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Title: **GONIO (APSAROS) IN ADJARA: EXCAVATION OF A ROMAN FORT INTERIM REPORT ON THE FIRST SEASON OF THE POLISH–GEORGIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION**

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**ABSTRACT:** The Roman fort of Apsaros in Gonio (Adjara, Georgia) still holds answers to many issues connected with the Roman military presence on the Chorokhi river in ancient Colchis. In 2014, a Polish team joined the Georgian expedition to carry out excavation in two sectors directly east of the centrally located principia. The sites were chosen based on a study of the results of geophysical prospection carried out in 2012. Two phases, dated to the early and late Roman periods respectively, were recorded. The early Roman architecture was interpreted as part of the installations and structures of a large bathhouse (*balneae*), including a mosaic floor in one of the rooms. The building was destroyed at least twice, most likely in a catastrophic fire. The article discusses the stratigraphy and the dating of the early Roman *balneae* based on glass artifacts and coins.

**KEYWORDS:** Georgia, Gonio, Apsaros, Roman army, fort, bath, *balneae*, glassware

გონიო (აფსაროსი) მდებარეობს აჭრაში. ქართულ-პოლონური არქეოლოგიური ექსპედიციის პირველი სეზონის შუალედური ანგარიში, რომელიც ციხის არქეოლოგიური გათხრების შესახებ.

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**საძიებო სიტყვა:** საქართველო, გონიო, აფსაროს, რომაული არმია, ციხე, აბანო, მინის ჭურჭელი.

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# POLISH ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

## XXV

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# CONTENTS

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## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	10
ABBREVIATIONS.....	11

### PAM REPORTS

PCMA FIELD MISSIONS AND PROJECTS IN 2014 AND 2015 (WITH MAP).....	15
---	----

#### EGYPT

##### ALEXANDRIA

ALEXANDRIA, KOM EL-DIKKA. SEASONS 2014–2015 <i>Grzegorz Majcherek</i> .....	33
APPENDIX: ISLAMIC CEMETERY AT KOM EL-DIKKA IN ALEXANDRIA: RESEARCH IN THE 2014 AND 2015 EXCAVATION SEASONS <i>Emanuela Kulicka</i> .....	53
KOM EL-DIKKA 2014: HUMAN BONES FROM AREA U <i>Robert Mahler and Urszula Okularczyk</i> .....	64
GLASS FINDS FROM AREAS U AND G AT THE KOM EL-DIKKA SITE IN ALEXANDRIA (EXCAVATIONS IN 2012 AND 2013) <i>Renata Kucharczyk</i> .....	87
GLAZED IFRIQIYYAN CERAMICS FROM THE HAFSID PERIOD FROM THE SITE OF KOM EL-DIKKA IN ALEXANDRIA <i>Anna Zawadzka</i> .....	104

##### MAREA

MAREA SEASON 2014: EXCAVATION IN HOUSE H1 <i>Dagmara Wielgosz-Rondolino and Mariusz Gwiazda</i> .....	115
--	-----

##### MARINA EL-ALAMEIN

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON POLISH EXCAVATIONS AT MARINA EL-ALAMEIN IN THE 2012–2015 SEASONS <i>Krzysztof Jakubiak</i> .....	127
RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION IN MARINA EL-ALAMEIN IN 2014 AND 2015 (POLISH–EGYPTIAN CONSERVATION MISSION). PART ONE: THE SOUTHERN BATH AND CENTRAL TOWN SQUARE <i>Rafał Czerner, Grażyna Bąkowska-Czerner, Wiesław Grzegorek and Grzegorz Majcherek</i> .....	145

## CONTENTS

---

RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION IN MARINA EL-ALAMEIN IN 2014 AND 2015 (POLISH–EGYPTIAN CONSERVATION MISSION). PART TWO: THE HELLENISTIC BATHS <i>Rafał Czerner, Grażyna Bąkowska-Czerner, Wiesław Grzegorek and Grzegorz Majcherek</i> .....	167
SELECTED CONSERVATION PROJECTS IN MARINA EL-ALAMEIN IN THE 2014 AND 2015 SEASONS <i>Marlena Koczorowska, Wojciech Osiak and Piotr Zambrzycki</i> .....	185
TELL EL-RETABA TELL EL-RETABA 2014–2015 <i>Sławomir Rzepka, Jozef Hudec, Łukasz Jarmużek, Veronika Dubcová, Lucia Hulková, Martin Odler, Alena Šefčáková and Piotr Sójka</i> .....	193
TELL EL-FARKHA TELL EL-FARKHA: ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK 2014–2015 <i>Marek Chłodnicki and Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz</i> .....	227
SAQQARA SAQQARA 2012 AND 2015: INSCRIPTIONS <i>Kamil O. Kuraszkiwicz</i> .....	255
NAQLUN DEIR EL-NAQLUN 2014–2015. PRELIMINARY REPORT <i>Włodzimierz Godlewski, Katarzyna Danys and Szymon Maślak</i> .....	265
WEST THEBES: ASASIF AND DEIR EL-BAHARI MIDDLE KINGDOM TOMBS OF ASASIF: ARCHAEOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES IN 2015 <i>Patryk Chudzik</i> .....	289
FOUR SEASONS OF DOCUMENTATION IN THE MAIN SANCTUARY OF AMUN-RE IN THE TEMPLE OF HATSHEPSUT AT DEIR EL-BAHARI <i>Franciszek Pawlicki</i> .....	303
BERENIKE ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK IN BERENIKE IN 2014 AND 2015: FROM HELLENISTIC ROCK-CUT INSTALLATIONS TO ABANDONED TEMPLE RUINS <i>Iwona Zych, Steven E. Sidebotham, Martin Hense, Joanna K. Rądkowska and Marek Woźniak</i> .....	315
SUDAN BANGANARTI AND SELIB BANGANARTI AND SELIB IN THE 2013/2014 AND 2014/2015 SEASONS <i>Bogdan Żurawski</i> .....	349
APPENDIX I: POTTERY FROM SELIB. PRELIMINARY REPORT (2013/2014 AND 2014/2015 SEASONS) <i>Aneta Cedro</i> .....	370

