

Gerda von Bülow, Sofija Petković (eds), *Gamzigrad-Studien I. Ergebnisse der deutsch-serbischen Forschungen im Umfeld des Palastes Romuliana*. Römisch-Germanischen Forschungen, Band 75, Wiesbaden 2020, Reihert Verlag, 414 pp., 123 illustrations b/w, 190 illustrations colour, 16 Tables and 15 Plates.

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As the title suggests, this work is only first volume of the final publication of German-Serbian excavations at Gamzigrad in the Zaječar District in eastern Serbia. It is very important archaeological site, one of Serbia's UNESCO World Heritage Sites.¹ The ruins itself were well known and have been excavated since 1953 by Serbian archaeologists as well as being mentioned in several publications previously (Herder 1846 [first mention]: 20–21; Kanitz 1861: 8–9; Breithaupt 1861 and few mentions in Serbian literature, Serbian excavations: Vasić 2007 and Živić 2011). However, it was not until the 1980s that an inscription was found during excavations that allowed for final identification (Srejšović 1985).

The archaeological site is located south of the Danube River, near the present city of Zaječar. Its unique position on the map of archaeological sites in Europe is a consequence of being the location of the complex including palace and temples called *Felix Romuliana* built by the emperor Galerius (Caesar during first tetrarchy, 293–305 AD, and Augustus in the second – 305–311 AD) in the ancient province of *Dacia Ripensis*. The whole area of this complex covers about 40,000 m² and was thus clearly a site of some importance especially in the late Roman period.

In this first volume, one may find all is needed to know about activities of the Serbo-German expedition conducted between 2004 and 2012 at the site, such as geophysical survey, topographical analysis, prehistory of the landscape of the area, analysis of the pottery, coins, sculpture, mosaics as well as preliminary results of the archaeological survey of several components of the whole palace complex.

In the “Vorwort”, the Editors explain the strategic aim of the project, which they state (on page 1) to be:

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¹ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/1347> (accessed: 09.05.2021)

1. A landscape archaeological exploration and investigation of the wider environment, the interactions between environmental conditions and settlement activities from prehistory to the Middle Ages should be shown.
2. Settlement historical prospecting with geophysical methods and excavations outside the walls of the palace should answer the question to what extent the palace was a uniquely constructed facility or whether it was embedded in a grown cultural landscape.
3. The planned digital construction survey of the already uncovered palace interior should serve to prepare conservation and restoration measures.

The results of the geoarchaeological and settlement history research as well as the detailed archaeological research are the subject of the articles in this volume.

As one may see, the first volume mainly concerns geophysical and geohistorical survey with the addition of description of selected object categories. That seems a reasonable plan, however, we await further volumes with presentations of other categories of finds.

Unfortunately, not all the initial assumptions of the publication have been implemented. The tragic death of prof. Dr. Ulrike Wulf-Rheidt, who was responsible for the analysis of building structures, made it impossible to include this part of the research in the publication. She was especially responsible for the architectural analysis of the exposed interior of the palace and developed the first ideas for protective structures for the mausoleums and the tetrapylonon Magura height.

The first chapter is “Bauforschung und Arbeiten des Architekturreferats in *Felix Romuliana*- Gamzigrad von 2004–2012” (by Christoph Rummel, pp. 5–8). The chapter is very short and generally describes only the history of architectural research made under the lead of prof. Wulf-Rheidt in the years 2004–2012. Despite the fact that we already know several papers published by prof. Wulf-Rheidt (Wulf-Rheidt 2007; 2011; Bülow and Wulf-Rheidt 2008; 2009; Skundrić and Wulf-Rheidt 2016) it would be very interesting to find a synthetic view and interpretation of the architectural constructions in the following volumes. The point is that *Felix Romuliana* is one of most interesting palatial constructions from the time of the Tetrarchy as well as late Roman official buildings in general. As Rummel enumerates, in the research were documented many remains of funeral constructions, a tetrapylon, mausoleums, temple, arch constructions and most importantly the palace itself, with the intention of performing their reconstruction. This type of documentation was made over the years 2004–2007. In following years important part of the activity was re-examination of the decoration of the known buildings.

As the author mentions, the aim of prof. Wulf-Rheidts was in the second phase to attain a better understanding not only construction itself but also gain a holistic view of the place of the construction using a “Geographical Information System” (*Gamzigrad*: 6). The final result should be a 3D model of the palace and its neighbourhood

and that was the aim of new project connected with TOPOI Exzellenzcluster. The final results of this work will be published later.

