

## ULPIA TRAIANA SARMIZEGETUSA. ABOUT THE WOODEN PHASE STRUCTURES ON THE *INSULA 3*

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*In the summer of 2005, led by Dorin Alicu, in Sarmizegetusa began archaeological excavations in a new sector, located west of Trajan's Forum, in the area that will be known under the generic name Insula 3.*

*The excavated archaeological areas, extended from year to year, revealed structures and artifacts from many phases of the Roman habitation of Colonia Dacica Sarmizegetusa, and later interventions, from the Middle Ages and the modern era.*

*Of particular interest were proven constructions that belong to the first Roman phase investigated here. In this level, has been researched a gravel road, oriented North-South, near it being outlined the remainings of buildings with wooden walls.*

*We have identified several buildings divided and aligned, crossing the investigated areas, from North to South. The shape, size and characteristics of these special wooden barracks remind us of military camps, the rich and varied military equipment found inside them, is another factor that indicates the military use of these structures, which date back to the early years of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.*

In 2005, in the western part of the forum of Dacica Sarmizegetusa Colony, a team of archaeologists<sup>1</sup> from National History Museum of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca and Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilization, Deva began the archaeological research on a land acquired through a government program, the land being conventionally called *Insula 3* at that time (**Pl. I/1**).

Constantin Daicoviciu had already excavated that area in the interwar period but, unfortunately, the results have remained unpublished. The opening of new sections to the West and the analysis of the two researches aimed at discerning an overall picture of the situation in the western city centre. In light of new archaeological research it has established that in the old excavations we are dealing with an oriental temple dedicated to the deity Yarhibol<sup>2</sup>.

The 2005 excavation season led to partial mapping and investigation of the two sections, one continuing the other, named S1 and S2, East-West oriented, 2 m wide,

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<sup>1</sup> Dorin Alicu was responsible for site and for the team make part also Gică Băeștean, Marius Barbu, Mihaela Ion and Oana Tutilă. For a period, Cătălin Delinesc made part from the team of research.

<sup>2</sup> Piso, Țentea 2009, p. 190.

15 and 30 m long. In the campaigns that followed, other sections were opened: S3 (6 m × 2,5 m) East-West, S4 (10 m × 5,5 m) East-West, S5 (7,50 m × 2 m) North-South, S6 (43 m × 2 m) East-West. After the baulks had been removed and after several expansions of these sections, area Su 1 (Su 1 = S1 + S2 + S3 + S5 + S6 = 49 m × 8 m) appeared while S4 expanded to the West, measuring 12 m (East-West) and 7,5 m (North-South) (**Pl. I/2**).

As a result of successive excavation seasons, the remains of Roman buildings and late canals<sup>3</sup> were removed. Under these circumstances, we could only identify three N-S oriented streets (*cardines*), *cardo* 3, 4 and 5 dating from the stone phase and, unfortunately, we failed to detect any *decumanus*. It was only on the southern edge of section S5 that fragments of shaft columns and Doric capitals made of limestone were found and they must have bordered the street discovered in the excavations carried out between the X and Y complexes<sup>4</sup>. We also managed to discover one side of an *insula*, between the *cardo* 3 and *cardo* 4, because the rest of the land is private property. In all three cases we uncovered the Roman sewerage system. The East-West route of canal C4 changes to the North when it gets under *cardo* 3. The sloping route of C13 comes from the South-West and heads to the North-East under *cardo* 5. Both canals are covered with bricks. So far, the C12 canal route has been North-South and there is no evidence to suggest that it was paved with bricks.

Since 2008, we have managed to reach the wood phases that had been disturbed by the early stone phases of Roman buildings and late canals. However, we do not intend to answer the question whether the structures we found are civilian or military, although the large number of pieces belonging to military equipment could force us to draw certain conclusions. First of all, we intend to present our discoveries and to put forward possible hypotheses which could be drawn from the analysis of the finds.

For a long time it was believed that there was a Roman camp with the mission to observe Dacians' movements during the two wars. This theory is grounded on two hypotheses. According to the first one, the camp was located on the site where the city was built<sup>5</sup>. The second refers to the fact that the Roman troops raised the colony while their garrison was in another area<sup>6</sup>.