## CONTENTS

---

<i>APPENDIX 2: OSTEOARCHAEOLOGICAL ANALYSES OF SKELETAL MATERIAL FROM SELIB 1 AND BANGANARTI (2013/2014 AND 2014/2015 SEASONS)</i> <i>Magdalena Bury</i> .....	385
<b>EL-DETTI</b>	
EARLY MAKURIA RESEARCH PROJECT: INTERIM REPORT ON THE EXCAVATION AT EL-DETTI IN 2014 AND 2015 <i>Mahmoud El-Tayeb, Ewa Czyżewska-Zalewska, Zofia Kowarska and Szymon Lenarczyk</i> .....	403
<i>APPENDIX: METAL OBJECTS FROM THE EL-DETTI CEMETERY</i> <i>Lukasz Zieliński</i> .....	420
ANIMALS FROM THE TUMULI IN EL-DETTI IN SUDAN: FROM BONE REMAINS TO STUDYING RITUAL <i>Urszula Iwaszczuk</i> .....	431
<b>KHOR SHAMBAT</b>	
KHOR SHAMBAT 1: NEW NEOLITHIC SITE AND CEMETERY IN OMDURMAN (SUDAN) <i>Przemysław Bobrowski, Maciej Jórdeczka, Iwona Sobkowiak-Tabaka and Michaela Binder</i> .....	447
<b>LEBANON</b>	
<b>JIYEH</b>	
CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION OF A VOTIVE MASK FROM JIYEH IN LEBANON <i>Anna Tomkowska</i> .....	479
PLANT REMAINS FROM JIYEH/PORPHYREON, LEBANON (SEASONS 2009–2014): PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF ARCHAEOBOTANICAL ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH <i>Monika Badura, Ewelina Rzeźnicka, Urszula Wicenciak and Tomasz Waliszewski</i> .....	487
<b>IRAQI KURDISTAN</b>	
NEWCOMERS AND AUTOCHTHONS. PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE 2014–2015 SURVEY IN THE KURDISTAN AUTONOMOUS REGION, IRAQ <i>Dorota Ławecka</i> .....	511
<b>GEORGIA</b>	
<b>GONIO</b>	
GONIO (APSAROS) IN ADJARA: EXCAVATION OF A ROMAN FORT. INTERIM REPORT ON THE FIRST SEASON OF THE POLISH–GEORGIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION <i>Radosław Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski and Shota Mamuladze with Piotr Jaworski and Marcin Wagner</i> .....	521

## CONTENTS

- INTERIM REPORT ON THE POLISH–GEORGIAN EXCAVATION OF A ROMAN  
FORT IN GONIO (APSAROS) IN 2014  
*Shota Mamuladze and Radostaw Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski*  
*with Tamar Shalikadze, Nargiz Surmanidze and Emzar Kakhidze* ..... 533

### ARMENIA

#### METSAMOR

- METSAMOR (ARMENIA): PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE EXCAVATIONS IN 2013,  
2014 AND 2015  
*Krzysztof Jakubiak, Ashot Piliposyan, Mateusz Iskra and Artavazd Zaqyan* ..... 553  
*APPENDIX: ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF BURIALS FROM METSAMOR*  
*IN SEASONS 2013–2015*  
*Rusanna Mертchyan and Hasmik Simonyan* ..... 566

### STUDIES

- FROM CIRCLE TO RECTANGLE. EVOLUTION OF THE ARCHITECTURAL PLAN  
IN THE EARLY NEOLITHIC IN THE NEAR EAST  
*Marcin Białowarczuk* ..... 575
- LOCAL AND IMPORTED POTTERY IN THE NEOLITHIC GULF:  
A NEW PERSPECTIVE FROM THE SITE OF BAHRA I IN KUWAIT  
*Anna Smogorzewska* ..... 595
- CERAMIC PATCHWORK IN HELLENISTIC TO BYZANTINE PHOENICIA:  
REGIONALIZATION AND SPECIALIZATION OF VESSEL PRODUCTION  
*Urszula Wicenciak* ..... 619
- MEROITIC BEADWORK: AN OVERVIEW BASED ON FINDS FROM SAĪ  
IN ANCIENT NUBIA  
*Joanna Then-Obluska* ..... 691
- REMARKS ON POTTERY PRODUCTION, TECHNOLOGY AND VESSEL USAGE  
IN EL-ZUMA  
*Ewa Czyżewska-Zalewska* ..... 725
- TRADE AND FAITH IN NUBIAN EARLY MAKURIA (AD 450–550):  
MACROSCOPIC EXAMINATION OF PERSONAL ADORNMENTS FROM  
EL-ZUMA IN NUBIA  
*Joanna Then-Obluska* ..... 741
- POTTERY FROM DONGOLA: A STRATIGRAPHIC ASSEMBLAGE FROM UNIT B.I.41  
*Katarzyna Danys* ..... 761
- PAINTED DECORATION OF WATER JARS FROM BYZANTINE ATHRIBIS  
IN THE EGYPTIAN DELTA  
*Anna Południkiewicz* ..... 781

## CONTENTS

---

REMARKS ON STONE VESSELS FROM ISLAMIC LAYERS ON BIJAN ISLAND <i>Marta Mierzejewska</i> .....	799
IN SEARCH OF NUBIAN MASTER-BUILDERS: AN ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING FROM THE CATHEDRAL IN FARAS <i>Piotr Makowski</i> .....	809
<i>APPENDIX: PRAYER OF A YOUNG WOMAN</i> <i>Vincent WJ van Gerven Oei</i> .....	826
INDEX OF SITES .....	833
GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS .....	834
GUIDE TO PCMA PUBLICATIONS .....	835

