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CONTENTS

I. ARTICLES AND STUDIES

PREZYDENT RP BRONISŁAW KOMOROWSKI, List do uczestników Międzynarodowej Sesji Kaukazologicznej im. św. Grzegorza Peradze	9
BERNARD OUTTIER, What do Georgian Fragments from the Time of Rustaveli Teach Us?	11
HENRYK PAPROCKI, Religia Szoty Rustawelego w poemacie „Rycerz w tygryziej skórze”	19
JOSEB ZETEISHVILI, Gruzini mentorzy Rustawelego. Tematy i idee „Witezia w tygryziej skórze” w dawnej Gruzji	27
ELGUJA KHINTIBIDZE, TAMTA GRIGOLIA, A Great Novelty in Rustavelian Studies: “The Man in the Panther Skin” – Source of Plots of the XVII Century English Dramaturgy	35
ARTUR ALEKSIEJUK, Ideał kalokagatii w postawach bohaterów poematu Szoty Rustawelego „Rycerz z tygryskiej skórze”	41
ANDRZEJ FURIER, Polskie zainteresowania poezją Szoty Rustawelego w XIX wieku	59
KETEVA MANIA, “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin” and The Process of the Georgian National Consolidation according to Ilia Chavchavadze’s “Iveria”	73
KETEVA PAVLIASHVILI, Stages of Georgian Political-Cultural Messianism. In State Thinking of Georgia	85
IRINE CHACHANIDZE, Language Policy in Rustaveli’s Epoch: Reform of the Georgian Literary Language	91
EKA VARDOSHVILI, “Société Asiatique” in Paris and “The Man in the Panther Skin” of Shota Rustaveli	97
TAMAR BELKANIA, Rustaveli in the epoch of Stalin and a secret history of one translation (According to the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia)	105
GIORGI BADRIDZE, Shota Rustaveli in Great Britain from Wardrops to modern days	123
NINO DOBORJGINIDZE, IRINA LOBZHANIDZE, Corpus of the “Man in the Panther Skin”	129
MARZENA KURAŚ, Rustaveli on the Theatre Stage: from Georgia to Poland	139

II. MATERIALS, DOCUMENTS, MEMOIRES

IRAKLI PAGHAVA, Art, Court Culture and Economics in the Epoch of Queen Tamar: Monetary Implications	145
JABA SAMUSHIA, At the origins of Georgian Parliamentarism (Qutlu Arslan)	165
RADOŚLAW KARASIEWICZ-SZCZYPIORSKI AND EMZAR KAKHIDZE, Gonio (Apsarus) in Adjara - Excavations of Roman Fort. First Polish-Georgian Archaeological Mission	179
MARIKA MSHVILDADZE, The Antique Deities in Georgia (Charites)	199
NINA TAYLOR-TERLECKA, W oczach Zachodu: Scenki z życia domowego czerkiesów (na podstawie relacji podróżników	205

III. REVIEWS AND COMMENTAIRES

Hymnografia gruzińska. Król Dawid IV Aghmaszenebeli, Kanon Pokutny	218
Szota Rustaweli, „Witeź w tygrysiej skórze” epopeja gruzińska. Przekład, trawestacja oraz słowo wiążące Jerzy Zagórski. Opracowanie dramaturgiczno-adaptacyjne Mieczysław Kotlarczyk. Kraków, marzec 1960 rok	239

THE ROMAN FORT “APSAROS” IN GONIO - EARLY PHASE. NEW DISCOVERIES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR INVESTIGATIONS

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Introduction

In the southwestern Georgia, i.e. Ajara, at modern Gonio, ca. 8 km to the south of the city of Batumi at a strategically important site, where the roads leading to the east and to the south join, there today too stands a playing-card shape fort (4, 75 ha). It was these advantages that turned this fort into one of the strong points of Rome in the eastern Black Sea littoral (Fig. 1).

In spite of the Caucasus was routed by the Roman commander Pompey already in 65 BC, only after Nero who stimulated concentration of Roman military forces in the East, a special, so-called *Pontus Limes* or Pontus-Caucasian frontier was formed in order to serve the purpose of reinforcement of Roman positions in the Southern Caucasus and to take the region of Northern Caucasus under good control as well¹.

According to Pliny (*NH* 6. 12), Apsaros was a functioning fort already in the seventies of the 1st century AD, which is confirmed by archaeological evidence as well. Copper coins struck in the names of Nero and Domitian have been discovered here, as well as *amphorae*, current in the 1st and believed to have been produced in Italy and Cos, dummy-handled red-glazed bowls, glass vessel and so on².

¹ D. Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity. A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia 550 BC - AD 562*, Oxford, 1994: 39–44, 152ff; S. Gregory, *Roman Military Architecture on the Eastern Frontier* (PhD thesis), 2 vols., Amsterdam, 1997: 11–34; E. Kakhidze, *Apsaros: A Roman Fort in Southwestern Georgia. Meetings of Cultures in the Black Sea Region: Between Conflict and Coexistence*, “Black Sea Studies” VIII, Aarhus, 2008: 299–300.

² S. Mamuladze, *Recent archaeological finds in Apsarus*. The Bosphorus: gateway between the ancient west and east (1st millennium BC-5th century AD): proceedings of the Fourth International Congress on Black Sea Antiquities, Istanbul, 14th-18th September 2009, Oxford, 2013: 355–356).

In AD 132 Arrian, the governor of Cappadocia, traveled around the Black Sea littoral. He mentions five cohorts (*speira*) stationed in *Apsaros* (*Periplus* 6). Other sources also report on the Roman garrison at Apsaros. Thus, according to an inscription found at Abella, Italy, Marcus Plaetorius Celer, decorated by Trajan for his participation in the Parthian war (113-117), had commanded *numerorum* stationed at Apsaros. Importance also attaches to a fragment of a 2nd century AD papyrus, written by a veteran of Apsaros and discovered in Fayyum, Egypt. The inscription refers to the veteran Martial who had served in the *cohors II Claudiana* and stationed at Apsaros³. Along with this evidence, the deployment of later cohort as well as another auxiliary units of Sagitarius, Aurelius and Mil-litaria were confirmed by the epigraphic materials discovered in the fort itself⁴. Particularly interesting the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, on which, unlike other contemporaneous forts of the eastern Black Sea littoral, we find not only the name of the fort of Apsaros but its diagrammatic sketch as well (10. 5).

