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(HERAUSGEBERINNEN)

GAMZIGRAD-STUDIEN I

ERGEBNISSE DER DEUTSCH-SERBISCHEN FORSCHUNGEN IM UMFELD DES PALASTES ROMULIANA

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GERDA VON BÜLOW / SOFIJA PETKOVIĆ
(HERAUSGEBERINNEN)

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Landscape History Research in the Surroundings of the Archaeological Site *Felix Romuliana*

By Jana Škundrić-Rummel

INTRODUCTION

Despite a research tradition of more than 60 years at the site of *Felix Romuliana*, there has been little study of its hinterland[1]. The inclusion of the site into the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites and establishment of a Serbian-German research cooperation opened the possibility for new interdisciplinary researches, one being the initiation of a tandem dissertation project that joined for the first time archaeology and geosciences in studying the surrounding landscape at *Felix Romuliana*[2]. By means of conducting an archaeological survey supported by a geomorphological survey, we collected information that together with the results of ongoing excavations and geophysical research formed the basis for an evaluation of the landscape surrounding the site. Our data show that the history of the site and its surroundings is significantly more diverse than previously thought and directly reflect the way in which the economic and social landscape was transformed in both spatial and chronological terms. The survey revealed several patterns within the landscape, the most striking one being an apparent depopulation of the hinterland of the main site during its peak period of occupation – the Tetrarchy.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

In the late 3rd–early 4th century AD, major input in site development over a period of 20 years, generally believed to have been the result of direct involvement of the imperial family, resulted in the creation of a fortified palatial complex that continues to dominate the landscape to this day. In view of the practically unique combination of its well-preserved structural remains with no major subsequent building activities beyond the Late Antique period, past research primarily focused on the elaborate nature of the structures, quality of supporting artefacts, and presence in the historical record. As a result of this focus on such features, the site was often detached from its landscape context. Our goal was to identify to what extent changing cultural and political systems influenced the setting and meaning of the palace and what effects such developments had on its hinterland.

We also tried to address the theoretical and methodological concept that the site could have had central place role for a region hoping that it may be a helpful explanatory tool in assessing ancient settlement patterns. *Felix Romuliana* suggests itself as an ideal candidate for a case study of such kind as it is a site developed in specific political circumstances, shaped through direct reference to a source of status and wealth, possibly related to the emperor himself, and thus of key ideological value which is expected to generate a large amount of material input in its surroundings. And indeed, high-status occupation remains are abundant in the archaeological record of the main site[3] apparently making the site an obvious 'central place'. Yet this 'centrality' was often viewed as self-explanatory, and no actual studies were made to test the site's interrelation with local or regional developments. In other words, there is still no clear definition of what exactly constitutes the hinterland of this important site and how it was structured.

1 The first principal survey work on the area around *Romuliana* was carried out in 2001 (Centre for Archaeological research, Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade) with a small published report (see: Lazić et al. 2002).

2 The dissertation project was performed within the TOPOI Excellence Cluster in Berlin. For further information on the project see: http://www.topoi.org/group/a-i-4-topoi-1/ (Last access 11.06.2019).

3 See Živić 2010.

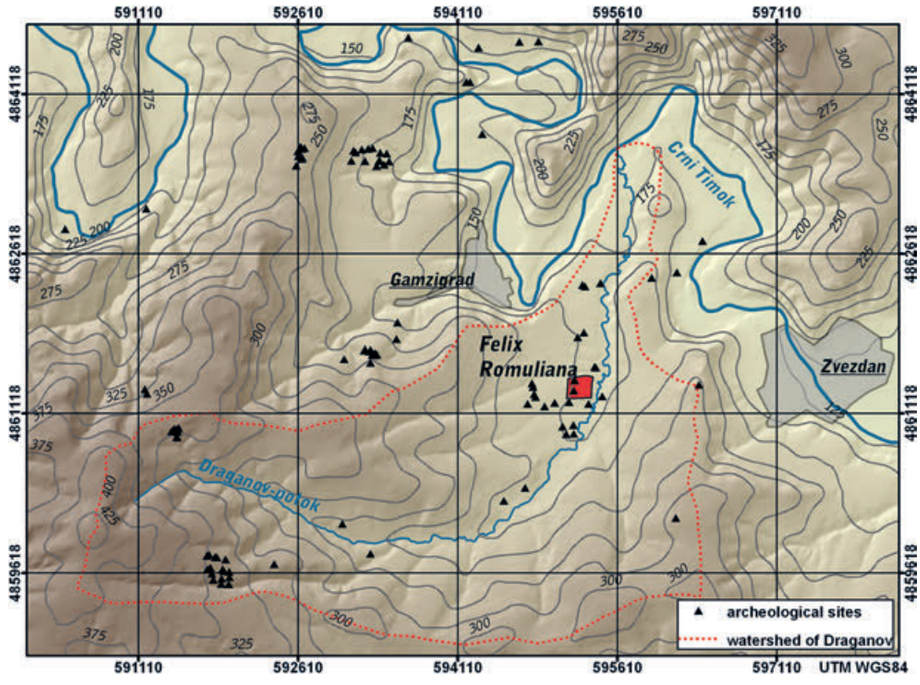

Fig. 1. Hinterland of *Felix Romuliana* and the area chosen for intensive archaeological and geomorphological survey.