The matter in dispute was the controversial layer 9, which covers the wood phase and on which stone phase buildings were erected in the *Forum*. Some archaeologists interpreted it as the destruction level of the wood phase buildings, and in this case we should be dealing with military barracks, while the researchers who had conducted the excavations considered it a stone phase construction layer.

This controversial layer contained many objects that can be attributed to soldiers. Among these objects there are parts of the legionary equipment, such as a catapult bolt fragment, *lorica segmentata*, two belts, a *dolabra* fragment, four *pilum* heads. But among the artifacts still appear objects related to auxiliary soldiers, such as equine equipment, a *clypeus* handle, a part of an *iaculum*, several arrowheads etc. There are some parts difficult to assign to legionary or auxiliary equipment, for example five

<sup>3</sup> Băeștean, in print.

<sup>4</sup> Piso, Țentea 2008, p. 269.

<sup>5</sup> Branga 1977, p. 189; Branga 1980, p. 31; Alicu 1980, p. 23-28; Daicoviciu, Alicu 1984, p. 13; Strobel 1984, p. 96; Bărbulescu 1987, p. 156-157; Gudea 2001, p. 38; Eck, Lobüscher 2001, p. 263; Lobüscher 2002, p. 91-100; Opreanu 2010, p. 51-74; Timoc 2006, p. 345.

<sup>6</sup> Piso, Diaconescu 1986, p. 161-183; Etienne, Piso, Diaconescu 1990, p. 273-297; Diaconescu 1997, p. 84-89; Etienne, Piso, Diaconescu 2002-2003, p. 60-88; Piso 2006, *passim*; Diaconescu, Bota 2009, p. 13-19.

spearheads, two parts of a *pilum* or a fragment of a dagger – *pugio*, five knives etc. Other discoveries include a part of a *vexillum*, two tent pegs and three handles of bronze vessels. As there is no household waste and there are only a few ceramic fragments, the archaeologists consider that these objects are not belonging to soldiers' barracks where they had been found. A number of 50 coins were discovered in this layer. They can be dated between 89 BC and the first emissions when Trajan became Consul for the fifth time (103-111 AD). These include two small treasures<sup>7</sup>.

As far as *Insula 3* is concerned, the wood phase road substructure was an important discovery (**Pl. II/1, III/1**). It is 2,50 m wide, North-South oriented and its gutter was uncovered in the East. Canal C4, the wall Z2 and Complex 1 dismantle it in the North while in the West it was destroyed by late canals.

Approximately 2 m East of this road, a wood phase building appeared between walls P1 and P3, known from past years' campaigns.

The oblong building is North-South oriented, parallel to the road and we were surprised to find out there are wall partitions P2, P10 and P11 (**Pl. III/2**). The two rooms resulted are 3,60 X 3,20 m wide and there are more rooms hidden under the North and South profiles (**Pl. II/1**). Inside the building several wood phase pits were found G3, G4, G5, G37, G38, G39, G40, G45, G46, G47, and G48. A fragment of a bronze shield edge (S 36 786, 102 Bz) was discovered in the wall P1 while inside the building a dagger (S 36824, 543 F) (**Pl. IV/2**), a spearhead (S 36825, 544 F) (**Pl. III/5**) and an iron pot (S 36823 542 F) which was carefully placed in a beautifully decorated ceramic bowl, of nord-padane origin (**Pl. IV/5**). A bronze Cociş type 8a4b2 *fibula*<sup>8</sup> (S 36795, 111Bz) (**Pl. IV/3**) came out of the pit deposit G4.

More to the East there is a North-South oriented wall P4, 30 cm wide. We do not know what happens to it in the North, because it suddenly disappears, probably destroyed by the late canals or by a Roman public fountain, located at the crossroads of *cardo 3* and *decumanus* from which only column and capital fragments were preserved. The possible existence of a public fountain is based on the discovery of architectural components that could come from the plumbing.

