

**RESUMPTION OF THE REGULAR ARCHEOLOGICAL  
EXCAVATIONS OF RATIARIA – NEW DATA, PROBLEMS  
AND PROSPECTS OF THE STUDIES IN EARLY  
BYZANTINE ERA**

The ruins of the ancient city *Ratiaria* located on the outskirts of Archar village, Vidin district. The archaeological site is in the locality called „Kaletó“, near and partly under the “Turkish quarter” of Archar, very close and almost parallel to the southern coast of the Danube river.

Initially the settlement was founded as a roman military camp in the early beginning of the I c. AD. In *castellum* resided different troops, probably *vexillationes* of *Legio IV Flavia* and *Legio VII Claudia*, and also here it had a base of the Roman river military fleet<sup>1</sup>. After the Dacian Wars (101-106 AD) *Ratiaria* was promoted by Emperor Trajan in the status of roman colony: *Colonia Ulpia Traiana Ratiaria*<sup>2</sup>.

At the end of the III-IV c. AD *Ratiaria* becomes the capital of the newly established Roman province of *Dacia Ripensis*. Then in the city again resided military troops. A few *vexillationes* of *Legio XIII Gemina* came by *Apulum*, nowadays Alba Iulia, Romania<sup>3</sup>.

In the early Christian era (late IV – VI c. AD) *Ratiaria* became bishop's and metropolitan center. The first bishop recorded in the local historical sources is *Paulinos* (340 AD). Another ratiarian bishop – *Sylvester* was participant of the Serdica council of the year 343 AD, and was remembered like one of the greatest defenders of the Nicæan dogma. But the most prominent figure in the local clergy in the Late Antiquity was *Palladius* – who was the Bishop of the city from year 346 to 381 AD. He is known historical figure, one of the most active supporters and theorists of *Arianism* in the late Roman Empire<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> V. Dintchev. *RATIARIA. From Colonia Ulpia Traiana Ratiaria to Anastasiana Ratiaria*. – In: R. Ivanov (ed.). *The Roman Cities in Bulgaria*. Vol. II, forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> *CIL*, III, 14 499.

<sup>3</sup> *Not. Dign. Or.*, XLII, 38.

<sup>4</sup> V. Dintchev, *forthcoming*, op.cit.

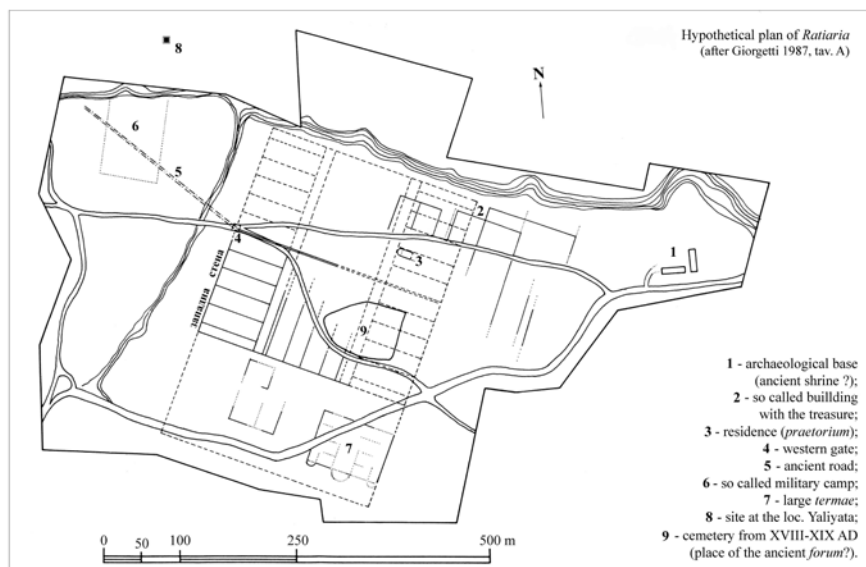


Fig. 1.1. General plan of *Ratiaria* from 1987, after D. Giorgetti 1987, tavola A;

Сл. 1.1. Општи изглед локалитета Ратиариа из 1987, по Д. Ђорђети 1987, табла А;

Development of the city in early Byzantine era continued under Emperor *Justinian I* (527-565 AD), when *Ratiaria* is referred in sources like the main city of *Dacia Ripensis – metropolis*<sup>5</sup>. According to *Procopius*, *Ratiaria* is one of the centers in which Justinian the First made active restoration and fortification works<sup>6</sup>.

