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**NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS OF THE LATE
ROMAN AND EARLY BYZANTINE CITY OF BONONIA
(PRESENT DAY TOWN OF VIDIN)**

In the summer of 2014 a team of archaeologists resumed the regular excavations of the Roman fortress of *Bononia*¹, situated along the Lower Danube (fig. 1).

This military and civil centre is one of the most important ones in the system of the Roman Empire, especially as far as the defence of the Lower Danube limes is concerned. It is *Bononia* that was the first larger settlement built by the Romans on the Danube after the narrow Iron Gates gorge, situated between the Carpathian Mountains and the Balkan Mountain Range. We can safely assume that the commonly used term “Lower Danube limes of the Roman Empire” starts exactly at this point.

At present the ruins of Roman *Bononia* lie under the central quarter of the contemporary town of Vidin, called “Kaleto” (the “Fortress”). So far very few archaeological excavations have been carried out on the site and these have always been rescue excavations. All the excavation works have been led by the fellow colleagues from the Regional Museum of History in Vidin (RMH-Vidin). These were mainly excavations in different building plots in the most rapidly developing town in north-western Bulgaria.

In the 60's and 70's our colleague Yordanka Atanassova unearthed several buildings in the Kaleto quarter in the town of Vidin, where a lot of construction work was going on during the time of socialism. She registered a building with thermal elements (either a public or private bath dated to the II – III c. AD), which is entirely in the newly developed plots with panel blocks of flats (the present day blocks No 27 and 29 of Georgi Benkovski residential estate) in an

¹ The term “castellum”, strictly characterizing the functions of the settlement, is widely used in reference literature. In this paper I use also the general scholarly concept of “Roman fortress” (i.e. settlement having both military and city-civil functions). This is so due to the fact that while in the Early Roman period – until about the principate of Trajan - military fortresses were usually separate from the civil settlements, during the Late Antiquity (the most prominent phase of the development of *Bononia* and the phase archaeologists are currently exploring) the functions were already quite mixed. This is why I often believe that it's more appropriate to use the commonly accepted general term – Roman fortress.



Fig. 1 Map of the Lower Danube limes with the location of *Bononia*.

Сл. 1 Карта границе доњег Дунава и Бононије

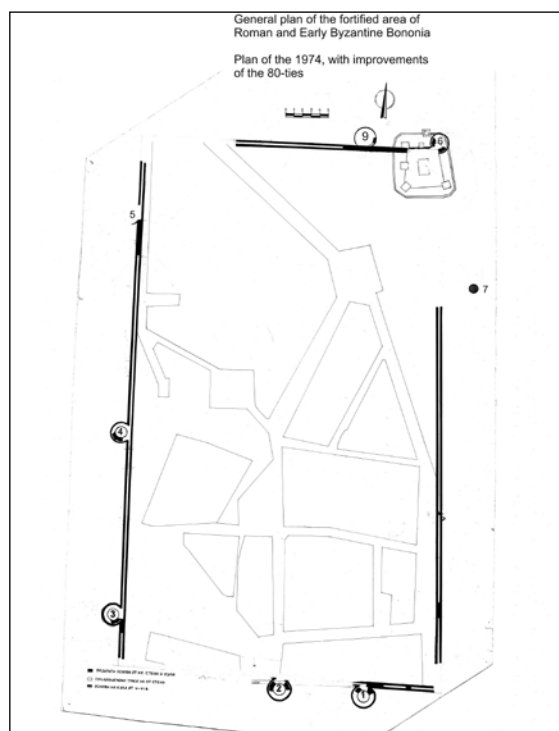


Fig. 2. General plan of *Bononia* from the 70's of the XX c. (as per the excavations of Y. Atanassova).

Сл. 2 Генерални план Бононије из седамдесетих година XX века (по ископавањима Ј. Атанасове)

insula of the inland *Bononia*, which is situated in Tsar Assen I Street, to the south of the present Synagogue of Vidin, and a „richly decorated monumental public building”, which is situated right under the very foundations of the Jewish temple². Even fragments of mosaic floors and intact fluted bronze vessels were uncovered in these plots. Another substantial architectural structure from *Bononia* was registered on Knyaz Boris I Street, the central street in the Kaletu quarter, near the present day barracks, at the crossing with Kazarmena Street, where the northern quarters of the Roman city and the fortification wall were most probably located.

Most surviving data refers to the fortification walls and the related defence towers of *Bononia*. During various digs organised by the Museum nine defence towers were registered – two on the north and the south wall each, four on the western wall and one on the Danube bank. As a result of the individual rescue excavations, carried out by Y. Atanassova in 1974,

² Й. Атанасова, *Античната Бонония-Видин*, Вестник „Червено знаме”, 05.06.1968 г.

she produced a general plan of the defence system of *Bononia*³, which was supplemented and up-dated by the colleagues in the Museum in the 80's (fig. 2). The first edition of the general plan from the 70's (published again in the same format in 1999 and 2002), shows seven of the nine existing towers. The partial excavations were entirely of a rescue nature and the archaeologists were in no position to identify the overall form of the towers. Y. Atanassova described the (then) seven towers of *Bononia* as polygonal structures in height and in the form of a circle at the plinth and foundation levels and internally as well⁴. However not a single tower has been entirely uncovered, nor has any of the gates of the city been localized during any of the rescue excavations of the fortification of *Bononia* in the 70's and 80's. Most of the facades, the external sides of the fortification walls, have not been properly unearthed. None of the towers has been displayed. All of them have been partly uncovered during digs and after the rescue excavations they have been completely buried and buildings were erected on top of them. Only the tower under the medieval Baba Vida fortress – i.e. the north-eastern corner tower of *Bononia*, was partly displayed under the displays and reconstructions of the tourist site. The plan, which we present here with the improvements of the colleagues from the Museum in Vidin made in the 80's, shows eight towers – including the tower to the west of Baba Vida – Tower No 9⁵. Further, in the latest plan of *Bononia*, produced in 2014 (fig. 3) Tower No 8 is already shown. Unearthed in 1988 and now excavated by our new team this last found tower is shown for the first time at the general plan of *Bononia* (on the plan from 2014; the plans of 1999 (R. Ivanov) and 2002 (M. Ivanov) this tower is missing).