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AA</i>	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger; Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts</i> (Berlin)
<i>ÄA</i>	<i>Ägyptologische Abhandlungen</i> (Wiesbaden)
<i>ADAIK</i>	<i>Abhandlungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo</i> (Glückstadt)
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i> (New York)
<i>ANM</i>	<i>Archéologie du Nil Moyen</i> (Lille)
<i>ASAE</i>	<i>Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte</i> (Cairo)
<i>AV</i>	<i>Archäologische Veröffentlichungen, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Kairo</i> (Berlin–Mainz am Rhein)
<i>BAAL</i>	<i>Bulletin d'archéologie et d'architecture libanaises</i> (Beirut)
<i>BAH</i>	<i>Bibliothèque archéologique et historique</i> (Paris)
<i>BAR IS</i>	<i>British Archaeology Reports International Series</i> (Oxford)
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i> (Ann Arbor, MI)
<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de correspondance hellénique</i> (Paris)
<i>BdE</i>	<i>Bibliothèque d'étude</i> (Cairo)
<i>BIFAO</i>	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale</i> (Cairo)
<i>BSAA</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société d'archéologie d'Alexandrie</i> (Cairo)
<i>BSFE</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société française d'égyptologie</i> (Paris)
<i>CCE</i>	<i>Cahiers de la céramique égyptienne</i> (Cairo)
<i>CdE</i>	<i>Chronique d'Égypte</i> (Brussels)
<i>CRIPEL</i>	<i>Cahiers de recherches de l'Institut de papyrologie et égyptologie de Lille</i> (Lille)
<i>DBMNT</i>	<i>Database of Medieval Nubian Texts</i> ( <a href="http://www.dbmnt.uw.edu.pl">www.dbmnt.uw.edu.pl</a> )
<i>EtTrav</i>	<i>Études et travaux</i> (Warsaw)
<i>FIFAO</i>	<i>Fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale</i> (Cairo)
<i>GAMAR</i>	<i>Gdańsk Archaeological Museum African Reports</i> (Gdańsk)
<i>GM</i>	<i>Göttinger Miszellen</i> (Göttingen)
<i>JARCE</i>	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i> (Boston et al.)
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i> (London)
<i>JGS</i>	<i>Journal of Glass Studies</i> (Corning, NY)
<i>JJP</i>	<i>Journal of Juristic Papyrology</i> (Warsaw)
<i>MDAIK</i>	<i>Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo</i> (Wiesbaden)
<i>OBO</i>	<i>Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis</i> (Freiburg–Göttingen)
<i>OIP</i>	<i>Oriental Institute Publications</i> (Chicago)
<i>OLA</i>	<i>Orientalia lovaniensia analecta</i> (Louvain)
<i>PAM</i>	<i>Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean</i> (Warsaw)
<i>SAOC</i>	<i>Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilisation</i> (Chicago)
<i>WVDOG</i>	<i>Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft</i> (Berlin–Leipzig)

# GONIO (APSAROS) IN ADJARA: EXCAVATION OF A ROMAN FORT

## INTERIM REPORT ON THE FIRST SEASON OF THE POLISH–GEORGIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION

Radosław Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski<sup>1</sup> and Shota Mamuladze<sup>2</sup>  
with Piotr Jaworski<sup>3</sup> and Marcin Wagner<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,3,4</sup> Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw, <sup>2</sup> Gonio-Apsarus Archaeological-  
-Architectural Museum Reserve

**Abstract:** The Roman fort of Apsaros in Gonio (Adjara, Georgia) still holds answers to many issues connected with the Roman military presence on the Chorokhi river in ancient Colchis. In 2014, a Polish team joined the Georgian expedition to carry out excavation in two sectors directly east of the centrally located principia. The sites were chosen based on a study of the results of geophysical prospection carried out in 2012. Two phases, dated to the early and late Roman periods respectively, were recorded. The early Roman architecture was interpreted as part of the installations and structures of a large bathhouse (*balneae*), including a mosaic floor in one of the rooms. The building was destroyed at least twice, most likely in a catastrophic fire. The article discusses the stratigraphy and the dating of the early Roman *balneae* based on glass artifacts and coins.

**Keywords:** Georgia, Gonio, Apsaros, Roman army, fort, bath, *balneae*, glassware

Apsaros is a known and well published site (Plontke-Lüning 2003; Kakhidze 2008), not the least the remains of ancient Roman fortifications (Geyer and Mamuladze 2002; Khalvashi 2002: Fig. I; Geyer 2003: Pls 2, 3, 5; Kakhidze and Mamuladze 2004: Figs 1–3, 9, 10; Kakhidze 2008: Figs 3, 10–12). Even so, many questions remain concerning Roman military presence on the Chorokhi river (see Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski and Kakhidze 2015). Aiming to address some of these issues, a Polish–Georgian team directed by Prof. Shota Mamuladze

from the Gonio-Apsarus Archaeological-Architectural Museum Reserve (Batumi, Georgia) and Dr. Radosław Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski from the Institute of Archaeology and Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, opened test trenches in July 2014. Two areas (marked as 4 and 5 on the plan) were selected based on an analysis of the results of a geophysical survey carried out in 2012 by Prof. Krzysztof Misiewicz from the University of Warsaw (Misiewicz and Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski 2013) [Fig. 1].