The 3rd century AD may be considered a turning point in the history of Apsaros. Zosimus tells about the raids of the Barbarians on the Colchian littoral in the mid-3rd century (*Hist. Nova* 1. 31–33). Historical sources say nothing about the devastation of Apsaros at the time, but observation of the stratigraphy of the fort site shows that at the turn of the 4th century the fort had temporarily ceased functioning.

From the end of the 3rd century AD the centre of the Roman Empire gradually shifted to the east. Thanks to Constantine the Great, Romans managed to strengthen their positions in the eastern part of Black Sea (Zos. *Hist. Nova* 2. 33). They, supposedly, stationed their garrisons at Apsaros as well. Lack of archaeological data makes us to be careful. Hypothetically there had to be some sweeping changes about AD 340. The Lazica (western Georgian state) became more powerful. Apparently, in order to neutralize the increasing strength of Lazica, the Romans gave preference to Tsikhisdziri, located nearer to the centre of Lazic, Rioni river area. Significantly enough, the 4th-century ecclesiastic sources in relation to Apsaros describe considerably remote developments. In more reliable sources, e.g. *Res Gestae* by Amianus Marcellianus, in the description of the Black Sea littoral nothing is said about Apsaros, whereas Phasis

³ M. Speidel, *Roman Army Studies*, vol. 1. Amsterdam, 1984: 105–107.

⁴ M. Khalvashi, L. Aslanishvili, *Flavius Arrian and Roman garrisons in Apsarus*. Proceedings of the International Conference: Humanities in the Informational World III, Batumi, 2015: 336–343.

and Dioscurias are named as towns (22. 8. 24). Nor can be found Apsaros in *Notitia Dignitatum*, where Roman military units and places of their deployment in *Dux Armenia* are mentioned (*Or.*38). To be sure, Anonymous repeats Arrian's text word for word, but he had obviously used additional sources. Thus, e.g. he refers to Apsaros as well as Cordylon and Athenai as a village (*Periplus* 40). According the Procopius, by the 540 the Byzantines found Apsaros, similar to Phasis, entirely devastated (*Wars* 8. 2). It is not accidental either that same author, as well as Stephan the Byzantine, mainly speak about the past of Apsarpos. Thus, Justinian's novels list the cities and forts in Lazica and the *Pontus Polemoniachus* (*Jus. Nov.* 31), among which one cannot find Apsaros.

Archaeological data also support evidence preserved in written sources. Almost none of the specimens of the numerous *terra sigillata* represented in Apsaros are decorated with relief ornament, whereas this kind of pottery is lavishly ornamented with relief, geometric and vegetable motifs in 4th century and especially 5th century. Unlike of Tzikhisdziri and Pichvnari not a single fragment of so-called blue-spot glass is found here, which in specialist opinion, appears in circa the latter half of the 4th century, continuing to early 5th century. Absolutely none of the fragments of exactly the 4th- 5th centuries Sinopean amphoras whereas there are many specimens of this production centre of 2nd - 3rd and 6th centuries AD were discovered in Apsaros. Not a single coin in the rich numismatic material, found here, is dated to the second half of the 4th, and the 5th, and the first quarter of the 6th centuries. In the stratigraphy of the fort, in particular, between the cultural layers of the Roman and the Byzantine periods, a 20-25 cm sterile stratum is discernible, which must have formed in the 4th - 5th centuries.

Thanks to analyses of various categories of sources, including, among others, numismatic finds and pieces of information from Pliny (NH 6.12) and from the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, it can be concluded that the Roman troops stationed in Apsaros at least since the 70 of the 1st c. AD. This is confirmed by results of archaeological research⁵, and first of all by portable finds from excavations⁶. However, the early stage of the Roman presence is still insufficiently recognised.

⁵ E. Kakhidze, *Apsaros: A Roman Fort in Southwestern Georgia, Meetings of Cultures in the Black Sea Region: Between Conflict and Coexistence*, "Black Sea Studies" VIII, Aarhus, 2008: 311.

⁶ N. Fellmuth, *Zusammenstellung der Keramik – und Glasfunde aus den Schnitten des Jahres 2000 nördlich der Festung, in der Nordwestecke der Festung und im Bereich des modernen Friedhofs*, (in:) Geyer A. (ed.) *Neue Forschungen in Apsaros (2000-2002)*, Tbilisi, 2003: 43–60; E. Ka-

A good state of preservation of remains of later buildings and fortifications constructed by subsequent Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman garrisons is not favourable for research on the earliest phases of the fort. Another problem is an actual lack of access to private grounds situated outside surviving defensive walls, with special reference to plots which neighbour the walls on the east and north (Fig. 2). In these areas no excavations have been carried out so far⁷.

In the course of the first season of excavation carried out by a joint Polish-Georgian expedition under the direction of Prof. Shota Mamuladze (Gonio-Apsarus Museum and Sanctuary) and Dr Radosław Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski (Institute of Archaeology and the Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw), remains of therms were discovered. It is possible to date their origin to the second half of the 1st c. AD.

The excavations exposed part of three different rooms, and surviving layers and architectural relics (Fig. 3) were divided into two building phases (two periods of use of the building). The trench first of all served to verify geophysical survey which was carried out there two years earlier⁸. Thanks to identification of the source of magnetic anomalies which were recorded at that time, it is possible to assess in a preliminary manner that what awaits discovery is a large building of garrison therms with a surface of over 1100 m² (Fig. 4).

This discovery provoked new questions concerning the fort from the period of functioning of the therms and the surroundings of the fortress at that time.

The early fort in Gonio – location

As mentioned above, hitherto research in the fort and its vicinity has brought little information on the early presence of the Roman troops in Apsaros. What is very significant for present considerations are results of land survey measurements done to the north and east of the surviving

k h i d z e, S. M a m u l a d z e, *Roman coins found in Apsarus*, (in:) M. Iacob (ed.) *Roman Art and Civilization – a Common Language in Antiquity*, Tulcea, 2014: 166–167; *Roman coins found in Apsarus*, (in:) M. Iacob (ed.) *Roman Art and Civilization – a Common Language in Antiquity*, Tulcea, 2014: 167–169; *Roman coins found in Apsarus*, (in:) M. Iacob (ed.) *Roman Art and Civilization – a Common Language in Antiquity*, Tulcea, 2014: 169–171.

⁷ E. K a k h i d z e, *Apsaros: A Roman Fort in Southwestern Georgia, Meetings of Cultures in the Black Sea Region: Between Conflict and Coexistence*, “*Black Sea Studies*” VIII, Aarhus, 2008: 320.

