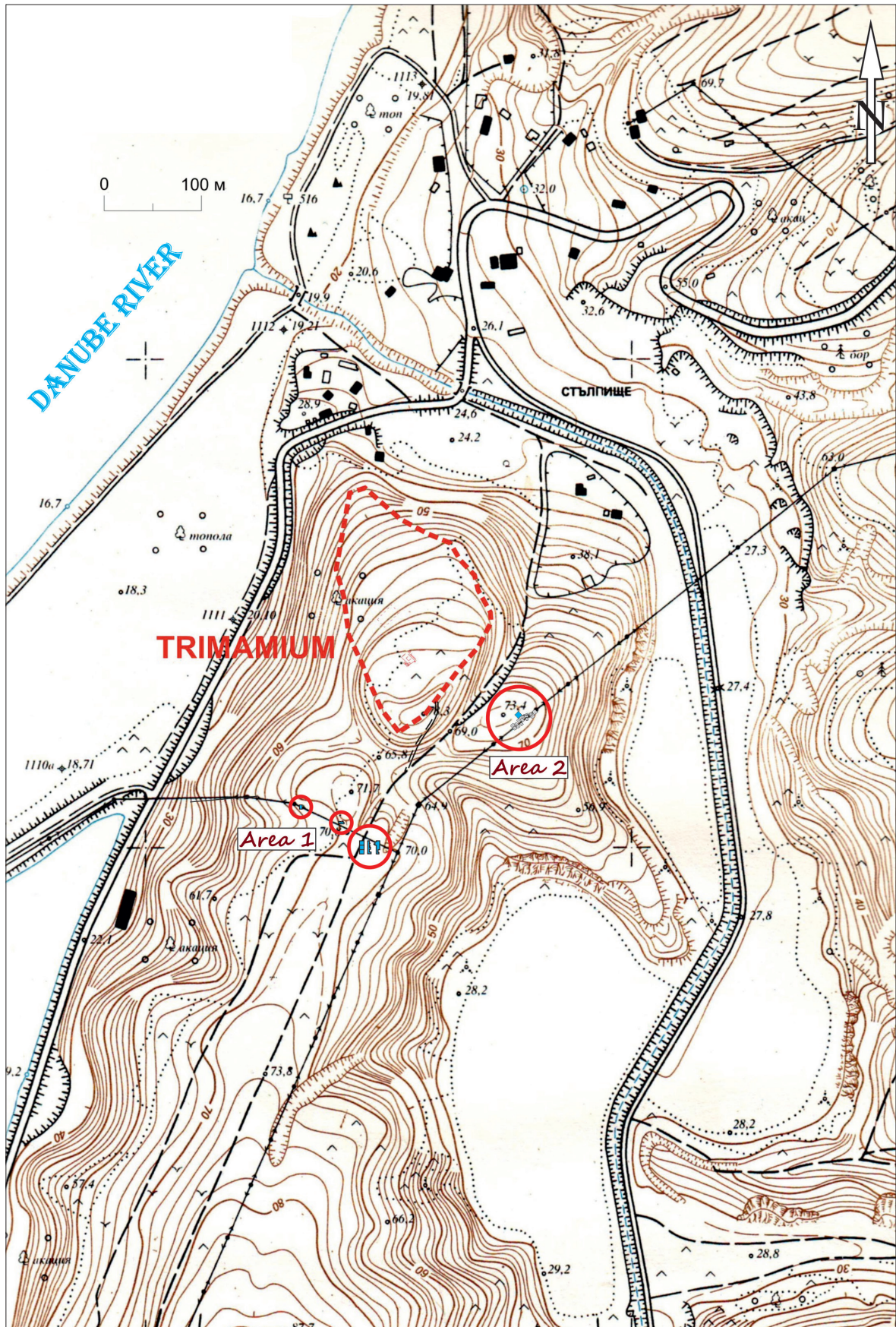


Fig. 29. Excavations in the southern necropolis of Trimammium in 2019 and 2022.