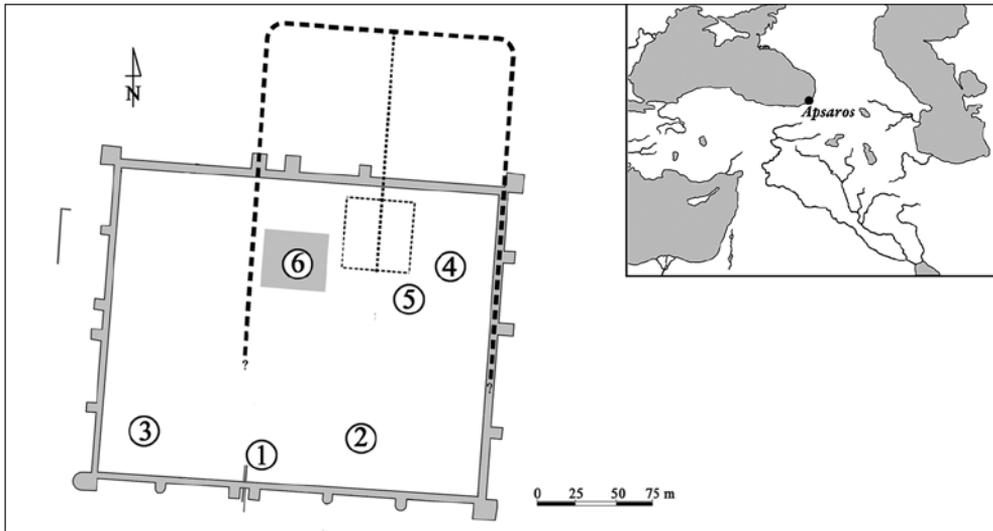


Fig. 1. The site of the Roman fort at Gonio (Apsaros): location of trenches in sectors 4 and 5 excavated by the Polish–Georgian team in 2014 (trenches in sectors 1, 2 and 3 excavated by the Georgian team, see Mamuladze et al. 2016, in this volume): 1 – southern gate forefront; 2 – southeastern sector; 3 – southwestern sector; 4 – eastern trench (NO 11, Squares 89, 90, 99, 100); 5 – western trench (NO 01, Squares 95, 96, 97); 6 – location of the principia (“central trench”); dashed line marks the presumed area of the early fort. Inset, map showing the general location of the site (After Geyer 2003; adaptation R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski; drawing J. Kaniszewski; inset map K. Misiewicz)

#### Team

*Dates of work:* 28 June–26 July 2014

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## EASTERN TRENCH

The eastern trench (Sector NO 11, Squares 89, 90, 99, 100, marked as 4 in *Fig. 1*) was situated closer to the eastern defence wall of the fort. It started out 4 m by 8 m and was subsequently extended. The area that was excavated in the end was 56 m<sup>2</sup> big.

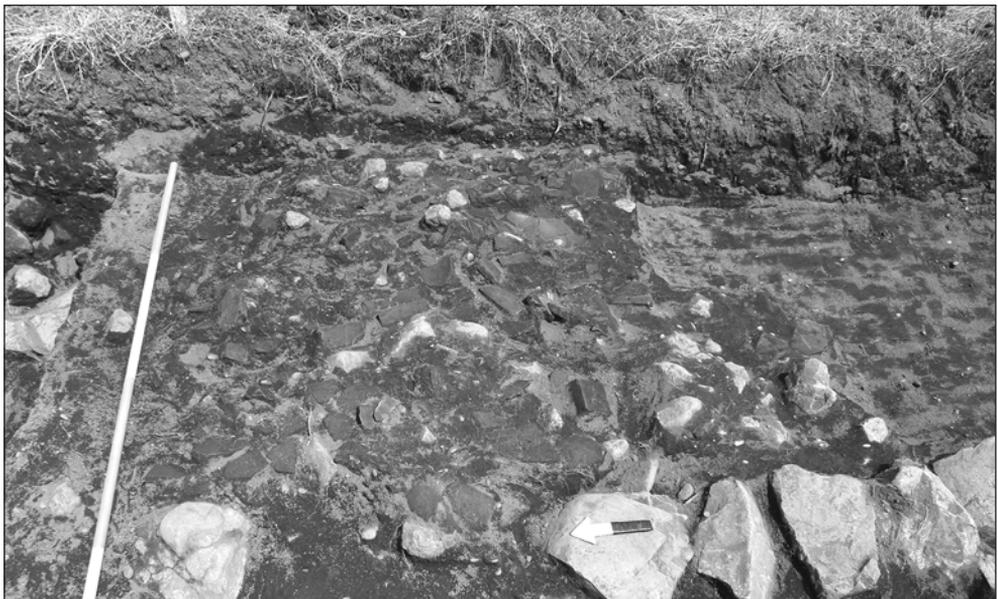
The area was heavily pitted by digging in Ottoman times, which affected the architectural remains found directly under the topsoil. Excavation led to distinguishing two architectural phases: the first from the early Roman period, the second from late Roman times.

Phase 1 remains comprise the foundations of a room (or rooms) that are hardly identifiable in terms of layout. They consist of two courses of irregular chunks of stone, laid without mortar in a sandy substrate that represents undisturbed subsoil. Later building activities are responsible for the

poor preservation of these remains. The foundations are dated generally to the first centuries AD.

A collapsed roof with fragments of ceramic roofing tiles (*tegulae*) was recorded in a section of the excavated trench. Remains consisted of charred wood and a collection of iron nails which had once secured the tiles [*Fig. 2*]. Belonging to this phase were two ceramic water pipes present in the northern section and in the southeastern corner of the trench [*Fig. 3:1,2*]. The pipelines were cut through by a Phase-2 building constructed in this area.

Phase 2 appears to be related to the late Roman period. The foundations from this phase corresponded to clear magnetic anomalies identified on a map of the area. Upon verification they could be interpreted as a rectangular building with two rows of



*Fig. 2. Remains of a collapsed roof with fragments of roofing tiles in the eastern trench, view from the west (Photo A. Trzop-Szczypiorska)*

squared rooms and a central corridor. The northwestern corner room [marked as 3 in Fig. 3] strongly resembles in plan and dimensions Byzantine barracks, known from excavations in the southwestern part of the fort (Kakhidze 2008: Fig. 11), and it may well have been a barrack of this kind.

No accumulations connected with Phase 2 usage were recorded. An archi-

tectural analysis of the north wall of the room, which was at the same time the external wall of the building, led to the conclusion that the building was refurbished at least once during its use. A new entrance seems to have been opened in the north wall. The remaining part of the wall was thickened from the outside as far as the corner of the building and was additionally