⁸ K. M i s i e w i c z, R. K a r a s i e w i c z - S z c z y p i o r s k i, *Gonio (Georgia). Non-invasive surveys of the Roman fort of Apsaros – 2012 Season*, “*Światowit*” X (LI)/A (2012), 117–122.

fortifications by a Georgian-German expedition (Fig. 2)⁹. In a map which shows results of these investigations it can be clearly seen that the early fort extended farther off to the north and the eastern and almost certainly also the southern border of its fortifications went along the same line as later defensive walls of the castra. There is no certainty concerning the western border, but it is assumed that it may have gone to the west of the surviving fortifications of the late fort¹⁰. However, the authors of this paper believe that in all probability the line of early fortifications was shifted back in relation to subsequent phases of defensive walls, and its traces may be located under later layers in the western part of the fort (Fig. 2: 6; 5).

On the basis of recorded remains of the early fort it is possible to assume that the *Porta Praetoria* went to the north, towards the river. A depression which is in all probability a vestige of a road going in this direction divides slightly the higher raised terrain into two parts (Fig. 2: 1). In this place, to the north of the Roman garrison, a settlement accompanying the fort (*vicus*) may have been situated. On the other hand, doubts concerning the existence of such a settlement near the Apsaros fort can only be clarified by future excavations¹¹.

Based on the afore-mentioned remains and results of German-Georgian (2000-2002) and Polish-Georgian (2012, 2014) research carried out within the defensive walls of the late fort, it is possible to propose first hypotheses concerning the plan and buildings of Apsaros in the 1st c. AD.

Plan and inner buildings

The afore-mentioned results of hitherto research allow to propose an early date of only one large architectural premise discovered within the area of examinations. It is known as the “central trench” (*Zentralschnitt*) in scholarship¹². Remains of ruins which were found there are identified as the *Principia*¹³. Both results of excavations and a personal

⁹ cf. A. Geyer. *Neue Forschungen in Apsaros (2000-2002)*, Tbilisi, 2003: Tafel 2.

¹⁰ A. Plontke-Lüning, A. Geyer. *Archäologische und naturwissenschaftliche Arbeiten in Apsaros in den Jahren 2000 bis 2002*, (in:) A. Geyer (ed.) *Neue Forschungen in Apsaros (2000-2002)*, Tbilisi, 2003: 31.

¹¹ cf. Kakhidze. *Apsaros: A Roman Fort in Southwestern Georgia, Meetings of Cultures in the Black Sea Region: Between Conflict and Coexistence*, “Black Sea Studies” VIII, Aarhus, 2008: 319.

¹² Khalvashi 2002; Geyer 2003.

¹³ Plontke-Lüning, Geyer. *Archäologische und naturwissenschaftliche Arbeiten in Apsaros in den Jahren 2000 bis 2002*, (in:) A. Geyer (ed.) *Neue Forschungen in Apsaros (2000-2002)*, Tbilisi, 2003: 27, 31; Kakhidze. *Apsaros: A Roman Fort in Southwestern Georgia, Meetings of Cultures in the Black Sea Region: Between Conflict and Coexistence*, “Black Sea Studies” VIII, Aarhus, 2008: 319; Kakhidze, Mamuladze. *Architecture of the Fort of Apsarus*, (in:) M. Iacob (ed.) *Roman Art and Civilization – a Common Language in Antiquity*, Tulcea, 2014: 161.

inspection of conserved relics clearly indicate that architectural relics of a building (or buildings) which were discovered in this area were in all probability coming into existence in the course of a few centuries. Already in the beginning of our considerations it is possible to exclude remains of a courtyard with bases of statues (possibly mounted ones) in the western part of the discovered architectural complex (Fig. 6). These remains are situated higher than the rest of the ruins and therefore they must have originated much later, perhaps even in the “Byzantine” period¹⁴. The rest of the discovered architectural substance is a “maze” of numerous segments of walls which intersect at the right angle or go in parallel to each other, often within a small distance. Part of these structures are built on to each other, and some form architectural wholes (the material used for construction is bonded in corners). One can therefore infer that these are remains of at least two building phases. If this assumption is true, these remains would be a trace of a large building, which was later thoroughly rebuilt at least once. This scenario would correspond to hitherto observations made in the course of excavations in the nearby therms. The early therms were also rebuilt once and then (after a period of time) they were dismantled and the terrain was levelled.

The discussed architectural relics of the supposed headquarters did not undergo a detailed architectural analysis after the discovery. The afore-mentioned “maze of walls” was not divided into phases and no attempts were made at isolating rooms which belong to any of these phases. Furthermore, in published materials there are no traces of assigning any specific functions to different parts of uncovered rooms. In such circumstances one must be very careful about the interpretation of the whole of the discussed ruins as remains of the headquarters’ building. Perhaps it is only the location of the supposed headquarters in the proposed plan of the early fort that can speak in favour of such a proposal (Fig. 5: 4).

The interpretation of the discussed ruins as the remains of the early headquarters has become more probable since the discovery of the early therms. Both architectural complexes may have originated and may have been in use at more or less the same time. Therms next to the *Principia building* in the central part of the camp were also found in the base of the

¹⁴ cf. Plontke-Lüning, Geyer. *Archäologische und naturwissenschaftliche Arbeiten in Apsaros in den Jahren 2000 bis 2002*, (in:) A. Geyer (ed.) *Neue Forschungen in Apsaros (2000-2002)*, Tbilisi, 2003: 27, 31; Kakhidze, Mamuladze. *Architecture of the Fort of Apsarus*, (in:) M. Iacob (ed.) *Roman Art and Civilization – a Common Language in Antiquity*, Tulcea, 2014: 161.

First Italic Legion at Novae¹⁵. It was also there that remains of the therms were discovered within a plot neighbouring the headquarters. Both buildings were separated by a street only.

This analogy suggests that in the next seasons at Gonio a trial trench should be marked out and it should go from the therms in the direction of the supposed headquarters. This would allow for a correlation of research results in both segments and would facilitate a reconstruction of the headquarters' plan in its subsequent building phases.

Another trace of buildings which should perhaps also be related to the discussed early stage of the Roman presence in Apsaros may be remains of a foundation and a fill composed of roofing tiles within Sector XI (Fig. 2: 3). It was also there that the excavations in Season 2014 were started. However, the mentioned remains are very strongly destroyed by later building activity (Phase 2 – a Byzantine one?).

Taking the gathered information into consideration, it can be assumed that the *praetentura* of the early fort was situated to the north of the surviving northern defensive wall. The *Porta Praetoria* would have also been open to the north. Therefore, the *Via Principalis* should have gone more or less along the line of the mentioned northern defensive wall (Fig. 5). The early architectural relics which are referred to as the remains of the headquarters would be in fact situated within a plot where the *Principia* was usually built. The therms whose ruins were discovered in the vicinity would have occupied plots which neighboured the headquarters on the east.