The tower, currently designated as Tower No 9, was not marked on the general plan of 1974 and therefore it does not figure in its re-published version by R. Ivanov (1999) and M. Ivanov (2002). In the early 80's it was known that this tower existed, but was not included in the documentation (as no digs were carried out on it). Therefore years later, after Tower No 8 was uncovered in 1988, it was assigned a bigger sequence number and is now shown as the last one to be found, although we were aware of its existence before Tower No 8 was found. In 1981 Y. Atanassova mentioned it for the first time – „the north-eastern corner tower is located under the feudal fortress of Baba Vida, and there is another flanking tower 70 meters to the west of it”⁶. This is how we come to know for the first time about the tower in the north wall, which has now been designated as Tower No 9.

³ Й. Атанасова, *Круглые и полигональные башни в Dacia Ripensis*, in: THRACIA, III. Primus congressus studiorum thracicorum, Serdicae 1974, 337-338, рис. 1; This plan is published again in: М. Иванов, *Бонония, Римски и ранновизантийски селища в България*, II. София 2002, 20, обр. 1, and in: Р. Иванов, *Долнодунавската отбранителна система между Дортикум и Дуросторум от Август до Маврикий*, София 1999, 171, обр. 33.

⁴ Й. Атанасова, 1974, 337-338; Й. Атанасова, *Античната Бонония-Видин*. – Вестник „Червено знаме”, 05.06.1968 г.

⁵ This plan we publish here also for the first time: which I owe thanks to my colleagues of RHM-Vidin – F. Filipova and I. Zvetkov.

⁶ Й. Атанасова, *Бонония и Кастра Мартис – крепости в Крайбрежна Дакия*, Вестник „Ведрина”, притурка на в. „Червено знаме”, бр. 4, 28 август 1981 г.



Fig. 3 General plan of *Bononia*, mapped on the contemporary Cadastre of Vidin – produced by the archaeological team (Dimitrov, Tsvetkov, Filipova, Roussev) in 2014.

Сл. 3 Генерални план Бононије, мапирано на данашњем Кадастре у Видину – нацрт археолошког тима (Димитров, Цветков, Филипова, Русев) 2014. године.

In 2014 the new archaeological team for *Bononia* gathered and up-dated all the data about the fortification system of the city. A new general plan was produced afterwards, which was combined with and superimposed upon the contemporary Cadastre of the town of Vidin (fig. 3). Hence today we can state the following: towers No 1 and 2 were situated along the south fortification wall (known in the 60's as the towers at Tereshkova block and at Edelweiss block); towers No 3, 4, 5 (known in the 60's as the towers at Lyulin block, Vela Piskova secondary school – currently Mihkalaki Georgiev school and Gurko Street) and the latest Tower No 8, localized in the 80's, are along the western wall; towers No 6 (displayed under Baba Vida) and Tower No 9 (last in the numeration, 70 metres to the west of the feudal fortress, currently buried in the Danube Park; not to be seen in: Atanassova 1974; Ivanov 1999 and Ivanov 2002) are part of the north fortification wall, and Tower No 7 was on the Danube bank, however it does not seem to belong to Roman or Early Byzantine *Bononia*⁷.

With regard to the military organization it must be noted that as early as the I c. AD *Bononia* belonged to the defence system of the Lower Danube limes. J. Beneš and M. Biernacka-Lubanska offered the hypothesis of a temporary military fortress of the *cohors I Cisipadensium*, at that as early as the I c. AD, on the basis of historical sources⁸. B. Gerov also raised the question of the Romanisation of the region and the early presence of military units on the spot.

⁷ The construction of this tower is radically different from the traditional Roman defence towers. Moreover, the bed of the fortress wall is completely at odds with the position of the tower No 7. Probably it was a watchtower for sentinels on the Danube bank of the Ottoman fortification of Vidin. Finding a coin of Emperor Anastasius in the region does not provide complete and reliable basis to identify it as part of the fortification of ancient *Bononia*.

⁸ J. Beneš. *Auxilia Romana in Moesia antiqua in Dacia*. Praha, 1978, 26-27, 95; M. Biernacka-Lubanska. *The Roman and Early-Byzantine Fortifications of Lower Moesia and Northern Thrace*. Wrocław, 1982, 57-58, fig. 1 and 230, No 25. M. Biernacka-Lubanska ascribed the fortification system of *Bononia* to the Roman Danubian fortresses along the limes – castellum.

There are inscriptions containing information about veterans in the immediate vicinity of Vidin – the village of Sinagovtsi⁹ and the village of Negovanovtsi, where there is evidence about a veteran, namely from *ala I Cisipadensium*¹⁰. In turn Professor V. Gerassimova similarly believes that this auxiliary unit was stationed continually in Moesia from the Flavian time onwards during the I c. AD and perhaps the early fortress of *Bononia* was constructed to accommodate it¹¹. The latest study on the problem concrete and synthesized facts about the early military presence in this area of the Lower Danube limes¹². The first deployment of *Cohors I Cisipadensium* was adopted during the late Flavian and Trajan (late I – beginning of II c. AD). But the positioning of the military troops in *Bononia* is not sure and should be clarified or reject by the future archaeological researches.

Although for the time being there are no field archaeological data, substantiating these facts, the Museum in Vidin indeed possesses a good deal of archaeological finds from the early period of the principate – the I – II c. AD. These mass ceramic artefacts (Roman ceramics and lamps), *terra sigillata* (quite a few non-published data and a small fragment of a bowl, type: Dragendorff 37), identified as Moesia Superior production (likely origin from *Viminacium*) and dated to the second third of the II c. AD¹³), an intact amphora (fig. 4)¹⁴ and architectural finds from Vidin (fig. 5)¹⁵, dated to the period of the I – II c. AD, not later than the reign of the Severans, however, regretfully some of them have not been published and analysed by experts yet. There is also a very rich collection of bronze art works from this period. It contains both portrait images and small bronze sculptures. In the town of Vidin a bronze head from a statue of a young man was found (fig. 6), and a statuette of Venus (fig. 7), statue groups and individual figures of Heracles were also found¹⁶. The presence of finds so

⁹ Б. Геров. Романизмът между Дунава и Балкана, част I, От Август до Хадриан. (= Годишник на Софийския Университет, Историко-Филологически Факултет – том XLV, 1948/49, кн. 4). София, 1949, с. 76, № 32 – epigraphic data about a veteran from Legio IV.