The second chapter is “Das deutsch-serbische Gemeinschaftsprojekt zur geophysikalischen und archäologischen Erkundung der Umgebung des Palastes *Felix Romuliana*. Chronik der Geländearbeiten von 2004 bis 2012” (by Gerda von Bülow, pp. 9–16). At the beginning, the author presents a brief overview of the previous history of the Serbo-German expedition. Von Bülow was head of the archaeological part of the project. Archaeologists and geophysicists focused, contrary to the architects, on the area around the palace. The first step was geomagnetic research of the area. In 2004, Mark Opelt used a “1-Kanal-Fluxgate-Gradiometer FM 36” together with a Totalstation with GPS. In the following years, devices of the same or higher class were used (Georadar, 8-channel gradiometer measuring trolley, 5-channel gradiometer configured as a measuring carriage with odometer). This allowed relatively quickly to identify areas of interest for further investigation, such as “a row of rooms with a portico in front that leads through a clearly recognizable enclosing wall to an already known *horreum* west of the palace”. The results of these studies were verified with the help of small sondages. In addition to the architectural remains, a grave was also examined, which turned out to be untouched. Many bronze coins from the late 3rd century and late fourth centuries have been found, some of them were minted between year 364 and 378 (Petković 2007: 266–267).

As a result of research carried out in 2007, especially in the area of circular structures to the north of the palace, it was hypothesized that the structure was damaged as a result of a natural disaster. As a consequence, in 2008, geographers from the Free University of Berlin were included in the research work. They conducted geomorphological studies, landscape analyses and test boreholes. By using a GPS device, the integration of the local surveying network into the world coordinate system was completed in year 2009.

The identified and partially archaeologically unearthed structures both inside and outside the palace are shown on the plan published on page 14 (*Gamzigrad*: fig. 1), in which they are superimposed on the existing, earlier plan of the palace. Most of the work was carried out outside the palace complex. Summing up: in the years 2004–2012, research was carried out in an area of about 5 km² (mainly outside the palace itself) and about 50 new architectural structures of various types were located. Most of them were concentrated in an area of about 250 x 300 m. As a result of the research, it can be concluded that the palace complex with the surrounding inhabited area covered almost twice as much territory than previously assumed.

A number of surveys were carried out in selected places, which provided a lot of new information on these structures. Most of them were destroyed before Emperor Galerius started building his palace.

The next sections of the volume have a rather technical character with many illustrations. Nevertheless, it provides important information and analyses of the topography

of the territory surrounding the palace itself. The first of them is a “GIS based topographical analysis in the surrounding of *Felix Romuliana*, Serbia” (by Janos Toth and Brigitta Schuett, pp. 17–26). The nature of this area (there are only two villages in the vicinity) has created the rare opportunity to conduct comprehensive topographic surveys over a large area. As a result of topographic research and geomorphological analysis, it was possible to partially reconstruct the process of dislocation of the soil in the area and therefore reconstruct its topography at the period when the palace functioned (pp. 19–20, fig. 7). The research covered an area of 193.75 km² (p. 20, fig. 4), which allowed inclusion in the analysis of the surrounding Roman fortifications at Kostol-Zajčev and Savinac, forming a chain of fortifications around *Felix Romuliana*. In the conclusion of the chapter, the authors point out that the location of the palace is “unique in its surrounding area”. And at the very end explains that “The outstanding character of the site is based on the complexity of favourable features such as the type of bedrock, relief and topography”.

The next chapter, “*Felix Romuliana*-Gamzigrad. Geophysikalische Erkundung des Innenbereichs zu archäologischen Zwecken” (by Tim Schüler and Mark Opelt, pp. 27–42) provides information about geophysical research of the palace area itself. The tests were carried out using high-quality equipment (SYSCAL Pro SWITCH 48) using mainly ERT and magnetic survey techniques. This chapter contains detailed, richly illustrated information on the results of the research, which reached up to 14 m below the surface of the terrain. Together with the control survey, they also made it possible to trace the location of geological layers and locate anomalies as well as provided comparative material for research conducted outside the palace.