At the present stage of research it is not possible to state anything certain about the location of other buildings inside the early fort. Discoveries of remains of buildings made from stone, brick, ceramic plates and ceramic roofing tiles cannot prove that the entire fort was from the beginning constructed with the use of these materials. Usually, it was the therms and the headquarters that were from the beginning built using permanent building materials or were rebuilt as first with the use of such materials. Other buildings, also including fortifications, were usually initially built as wooden, wood-and-earth or stone-and-earth structures, depending on the availability of different raw materials in the neighbourhood.

¹⁵ A. B. Biernacki. *The Roman legionary bath from the C2nd AD in Novae (Moesia Inferior)*, (in.) P. Freeman, J. Bennett, Z. T. Fiema, B. Hoffmann (eds.) *Limes XVIII : Proceedings of the XVIIIth International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies held in Amman, Jordan (September 2000)*, British Archaeological Reports international series 1084, Oxford, 2002: 649–662, fig. 3; T. Sarnowski. *Römische Militärziegel von der südwestlichen Krim. Probleme der Produktionstätigkeit und Produktionsorte*, "Archeologia" (Warsaw) LVI (2005), 2006: 40–41, fig. 2, 67)

What can be an argument in favour of such a gradual rebuild also in the case of the Apsaros fort is the isolation of at least two building phases in the supposed headquarters and two phases in the therms which were discovered in 2014. In the same season relics of early stone buildings were recorded within Sector XI, which is located at some distance from the centre of the castra. It was possible to isolate only one phase within these relics. Should this phase be perhaps correlated with the second building phase within the afore-mentioned features? On the other hand, within Sector XI no relics of earlier buildings made from impermanent materials have been found so far. Therefore, one should perhaps relate the lack of the second building phase within this sector to, e.g., levelling and destruction of part of layers before construction works in the Late Roman/Byzantine Period. Such a possibility could be implied by traces of a fire in the lower (earlier) level of destruction in Sector I and in an analogous layer in Segment I. In such a case, one could rather suggest a more or less simultaneous origin of masonry buildings in different parts of the fort. This would be, however, another premise that some parts of the terrains (Sector XI) were later abandoned after a supposed fire. Further research will perhaps provide an answer to these questions.

Surroundings of the fort in the beginning of our era

Water supplies

The Georgian-German expedition made a series of discoveries in the immediate vicinity of the fort in the years 2000-2002. Among the most significant pieces of information gathered during this research one must mention a discovery of a stone water intake, which was almost certainly used as a source of water supplied to the fort (Fig. 2: 5). The intake is situated ca. 1 km to the south of the *castra*¹⁶. Such a location explains why there are a few ceramic pipes entering the outline of the late fortifications via the southern gate. These pipes are generally dated to the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Period¹⁷. Perhaps all parts of aqueducts in this part of the fort are to be dated to the 3rd c. or later. This can be suggested by the fact that pipelines were placed in the inlet of the Late Roman-Byzantine southern gate¹⁸, as

¹⁶ Kakhidze, Mamuladze. *Architecture of the Fort of Apsarus*, (in:) M. Iacob (ed.) *Roman Art and Civilization – a Common Language in Antiquity*, Tulcea, 2014: 163.

¹⁷ Kakhidze. *Apsaros: A Roman Fort in Southwestern Georgia, Meetings of Cultures in the Black Sea Region: Between Conflict and Coexistence*, “*Black Sea Studies*” VIII, Aarhus, 2008: 319.

¹⁸ Kakhidze, Mamuladze. *Architecture of the Fort of Apsarus*, (in:) M. Iacob (ed.) *Roman Art and Civilization – a Common Language in Antiquity*, Tulcea, 2014: 163.

well as by a close vicinity to the therms, which should also be dated to the Late Roman or Byzantine Period¹⁹. The location of the therms close to the waterworks seems perfectly justified, and a similar chronology of the neighbouring therms and aqueducts is very probable. A similar example is known, among others, from the legionary camp in Novae²⁰. Developing on the issue of water supplies for the garrison of Apsaros, it is worth noting that in Sector XI in the eastern part of the fort two destroyed aqueducts made from ceramic pipes were discovered. One of these had an internal diameter of ca. 10 cm and may have served to supply the early therms discovered in Sector XI. The mentioned pipelines were built on the W-E axis and their farther course should be located in the street to the north of the therms (Fig. 5: 6). The course of the early aqueducts along this axis may imply that at least part of pipelines placed near the building of the supposed headquarters should also be related to the early phase of buildings of the fort. As regards the course of the pipes discovered in the eastern part of the *castra*, one can propose that in the 1st c. the troops at Apsaros used a water intake located to the east (and not to the south) of the fort. However, this hypothesis should be verified by magnetic geophysical survey and trial trenches to the east of the defensive walls. Furthermore, western slopes of neighbouring hills should also be carefully searched in order to identify sources of water which could be used by the garrison at that time.

Location of the fort in relation to the sea and the river and the location of a supposed harbour

It seems that the site of the fort was selected with an assumption that it would fulfil several significant conditions at the same time. In this part of the coast there was the only convenient route from the north to Roman provinces in Asia Minor. A site between the shore of the sea and neighbouring mountains allowed for a construction of a fort which could easily control this route. This site is also located near the most convenient (if not the only) passage through the River Tchorokhi, which flows somewhat

¹⁹ (cf. Kakhidze. *Apsaros: A Roman Fort in Southwestern Georgia, Meetings of Cultures in the Black Sea Region: Between Conflict and Coexistence*, "Black Sea Studies" VIII, Aarhus, 2008: 319; Kakhidze, Mamuladze. *Architecture of the Fort of Apsaros*, (in:) M. Iacob (ed.) *Roman Art and Civilization – a Common Language in Antiquity*, Tulcea, 2014: 161.

²⁰ A. B. Biernacki. *The Roman legionary bath from the C2nd AD in Novae (Moesia Inferior)*, (in:) P. Freeman, J. Bennett, Z. T. Fieema, B. Hoffmann (eds.) *Limes XVIII: Proceedings of the XVIIIth International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies held in Amman, Jordan (September 2000)*, British Archaeological Reports international series 1084, Oxford, 2002: 650.

farther off to the north. While looking at the present-day riverbed in the broad valley it is possible to notice that this impetuous mountain river must have behaved in its lower course in a similar way to an abandoned water hose under pressure. The river's estuary periodically changed its location and the main stream flowed into the sea closer to the northern and then closer to the southern extremity of the valley. It can be supposed that the fort was constructed in a period where the river flowed near the southern extremity of the valley, that is, at a smallest possible distance to the fortress. It does not seem possible to consider traces of a bridge construction and a supposed Roman road as remains which are contemporary with the early fort²¹. The location of the mentioned features deep inside the valley of the River Tchorokhi (traces of the bridge) and among the mountains (the road) implies a lack of relation to the fort. These may be traces of later (e.g., Byzantine Period) developments.