¹⁰ *ibidem*, p. 78-79, No 41 (= CIL XVI, 39) – inscription – military diploma from 93 AD.

¹¹ В. Герасимова. Дислокация на римските помощни войски в провинция Мизия от 44 – 86 г. от н.е. – Археология, 4, 1969, стр. 24.

¹² Florian Matei-Popescu. The Auxiliary Units in Moesia Superior and Dacia. A Review and an Update. – in: Proceedings of the 22nd International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies, Ruse, Bulgaria, September, 2012. Sofia, 2015, 407-418; see page 409.

¹³ A. Dimitrova-Milčeva. Terra sigillata und dünnwandige Keramik aus Moesia Inferior (Nordbulgarien). Sofia, 2000, 67, Nr. 338, tab. 5.

¹⁴ Й. Атанасова. Антична Бонония – Видин. в. „Червено знаме”, 05 юли 1968 г., the continuation from the previous newspaper – published as „Clay Amphora from the 5th c.”. The dating of the amphora does not go beyond the mid-II c. AD.

¹⁵ Ionic capital, column detail unearthed during construction works near the Cross-like barracks in 1962, i.e. exactly in the centre of *Bononia*. The detail follows entirely the Anatolian decorative patterns for ornamentation of the Ionic capitals and dates quite likely to the late II – early III c. AD, an early Severan detail. Published in: Z. Dimitrov. Architectural Decoration in the Colony of *Ulpia Ratiaria*. – in: Proceedings of the 22nd International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies, Ruse, Bulgaria, September, 2012. Sofia, 2015, 564-566, pl. 2.3, 2.4, cat. Nr. 14

¹⁶ Й. Атанасова-Георгиева, Д. Митова-Джонова. Антична пластика от Видин-

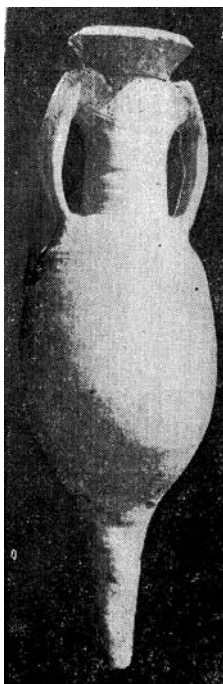


Fig. 5 Architectural detail – Ionic column capital, unearthed in Vidin during construction works in 1962 near the Cross-like barracks, i.e. in the centre of *Bononia*.

Сл. 5 Архитектонски детаљ – капител јонског стуба, пронађено у Видину током ископавања 1962. године близу крстообразних ископина у центру Бононије

Fig. 4 Whole clay amphora from *Bononia*, unearthed during excavations in Vidin.

Сл. 4 Керамичка амфора из Бононије, пронађено током ископавања у Видину

deserving to be displayed, the mass finds, the architectural elements and stone pieces of art from the period of the principate, together with the evidence commented by M. Biernadcka-Lubanska, J. Beneš and B. Gerov, suggest that our archaeological excavations are seriously lagging behind. To say the least there is no direct stratigraphic data from inside the fortress, which might evidence cultural layers from the period preceding the Late Antiquity.

All archaeological data from the rescue excavations to the present moment and our latest data as well, support the point that *Bononia* developed most rapidly during the Late Roman period. There is reliable evidence about a military unit residing here during this time span. The data from the historical sources have already been substantiated with archaeological finds. During this period an equestrian unit resided in the *Bononia* castle – *Cohors I Dalmatarum* as is known from epigraphic data¹⁷, whose presence has to do with the unearthed bricks with stamps bearing the familiar formula of the Late Antique province of *Dacia Ripensis*, dating from the second half of the IV c. AD. It reaches its peak during the reign of Emperor Constantine, when it became the strongest fortress along the Lower Danube bank. The fortified area is about 200 dca, and the fortification walls and the related towers are exceptionally solid. The average width of the fortification curtain is 4 metres at the level of the plinth rows, the towers are decagonal and their average internal diameter is about 20 m.

ския Музей. София, 1985. A bronze head from the late I – early II c. AD, p. 15-17 (Inv. No I - 905). Statuette of Venus, Claudian period, p. 64-65 (Inv. No 983). Bronze figures of Heracles, late II – III c. AD, p. 108-111.

¹⁷ Р. Иванов 1999, цит. съч., с. 30.



Fig. 6 Bronze head from a Roman statue of a young man (late I –early II c. AD), unearthed in Vidin.

Сл. 6 Бронзана глава римске статуе младића (крај I-почетак II века н.е.), пронађено у Видину



Fig. 7 Bronze statuette of Venus, unearthed during excavations in Vidin, 12cm high.

Сл. 7 Бронзана статуета Венере, пронађено током ископавања у Видину, висина 12cm

The summarized data on the contours of the *Bononia* fortress and the shape of its towers, provided by the Vidin archaeologist Yordanka Atanassova in the remote 1974, outline even then the approximate layout of the fortified area: rectangular space parallel to the Danube from the northeast to the southwest (fig. 2 and contemporary plan in fig. 3). Our explorations in 2014 confirmed the overall contours, and the adjustments to the general plan against the contemporary Cadastre showed little deviation from the existing streets in the town.