In the South, the wall P4 disappears under the profile, while East of it, we noticed no traces of wooden structures, which demonstrates that it marks the limits of a building. On the other hand, West of P4 three pits were found (G17, G18, G19), with diameters between 20 cm and 25 cm and depths between 30 cm and 35 cm. Three pits were located at distances of 10 cm, 50 cm and 100 cm West of the wall P4, they are aligned in the same direction as the wall P10 and they may belong to a structure that continues this wall in the East of P1 (**Pl. II/1**). Perhaps we are dealing with a wall that divided the space between the walls P1 and P4 and which was placed on the ground, the path being detected only by the sequence of pits. Unfortunately, this sequence of pits could not be traced near the P1, the area being destroyed by the late channels C3 and C5. The width between P1 and P4 walls is 5,20 m, while the overall width of the building bordered by the wall P4 in the East and P3 in the West is 9 m. A bronze harness mount (36867 S, 122 Bz) was also discovered here.

West of the above-mentioned wood phase street, parallel partitions P6 and P7 were found on the walls Z3, Z2 and Z4 and they appear to form an approximately 1 m wide corridor (**Pl. III/3**). The wall Z2 cuts these 30 cm wide North-South oriented structures, which disappear in the North profile. East of the P7 a possible wooden wall

<sup>7</sup> Etienne, Piso, Diaconescu 2002-2003, p. 74-86; Piso 2006, p. 69-72.

<sup>8</sup> Cociş 2004, p. 52.

can be distinguished, but taking into account it is only 20 cm wide and a few centimetres deep, it could be a mere plank, named P8, E-W oriented, crossed by Z3 and not intersecting with the P7. Inside the building delimited by P6 and P7 and cut by the stone phase walls, pits G31, G32, G33, G34 were discovered, containing pieces of military equipment. In G31 we found a greenish-yellow sandstone projectile and an iron tent peg (S 36886, 545 F) (**Pl. III/6**). Iron fragments were unearthed from G33 and they could be parts of a weapon. A bronze rivet spur (S 36882, 126 Bz), which seems to have been silver coated was uncovered there, too. It is possible that these fragments should come from a *gladius*.

The corridor bordered by Z2 and Z9 revealed the N-S oriented and 30 cm wide wall P 13 that belonged to the wood phase. But only 1 m of this wall was preserved, namely the width of the corridor, because the stone phase wall Z10 was built above it.

On both sides of P13, the pits G56, G57, G58, G59, G60, G61, as well as the sequel of G32 were discovered. Inside the G59 fragments of a *pugio* sheath (S 36892, 550 F) were found, on which traces of insertions are still visible. Under *cardo* 3 which covered the stone phase channel C12, the wood phase pits G62, G63, G64 expanded to the East.

In the eastern part of the section S4 (**Pl. II/2**), a N-S oriented, 30 cm wide wall, P9 was defined, which is also cut in the southern part by the wall Z17. Along P9 the pits G41, G42, G44, and G49 were discovered (**Pl. III/4**). East of the wall P9, close to the profile, a pit filled with animal remains, ceramic fragments and a burned spot. On its West side there were several bones that came from different animals (**Pl. IV/4**).

This discovery was named Complex 2 and it could be related to a possible bone and horn processing workshop<sup>9</sup>. Near this complex there was a pit G52, in which a fragmentary *umbo* (*clypeus* or *parma* type) (S 36891, 549 F) were discovered, while another one was found nearby, coming from a rectangular shield, *scutum* (S 36890, 548 F). West of the same wall, next to it, there was a pit G43, between two other pits G51 and G52, in which several fragments of *lorica segmentata* (S 36888, F 547, S 36889, 130 Bz) (**Pl. IV/1**), two *dolabra* sheaths (S 36883, 127 Bz) were unearthed. In the same area two bronze buckles were also found (S 36884, 128 BZ, S 36885, 129 Bz) and they appear to come from military belts.

In terms of appearance and functionality of wood stage buildings, they are aligned to the East and West of the street that runs through the area Su 1, they have a rectangular, elongated shape, they are North-South oriented, and divided in the same direction.

The implantation trenches of these wood walls are 30-35 cm wide and 40-45 cm deep, with pits of 15-25 cm in diameter. None of the buildings investigated by researchers had any trace of fire or showed signs of reconstruction, which leads to the conclusion that these buildings had a short period of existence, being demolished, perhaps at the same time with the erection of stone buildings and they perfectly preserved the planimetry of the wood buildings.