The coast, seen from the open sea, must have looked like completely differently than today. This is evidenced by a deep trench for the construction of an Orthodox Church in Gonio, which is located about 60 m to the west of the western line of the defensive walls of the fort. Sections of the trench are about 1.75 m deep and they reveal deposits of gravel and cobbles which reach down to the very bottom. Identical gravel and cobbles can be found today on a nearby beach. At the same time, in this trench there are no traces of a cultural layer which could indicate a usage level (or levels) from the past centuries. This sterility of sections must be striking. It may be an indication that 2000 years ago the fort was constructed very closely to the shore. Perhaps water reached even farther off towards the fortification which are discernible now. This can also be supposed based on the afore-mentioned land survey measurements carried out to the north of the fort. They demonstrate that the western line of the early fortifications is concealed in all probability somewhere under the ground within the Late Roman fortress (Figs. 2: 6; 5).

It has not been demonstrated so far that the mentioned deposits of gravel and pebbles, which were discovered so closely to the *castra*, continued inside the fort²². It can be therefore supposed that this "Ancient

²¹ Geyer. *Neue Forschungen in Apsaros* (2000-2002), Tbilisi, 2003: Tafel 1, nos. 6 and 7.

²² A. Kakhidze, S. Mamuladze, T. Ebralidze. *Arbeit vor dem Südost*, (in:) A. Geyer, S. Mamuladze (eds.) *Gonio-Apsaros III*. Tbilisi, 2002: Abb. 2; A. Plontke-Lüning, N. Felimuth, A. Geyer *Arbeiten in der Nordwestecke der Festung, nördlich der Festung und im Bereich des modernen Friedhofs*, (in:) A. Geyer, S. Mamuladze (eds.) *Gonio-Apsaros III*. Tbilisi, 2002: Abb. 6, 10, 11; M. Khalvashi. *Arbeiten im Zentralbereich der Festung*, (in:) A. Geyer,

beach” is a vestige of the shore line which was very much like that encountered by the Romans. In such a case, it does not seem well-founded to propose an early chronology of the canal which is situated farther off to the west²³.

These suppositions concerning a small distance between the Early Roman fort and the river and the sea seem perfectly justified. The fortress should be easily accessible from the side of the water, preferably directly from the sea. It seems that the early harbour was located not to the north, where a small tributary of the river Tchorokhi flowed (as it is the case today), but to the west. In such a case the *Porta Praetoria* would have led towards the strategically important ford, and the *Porta Principalis Sinistra* (in this case, the western gate) would have opened towards the harbour (Fig. 5). It is difficult to be completely certain where one should search for remains of embankments and other port installations. These may be located now under a present-day asphalt road or the western line of Late Roman fortifications. Relics of an unidentified wall (discovered in 1961) which go along the N-S line to the west of the mentioned asphalt road are perhaps a trace of the embankment of this first harbour (Figs. 2: 7, 5: 3)²⁴.

Control over the river ford

On the basis of information on the extent of gravel deposits, it can be supposed that in the vicinity of the fort in the period of about 2000 years a more than 500 m wide strap of land came into existence (the sea moved back more than 0.5 km). In the river valley the land probably moved forwards at an even faster pace. This is why a bay of sea water may have still existed in the place of the present-day estuary at the beginning of our era. With regard to that, it seems well-founded to assume that a convenient ford through the river Tchorokhi was at that time located in the vicinity of the present-day bridge on the road which connects Batumi and Gonio. However, no matter where the ford was located, it was impossible to

S. Mamuladze (eds.) *Gonio-Apsaros III*. Tbilisi, 2002: Abb. 13; G. Lorthkipanidze, A. Noneshvili *Arbeiten im Turm 2*, (in:) A. Geyer, S. Mamuladze (eds.) *Gonio-Apsaros III*. Tbilisi, 2002: Abb. 7.

²³ Geyer. *Neue Forschungen in Apsaros (2000-2002)*, Tbilisi, 2003: Tafel 2; K. Storch. *Archäologisches Reservat Gonio-Apsaros. Sonarvermessungen in verschiedenen Gewässerresten und im Meer*, (in:) A. Geyer (ed.) *Neue Forschungen in Apsaros (2000-2002)*, Tbilisi, 2003: 35–41.

²⁴ cf. Geyer. *Neue Forschungen in Apsaros (2000-2002)*, Tbilisi, 2003: Tafel 2; Plontke-Lüning, Geyer. *Archäologische und naturwissenschaftliche Arbeiten in Apsaros in den Jahren 2000 bis 2002*, (in:) A. Geyer (ed.) *Neue Forschungen in Apsaros (2000-2002)*, Tbilisi, 2003: 30–31.

control this important passage directly from the fort. This problem must have concerned not only garrisons in the early period, but also in the subsequent centuries. Research carried on in other borderland areas which were manned by the Roman army demonstrates that in similar cases it was necessary to complete the security system with watchtowers. Such a watchtower (or perhaps several similar structures?) should have been located to the north-east of the fort – on hills, from which it was possible to see the only part of the river Tchorokhi's valley which was convenient for crossing²⁵.

At the present stage of research it is obviously impossible to assume that watchtowers in the vicinity of Gonio certainly existed and that they were constructed already in the 1st c. This, however, seems very probable. It is possible that as early as the mid-2nd c. a fort came into being at the site of the later fortress of Petra Justiniana (Tshikhisdziri). It was located farther off to the north²⁶. Hitherto research at this site have not revealed such early traces of buildings and fortifications. On the other hand, portable finds seem to confirm the activity of the Romans in this place at least since the mid-2nd c. It is worth mentioning that the location of the mentioned fortress strongly resembles another known Roman fort on the Black Sea, namely Charax in Cape Ay-Todor to the west of Yalta. This fortress came into existence in the first half of the 2nd c. at the latest and remained in Roman hands to c. mid-3rd c.²⁷.