The first explorers of *Ratiaria* at the end of the nineteenth century are Felix Kanitz, Vatslav Dobruski and Boris Dyakovich. They published some of the first studies on the city and locate accurately the ruin of Roman colony<sup>7</sup>. Exactly from *Ratiaria* originate some of the most attractive and impressive finds in the exhibition of the National Museum of Archaeology in Sofia – Anatolian garland *sarcophagi*, statues, jewelry and gold treasures<sup>8</sup>. In the period from year 1958 to 1962 under the guidance of prof. V. Velkov conducted the first planned archaeological researches in the area of *Ratiaria*<sup>9</sup>. The excavations continue

<sup>5</sup> Hier., *Synecd.*, 655, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Procop., *De aedif.*, IV, 6, 24.

<sup>7</sup> F. Kanitz. *Donau Bulgarien und der Balkan*, I. Leipzig, 1879, 96-99; В. Добруски. *Археологически издирвания в Западна България*. – Сборник за народни умотворения, наука и книжнина, 2, 1890, 22-31; Б. Дякович. *Бележки по археологията на крайдунавска България*. – Сборник за народни умотворения, наука и книжнина, 16-17, 1900, 156-167.

<sup>8</sup> Б. Филов. *Избрани паметници на античното изкуство в България*, II. *Саркофаг от Рацария*. – Известия на българското археологическо дружество, I, 1910, 8-16; Г. Кацаров. *Римски находки при с. Арчар*. – Периодично списание на Българското книжовно дружество, 71, 1911, 853-862, 1911.

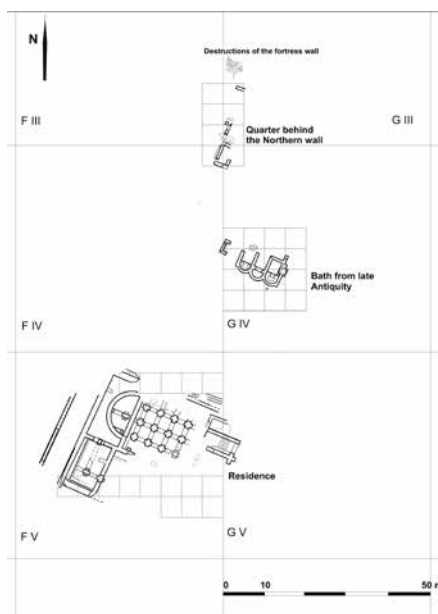
<sup>9</sup> V. Velkov. *Ratiaria (Eine römische Stadt in Bulgarien)*. – Eirene (Praha), V, 1966, 155-175.

in 1976 and they are organized by the Institute of Archaeology by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and Regional Museum in Vidin. Later in 1978 – 1989 studies have already included international experts from the oldest Italian university in Bologna<sup>10</sup>. Today, assessing the level of studies after the period of almost century and a half studies, in fact it can't be said that a significant part of the ancient city have been investigated. But we have a plenty of different publications<sup>11</sup>.

In the early 90s of the twentieth century excavations in *Ratiaria* stopped and then for a quarter century ancient ruins are subjected to continuous treasure-hunting invasion, which acquires unseen elsewhere dimensions.

In 2013 regular archaeological excavations of the Roman colony *Ulpia Ratiaria* resumed<sup>12</sup>. Even the first two campaigns (2013/14) led to the discovery of significant permanent building constructions, architectural complexes, archaeological structures

and contexts – the largest building with representative character, called „Residence“, where were discovered many new sectors, different from these studied in the 80s; completely unknown baths from late antiquity; buildings located behind the north wall (see: general plans of *Ratiaria* from 1987 – **fig. 1.1** and newfounded complexes, studied since 2013 – **fig. 1.2**).