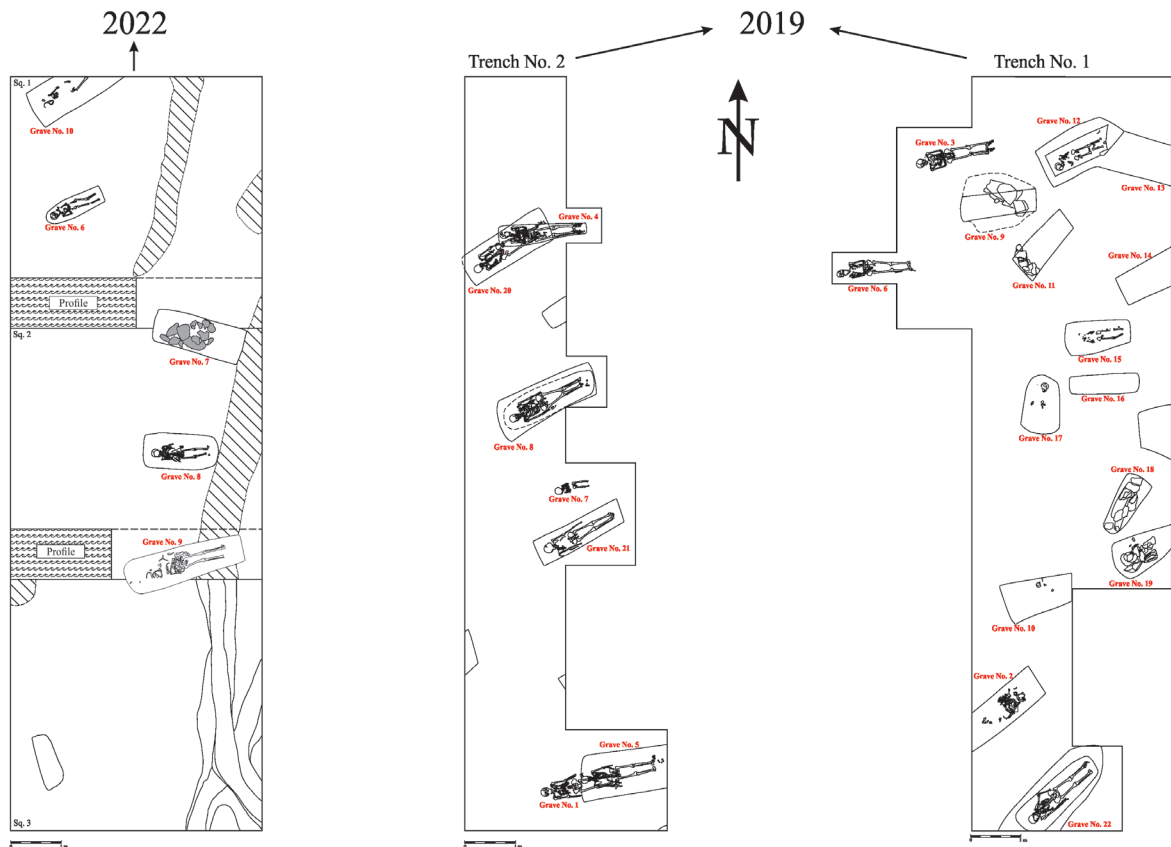


Fig. 30. Excavation area 1 in the southern necropolis of Trimammium (drawing by N. Rusev).



Fig. 31. Inhumation grave from the Roman Period (photo and drawing by N. Rusev).

Fig. 32. Small finds from the topsoil layer in the area of the necropolis (photo by N. Dijanova).



Fig. 33. Grave goods from the Roman Period (photo by M. Denchev and N. Dijanova).