A translocation of the fort which controlled the route from Colchis to Asia Minor farther off to the north should have diminished a need for extension of fortifications on the southern bank of the river Tchorokhi. Such a solution worked well in, e.g., Britain, where the construction of Antonine Wall not only contributed to stopping of developments

²⁵ cf. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski. *Roman military sentry posts in Crimea. New discoveries?*, "Światowit" 2006–2008, VII (XLVIII)/ A, 2012: 93–94.

²⁶ cf. Kakhidze. *Apsaros: A Roman Fort in Southwestern Georgia, Meetings of Cultures in the Black Sea Region: Between Conflict and Coexistence*, "Black Sea Studies" VIII, Aarhus, 2008: 311, 313.

²⁷ M. I. Rostovcev. *Svătılıše frakiiskih "bogov" i nadpisi beneficiariiev* v "Ai-Todore, IAK ("Izvestiâ imperatorskoj Arheologičeskoj kommissii"), XL, 1911: 11–12; B. Latyshev, IOSPE I² (Inscriptiones antiquae Orae Septentrionalis Ponti Euxini). *Inscriptiones Tyrae, Olbiae, Chersonesi Tauricae aliorum locorum a Danubio usque ad regnum Bosporanum*, Petropoli 1916 : 674; Sarnowski 1988: 141, tab. 10; V. M. Zubar. *Rimskââ krepost' Haraks*, "Stratum plus" IV, 2000: 192; V. D. Blavatskii. *Haraks*, "Materialy i issledovaniâ po Arheologii SSSR" XIX, Moskva, 1951: 254; K. K. Orlov. *Arhitekturnye kompleksy Haraksa*, (in:) *Arhitekturno-arheologičeskie issledovaniâ v Krymu*, Kiev, 1988: 18; Zubar. *Rimskââ krepost' Haraks*, "Stratum plus" IV 2000: 190, 289; cf. T. Sarnowski. *Römische Militärsiegel von der südwestlichen Krim. Probleme der Produktionstätigkeit und Produktionsorte*, "Archeologia" (Warsaw) LVI (2005), 2006: 91–101.

in Hadrian's Wall, but also to withdrawal of troops from this earlier line of fortifications²⁸. Therefore, if the control over the land route was also transferred farther off to the north in Colchis, the garrison left at Apsaros could concentrate on the security of seafaring and was able not to man (not to construct?) additional posts which facilitated the observation of the passage through the river. What can suggest a strong decrease in the activity of the Romans at Apsaros (since the early 3rd c. at the latest) is a preponderance of finds dated to the 2nd c. over those which can be related to the 3rd c.²⁹. Quite possibly, the fact that part of the terrain inside the early fort was not used may be a material trace of a decrease of the garrison (cf. above – data on the possible abandonment or dismantling of a building in Sector XI after a fire).

To sum up the issue discussed above, future research should also focus on search for remains of watchtowers which may have been located on the hills to the south of river Tchorokhi.

Building materials and their use during the construction of the early phase of the fort

The investigation carried out by the Georgian-German expedition from the beginning of this century which have already been mentioned for several times have also contributed to pointing to a supposed site of stone extraction in the vicinity of Gonio. This site may have been used in Antiquity³⁰. However, the rock outcrop which is situated on the sea shore at the distance of ca. 3 km to the south of the fort seems to be somewhat too distant. Hills where stone could be acquired are located in the direct vicinity of the fort, from 400 to 800 m to the east of it. In this place it is worth to refer to study which were carried out a few years ago with the participation of a geologist in Sevastopol and Balaklava in Crimea. It was then possible to prove that local stone was used for the construction of the Roman fort in Balaklava-Kadykovka. It came from an outcrop which was located at the distance of no more than 0.5 km. For repairs, other raw material was additionally used. It may have been brought from the distance of about 1 km, but on a small scale only³¹. Only for ornamented

²⁸ Austen 2009: 408

²⁹ A. Plontke-Lüning, A. Geyer. *Archäologische und naturwissenschaftliche Arbeiten in Apsaros in den Jahren 2000 bis 2002*, (in:) A. Geyer (ed.) *Neue Forschungen in Apsaros (2000-2002)*, Tbilisi, 2003: 32).

³⁰ Geyer. *Neue Forschungen in Apsaros (2000-2002)*, Tbilisi, 2003: Tafel 1, Nr 8.

³¹ R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, U. Zawadzka-Pawlewska, *Defensive Walls of Chersonesos Taurica. An Analysis of Destruction and Reconstruction Traces*, "Światowit" XI (LII)/A (2013) 2014: 113-131.

architectural details, sculptures and blocks and plates for inscriptions better quality raw material was brought from a quarry in Inkerman, located at the distance of nearly 10 km³². For this reason, in Gonio it would be recommended to undertake geological survey in order to identify closer situated places, where it is possible to find stone identical to that used in buildings from the first centuries AD. Results of hitherto excavations in the fort demonstrate that stone could not be acquired directly at the building site. Undisturbed subsoil is composed of deposits of sand which, according to Georgian scholars, comes from dunes which were originally located on the sea shore. Dunes formed at least a few centuries before the arrival of the Romans. On their surface there are traces of settlement from the Early Iron Age, which is about the 8th c. BC. Therefore, in order to extract stone in the Roman Period it was in all probability required to go to slopes of nearby hills.

It seems almost certain that in the early stage of stationing of the Roman garrison wood was also used for construction purposes. Wood should have been easily accessible in forests covering the afore-mentioned nearby hills. The territory of present-day Adjara is situated in a climatic zone which favours lush growth of flora. It can be therefore assumed that there should have been no problems with suitable wood for construction purposes, especially at the threshold of the presence of the garrison. Hitherto excavations at Gonio have not brought evidence of use of wood for construction of fortifications and buildings³³. However, future research can lead to a discovery of remains of wooden structures which may be located at a greater depth. Traces of wooden posts which served as supports in porticoes³⁴ or as elements of load-bearing structures of early fortifications³⁵ are known from other Roman forts and camps.

Yet another kind of building materials known from a great number of building sites of the Roman army is building ceramics: bricks, roofing tiles, pipes, floor tiles... Materials which were manufactured and used by the army were often stamped by detachments which manufactured them

³² R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, *The Roman Army and the Walls of Cheronos*, "Światowit" XI (LII)/A (2013) 2014: 87-112.

³³ cf. Kakhidze. *Apsaros: A Roman Fort in Southwestern Georgia, Meetings of Cultures in the Black Sea Region: Between Conflict and Coexistence*, "Black Sea Studies" VIII, Aarhus, 2008: 319.

³⁴ R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, O. Â. Savelâ. *In the Heart of a Roman Fort in Crimea. Excavations in Balaklava (Sevastopol, Ukraine). Season 2009-2010*, "Światowit" VIII (XLI-X)/A (2009-2010), 2011: 174.