General plan of the new founded structures in the central part of *Ratiaria*

Fig. 1.2. General plan of the new excavated sectors in the central part of *Ratiaria*, since 2013;

Сл. 1.2. Општи план испитиваних сектора локалитета Ратиариа, из 2013;

<sup>10</sup> D. Giorgetti. *Res ad topographiam veteris urbis Ratiariae perinentes. Prolegomeni all' urbanistica della città romana*. – *Ratiariensia*, 3-4, 1987, 33-84, tav. V-XXII, A-E.

<sup>11</sup> Ђ. Атанасова. *Археологически проучвания на западната крепостна стена на Раџиариа (1976-1985)*. – *Известия на музеите в Северозападна Българија*, 23, 1995, 59-85; G. Kuzmanov. *A Residence from Late Antiquity in Ratiaria (Dacia Ripensis)*. – *Archaeologia Bulgarica*, IV, 2000, 1, 27-43; J. Valeva. *An Audience Hall Mosaic from Ratiaria: a Lost Picture of Orpheus?* – *Archaeologia Bulgarica*, IV, 2000, 1, 45-57; G. Kouzmanov, J. Valeva. *Mosaïque d'une salle d'audience de Ratiaria (Dacia Ripensis)*. – In: D. Paunier, Chr. Schmidt (eds). *La Mosaïque Greco-Romaine, VIII. Actes du VIII<sup>ème</sup> colloque international pour l'étude de la mosaïque antique et médiévale (Lausanne/Suisse/ 6-11 octobre 1997)*. Lausanne, 2001, 355-368; Г. Кузманов. *Римски и кьсноантични лампи от Раџиариа*. – *Годишник на археологическия институт с музей*, II, 2002, 242-261.

<sup>12</sup> *Excavations have been restored after the initiative of the Ministry of Culture and NAIM-BAS by the following archaeological team: Prof. Dr. Zdravko Dimitrov (NAIM-BAS), Head, Prof. Dr. Ivo Topalilov (Shumen University) and Ilko Tsvetkov (of Rome Vidin), deputy heads*

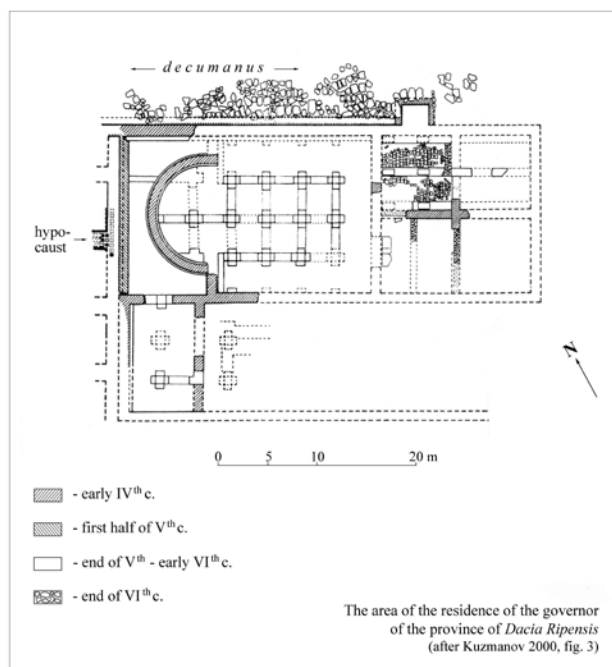


Fig. 2. Plan of the "Residence", after Kuzmanov 2000, fig. 3;

Сл. 2. План "Резиденције", по Кузманову 2000, сл. 3;

At the very beginning of the study our team focused on the clearing up the destructions from the last 25 years in the area of the largest ensemble studied in previous excavations – so-called "Residence" (**Fig. 2**). This complex was already mentioned by the first researchers as a great architectural complex of a representative type, probably the residence of the governors of the province of *Dacia Ripensis*<sup>13</sup>. The aim of our first excavations here was to determine the extent of devastation of this major ensemble within the Roman colony of weather and treasure - hunter interventions.

In "Residence" during the 80-ties of the twentieth century were made serious conservation and restoration works. For example: masonry over the facing the main walls pillars; concrete and mortar caps on the upper surface of the walls, arches and piers; complete restoration of two arches, which representing to the visitor's possible reconstruction of the architectural complex.