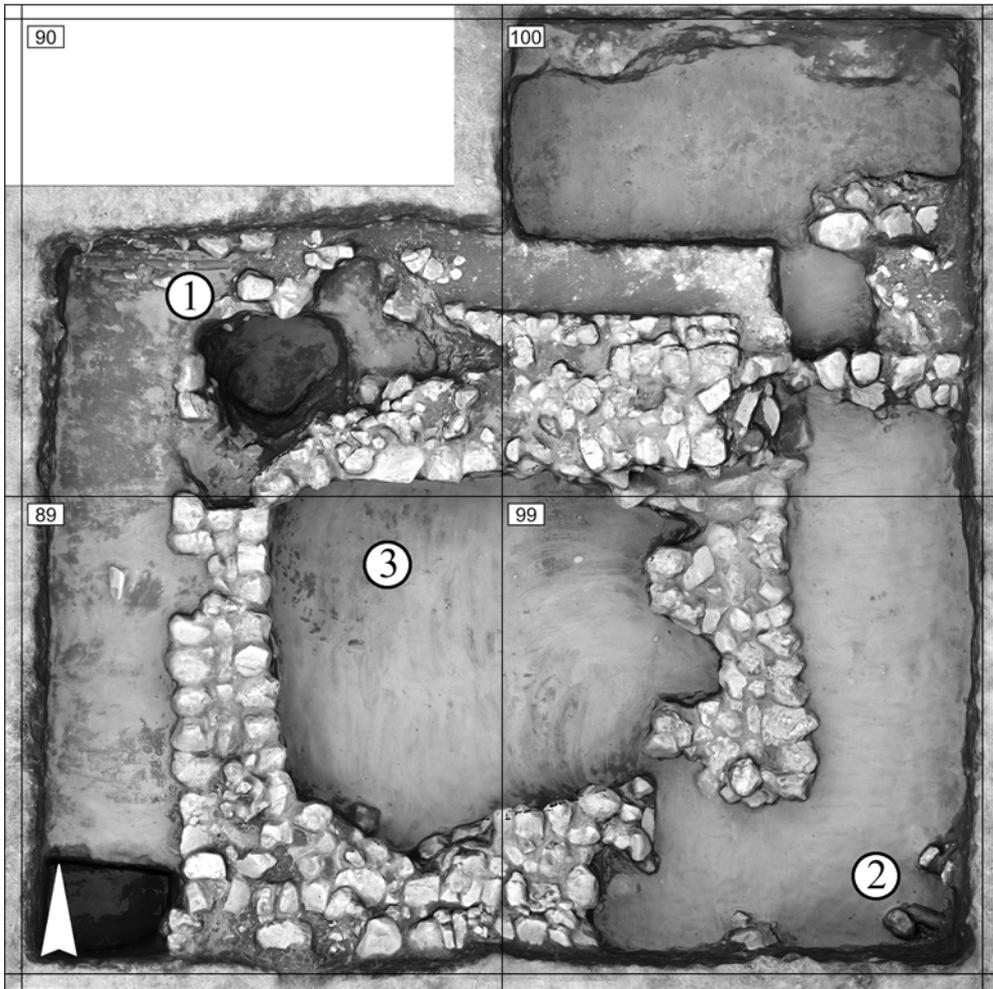


Fig. 3. Eastern trench at Gonio (Apsaros): 1, 2 – remains of two ceramic water pipes; 3 – northwestern corner room of the presumed Byzantine barracks (Photo E. Mizak; digitizing J. Kaniszewski)

reinforced with a layer of stone bonded in lime mortar.

In both phases the structures were founded on undisturbed sandy subsoil, requiring the foundations to be shallow but very wide (more than 1 m). The sandy deposit is a coastal dune. Extremely fragile thick-walled pottery and characteristic ceramic “stakes” indicated the presence of a settlement from the Early Iron Age.

#### WESTERN TRENCH

The western trench (Sector NO 01, Squares 95, 96, 97, marked as 5 in *Fig. 1*) was located more or less midway between the eastern defence wall of the fort and the area where the *principia* were discovered (see Plontke-Lüning and Geyer 2003: 31; Kakhidze 2008: 319, *Fig. 12*; Kakhidze and Mamuladze 2014: 161). Its initial size was also 4 m by 8 m, and its longer axis was aligned N–S. It was extended 4 m to the south, reaching a total surface area of 48 m<sup>2</sup>.

Architectural remains were discovered on a deeper level than in the eastern trench, about 0.50 m below the surface; in places, the excavated depth in the trench reached 1.50 m. Investigations had to be stopped frequently because of the remains of a Roman building discovered there previously. Two phases of architectural remains were identified, dated similarly as in the eastern trench to the early and late Roman periods.

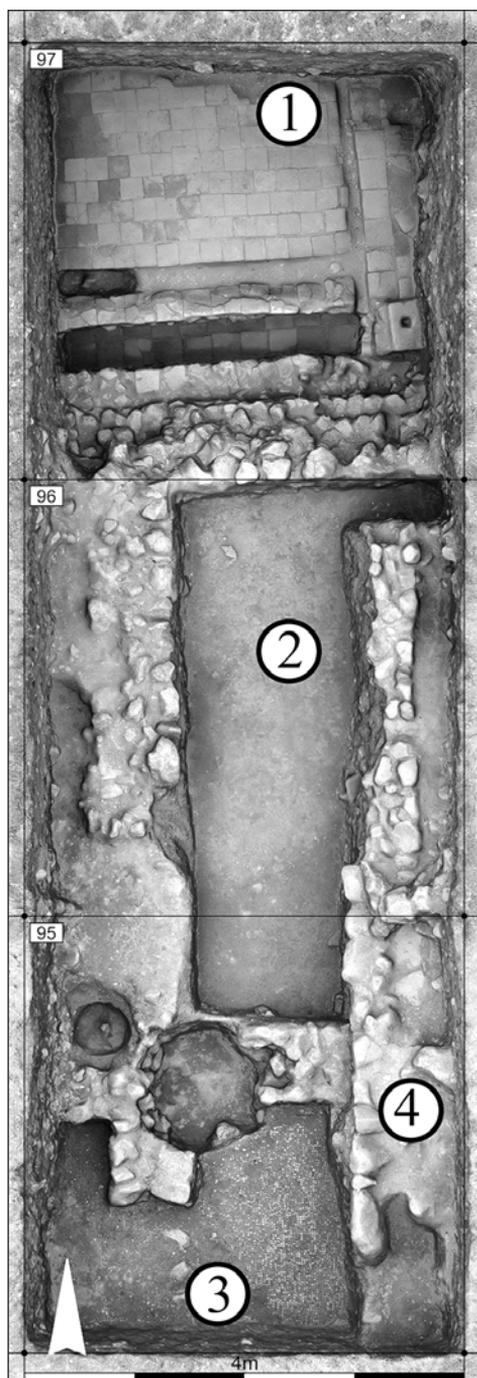
Remains from the early Roman phase (Phase 1) were found at the depth between 1.00 m and 1.50 m below ground surface. A fragment of floor, laid with rectangular ceramic tiles either 19 cm or 26 cm square and 4.5 cm thick, was discovered in the northern part of the trench (marked as 1 in *Fig. 4*). A water runoff channel with the bottom made of bricks lined the south-

ern edge of the floor (the other edges of the floor were outside the excavated area). Farther off to the south, remains of a pool with walls made of rubble stone were found. The bottom and the walls of the pool were waterproofed with hydraulic mortar. The western edge of this container and parts of its northern and southern borders were identified within the borders of the trench (marked as 2 in *Fig. 4*); its actual size was traced on the geophysical map and could be reconstructed as 6 m by 7 m.