It is worth mentioning that when studying the wood phase buildings, no tegular fragments were found, which enables us to conclude that these constructions must have been covered with wood or reed.

Wooden, elongated and compartmented buildings, with rooms of approximately 11 to 12 square metres like these are similar to camp barracks. This kind of light constructions (*hibernacula*), with no foundation and having reed or shingle roof, can be found, for example, in the camp at Tibiscum<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Băeştean, Barbu 2010, p. 119-122.

<sup>10</sup> Timoc 2007, p. 8.

If this were indeed military barracks, we believe that they are divided in *papilianus* and *arma* and that such *contubernia* existed in most camps. In Dacia such an example is the camp barracks from Gilău<sup>11</sup>.

Located inside the better defined building on the East side of the road, the western sequence of rooms, with divisions of 3,20 m (North-South) × 3,60 m (East-West) can be considered an *arma*, because most pieces of military equipment were found here. Under the circumstances, the larger eastern rooms, 5,20 m wide would be *papilianus*.

We cannot also rule out the possibility that there may have been a corridor between the two sequences of rooms, as it seems to be the case of the building on the West side of the road. But this still remains uncertain for the moment, because the area was destroyed by late channels. If we take into account the existence of such a corridor, the width of a room in the eastern sequence of the building on the East side of the road will remain approximately 4,20 m, only 0,60 m larger than that of the western rooms.

The type of fibula discovered in the pit G4 is considered by Sorin Cociş to be found in Pannonia, Noricum and in the beginning of the second century in Dacia.

Four coins dating from the wood phase of *Insula 3* were also discovered and they were issued in the end of the first century and the beginning of the second<sup>12</sup>. Two of them, found in G57, with dimensions of 28 × 26,4 mm and 27,2 × 24,4 mm, belong to the *aes* type and they were issued by the emperor Domitian.

Another *aes*, found in the western part of the area Su 1, having 26,9 mm in diameter, was coined under Trajan between 103-111<sup>13</sup> (Pl. IV/6) and a *sestertius*, unearthed near the wall P7, having 34 mm in diameter was issued by the same emperor between 98 and 99<sup>14</sup>.

Chronologically speaking, it is clear that these constructions were built in the first years of the second century AD and they had not been used for a long time.

The Roman military equipment found so far in the *Insula 3*<sup>15</sup> in the layer belonging to the first construction phase of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, although less numerous, allows us to draw some conclusions.

All categories of equipment are present here: offensive arms (weapons), defensive (armour) personal equipment, i.e. belts, *dolabra* and tent accessories. While many of the artifacts can be found both in the legionary and in the auxiliary equipment during Trajan's age (*gladius* sheath, belt and tent accessories, *dolabrae*), others are more or less specific to one of these categories of troops. Probably the rectangular *umbo*, the *lorica segmentata* and the *pugio* decorated sheath are parts of the legionary equipment, while the rounded edge *umbo* and the leaf-shaped blade of the spear belong to the auxiliary. The dagger is a special artifact. It is a weapon used by the entire army of that time, but its particular characteristics seem to suggest it is a part of the auxiliary equipment. The harness mount is a relatively common object, but due to the low number of legionary cavalry, it is likely to have belonged to the auxiliary equipment, too.

Stone projectiles are totally different from the rest of the equipment. They are not part of the personal equipment of soldiers and their presence, scattered throughout the entire excavated area, supposing they are missiles, would rather suggest a battlefield, which, of course, raises difficult interpretation issues of the archaeological

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<sup>11</sup> Marcu 2009, p. 75.

<sup>12</sup> The coins could be determined helped by Cristian Găzdac.

<sup>13</sup> RIC II, p. 503.

<sup>14</sup> RIC II, p. 489.