Today the situation on the terrain is as follows:

- Arches are seriously threatened by the complete destruction;
- Some of the facing the walls pillars are „broken“ and some of them are fallen on the field;
- Concrete caps crumble and the walls under today are exposed to direct weathering. In their construction enter water in winter and after freezing this leads to a systematic demolition of structures.

Except the urgent conservation-restoration activities around the pillars of "Residence" we conducted some new studies in the western and northern parts of the complex.

<sup>13</sup> Kuzmanov 2000, *op. cit.*, 27-43;

In the northern areas of “Residence” were found preserved parts of the mosaic panels of the period of late Antiquity (**Fig. 3**). Above and below the *tesserae* we found a good archaeological situation. There are four very clear visible different archaeological contexts – floor levels corresponding to the different stages of the life of “Residence”.

Important data for reconstruction of the whole building were discovered in the eastern part of the complex, where by the sondage studies were found perfectly preserved areas of the *hypocaust* system (**Fig. 4**). Among the most important results of our new studies are the newest data from the western outer walls of the complex, which indicates excellent reconstruction of “Residence” in their earlier periods and also data from new found buildings (unpublished in 80-ties), developed in the west direction from “Residence” and probably dated to the latest stage of the existence of city (VI c. AD). In the southwest corner of the complex was even discovered a new wall, which continues west Residence wall to the south and outside of the boundaries of general plan, according to the excavations of G. Kuzmanov<sup>14</sup>. Obviously the problems with the study of the complex known as „Residence“ are not clarified. As the general plan of the whole representative ensemble and the stratigraphy and different construction periods have a number of uncertainties. Our new studies should clarify these problems in the next archaeological seasons.

Besides the „Residence“, in 2013 we need to intervene urgently in late Roman / early Byzantine *termae*, almost completely destroyed by the looters in



Fig. 3. Detailed picture of the preserved parts of mosaic floor in the northern rooms of the Residence, excavations in 2014;

Сл. 3. Детаљан изглед сачуваних делова подног мозаика на северној страни Резиденције, ископавања из 2014;



Fig. 4. *Hypocaust* system in the Residence, sondage from 2014;

Сл. 4. Хипокауст систем Резиденције, сонда из 2014;

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, fig. 3.



Fig. 5. General view of the late antique bath in *Ratiaria*, found 2013 – view from the north;

Сл. 5. Општи изглед позноантичког купатила, Ратиарија, пронађено 2013 – изглед са северне стране



Fig. 6. Detailed picture of the *suspensura* in room Nr. 1 of late antique bath;

Сл. 6. Детаљи суспензуре у соби бр.1 позноантичког купатила

the last few years (**Fig. 5**). In September 2013 in the field were only visible two *exedrae* of this bath, severely damaged in its walls because of the huge activities by bulldozers.

After a complete study of the baths in 2013 - 2014 we found that preserved part of *suspensura* and a few small *piscinae*. Overall the bath is oriented after the main urban plan structure from the late antique period. The complex is located just one *insula* northern from the complex of “Residence”. Today there are three southernmost rooms that contained the pools with warm water. We could call them *caldarium*, although the bath is not developed in classical planning scheme for the Roman baths.

These three rooms ended with *absidal-shape* curves to the south and are located along the still unexcavated *decumanus*, passing south of the *thermae*. The rooms are tightly adhered to each other. The building technique is *opus mixtum*. The interior structures are built perfectly. There are seats in each of the *arc-shaped exedra*. Moreover, there are different levels in the building of the walls and floors. For example, the headquarters of the interior walls along and



in the framework of the *exedrae* are at a higher level than the running line of their porches inside the building center. In the outer walls of the rooms are built small pools - *piscinae*. They are made by oval - shape curves and in inner sides are coated with a hydrophobic coating.

In substruction bath has *hypocaust* system that was built from square and round brick fragments. In room № 1 best of all is preserved construction of *suspensura*. It is well visible in the inside area of the absidal - shape *exedra*, forming the so - called *caldarium* Nr. 1 (**Fig. 6**).