A corner of a room was discovered to the south of the pool in the southern part of the trench. Its floor was paved with a mosaic (marked as 3 in *Fig. 4*), made of irregular tesserae, mainly grey, yellow and brown, forming an unpatterned composition [*Fig. 5*]. The room extended to the east and south. Part of the west wall of the room, with the mosaic, and part of the wall between this room and the pool (within the borders of the trench) were destroyed by Ottoman-period pits.

Architectural analysis of the remains suggested an identification with a large *balneae* or bath. Based on the geophysical results, the complex of the baths may be estimated at more than 1100 m<sup>2</sup>. The units from north to south can be interpreted as an apodyterium and a pool in the frigidarium. Nothing can be said about the function of the room with the floor mosaic.

The excavated remains of two layers of roofing tiles imply that the building was destroyed at least twice. Other evidence shows that it was repaired at least once, and it was then that the presumed apodyterium went out of use. A layer below the brick floor, containing an abundance of gravel, could be interpreted as a hardened



street surface. The presence of a street here had been suggested by the geophysical results. The remaining rooms (with pool and with mosaic floor) were still in use.

Glass finds from the drainage channel have dated the phase to the 1st/2nd century AD (see below), linking it to the early stages of Roman presence in this area.

In Phase 2, the area seems to have been largely abandoned. Excavations revealed one section of a N–S wall above the remains of the pool (marked as 4 in *Fig. 4*), connected possibly with a room that stretches to the east of the present trench. Since this wall is founded on a much higher level, it is likely that it belonged to a building from the late Roman period.

#### DISCUSSION OF STRATIGRAPHY

A complex sequence of layers was associated with the architectural remains discovered in the western trench (Sector NO 01, Square 97) [*Fig. 6*]. The excavated rooms of the bathhouse were built evidently in one go. Two separate levels of rubble containing broken roofing tiles indicated that the *balneae* was destroyed at least twice, once in a conflagration.

The bath originally included the room with a floor made of ceramic tiles and a drain running along the south wall which separated it from the pool. With time this room went out of use. Layers 8

*Fig. 4. Remains of a balneae in the western trench: 1 – apodyterium(?) and channel draining water from a neighboring pool; 2 – part of a pool in the frigidarium; 3 – corner of an unidentified room with mosaic floor; 4 – fragment of a wall belonging to a Byzantine structure (Photo E. Mizak; digitizing J. Kaniszewski)*

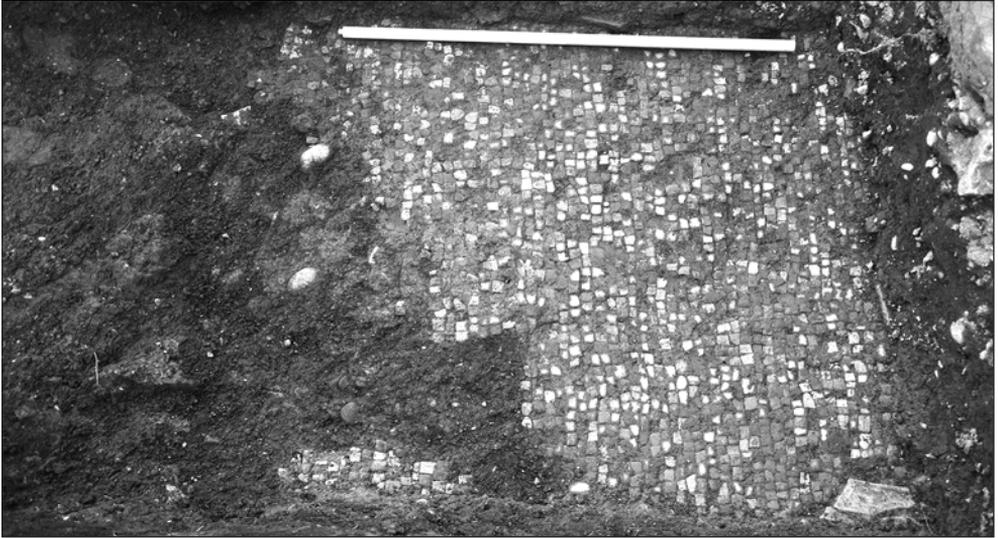
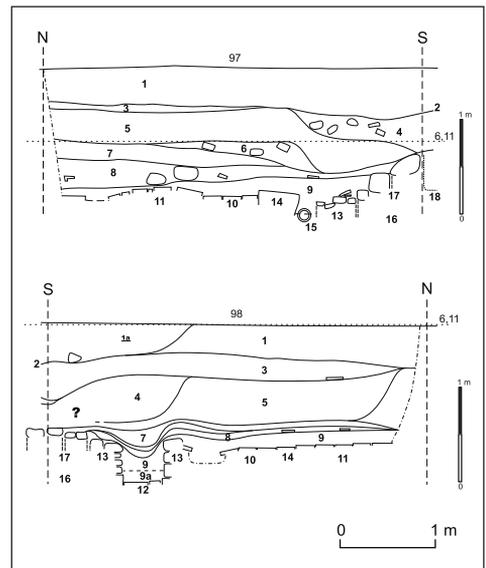


Fig. 5. Fragment of a mosaic floor after discovery, view from the south  
(Photo E. Mizak)

Fig. 6. Sector NO 01 (Square 97): top, eastern section; bottom, western section  
(Drawing and digitizing M. Marciniak)