The part “Landscape History research in the Surroundings of the Archaeological Site *Felix Romuliana*” (by Jana Škundrić-Rummel, pp. 43–58,) is devoted to the study of the hinterland of the castle itself. The work was mainly based on archaeological research supported by geomorphological research. The author points out that “our data show that the history of the site and its surroundings is significantly more diverse than previously thought and directly reflect the way in which the economic and social landscape was transformed in both spatial and chronological terms” (p. 43). The main transformation in question seems to be a significant depopulation of the hinterland in the period of Tetrarchy in contrast to the actual site of the palace complex itself. In the final part of the chapter are interesting comments about the connections between centre and periphery (palace and hinterland). However, the author pointed out that it was maybe too short a period “for the development of any hierarchies on a local level” (*Gamzigrad*: 55). The first settlements in the area appeared in the Neolithic period. In that context, the settlement activity in the area under the Roman Empire marks, as is described, a “clear hiatus”. Also very interesting are the final remarks on a theoretical level about artificial and sudden (in the term of historical processes) building of the palace centre and its “area of influence” on the hinterland.

The chapter “Prehistory of North-eastern Serbia using examples from *Felix Romuliana* and its surroundings” (by Alexandar Kapuran, pp. 59–82) complements the previous chapter in a very good manner. The author deals with the human activity in the area since the Neolithic period, which gives a broader perspective for historical processes before the Late Roman Period and allows the comparison of changes in the settlement process in the long perspective. It shows the development of human settlements in that region connecting basins of the Morava and Nišava rivers with the Carpathian and Lower Danube regions. The chapter is illustrated with many plates with illustration of the mainly ceramic material finds in the area.

The section “Die Ergebnisse archäologischer Sonderausgrabungen auf geomagnetisch prospektierten Flächennördlich (ca 6 ha) und südlich des Palastes *Felix Romuliana*” (Gerda von Bülow with contribution of Miloje Vasič, pp. 83–116) shows the results of archaeological survey of the two areas north and south of the palace. To the north there was a line of geomagnetically identified and partly excavated two rows of rooms as well as a huge (106 m long and 22 m across) aisled construction, an oval (most likely columnar) construction 30 x 36 m diameter with an eight-sided structure in the middle. The text presents several hypothetical interpretations of the structures. There were also found signs of other, but heavily damaged, structures.

To the south were identified two architectural structures discovered during the geomagnetic survey. The results show that the constructions are very similar to the earlier unearthened remains north of the palace. However, the poor preservation of the remains suggests that maybe this space was subject to more intensive changes than in the “Northern Area”. The detailed description of these results is illustrated with many instructive figures. The author points out in the chapter’s summary that the unearthened remains could be primarily part of a much more extensive architectural complex however of more residential purpose than the more official and monumental structures in the “Northern Area”. It is, however, still not clear when both the “southern” structures were built during existence of palace or before. Additionally, traces of earlier constructions were also found, which were dated to the late 3rd century, and which were destroyed most probably by a natural disaster.

The part “*Felix Romuliana*. Die Gefäßkeramik aus der Grabungen *extra muros* 2006–2008” (Sven Conrad, pp. 117–170) is the chapter that is the longest and richest in illustrations. It presents in very solid manner a general view of the research on the ceramic material from *Felix Romuliana* before the German-Serbian expedition started its activity, the stratigraphical situation in the German-Serbian trenches and the typological background of the ceramic fragments found during the excavations. The latter is the most essential part of the chapter. This is followed by a section that presents a statistical summary of the material and further systematization of the ceramic vessels identified during the excavations. Here can be found also a very solid and typical presentation of the ceramic material, which as almost always, is crucial

for site chronology. The chapter ends with a summary that presents brief information about the general chronology of the finds (second half of the 3rd century AD to the first quarter of the 4th century [basilica] and from the 4th to the 6th century AD with some medieval material from the 10th–14th centuries on other sites) and new forms of vessels found in *Felix Romuliana* as well as about the imported pottery. The assemblage is predominately composed of fragments of local pottery with very few imports. In the typology, so called “kitchen ware” predominates, with very few transport amphorae. However, the author points out that the presented material from the extramural areas may not be representative for the whole *Felix Romuliana* complex. After the text, there are several very useful tables with the material divided both chronologically and typologically. The last part of the chapter is a catalogue of the finds (136 items).