In the outer walls of the rooms are reserved few clay tubes. Their function is ventilation, not water supply.

Particularly important are the data from our excavations in terms of interior decoration of the baths of *Ratiaria*. There are marble slabs, carved from imported *Aegean* or *Proconnesian* marble. The plates are undoubtedly flooring segments (according to the parameters and the average thickness of the parts). These slabs most likely litter floor levels in porches and vestibules of the *thermae*.

Another important element that determines the flooring of the late antique bath are ceramic fragments of mosaics that covered the inner space of the ensemble.

Within the boundaries of the bath we found brilliantly executed Ionic base from so - called *Attic type* (**Fig. 7**). This architectural detail was part of the mural pillar (i.e. facing the walls construction). These are architectural elements that are often used in the facades of the *Roman thermae*, their lobbies and corridors and passages – such these from the baths in *Odessos* and from different buildings in *Marcianopolis*<sup>15</sup>. Therefore this Ionic marble detail is probably also from this bath building.

Unfortunately, all these elements of interior – marble slabs, segments of ceramic floors, architectural details – were found split and broken on the field, not *in situ*. *Hypocaust* system is also completely dug by the looters. The overall condition of the architectural remains now is very serious. The walls are undermined and highly eroded. One of little pools (*piscina*) is moved away from its original location.

After urgent temporary restoration and conservation strengthening in some of the walls that were to collapse, we preserved whole bath with wooden shields. In some places were made totally new connections of the walls,



Fig. 7. Ionic base from so-called Attic type, found in the western sector of late antique bath;

Сл. 7. Јонски капител тзв. атичког типа, пронађен у западном сектору позноантичког купатила

<sup>15</sup> З. Димитров, *Архитектурна декорација в провинција Долна Мизия (I-III в. сл. Хр.)*. Софија, 2007, кат. Nr. 19, 20, 22, 23.

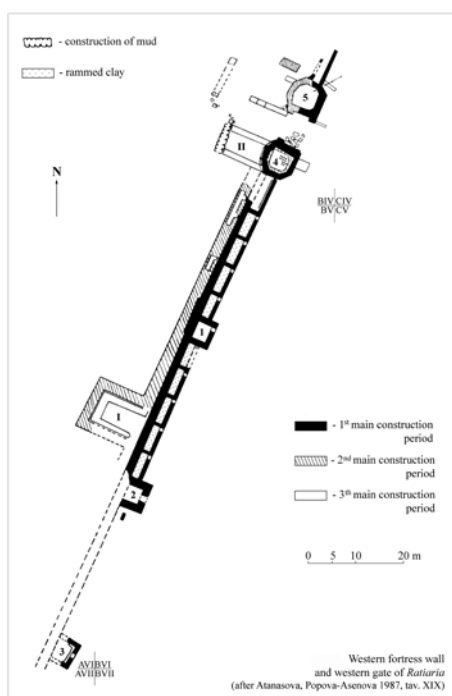


Fig. 8. General plan of the excavated sector of the western fortification wall and gate with its towers, after Atanasova, Popova-Asenova 1987, tav. XIX;

Сл. 8. Општи план испитиваног сектора зида западне фортификације и улаза са кулама, по Атанасовој, Попова – Атанасова, 1987, табла XIX;

archaeologically. Unfortunately we only came across the main trench of fortification system. The stratigraphic profiles convinced us that it is not only because of treasure - hunter interventions, but also after extracting stone materials from the ruins in late Ottoman period and even later, when the modern village of Archar was constructed. This is the main reason for the total lack of the stone remains of the fortification wall in this northern sector. In this sector „North“ (*quarters in the general plan of town: G III-IV and F III-IV*), we come across a part of the trench of the curtain wall of the fortress. As with the western wall, it is about 2.20 m wide.

Important archaeological data received from several small buildings that were preserved clinging behind the northern wall in the same quarter. These

filled with mortar. Late antique baths in *Ratiaria*, situated north of „Residence“, urgently needs of new serious conservation and restoration project.