In 2014 our team of archaeologists from the National Institute of Archaeology with Museum by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (NIAM-BAS) and the Regional Museum of History-Vidin (RMH-Vidin) carried out the first regular archaeological digs of *Bononia* in the entire history of excavations¹⁸. The main purpose of this newly assembled team is to explore completely the entire western wall of the fortress – i.e. to have regular archaeological excavations, complete documentation, restoration, conservation and socialization of the architectural details, which have survived in good height from the Late Roman period. The long-term objective of this archaeological team, devoted to the exploration of *Bononia*, is to explore systematically this significant cen-

¹⁸ Assoc.Prof. Dr. Zdravko Dimitrov (NIAM-BAS) – team leader, Ilko Tsvetkov and Fionera Filipova (RMH-Vidin) – deputy team leader, and postgraduate student Nikolay Russev (NIAM-BAS) – team member.



Fig. 8 The beginning of the excavations of *Bononia* 2014 – inside Tower No 8.

Сл. 8 Почетак ископавања Бононије 2014. године - ентеријер куле бр. 8

tre from the Roman and Early Byzantine period by having regular annual excavations.

The excavations in July 2014 started around Tower No 8 of the defence system of the city. It is situated in the western fortification wall of the fortress and its dimensions are astonishing (fig. 8). The fortification wall is entire 4 metres wide, while the tower itself has an internal diameter of about 20 metres. The form of the defence facilities is unique for the Bulgarian lands – the towers are decagonal. The only analogue of this defence facility is the adjacent fortress – *Felix Romuliana* – at present near the town of Zaječar in Serbia¹⁹.

The reason to start by exploring the fortification system of Tower No 8 in the western fortification wall of *Bononia* was that this is where the previous field explorations of the Roman city finished in 1989²⁰. These were rescue excavations carried out urgently in the late 80's while digging to lay the foundations of a residential block of flats in this quarter of Vidin. Then the builders ran across the solid walls of the western fortification and they actually unearthed a new fortification tower in the wall. This is Tower No 8 according to the numeration of the defence towers of the Roman city²¹.

In the summer of 2014, after a 25-year break, our team resumed the archaeological excavations of Tower No 8 from the antique fortress of *Bononia*. Unlike any other previous excavations of the remains from this Roman centre

¹⁹ Ђ. Атанасова 1974, цит. съч., 337-344; М. Milinković. Stadt oder „Stadt“: Frühbyzantinische Siedlungsstrukturen im nördlichen Illyricum. – In: J. Henning (Ed.). Post-Roman Towns, Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium: Vol. 2 - Byzantium, Pliska, and the Balkans. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, New York, 2007, pp. 157-191; see page 198, Abb. 4; Gamzigrad: Gamzigrad: An Imperial Palace of the Late Classical Times (Ausstellungskatalog), Beograd, 1983.

²⁰ А. Николаева, И. Цветков. Спасителни разкопки в Антична Бонония. – в: АОР през 1988. Кърджали, 1989, 72-73; А. Николаева. Антична Бонония. – в: АОР през 1989. Кюстендил, 1990, 71.

²¹ Tower No 7, which is on the bank of the Danube, is somewhat problematic. It is most probably part of the Ottoman fortification of the town of Vidin. On the other hand Tower No 8 was unearthed behind the Mihalaki Georgiev secondary school on tourism (known as Vela Piskova before 1990) in 1988, the last tower, Tower No 9, is to the west of the mediaeval fortress of Baba Vida – to the territory of the former barracks of Vidin and it was the last one to be mapped in the new general plan of *Bononia*, which we produced together with Tsvetkov and Filipova in 2014.

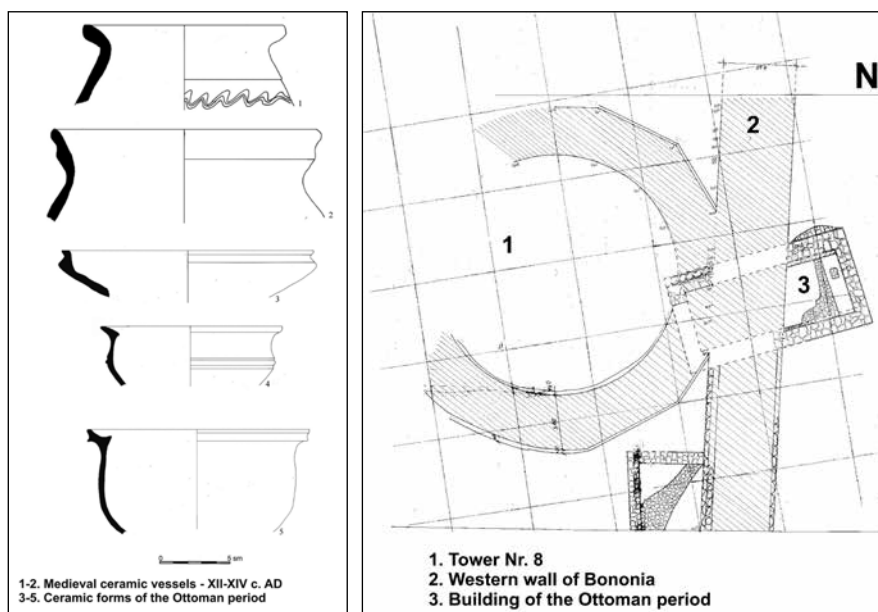


Fig. 9 Table ceramics from the Ottoman and mediaeval period (XII - XIV c.), unearthed inside Tower No 8.

Сл. 9 Стона керамика из отоманског и средњовековног периода (XII – XIV век), пронађено у кули бр. 8

Fig. 10 Building from the Ottoman period, erected on the ruins of the Roman fortress of *Bononia* and mapped on the general plan of Tower No 8 in 1989 (after A. Nikolaeva, I. Tsvetkov).

Сл. 10 Грађевина из отоманског периода, изграђена на рушевинама римске тврђаве Бононија и учртана на карти куле број 8 1989. године (по А. Никојалевој и И. Цветкову)

along Lower Danube, these were regularly scheduled digs. These excavations were planned in advance, were initiated by our colleagues in RMH-Vidin and were funded by Vidin Municipality.