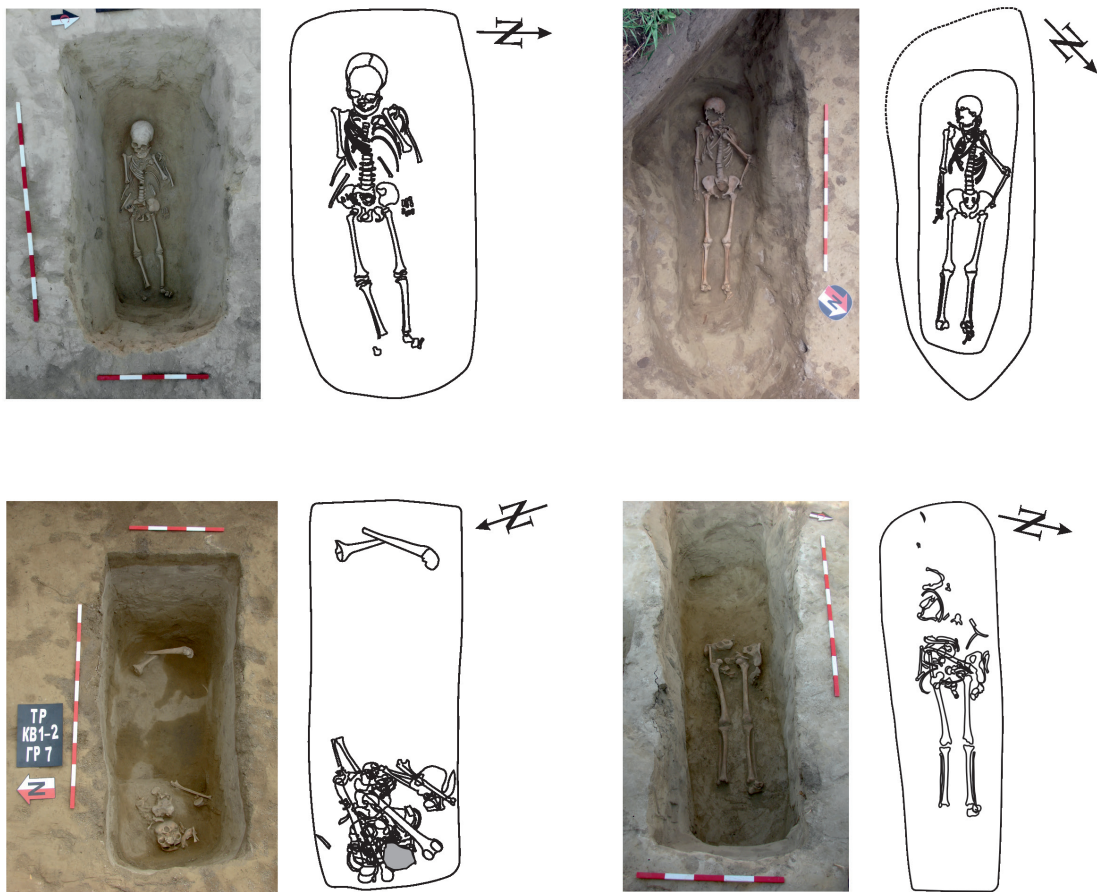


Fig. 34. Inhumation graves from the Late Antiquity (photo and drawing by N. Rusev).



Fig. 35. Grave goods from the Late Antiquity (photo by N. Dijanova).