<sup>15</sup> Petculescu, Băeştean, Barbu, in print.

context. We cannot ignore the hypothesis of a battlefield, although it is harder to sustain. At least one of them comes from the pit G31, in which the tent peg had been discovered. The rest of them, even if they were found in the demolition level of the stone phase, but strongly tossed by later canals, probably still belong to the wood stage. In fact, other pieces of military equipment were unearthed in the same ruins, removed from their context by subsequent interventions. However, we could hardly believe that, after a battle that had taken place at a certain moment in the stone phase of the buildings, there would still be projectiles on the roads or in the houses that we would find later on, after the demolition of the buildings. It is harder to say whether those projectiles were piled up during the wood phase or whether only a few of them still exist, as it is the case with the dagger or the blade. The analysis should not be made in relation to the situations of permanent Roman camps, in which the armament remained in the same place. Here, we probably deal with military barracks over which a city would be built. Taking into consideration the 9<sup>th</sup> layer and the cleaning made between the levelling of the wood and the stone phases, it seems much more probable that we deal with ill-assorted projectiles that were lost among the clay gluing works made in the wood phase. Anyhow, the presence of battle machines, at least during the wood phase, questions the civil character of the buildings.

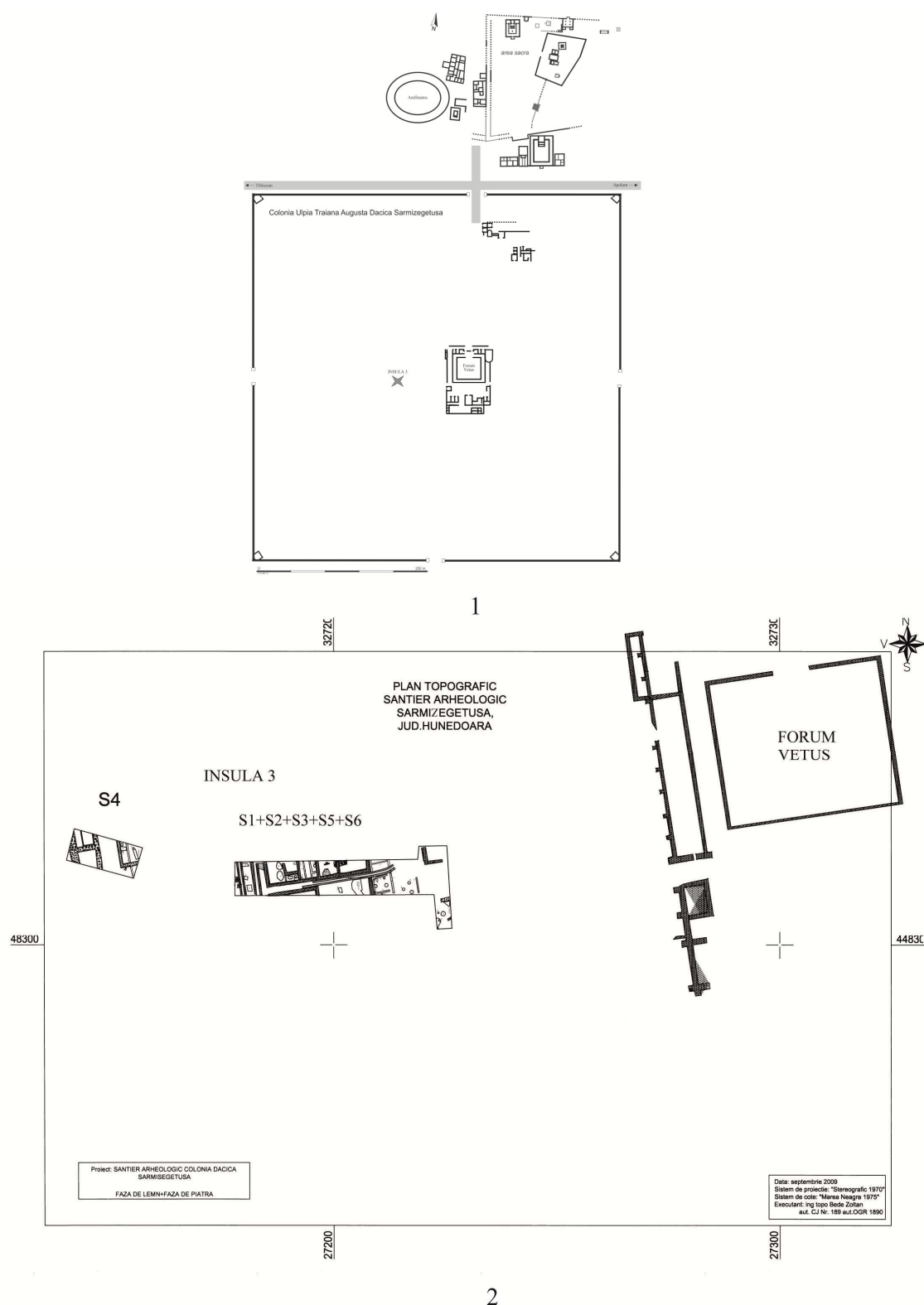
Such a concentration of military objects on a relatively small area of a civil settlement is highly unusual. And even if we take into account the possibility that Roman veterans who settled in the colony founded by Trajan in a newly conquered and therefore unsafe territory, could have kept a part of the weapons for their personal security, it still does not explain the presence in this area of numerous fragments of *lorica segmentata*, tent stakes and even their *dolabrae* and shields.