The chapter “The results of Archaeological Research in the South Tower of the West Gate of Later Fortification of ‘Felix Romuliana’ (Tower 19)” (Sofija Petković, pp. 171–204) is concentrated around the excavations at the Tower 19. After a detailed presentation of this work, the author concluded that the chronologically identified activity could be divided into two main phases – the first from the last quarter of the 4th century AD until the mid – last quarter of the 5th century, and the second dating from the end of the 5th century to the beginning of the 7th century AD with many architectural sub-phases during both phases. The author give us in the introductory part of the paper a presentation of a more general chronology of the site naming six archaeological horizons identified at the place: 1. prehistoric (early Neolithic to the Iron Age), 2. Roman settlement and fortification (2nd–3rd centuries AD), 3. Imperial palace (3/4th centuries), 4. Late Roman fortification and necropolis (end of the 4th – middle of the 5th century), 5. early Byzantine fortification (end of the 5th – beginning of the 7th century) and 6. Medieval settlement and necropolis (end of the 9th – end of the 11th century). She also briefly describes the identified architectural activities in these periods and gives basic literature of the earlier, pre-German research. This part is very useful as it allows getting the “bigger picture” of the site in its chronological changes. The text is very well illustrated and as an Appendix has a catalogue of small finds from the Tower 19 (38 items).

The subsection “Coins from Tower 19 in *Felix Romuliana*” (Miloje Vasić, pp. 205–212) starts two chapters with publications of the two kinds of finds from the Tower 19 excavations crucial for dating: coins and pottery. It is very solid numismatological publication with proper tables and graphs. In general, the author presents 79 bronze coins dated from 239 (Viminacium) until 423 AD (and one coin of Justin I). However, the author concludes that the “real circulation had begun during the reign of Valentinian I, probably after 367 AD”. He also correlates archaeological layers with the coin finds which is an important contribution to building a chronology of the site. Another chapter, “The Pottery from Tower 19” (Sven Conrad and Ana

Premk, pp. 213–244) with many illustrations and tables present results of research on the pottery finds. Here is a detailed description of types of the identified vessels with their dating. In general, “they cover a stratified chronological spectrum from the second half of the 4th to the 6th century. Most of the finds can be attributed to table vessels and kitchen ware”. This chapter gives solid confirmation, based on the material evidence, of the conclusions presented in earlier chapters.

The section “Die Villa *extra muros* nördlich von *Felix Romuliana*. Ergebnisse der Grabungen 2010–2012” (Gerda von Bülow with contribution of Miloje Vasić, pp. 245–286) presents results of excavations north of the palace. The text in which the course of archaeological works is discussed in detail is well illustrated with plans and photos. After that part, the authors present their own interpretation of the architectural remains. First of all, they are dealing here with a quadrangular structure with dimensions of 22.5 m (north-south) and 32.75 (east-west), in which seven separate rooms were identified. The main entrance led to the courtyard surrounded by a colonnade, from which it was possible to enter other rooms. This type of building was described in a 1970 publication (Vasić 1970: 56–59) as a “closed four-sided villa” with a strong influence of the local (Dalmatian) architectural tradition (interior corridor). This type of building was especially popular in Pannonia from the second half of the 3rd century (Thomas 1964: 363–365, fig. 177). The authors of the chapter accepted this identification adding that the “villa” was destroyed by an earthquake or similar natural disaster. The northern and western parts of the complex were then restored but more as a workshop place or other outbuilding, but several parts were also used as the site of burials. Dating from coins (43 coins found) starts with Gallienus (245–268 AD) and ends with Gratian (375 AD) as well as with Arcadius (395–408 AD) in graves and there is proposed the following sequence: the first phase (villa): end of 3rd / beginning of 4th century AD with destruction in the second quarter of the 4th century AD; second phase: rebuilding (four workshops and graves) latest in 3rd quarter of 4th century AD. The activity in this area ends at the beginning of the 5th century AD.

The chapter “Fifth century burial in front of the Northern Gate of *Felix Romuliana* – anthropological analysis” (by Dragana Vulović, Nataša Milandović-Rudmilović and Stefan Pop-Lazić, pp. 287–304) describes (with many photos) an isolated grave explored in 2014 in the vicinity of Tower 8. Thanks to the coins found in the grave (of Marcianus, Theodosius II and Aelia Pulcheria) it is possible to date this burial quite precisely to the 460 or a little later. Anthropological analysis allows us to conclude that deceased was a male dead at the age of 35. Several skeletal anomalies allowed the researchers to identify some of the diseases that plagued the deceased during his lifetime and to conclude that he was horseman and archer. In turn, the equipment of the grave and its location allows the conclusion that he was respected member of the local community but “buried with haste most probably due to the imminent danger from the enemy or urgent evacuation”.