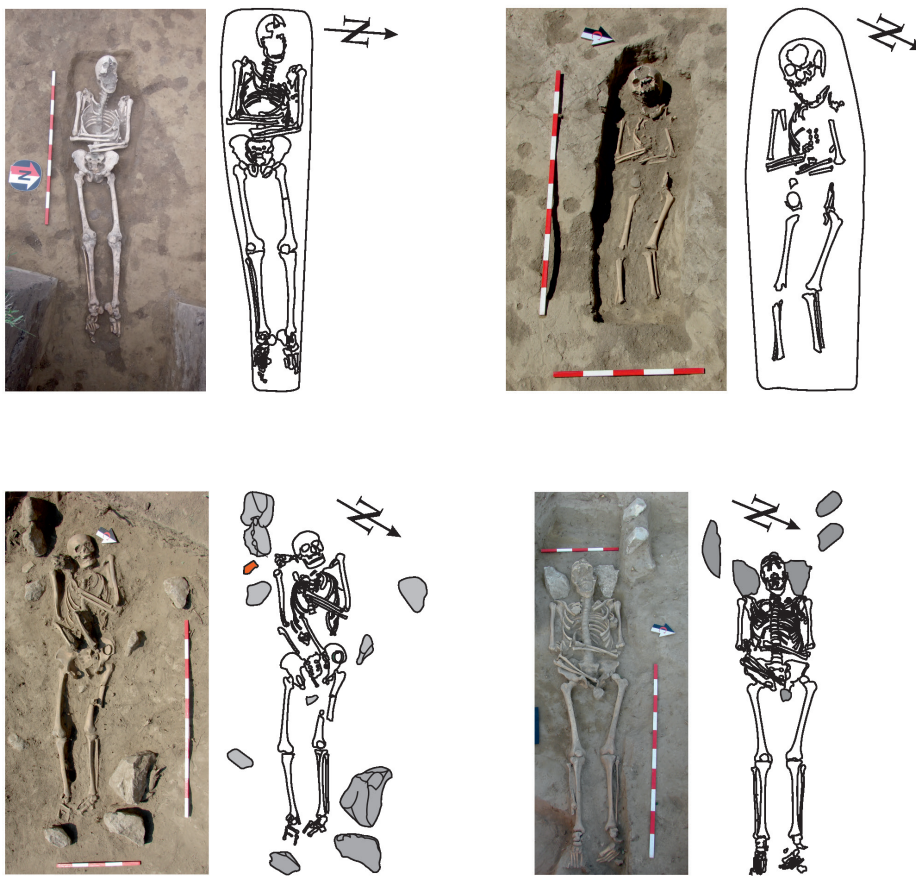


Fig. 36. Inhumation grave from the Middle Ages (photo and drawing by N. Rusev).



Fig. 37. Grave goods from the Middle Ages (photo by N. Dijanova).

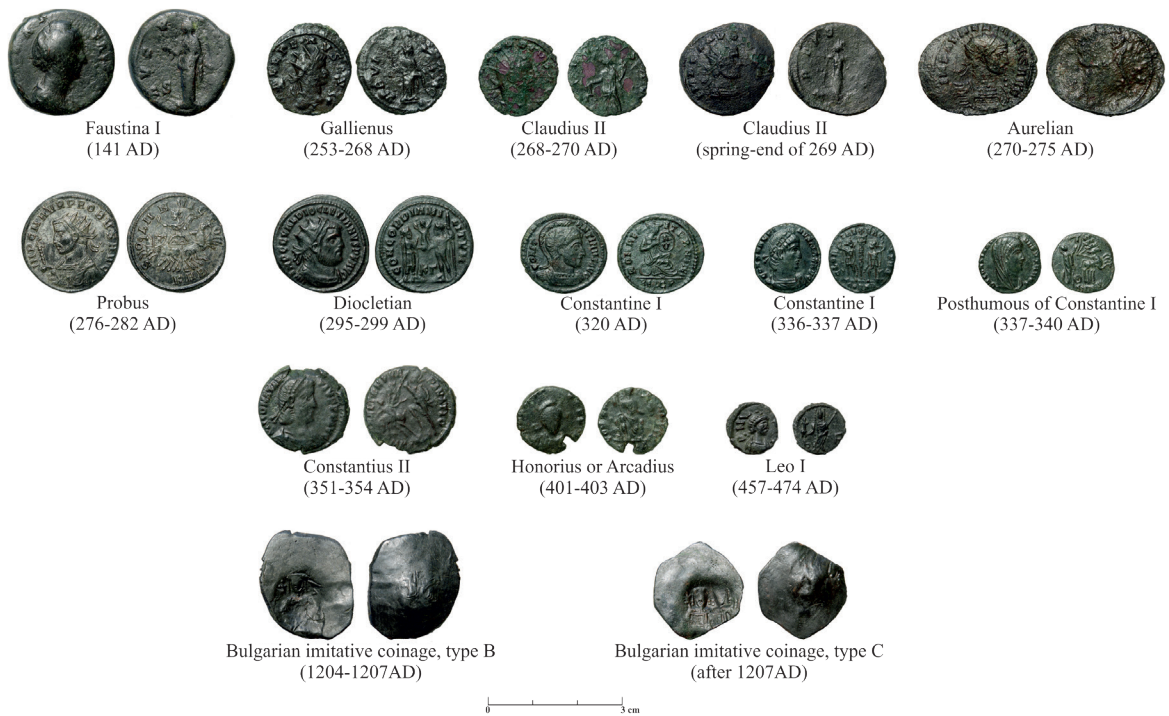


Fig. 38. Coins from the topsoil layer in the area of the necropolis (photo by N. Dijanova).