### *Fortification of Ratiaria*

These are the architectural structures of *Ratiaria* which give the best opportunities for transformation of the site in a real existing tourist accent in Vidin district. Since the year of 1976 the western wall and the west gate are well-known. The gate is flanked by two very attractive heptagonal towers<sup>16</sup>.

The building history of the fortification walls of *Ratiaria*, most powerful *castellum* along the Bulgarian part of the Lower Danube limes zone, is extremely complicated. The wall has three building stages, additions from the west and extensions in general plan (**Fig. 8**). The towers are completely unique – they have a heptagonal shape. There are secret passages, data for *cataractas* and other constructions, like *poternes*.

In 2014, our new excavations reached the Northern wall of the city, which so far not been studied

<sup>16</sup> J. Atanasova, A. Popova-Asenova. *Il muro di cinta di Ratiaria, lato occidentale. Ricerche archeologiche 1976-1985*. – *Ratiariensia*, 3-4, 1987, 85-96, tav. XIX; Џ. Атанасова 1995, *op.cit.*, 59-85; Dinchev, *forthcoming*, *op. cit.*, fig. 7-8.



Fig. 9. Foundations of the buildings from the northern quarter behind the northern fortification wall of *Ratiaria*;

Сл. 9. Основа грађевина на северној страни иза северног зида фортификације Ратиарија



Fig. 10. The buildings' walls outside, constructed of adobe and coated with raw clay;

Сл. 10. Зидови грађевина са спољне стране, конструисани од ћерпича и глине



Fig. 11. Early Christian tomb with semi-cylindrical vault from Yaliata necropolis – whole complex;

Сл. 11. Ранохришћанска гробница са полуцилиндричним сводом, Јалиата некропола – изглед целокупног комплекса



Fig. 12. The tomb – detail of the interior space, visible on the terrain.

Сл. 12. Гробница – детайл унутрашњег простора, видљиво на терену

are small Late Antique buildings that probably were related to the fortification. Between the buildings there are small passages. The most interesting facts here are two:

- the building of foundations in these houses. They are entirely of boulders that were crammed into pre-carved trenches of walls (**Fig. 9**). In their height the walls of these small buildings are constructed of adobe and then coated with raw clay outside (**Fig. 10**);
- these are the first completely preserved intact stratigraphic data from new excavations of Ratiaria. In stratigraphic profiles and cross-sections of these buildings are clearly visible ruins of adobe walls and the burning down of this area of the city, which according to the numismatic material dated before the middle of the V c. AD<sup>17</sup>, which we believe confirms, according to archaeological methodology, the written historical evidences of serious and very destructive invasions of Huns from AD 441-444.

After the excavations and studying of the entire fortification walls of *Ratiaria*, especially from these from the west, we have real possibility to reconstruct, preserve and greatly stand out over the field the constructions of *curtains* and towers. Actually, they have substantial original preservation in height.

In chronological frames of the early Byzantine era (IV-V c. AD) from the area of „Kaletо“ there are many new problems and prospects for the research.

1. **Necropolis in “Yaliata” district.** This is the northern necropolis of *Ratiaria* located along the Danube river and entirely under the terrace of the northern wall of ancient city. In the zone of the so-called “Roman villa” of the II century AD, studied by Italian colleagues in the 80s of XX century, but still unpublished<sup>18</sup>, are now well preserved two early Christian tombs with semi-cylindrical vaults (**Fig. 11, 12**);

<sup>17</sup> Under the mud layer destruction and burning down no later coins that these from the rule of Theodosius II (408-450).

<sup>18</sup> Giorgetti 1987, *op. cit.*, tav. A, see: Nr. 8.

2. The *small bath* behind the western wall and newly discovered *late ancient baths*, north of the “Residence”, are another serious opportunity to continue studies of Ratiaria in the early Christian period and Late Antiquity as a whole;

3. *Residence* – this is the main complex, whose essence, separate construction periods, stages of functioning and general plan are not fully explored and clarified;

4. *Buildings and quarters behind the northern wall*. In 2014, we were hopeful and even motivated by the fact that near the walls are still preserved intact architectural structures covered by their authentic cultural layers, although the treasure-hunter intervene. Therefore, studies of the northern districts should be able to contribute to some new data on the stratigraphy of the Late Antiquity *Ratiaria*.