The section “Die Porphyrsulpturen aus dem Palas von Gamzigrad” (by Marianne Bergmann, pp. 305–352) is not only one of longest chapters but also one that will arouse the highest interest from reader. It is well illustrated. Porphyry stone was, from the times of Diocletian, reserved only for sculptures depicting emperors and the imperial family. In the introduction, the author presents the ideological background of the official, imperial art in this period of which most important basis was founded by Alföldi (1934: 3–9; 1935). The later literature of the subject is also presented through the latest works of Bergmann (2018). After this important introductory part, there then follows a catalogue of 19 identified fragments of sculptures. It is divided by iconologically defined types of sculptures. At first are presented fragments of “larger than life” sculptures of emperors (nos 1–3), the fragments of (most probably) Victoria statues, which could be part of the large figures of emperors (nos 4–8 and 10). The other fragments belonged to another five or six sculptures that were not exactly identified. The most interesting is relatively well-preserved head of an emperor with a crown. After the catalogue the author presents results of her research and interpretation. In this part she presents also photographic reconstructions of the head introducing presumed colours which is very instructive and her thoughts about possible colours of other fragments. All this with very accurate knowledge of the literature of this subject. In the next part of the paper, follows possible identifications of the head as well as its dating with developed arguments. These considerations are underpinned by a thorough analysis of the history of the development of the imperial portrait during the period of the Tetrarchy. Only after that follows a section devoted to a detailed consideration of whether the artefact presents a portrait of Galerius or Licinius with a final in-depth analysis of the crown, which plays a key role in the dating and identification of the portrait as well as additional historical context which finally gives the hypothesis that it is rather a portrait of Galerius and the sculpture could be dated to the years 308–311 AD. Then follows a very interesting section, where the author tries reconstructing original sculpture of Victoria based on fragments nos 11–16 also with the photographic documenting the final proposal of the reconstruction. In the next section, one may find also few words about the original Egyptian workshop of the sculptures and after that an analysis of the destruction of parts of the sculptures which, according to the author, not only had political but also religious reasons (involving the fight against pagan religion).

The chapter “Mosaics from Gamzigrad, with special overview of the *sectilia* pavement” (by Gordon Jeremić, pp. 353–371) is another exciting part of the volume dealing with Roman art. The mosaics presented in the chapter were found in the palace itself also during earlier Serbian excavations. As a result, the author provides a presentation summing up the mosaics from all over the site. The mosaics – geometric and figural – are of most interesting value not only for art historians but in a wider sense. They include pictorial designs featuring depictions of Dionysius, the *venatio* and

animals (including a leopard) as well as numerous fragments and larger parts with geometric patterns. From the numismatic finds, the author dates the mosaics to the years 309–311 AD. Further analysis, including comparison of mosaics in the palace of Galerius in Thessaloniki and in other places in the Mediterranean basin, that could allow a more precise determination of the “primary *officinae* that were making the mosaics” is reserved for another publication.

The chapter “Eine neu entdeckte marmorskulptur aus der Villa *extra muros* nördlich von *Felix Romuliana* – Teilstück einer mythologischen Jagdszene” (by Gerda von Bülow, pp. 372–394) deals with the fragments of a highly interesting sculpture found in the year 2010 by the German team in the north-western corner of the palace, in the multi-part building structure. The fragment represents a wild boar attacked by a hunting-dog and was part of a larger sculpture, the most likely form of which is reconstructed by the author on the basis of a careful analysis of analogies of both sculpture and paintings from the period. The entire scene depicted a rider hunting a wild boar with a javelin, however it is not possible to date this piece precisely but only widely between 2nd and 4th centuries AD. The general reconstruction proposal is also presented in drawing (fig. 26) together with an ideological interpretation of the sculpture however without decisive conclusion.

The final chapter “Zusammenschau” (by Gerda von Bülow, pp. 395–405), also translated into Serbian and English language versions, sums up the history and main results of the project, concentrating on the geophysical and archaeological activity in years 2004–2012. It is true that apart from archaeological research, it was the geophysical research and geophysical survey based on preliminary results that produced the most valuable data and substantially enriched our knowledge not only about palace itself, which had been investigated earlier, but most of all about the remaining parts of the entire complex, as well as about the more distant surroundings, including the topographic changes that have occurred since the Neolithic period.

It remains to be hoped that the next volumes will be equally interesting and will also include a synthetic summary of all previous research.

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