- 1–2 – topsoil down to the lowest reach of human interference in modern times
- 3 – tentative street surface with abundant gravel
- 4 – wall remains from Phase 2
- 5 – layer of pure clay (from the upper parts of the bath wall), Phase 1 after repairs
- 6 – fill layer (rubble) related to layer 5 (Phase 1), second level of destruction
- 7 – street surface with gravel, from after the first destruction and subsequent reconstruction of the *balneae*
- 8 – stone rubble and charcoal, corresponding to the first destruction of the bath (Phase 1)
- 9 – layer with fine charcoal above paved tile floor
- 9a – fill of channel draining water from the pool in the frigidarium
- 10 – floor of ceramic tiles
- 11 – bedding layer of coarse-grained pure sand
- 12 – bottom of channel paved with ceramic tiles (only in the western trench)
- 13 – channel walls of rubble stone
- 14 – stone block with openings (reused aqueduct connector made of ceramic pipes)
- 15 – ceramic pipe draining water to the channel



- 16 – remains of wall separating room with paved floor (apodyterium) from pool (frigidarium)
- 17 – presumed edge of the *balneae* after reconstruction and installation of a paved floor
- 18 – layer of hydraulic mortar inside the pool

and 9 attest to the destruction (intentional dismantling?) of the walls. These layers are deposited not only above the ceramic tiles and the channel, but also on top of the remains of the northern face of the wall which separated the room from the pool in the adjacent room. They also filled part of the channel, indicating that some of the building materials, like the stone covering of the drain and some of the ceramic tiles, were salvaged from the room after it had been abandoned.

A gravel street surface (layer 7) was introduced on top of the leveled ground (layer 8). The presence of a street running on the northern side of the *balneae* was suggested by the results of the geophysical survey. Superimposed on this street surface

and the reconstructed (thinner) north wall of the pool were layers related to the next and final destruction of the bath (layers 5 and 6). A layer of pure clay (layer 5) may have come from the upper parts of the external (north) wall of the bath, which was made of raw clay on a wooden frame. This destruction layer also filled the interior of the pool in Square 96.

Layer 3 covers the ruins of the bath and the layers related to the two-stage destruction of this structure and to later buildings (Phase 2). Judging by the gravel in it, which is similarly abundant as in layer 7, it may be the vestige of another (wider?) street. Layer 3, as is the case of the wall from Phase 2 (Square 96), was preserved all the way up to the bottom of the topsoil.

## CONTEXT AND INTERPRETATION OF THE ARTIFACTS

### COINS

Two bronze Roman coins were found in layer 3 in Square 97. One was illegible (except for a laurel wreath observed on the reverse), while the other one, although worn, shows the bust of a man on the obverse. It may have been produced in one of the Oriental mints (Antioch?), in the reign of Vespasian.

### GLASS

Glass vessel fragments were found in abundance in the western trench, mostly in Square 97 (126 inventory items), compared to just 14 finds from the eastern trench. The glass was mainly of a natural color (pale green, green or bluish-green). Only a small percentage was made of colorless glass or colorless glass with a yellowish tinge. The vessels coming from the baths, including the room with the ceramic

floor (in Phase 1), were mostly fragments of balsamaria/unguentaria (Isings 1957: Forms 27 and 28a,b) (compare Kakhidze and Shalikadze 2009: 70–71). They were discovered in the fill of the channel (layer 9a, Inv. Nos 316–318) [*Fig. 7* top] and above the floor of ceramic tiles (layer 9, Inv. Nos 224, 225, 229, 231, 238) [*Fig. 7* center]. They were also found in layer 8, which corresponds to the first destruction of the *balneae* (Inv. Nos 246, 253, 292, 293, 295–297, 300) [*Fig. 7* bottom]. The finds in these layers formed apparent clusters.

Balsamaria [*Fig. 8*: Inv. Nos 184, 201, 212] were still found in layer 3 from the time when the bath was already abandoned and dismantled (the two worn Roman coins also originated from this layer). The assemblage also included the feet of bottles or goblets (probably Isings Form 34), which are barely present in the deeper layers