The main purpose of the excavation works of Tower No 8 in 2014 was to finalise its archaeological exploration, to document it in drawings and photos, because the process started in 1988-1989, but has not been finalised yet²². The tower, as was mentioned above, was unearthed by construction workers during the construction of a residential block of flats in the „Kaleto” quarter in Vidin. The construction works were discontinued, however, during the rescue excavations the archaeologists were able to identify only the contours of Tower No 8 and part of the fortification wall, running around it.

Regular archaeological excavations are required for this site because Tower No 8 is most probably one of the two towers flanking the Western Gate of the strong Roman fortress of *Bononia*; more specifically it might be the

²² The plans of Tower No 8 from 1988-89 are from the digs of A. Nikolaeva and I. Tsvetkov (currently deputy team leader for Bononia). I am grateful to the follow colleagues from RMH-Vidin (also to Fionera Filipova, Director of the museum) for the provided data and available archive materials from the early digs of the Roman city.



Fig. 11 Facility inside Tower No 8 – a closet (?) from the Ottoman period.

Сл. 11 Садржај куле бр. 8 – ормар (?) из отоманског периода.



Fig. 12 Construction of the walls of Tower No 8 – *quadra* and brick rows.

Сл. 12 Конструкција зидова куле бр. 8 - *quadra* и редови опеке

tower on the north side of the gate. There are exceptional advantages in having regular excavations along the entire western fortification wall of *Bononia*, not only from a scholarly point of view, but likewise in terms of the potential it has for future display, because it falls entirely on municipal land which at present is not developed or inhabited. This makes an eventual future socialization of this side of the overall fortification of *Bononia* absolutely feasible and doable.

In consideration of these facts our archaeological team invested its initial efforts quite logically in the completion of the previous explorations from the 80's. Furthermore we intend to continue these excavations, confined at the time within the foundation pit for the building, with the purpose to localize the western gate of *Bononia*.

During the excavations, due to the limited funding, time and work force, we focused our attention in two sectors – inside Tower No 8, which has not been explored (fig. 8), and on two large sondages behind the internal side of the curtain of the western fortification wall. The purpose of the sondages is to obtain the stratigraphy and the overall chronology of the western fortification wall and to identify the earliest solid archaeological structures in this part of *Bononia*. The location of towers No 4 and No 5 was also ascertained in the contemporary

terrain, which differs substantially from the terrain of the rescue excavations of Y. Atanassova in the 70's of the XX c. It was thus established that there are only 68-70 metres between Tower No 4 and Tower No 8, which is currently being excavated, which is an unambiguous sign that the Western Gate of *Bononia* must lie exactly between these two towers. Apart from the metric data, the central part of the western wall falls precisely in this zone and bearing in mind that the fortress was of a regular form and altogether the footprint of the fortress follows strictly the layout of a Roman military fortress, it's only logical to expect the gate to be situated in this area also from a city development point of view.

Our new excavations inside Tower No 8 provided a magnificent opportunity to get a clear picture of the stratigraphic layers and establish the chronology of the whole facility.

Our approach was to obtain a stratigraphic profile inside the facility and to deplete the layers from both sides (fig. 8). The unusually heavy rain in July did not allow us to complete our exploration, so that during the next regular archaeological excavations these layers inside Tower No 8 must be finished.

We actually started working inside Tower No 8 from an absolutely preserved archaeological situation. We started depleting the cultural layers in depth from the contemporary ground surface in the „Kaleto” quarter; the layers have not suffered either from any construction works or from any other non-regulated intervention.

Solid layers from the Ottoman period and the Late Middle Ages were registered in the upper levels, literally under the modern remains from the XX c. The structure of these cultural layers is homogenous. It's worth noting that they are of a considerable depth. The light brown loose soil containing materials from the Ottoman period is over 1m deep at some places. Numerous fragments of the Ottoman ceramics, typical for the period, were unearthed and also a lot of remains from whole and fragmented ceramic tobacco pipes. The ceramics has both glazed ornamentation and ordinary ornamentation, without any coating. The shape of the unearthed fragments indicates rather table ceramics – cups, bowls, plates (fig. 9). The ceramic tobacco pipes have a particularly rich decoration and are very different in form – and diverse patterns.

These abundant remains from the Ottoman period of Vidin do not come as a surprise against the background of the numerous comprehensive historical sources about this stronghold in the north-western territories during the XVI-XIX c.²³.

²³ С. Ванков. Крепостната ограда на град Видин в началото на XVIII в. София, 1939; Д. Цухлев. История на града Видин и неговата област – Видинско, Кулско, Белоградчишко, Ломско, Оряховско, Врачанско, Фердинандско, Берковско и Крайна. София, 1932.



Fig. 13 Plan of Tower No 8 – overall view of the excavated sectors of the tower towards the end of the 2014 season.

Сл. 13 План куле број 8 – изглед свих ископаваних сектора и изглед куле крајем сезоне 2014.



Fig. 14 *Quadra* blocks from the plinth rows of Tower No 8, the western fortification system of *Bononia*.

Сл. 14 *Quadra* блокови из плинте куле број 8, западна страна фортификација Бононије



Fig. 15 The connection between Tower No 8 and the curtain – synchronic *quadra* construction.

Сл.15. Веза између куле бр.8 и истовремене квадра конструкције

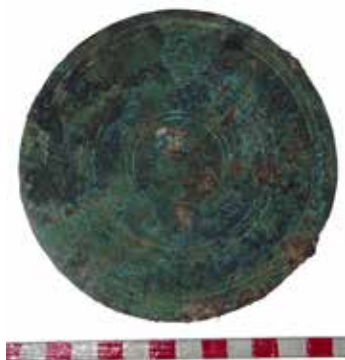


Fig. 16 Bronze mirror from the Roman period, unearthed in the Ottoman layers of Tower No 8.

Сл. 16 Бронзано огледало из римског периода, пронађено у отоманским слојевима куле број 8.

It is of interest that mediaeval ceramics from the XII – XIV c. is also found in the layers from the Ottoman period (fig. 9); however, we cannot definitively argue that a cultural layer of this period can be registered in the zone of the western fortification wall and the related Tower No 8. Besides, one whole pot from the period of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom was found among the abundant set of mediaeval ceramics. Taking a look at the general plan of the 1988-89 digs, which was up-dated and finalized by our team during the 2014 digs, a building can be noticed whose plan differs from the plan of the late antique buildings (fig. 10).