Taking into consideration the fact that the rooms where the pieces were discovered, their shape and dimensions are similar to *contubernia* barracks in camps, we can say that, at this stage of the research, the most likely hypothesis is that the military equipment in the *Insula 3* belongs to the Roman soldiers quartered in a camp with a mixed legionary and auxiliary garrison.

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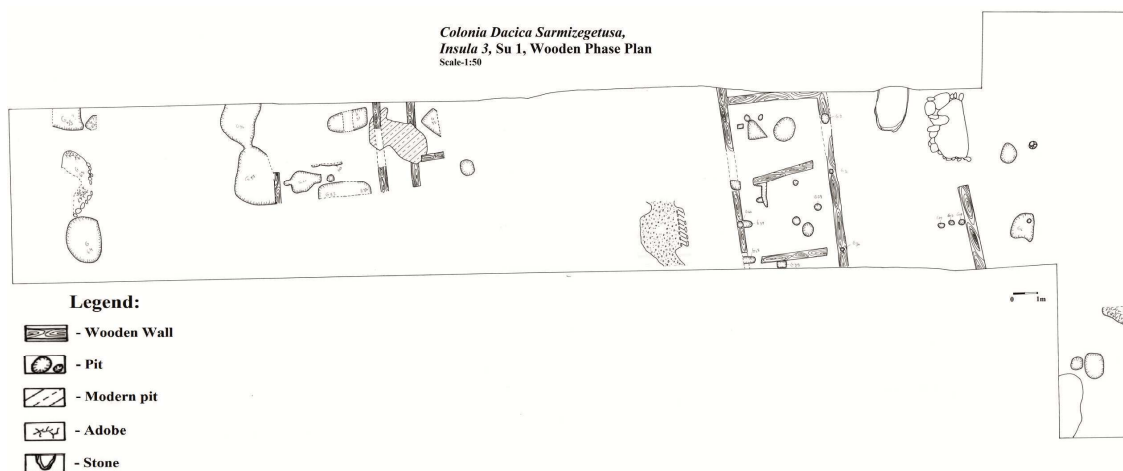
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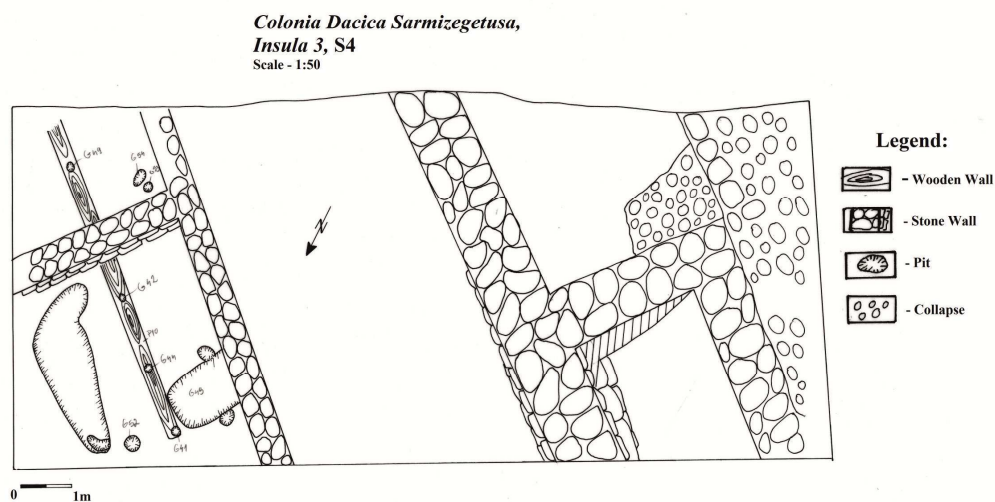