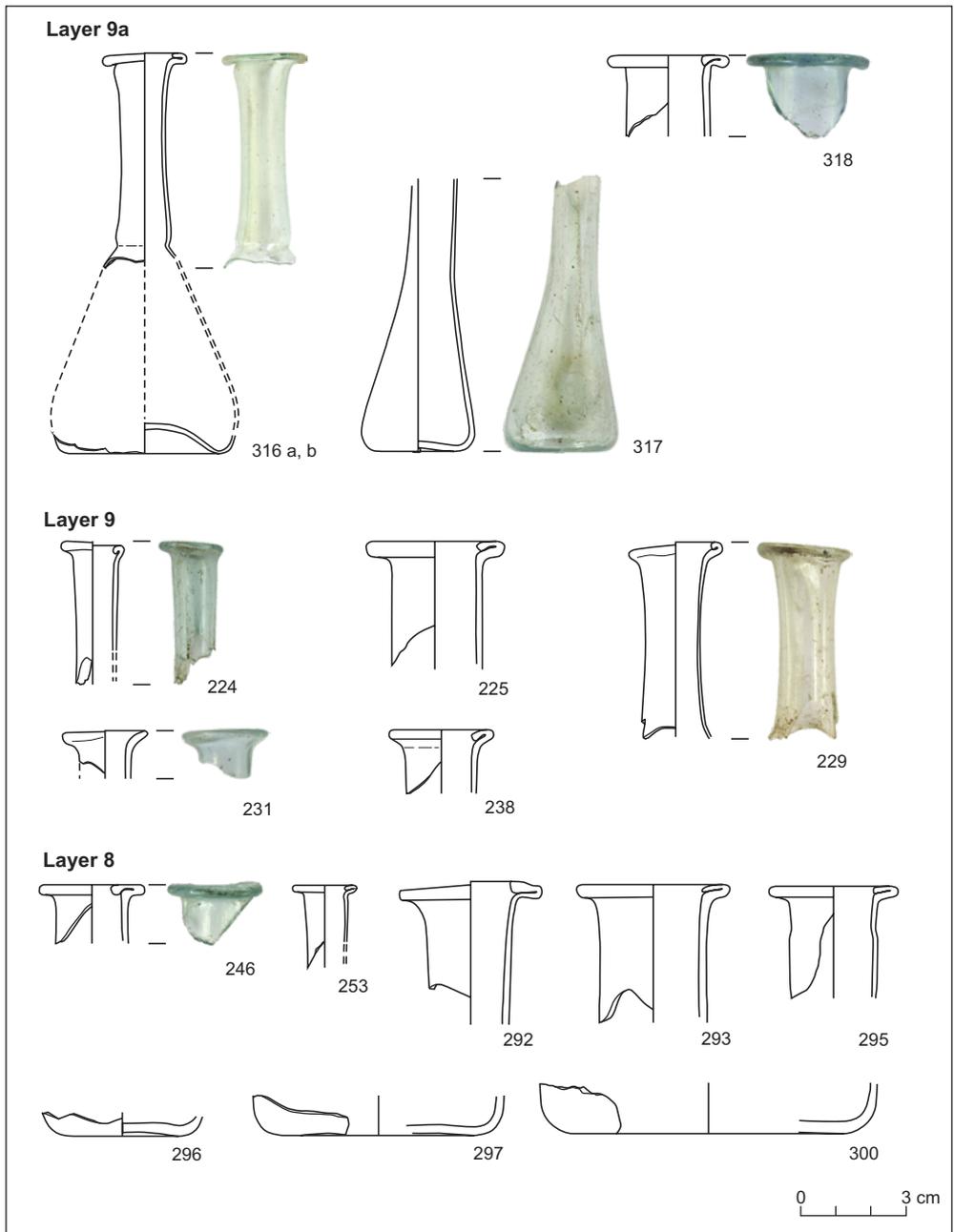


Fig. 7. Glasses from the western trench, Phase 1 (functioning and first destruction of the bath)  
(Photos A. Trzop-Szczypiorska; drawing and digitizing M. Wagner)

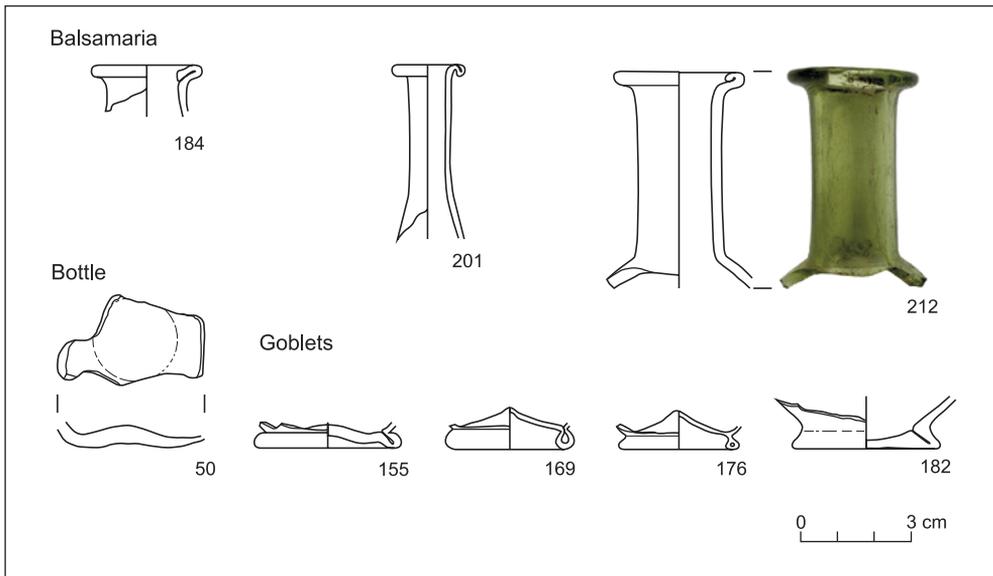
[see *Fig. 8*: Inv. Nos 50, 155, 169, 176, 182]. These, however, did not form any clusters and were more uniformly spread throughout layer 3.

### NAILS

Iron nails dominated the assemblage of finds from the eastern trench, associated for the most part with a layer of ceramic roofing tiles, which was identified as the roof of the earlier building phase (Phase 1). The nails are rectangular in section and they can be classified into two major groups: large and small nails. The small nails survived usually as heads, the shanks being merely a few millimeters long, up to 1 cm in some instances. The large nails could have been 10 or even 12 cm long initially. One nail, considerably larger than the oth-

ers, must have been more than 20 cm long. It may have been used to join construction beams of the roof or of the walls.

Most of the nails were found in the fill of broken roofing tiles and charred fragments of wood, while two of the small nails were discovered in an opening of a ceramic tile. The conclusion is that they were used in roof construction. The large nails were used almost certainly to attach laths (horizontal slats) to the chevrons. The roofing tiles were then placed on the laths. The small nails were used to fix ceramic tiles to the wooden structure of the roof. The thickness of the surviving fragments of the *tegulae*-type roofing tiles is about 2 cm, which leads to the assumption that the original length of the small nails was not less than 4–5 cm.



*Fig. 8. Glasses from the western trench, layer 3 after the abandonment of the bath (Photo A. Trzop-Szczypiorska; drawing and digitizing M. Wagner)*

## CONCLUSIONS

Remains of buildings from the early Roman and late Roman periods, as well as pits from the Ottoman period (17th–19th century), were discovered in both trenches. In the case of architectural finds from the first centuries AD, two levels of destruction were recorded in the western trench (Sector NO 01) and one with collapsed roofing tiles in the eastern trench (Sector NO 11). In all probability, this one-time destruction of the eastern section of the complex should be related in time to the first (earlier) level of destruction in the western segment. In both places this layer is accompanied by traces of burning and charcoal. Taking into consideration the

location of the discussed trenches on the site, one can assume that the finds attest to a fire that consumed a major part of the earliest stone buildings of the fort. Several structures were apparently not reconstructed afterwards (in the eastern trench).

Architectural remains from the late Roman period are superimposed on the early remains, although no precise chronology can be established for them at the present stage of research. In the western trench, they comprise a section of wall with no traces of repair and in the eastern trench the remains of a corner room in the building of the presumed barracks, which was apparently renovated at least once.

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