The building was constructed with

hewn stone taken from the ruins of the Roman fortress. Nonetheless the building, which has an altogether rectangular layout, is well founded and this is why it survived in a very good condition to the present day. Regretfully in 2014 we only managed to take pictures of this archaeological structure, but it was actually unearthed in 1988-1989, so that there was no documentation about it, a fact that makes it difficult to comment on other archaeological facts about it. Based on comparing the Ottoman layers inside Tower No 8 in the field to the general stratigraphic data of Tower No 8 and the related fortification wall we found that this is a building from the early Ottoman period of Vidin – perhaps the XV-XVI c.

Upon further exploration of Tower No 8 we came across a very interesting facility made from roof-tiles and bricks (fig. 11). It is small in size – a length of about 40-50 cm and it is appended to the internal wall of Tower No 8. The roof-tiles are from the Late Roman period and belong to the Corinthian type – i.e. these are Corinthian roof-

tiles. They were laid vertically in the layer and were firmly affixed to the tower wall. In terms of archaeological situation and stratigraphic position this context falls within the layer from the Ottoman period. Obviously at that time the ruins of Tower No 8 were visible in good height above the surface. The facility made from bricks and roof-tiles (originally dating from Late Antiquity) marks a reliable floor level inside the tower in this homogenous and monochrome layer from the Ottoman period. The level is not stumped, there are no traces of any floor, i.e. the inside of the tower was used on a rather primitive level; there is

no data at all about it being inhabited. This facility might have been a small storage – a closet or any other similar facility, which was connected with buildings from the Ottoman period in the vicinity.

A significant result of our excavation of Tower No 8 is the complete uncovering of the walls of the fortification facility. The walls of the tower were cleared and fully documented – both internally and externally. As a result the superstructures, the plinth rows and the foundations of the facility were photographed (fig. 12). The walls (as well as the whole fortress) were constructed in the *opus mixtum* technique. The foundations of Tower No 8 are very solid. They were dug deep in the Danube loess. They were

constructed of large split portions of boulders, but some of the boulders were semi-hewn. As a whole the construction technique in the foundations is the following: digging a deep trench in the solid continental sterile earth – loess. The boulders were thrown in the trench, however, in densely lined rows, and white mortar was poured over them afterwards (fig. 12). Two impressive plinth rows run above these foundations. They were made of the largest *quadrae* in the whole structure. Some *quadra* blocks are over 1 m in length, and the height of the rows is 35-40 cm. The facades of the boulders are perfectly cut vertically and thoroughly polished. The gaps between the *quadrae* are minimal, i.e. the boulders are tightly adjoined. There is no mortar poured here, and indeed there is no need of any. This adjoining substance was used during the transition from stone to brick construction, which however, is a fact in the superstructure of the curtain. The plinth sector of the fortification walls of *Bononia* is invariably made from bulky quadric blocks with dry gaps, having perfectly hewn parallel walls. Altogether the perfect levelling of the building structure is quite impressive. A second similar row of *quadrae* was laid on top of the above mentioned first plinth row of the superstructure (the first row above the foundation). It exemplifies the most typical architectural feature of the fortification in the whole of *Bononia*. This is the sloping plinth structure – plinths run aslant to the smooth fortification wall rising above them. It is exactly these second plinth rows that mark the transition from the plinth to the solid curtain wall above. Again these rows provide a perfect picture not only of the horizontal crossing of the *quadra* pieces, but also of the vertical lines in the individual corners in the polygonal towers. This explains why in Tower No 8 there are elaborately hewn blocks of stone as the one in fig. 12, (see the block with the marked scale of the drawing), having both vertical and horizontal crossings and in the end there are three different geometrical planes in the façade surface. This construction tech-



Fig. 17 The stratigraphic profile behind the western fortification wall – photograph of the cultural layers.

Сл. 17 Стратиграфски профил иза западног фортификационог зида – фотографија културних слојева локалитета.



Fig. 18 Bronze coins of Emperor Constantine the Great – commemorative, of the „Urbs Roma” type, from the 30’s of the IV c. AD, localized in the Roman layer immediately behind the western fortification wall.

Сл. 18 Бронзани новчић цара Константина Великог – коменоративни новчић типа „Urbs Roma“, из тридесетих година IV в. н.е., пронађен у римском слоју иза западног фортификационог зида.

of the tower to the west falls in a private plot of land and it is for the time being impossible to have excavations there. The display potential of the whole structure is worth dwelling upon. Currently, Tower No 8, observed from Tsar Assen I Street has a height of over 3 metres in *superstructio*, and the fortification wall in the adjacent building (preserved in the basement of a contemporary building at the junction of Tsar Assen I Street and Gurko Street) is at the level of the contemporary surface. Continuing along Gurko Street to the north one actually walks along the western wall of *Bononia*. Only 30-40 m after Tower No 8, in an old widow’s garden, some zones of the western fortification wall were uncovered, literally “sticking up” above the surface. Compared with the level of the Late Roman *Bononia*, this suggests a fully preserved height of at least 4 metres in case of eventual overall unearthing of the fortification.

In this context the enormous parameters of the structures are particularly inspiring – the fortification wall at the plinth level is 4 metres wide (Y. Atanassova mentioned even 4.30 metres in some of her studies), and the dimensions of the *quadra* blocks vary from 0,70-0,80 to over 1,00 meter in some places, as is the case with the above mentioned Tower No 8 (fig. 14). Several brick rows in the *opus mixtum* style survived as well in the northern part of tower.

nique contributes not only to the unique form of the towers in *Bononia*, but also to their unique outer appearance. They are definitely multi-functional defence facilities, but along with that they exhibit perfect workmanship and, in spite of their fortification function, they have certain purely architectural merits.