**Pl. I.** 1. Site location plan; 2. Plan with surface Su 1 and ditch S4 situated in East side of the forum of Colonia Dacica Sarmizegetusa





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**Pl. II.** 1. Wooden phase structures in surface Su 1;  
2. Wooden phase and stone phase structures in ditch S4



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3



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**Pl. III.** 1. Road from wooden phase; 2. Building from wooden phase aligned to the road in East side of it; 3. Two walls of buildings from wooden phase, West side of the road; 4. Structures in wood from S4, a possible bone and antler processing workshop; 5. Fragmentary *pugio* and spear head discovered in traces of wooden phase; 6. Iron tent peg from Su 1



**Pl. IV.** 1. Fragments from *lorica segmentata*; 2. *Pugio*; 3. An early fibula, dated beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD; 4. Antler from processing workshop; 5. Nord-padane pottery; 6. Bronze coin from Trajan emperor, dated 103-111 AD

### Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa. Despre structurile fazei de lemn descoperite în sectorul *Insula 3*

#### Rezumat

În vara anului 2005, sub conducerea regretatului Dorin Alicu, la Sarmizegetusa demarau cercetările arheologice într-un sector nou, situat la vest de Forul lui Traian, zonă ce va fi cunoscută sub numele generic de *Insula 3*.

Suprafețele arheologice dezvelite, extinse de la an la an, au scos la iveală structuri și artefacte, aparținând mai multor faze ale locuirii romane din Colonia Dacica Sarmizegetusa, dar și intervenții mai târzii, de pe parcursul evului mediu sau a epocii moderne.

Deosebit de interesante s-au dovedit a fi construcțiile ce aparțin primei faze de amenajare antropică, de aici. În acest nivel, a fost cercetat un drum pietruit, orientat pe direcția nord-sud, de o parte și de alta a acestuia conturându-se amprente de clădiri, cu pereți din lemn.

Au putut fi identificate mai multe corpuri de clădiri compartimentate și aliniate, ce străbat suprafețele cercetate, de la nord la sud. Forma, dimensiunile și caracteristicile acestor construcții din lemn amintesc de barăcile castrelor, bogatul și variatul material militar, descoperit în interiorul lor, fiind încă un factor ce indică o utilizare campestră a acestor structuri, ce se datează în primii ani ai secolului al II-lea p.Chr.

#### Lista ilustrațiilor

**Pl. I.** 1. Planul sitului; 2. Planul suprafeței Su 1 și al secțiunii S4 situate la est de forumul orașului Colonia Dacica Sarmizegetusa

**Pl. II.** 1. Structurile fazei de lemn cercetate în suprafața Su 1; 2. Structurile fazei de lemn și fazei de piatră cercetate în secțiunea S4

**Pl. III.** 1. Strada din faza de lemn; 2. Clădire din faza de lemn, aliniată la est de drum; 3. Ampretele unor pereți din lemn aliniați la vest de drum; 4. Structura din lemn cercetată în secțiunea S4, un posibil atelier pentru prelucrarea osului și a cornului; 5. *Pugio* și vârf de lance, descoperite în cadrul structurilor din faza de lemn; 6. Țăruș de cort din fier descoperit în nivelul fazei de lemn din suprafața Su 1

**Pl. IV.** 1. Fragmente (bronz și fier) dintr-o armură de tip *lorica segmentata*; 2. Pumnal roman; 3. Fibulă din bronz datată la începutul secolului al II-lea p.Chr.; 4. Corn de căprior din atelierul de prelucrat osul și cornul; 5. Vas ceramic de proveniență nord-padană; 6. Monedă de bronz datată 103-111 p.Chr.