³⁵ Sarnowski. *The Legionary defences of Novae. Report on latest sections*, "Archeologia" (Warsaw) XXXII (1981), 1984: 31, 43; 2012: 37-40, fig. 3-4.

and/or by persons responsible for manufacture. Although at Gonio there are only a handful of examples of stamped building materials, practically all kinds of building materials have been found in the course of excavations in the fort. During the research carried out by the Polish-Georgian expedition in 2014 water-leading pipes were recorded. Furthermore, discoveries also included a canal which drained off sewage, a paved floor for which floor tiles were used and fills composed of broken roofing tiles (traces of collapsed roofs).

Research results which have been published so far do not give an answer to a very significant question whether building ceramics was brought from other places or manufactured at the site. It seems that no-one has carried research analogous to that which was done, e.g., with regard to tegular material from south-western Crimea³⁶. There, analyses were done on samples taken from stamped roofing tiles and bricks which came from several places of stationing of the Roman troops and on samples of raw clay from deposits which neighboured these sites. Physicochemical analyses demonstrated that a considerable part of building ceramics was made in Crimea (including Balaklava) and not imported from, e.g., Lower Moesia as ballast for warships and cargo ships. Similar analyses should be carried out in the case of building materials from Gonio. This research must include samples of raw clay from the neighbourhood of the fort. It seems that proper deposits can be found in the nearest vicinity of the garrison, as during the excavations in the area of the early therms it was also possible to discover a layer which was almost entirely composed of clay. On the basis of the context it is possible to assume that these are remains of a wall made from raw clay as part of rebuilding of the early therms. Similar layers were also found during previous examinations³⁷.

In the case of the fort in Gonio of special interest seems to be an answer to the question whether imported or locally made building ceramics was used in the construction of the earliest buildings.

³⁶ T. Sarnowski. *Römische Militärziegel von der südwestlichen Krim. Probleme der Produktionstätigkeit und Produktionsorte*, "Archeologia" (Warsaw) LVI (2005), 2006: 91–101; R. Karasiewicz-Szczygiorski, O. Savelya. *Several Observations Concerning the Chronology and the Plan of the Roman Fort in Balaklava (Sevastopol, Ukraine)*, (in:) Proceedings of the International Conference „The Problems of the Preservation of historical and cultural Heritage” Yerevan 25th-27th of September, 2013 (forthcoming).

³⁷ A. Plontke-Lüning, A. Geyer. *Archäologische und naturwissenschaftliche Arbeiten in Apsaros in den Jahren 2000 bis 2002*, (in:) A. Geyer (ed.) *Neue Forschungen in Apsaros (2000-2002)*, Tbilisi, 2003: 19–20.

The early therms – identification of discovered remains and interpretation of results of geophysical survey

In result of hitherto research parts of three different rooms were discovered. Concerning the northern room, a fragment of paved floor made from ceramic tiles was uncovered (Fig. 3: 1). There is a canal near the southern extremity of the floor, going along the W-E line. Its bottom was also paved with the mentioned tiles. Remains of a pool with walls made from rubble stone were discovered farther off to the south of the canal (Fig. 3: 2). Its walls and floor were tightened with hydraulic mortar with admixture of finely ground ceramics. The trench encompassed the western part of the pool. This container extends farther off to the east. Based on geophysical examinations it can be assessed that its dimensions were about 6 x 7 m (Fig. 4).

In the southern part of the trench, to the south of the pool a corner of a room was discovered. Its floor was paved with a mosaic (Fig. 3: 3). The mosaic is made from irregular tesserae, mainly grey, yellow and brown ones. The discovered fragment does not display any specific pattern or motif. The rest of the room with the mosaic is still buried under the ground to the east and south of the hitherto trench.

On the basis of a preliminary architectural analysis it can be assumed that the discovered remains are part of large garrison therms. The surface of the entire premise can be assessed at more than 1100 m² based on the results of geophysical survey. The described rooms are in all probability (counting from the north): part of the *apodyterium* and a pool of the *frigidarium* (with a canal draining off water). Concerning the function of the room with the floor mosaic, nothing certain can be said so far.

The analysis of stratigraphy and architectural remains of the therms demonstrates that the entire premise was built at the same time.

The therms were probably destroyed by a fire. The feature was reconstructed, but in a slightly altered form. The reconstructed building did not encompass the northern room (the supposed *apodyterium*). Rooms situated farther off to the south were still in use for some time. Then, they fell prey to destruction once again.

At the present stage of research it is difficult to say anything about the plan of the entire building. On the basis of geophysical survey it can however be said that to the east of the pool of the *frigidarium* there is one more large room under the ground. Even farther off, there are three smaller ones, situated one behind the other (Fig. 4). At the end of this row

of rooms in the eastern extremity of the therms there is a strong magnetic anomaly. This is in all probability an oven (*praefurnium*). Assuming such a location of one of ovens, the mentioned three small rooms in the eastern part of the therms may have fulfilled the role of the *caldarium* and the *tepidarium*. Obviously, these are merely assumptions which will be verified in the course of further excavations. So far, it is difficult to say anything about the number and function of other rooms, which are less clearly discernible in the documentation of geophysical survey. It can only be said that the building of the therms also extends farther off to the west and the south. Among features which await uncovering there, there is, among others, the farther course of the floor with the mosaic.

Conclusions

To sum up the discussion undertaken in the present paper it must be underlined that further excavations in the therms and trial trenches in their neighbourhood will be of key importance for a better identification of traces of the early presence of the Romans in Apsaros. It would be also recommended to undertake new research in the neighbourhood of the fort, first of all in plots situated to the north and east of the surviving defensive walls. Hitherto used research methods should also be completed with physicochemical analyses of building ceramics and tableware and of samples of raw clay from the vicinity. The authors hope that it will be possible to accomplish most of these plans in the course of next seasons of research carried out by the joint Polish-Georgian expedition.

Translated by Grzegorz Żabiński

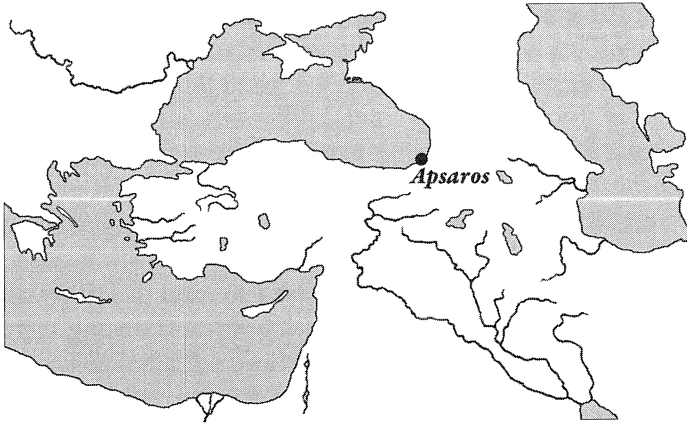


Fig. 1 Location of the Roman fort of Apsaros (K. Misiewicz).