Based on this elaborate façade rustication of the *quadra* blocks of the towers in the Roman fortress of *Bononia* the towers have an overall decagonal form. This is the case with Tower No 8 too – decagonal externally and arch-like internally, closing an ideal circle. Geometrically these are towers constructed on the basis of an ideal circle inserted in a decagon.

In 2014 new complete photos were taken of Tower No 8. So, now we have the complete plan of the facility (fig. 13). Regrettably, the “tip”

The eastern part of Tower No 8 is tightly adjoined to the western fortification wall of *Bononia*. This was synchronic construction and this is perfectly evidenced by the overlapping *quadra* blocks (fig. 15). Moreover, whole boulders were inserted to connect the *quadrae*.

During the excavation seasons ahead the goal is to reach the Late Antiquity level in depth in Tower No 8. In 2014 we were able to find coins from the IV c. AD, several ceramic fragments and an especially interesting large bronze mirror (fig. 16; field inv. No 84 from 2014).

The excavations of the curtain pertaining to the tower from the western fortification wall of *Bononia* resulted in even better finds. We prospected two places behind the fortification wall itself, and our efforts lead to obtaining superb information on the chronology and the construction stages of the fortification wall.

We found layers from the Late Antiquity and were able to localize where the foundation of the wall was dug into the solid loess (the sterile ground of the Danube bank). These data are perfectly visible on the control stratigraphic profile behind the wall (fig. 17). The wall of *Bononia* was erected during the reign of Constantine the Great (307-337 AD), and more precisely in the 30's of the IV c. AD, if we can rely on the numismatic items. Thus the opinion of the first archaeologist studying the fortification system of *Bononia*, Yordana Atanassova, can be made more specific. In 1974 she suggested that the fortification walls of *Bononia* were built in the late III – IV c. AD²⁴. However, given the numismatic data, the stratigraphy and the mass ceramic finds, we can state that the wall of the western fortification was built upon purely unappropriated land in the 30's of the IV c. AD.

Bronze coins, which led us to propose bravely this precise dating, were found in a very large quantity (over 40 pieces), but the important point is that over 75% of the coins are from the reign of Emperor Constantine (307-337) or of his sons, Constantine II (337-340), Constans (337-350) and Constantius II (337-361). The later coins issues of the Emperor prevail. Other chronologic framework, derived from the numismatic finds, set the upper limit of the functioning of this zone of *Bononia* – the latest coins are from the reign of the emperors Arcadius (395-408) and Theodosius II (408-450) – i.e. till the end of the first half of the V c. AD. There are no coins at all dating to the VI c. Besides it must be noted that three coins, dating to periods before the IV c., were unearthed in the whole sector under examination. These are coins from issues of the following emperors – Hadrian (117-138: Inv. No 36), Claudius II *Gothicus* (268-270: Inv. No 60) and Aurelianus (270-275: Inv. No 79). These coins, representing the period of the principate in the development of *Bononia*, were found in the Late Roman layer in qu. 108, behind the western fortification wall.

At the foundations of the wall itself, in the trench at the bottom which was dug in the solid Danube loess, as well as in front of it, coins from the period of Constantine were found, which were already mentioned above in terms chronology. Predominantly they date to the 30's of the IV c. AD or later. Particularly

²⁴ Ѐ. Атанасова 1974, цит. съч., с. 337-338; Ѐ. Атанасова 1981, цит. съч., вест. „Ведрина”.

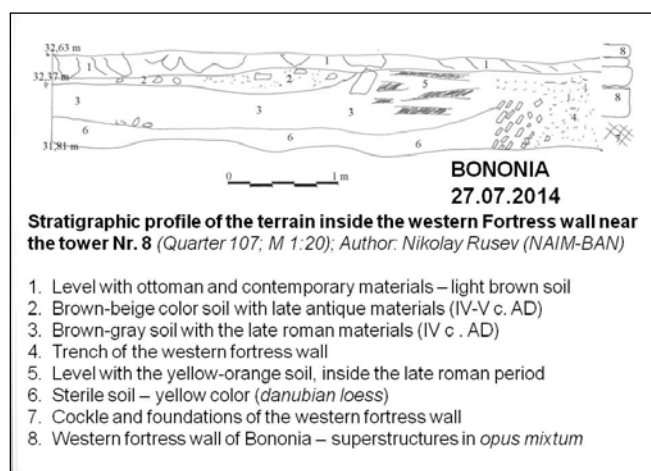


Fig. 19 The stratigraphic profile behind the western fortification wall – trench for the construction of the wall, floor and late Roman cultural layer (graphic image).

Сл. 19

Стратиграфски профил иза западног фортификационог зида – ров за конструкцију зида, под и позно римски културни слој (графичка слика).

impressive is the „Urbs Roma” issue, which is typical for the 30’s of the IV c. Three perfectly preserved items were found in the area behind the fortification wall, in the layer at its foundations (Inv. No 46, 54, 72 (all from qu. 107-108, Roman layer behind the wall)²⁵; fig. 18 a-d).

In this way based on the stratigraphic data and numismatic items, localized in solid preserved layers at the foundation of the fortification wall, we can safely date the construction of the trench and the foundation, hence also the earliest fortification facilities in *Bononia* during the first half of the IV c. AD, most probably during the reign of Emperor Constantine the Great. Most of the coins unearthed along the trench of the wall and at the level of the trench are from the 30’s of the IV c. AD.

Invaluable turned out to be the stratigraphic data of the south profile in the prospecting behind the fortification wall (fig. 19). It’s “graphic” distinctly visualizes the clear levelling of the terrain for the earliest construction. A line of broken vessels (mainly fragments of late antique amphorae – two mouths can be recognised – see fig. 20), *tegulae* and other fragments of construction ceramics, appears in the layer above it. This is the earliest reliable and accurately documented level behind the internal façade of the fortification wall of *Bononia*. This level can undoubtedly be dated to the first half of the IV c. AD.

Not only the mass ceramic material and the coin pieces, but also the finds that were uncovered during the excavations, date to and are particularly typical for this Late Roman period. A *crossbow type fibula* (with two well preserved onion-shaped knobs) stands out among all, and although it is fragmented, it is in a very good condition (fig. 21; Inv. No 30 from 2014).