In this respect, as key issues in the future studies of early Byzantine era of Ratiaria outlines several key points:

- The low level of studies, which should be offset by annual active field campaigns;

- Interpretation of “Residence” and accompanying complexes (including newfound baths to the north of it) is the most important (yet) scientific problem facing the researchers of *Ratiaria*, especially in terms of Late Antiquity;

- There are serious historical sources of an Episcopal center from the early Christian era in *Ratiaria*. But today on the field in ancient city have not been found archaeological evidence for the episcopate „Ratiaria“. Even absent any evidence of at least one religious complex from the early Christian era. It is also right to be seek data of Episcopal complex on the field – an representative building and related houses around;

- The most serious scientific question, however, in chronological frame of the early Christian *Ratiaria* is on overall development and urban planning of the area. Today, it is totally unclear what were even outlines of the fortified area of the late antique city. The environs of *Ratiaria* are also completely unknown territory: the suburbs of north and south, production centers (today we have data just for the few ceramic kilns to the western wall), necropolis from the west and north, fortified sites in vicinity, satellite villages and a number of other elements of the urban structure of the provincial capital of *Dacia Ripensis*.

Another important point, which is enshrined in the work program of studies of the archaeological team is to track and localize early legionary camp *Ratiaria – castellum legionis* of the 1st c. AD. Today, based on our two-year studies, we are fully convinced that early military camp is not located in the area of „Kaleto“, which is developing the late antique city. It's not placed under the construction of „Residence“, its surroundings or to the west. Possibility to have remains from the military camp under the eastern areas of „Kaleto“ or even under modern village Archar (in Turkish quarter) still remains at large, but, of course, this requires further archaeological researches.

Здравко Димитров  
НАСТАВАК РЕДОВНИХ АРХЕОЛОШКИХ ИСКОПАВАЊА ЛОКАЛИТЕТА  
РАТИАРИА – НОВИ ПОДАЦИ, ПРОБЛЕМИ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ СТУДИЈА  
РАНОВИЗАНТИЈСКОГ ПЕРИОДА

Рушевине античког града Ратиариа налазе се у непосредној близини села Архар у области Видина. Археолошки локалитет се налази у области „Калето“ недалеко од турског кварта села Архар, у непосредној близини реке Дунав.

Ратиариа је била један од важних центара у антици у области Доњег Дунава. Почетком првог века нове ере у Ратиарији се налазио војни логор, а потом за време цара Трајана насеље је добило статус римске колоније. Тек потом припало је провинцији *Dacia Ripensis*. Град представља један од најдуже проучаваних урбаних целина у Бугарској. Наиме, изучавања су започета још крајем деветнаестог века и трајала су све до осамдесетих година двадесетог века. Нажалост истовремено је реч о целини чији археолошки стратуми су донекле оштећени активностима „трагача за благом“ који ни у једном смислу нису археолози. Њихове активности су започете пре 25 година. Срећом, стручна археолошка ископавања су настављена 2013. године. Током две кампање археолошких рекогносцирања испитане су северна и западна страна локалитета. Реч је о претпостављеној резиденцији провинције *Dacia Ripensis*. Конзерватори из Видина и Музеја у Софији обновили су конзерваторско-рестаураторске активности. Изузев централног архитектонског комплекса димензија приближно 5 ари, археолошки тим је започео нова испитивања и у другим деловима овог римског потом позноантичког града. Једна од најбоље очуваних архитектонских целина била је истражена до данас. У питању су терме из позноантичког периода. Лоциране су 30 метара од претпостављене резиденције. Састоје се од неколико комора које су поприлично девастиране данас. Откривени су такође и елементи хипокауста. Осим испитивања на овом месту такође је испитивана и северна страна. Том приликом је пронађено неколико грађевина из рановизантијског периода.

Археолошки тим је суочен са бројним проблемима у истраживању, такође недоумицама у вези са локалитетом. У северној некрополи су неопходна хитна испитивања, као и утврђивање хронологије грађења. Свакако, недоумице ће довести до разрешења будућа испитивања локалитета Ратиариа.