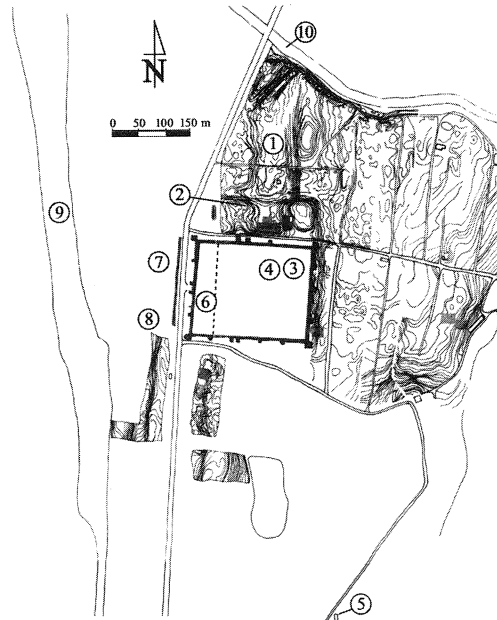


Fig. 2 Gonio. Site plan (after Geyer 2003, adapted by R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, drawing O. Kubrak); 1 – settlement beyond the defensive walls (*vicus*) – probable location; 2 – outline of early fortifications of the fort of Apsaros; 3 – trench in Sector XI (Season 2014); 4 – trench in Sector I (Season 2014); 5 – water intake (Late Roman Period?); 6 – supposed course of the western line of early fortifications of the fort; 7 – wall to the west of the fort, possibly an embankment of the port; 8 – building site of the new Orthodox church; 9 – canal; 10 – river – a tributary of the Tchokokhi.

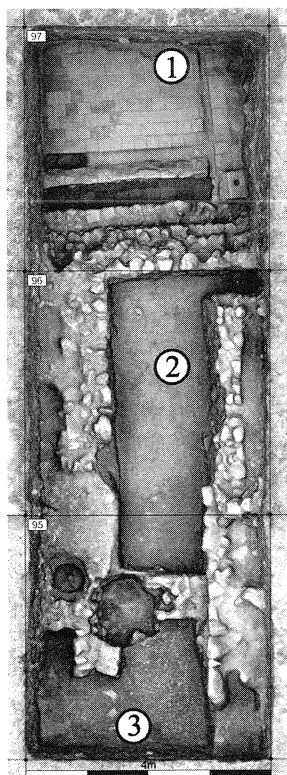


Fig. 3 Gonio. Remains of the therms discovered in Sector I (Squares 95-97): 1 – supposed *apodyterium*; 2 – part of the pool of the *frigidarium*; 3 - corner of an unidentified room with a mosaic (J. Kaniszewski).

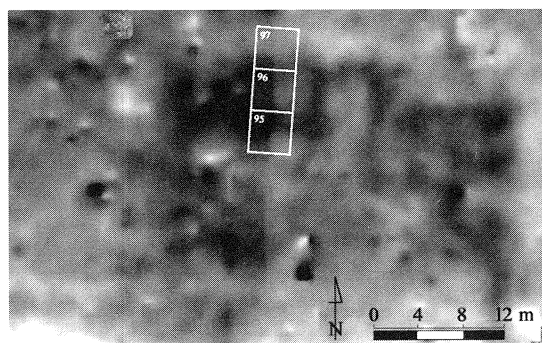


Fig. 4 Results of geophysical survey in Sector I (Squares 95-97 are marked) where part of rooms of the therms were discovered in result of verification excavations. Magnetic anomalies mark the extent of rooms of the therms which were not uncovered (K. Misiewicz).

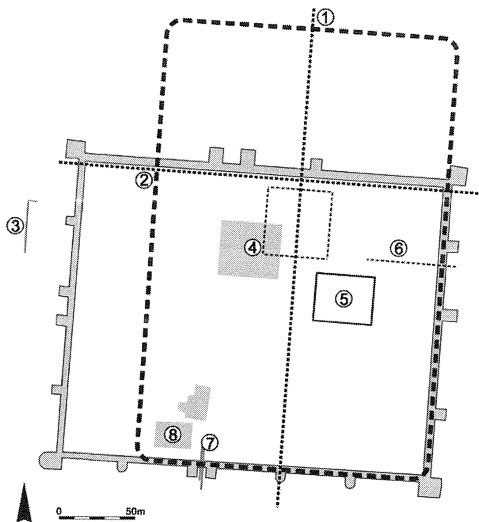


Fig. 5 Gonio. Probable extent of the fortifications of the early fort (after Geyer 2003, adapted by R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, drawing J. Kaniszewski); 1 – *Porta Praetoria*; 2 – *Porta Principalis Sinistra*?; 3 – Supposed embankment of the port; 4 – *Principia*?; 5 – Early therms; 6 – Course of the aqueduct which supplied water to the early therms?; 7 – Late aqueducts; 8 – Late therms;

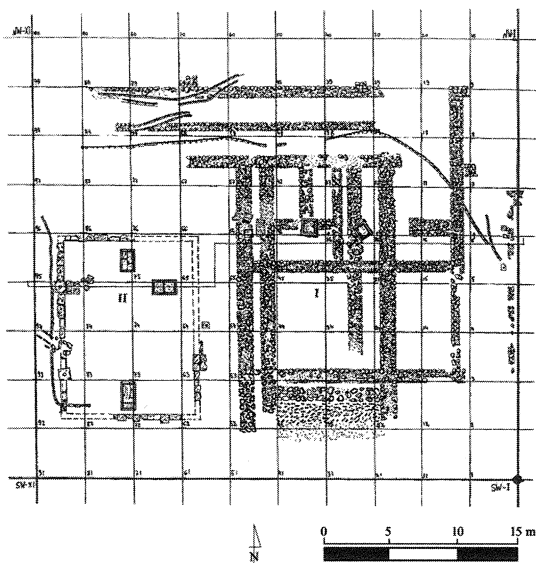


Fig. 6 Gonio. Ruins discovered in the “central trench” (after Khalvashi 2002).