Besides the specific stratigraphic data in the zone behind the fortification wall, two more findings are significant:

1. So far no buildings have been registered from the Late Antiquity right behind the wall, a fact that indicates some unappropriated land behind the fortification wall;

²⁵ Jubilee coins from the 30’s of the IV c. AD, all three of them come from different mints – Siscia, Thessaloniki and Cyzicus.

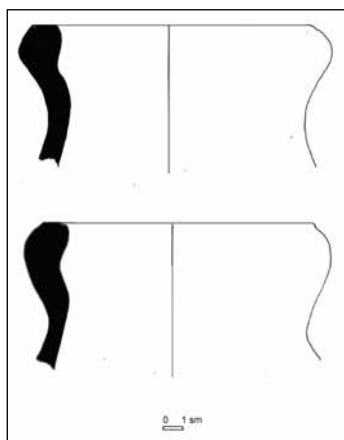


Fig. 20 Ceramics fragments from the IV c. AD – mouths of Late Roman *amphorae*, unearthed in the floor level layer behind the fortification wall of *Bononia*.

Сл. 20 Фрагменти керамике из IV в. н.е.– отвори позноримске амфоре, пронађени у нивоу патоса иза фортификацијског зида Бононије



Fig. 21 Crossbow type fibula (with onion-shaped knobs) from the excavations of *Bononia* in 2014.

Сл. 21 Крстасто-луковичаста фибула из ископавања Бононије 2014.

2. The fortification wall of *Bononia* in this western part was definitely built on an uninhabited terrain in the 30's of the IV c. AD. This means that there had been neither any earlier wall from the Late Roman period, nor any cultural layers from the principate period.

If we are to localize earlier layers of the inhabited *Bononia*, for instance from the period of the I – III c. AD, then we should not be investigating the zone around and below the western fortification wall. This gigantic facility with very solid walls, constructed in *opus mixtum* technique, is a completely new construction programme developed over a free terrain, not inhabited in times earlier than the IV c. AD.

Obviously the early fortress of *Bononia* and the structures from the Principate period must have been located in smaller plots inside the Roman fortress. Apparently the large scale construction works in Constantine's time produced a completely new, very strong fortress, which (to all probabilities) must have captured much larger areas of *Bononia*.

The general plan of the late antique *Bononia* is known from the Cadastre of the present day town of Vidin. There are nine towers marked in it (the ninth one, which is at the bank of the Danube, is questionable, as it likely dates to the Ottoman period of the fortress), as well as parts of the fortification walls, at the places where they were detected during construction works.

The greatest accomplishment during our 2014 digs was that we completed the up-date, digitalization and mapping of the antique ruins – the fortress towers and the zones of the curtains, which have been localized – on the new cadastre plan of Vidin (fig. 3). Thanks to the above we could expect to localize the western gate of *Bononia*, which is supposed to be located immediately to the south of the excavated Tower No 8.

Здравко Димитров
НОВА АРХЕОЛОШКА ПРОУЧАВАЊА КАСНОАНТИЧКОГ
И РАНОВИЗАНТИЈСКОГ ГРАДА БОНОНИЈА (ДАНАС ВИДИН)

Протеклих 70 година проучавања великог римског центра Бононија, у доњем току Дунава, претежно су имала карактер заштите и спасавања. Тако су, од архитектонских објекта овог великог римског логора и касноантичког урбаног центра, откривене одређене области заштитних зидина тврђаве, девет одбрамбених кула као и делови појединих зграда - терме, јавне објекти и други њима слични. Упоредо са овим, погрешно протумаченим и несистематизованим подацима чији је добар део необјављен до данас, појављују се много важнија и разноврснија археолошка открића. Тако су пронађени многи фрагменти статуе (као на пример, бронзана глава једног младића са почетка II века), читаве групе мале бронзане пластике, бронзаних скулптура - фигуре Венере и Херкула, керамика, архитектонски елементи, новчићи.

Током 2014. године после четвртвековног прекида, обновљена су проучавања римског војног и цивилног центра Бононија, који се по својој локацији распростире испод данашњег бугарског града Видина. После једног кратког периода археолошких ископавања, од само месец дана, пронађене су ископине куле № 8 које су биле део фортификационог система касноантичког дворца. Овом приликом констатован је отомански слој, керамички материјал из периода средњовековне Бугарске – XII до XIV век као и значајни остаци Бононије. Кула бр. 8 је у облику десетоугаоника са спољне стране и кружна у унутрашњости. Ширина зидова саме куле, као и суседних зидова на западној страни Бононије, су у опсегу од 3.60-4.00 метара. Пречник куле са унутрашње стране је нешто већи од 20 метара.

После извршених контролних стратиграфских профила установљено је да су културно-археолошки слојеви у основи западног фортификационог зида Бононије са почетка IV века после Христа. У темељној траншеји за постављање фундамената тврђавског зида били су откривени слојеви из епохе императора Константина Великог. Откривена и три примерка јубиларне серије URBS ROMA, исковани после 330 године, као и керамички фрагменти (са амфора) који датирају из исте епохе.

Два најважнија резултата нашег истраживања су:

-Прво: Установљено је да се испод и око западног зида и куле бр. 8 Бононије, немогу слојеве из ранијег периода, односно да се најстарије археолошке структуре римског логора принципата (I-III в.) налазе унутар касноантичке Бононије, те да су очигледно имали другачије контуре;

-Друго: Направљен је био потпуно нов, ажуриран генерални план Бононије из периода касне антике, у оквиру кога је снимљено свих девет кула, трасе зидова утврђења и позиција првих ископавања Бононије из 60-тих година XX века, када је унутар тврђаве био откривен археолошки материјал из раног римског доба - принципата.

Археолошка истраживања римског утврђења Бононија биће продужени, од стране нашег тима, и у наредним годинама. Основна питања и проблеми око којих ћемо концентрисати наше напоре су: потпуно откривање и обелодањивање западног зида, отварање западне капије тврђаве и отпочивање ископавања унутар римског града и војног центра.