FIELD SURVEY CONDUCTED IN *FELIX ROMULIANA*

Our project was conducted in the form of tandem surveys. An archaeological survey gathered evidence for all available past human activity in the surroundings through field walking and museum / archival research, while the geographical part of the project focused on Holocene landscape development and was conducted in the form of a geo-morphological survey[4].

For the purpose of this project, several survey zones have been defined. The first zone extends 1–2 km around the palace. The area we chose to study corresponds with the catchment of a small stream, the so-called Seliški or Dragan's stream, which probably served as the primary water supply to the site in antiquity and today *(fig. 1)*. The catchment area of the Seliški stream is a well-defined area in topographic terms and can be divided into several parts. One level is the actual stream flowing SW-NE and its flood and alluvial plains. The second level comprises most of the territory surrounding the palace and consists of slopes covered with meadows and agricultural fields. It is surrounded by the third level, a chain of more elevated hills and hilltops (Petronj, Krovalj, Golaja, Magura, etc.). The whole area is cut by small ephemeral streams. The survey conducted in 2008/2009 covered an area of approximately 6.25 km^2, i. e. 41.6 % of the entire Seliški stream catchment area. We also conducted a revision survey in the area that is extending beyond the catchment of the Seliški stream in order to check and expand the previous survey of 2001 in the districts of the villages of Zvezdan and Gamzigrad, recording 67 sites in total[5]. We tried to compare how the earlier recorded sizes, locations, shapes, characters, and datings of sites fit to the current archaeological surface record in order to assess changes in patterns caused by agricultural land-use in the period since the earlier survey. This area falls under our second zone, covering 10–15 km around the site. The third zone that extends 50–60 km around the site includes the entire districts of Knjaževac and Bor. Survey work on such scales was only possible through library, documentation, and archive work as well as incorporation of earlier surveys and excavations and known data for Late Roman sites and communications.

Every route in our survey was walked over as a separate zone or unit marked by vegetation differences, water sources, visibility, or artificial markings such as local vil-

4 See the contribution by Tóth / Schütt in this volume, pp. 17–26.
5 Lazić et al. 2002, 64–67.

lage roads or paths. We used agricultural fields as collection units and walked through them with 6–9 members of the survey team at 15 m intervals. Once a site had been identified, a more detailed survey was made in smaller walking distances between surveyors in order to map finds density contours and make collections. Some areas, despite high density vegetation cover, were also walked over in order to identify possible structural remains (stone blocks, bricks, and other). The results were recorded using a combination of hand-held GPS measurements and field maps scaled 1 : 10 000 and 1 : 5000, based on satellite images, and gave us a good background for orientation and positioning on the terrain. Parallel to the archaeological survey, the geography team visited all newly discovered locations and developed an 'inventory' of the landscape and geomorphological situation for every settlement location. On several find-points geophysical prospection was also carried out in order to connect surface material with possible subsurface structures[6]. The surface material collection mostly includes pottery material, daub, bricks and tiles, smaller amounts of stone tools (millstones, grinding stones), metallurgical debris (slag, metal blooms) and small amounts of metal finds (one bronze coin, iron nails), glass (mosaic tesserae), and flints.

SITE FUNCTION

The survey presented here recorded sites of all periods, sizes, and functions. In other words, it was not restricted solely to the Roman period or a specific site type such as settlements. In the two campaigns, we were able to locate 24 new sites. Together with the earlier survey data, a grand total of 91 sites have now been identified in the hinterland, many of which could be refined chronologically, extending from the Neolithic to the Middle Ages[7]. The clearest data and largest quantity of surface material dates to the prehistoric periods, particularly the Bronze Age. Material dating to Antiquity was less abundant and stands out from the rest of the dataset by being of poor quality. This is aggravated by the limited amount of present understanding of the development of local pottery characteristics and the small sample recovered during the survey. In the Late Antique period, after the political system of Tetrarchy ended, the palace complex seems to be left unfinished and removed from major developments. However, the Early Medieval period provides new impetus for the hinterland, visible also in our archaeological record that will be discussed later.

Determining the function of newly found sites showed to be a challenge in view of the limited material recovered. Any site could have had multiple functions in different periods (annual or long-term), and settlement systems could have changed radically over time. For example, current research indicates a major transformation of the main site of *Felix Romuliana*, in which a luxury palatial complex that existed for 20 years in the last decade of the 3rd century and first decade of the 4th century is transformed into an industrial and craftsmanship centre in the following two centuries. However, some basic category divisions could be established, and although tentative, it provides a starting point for comparison or at least shows that the surface record has the capability to show a variety of functional attributions. We divided the record into the following functional categories of sites: habitation site (H), graves or cemeteries (G), tumulus or mausoleum (T/M), technical site (T), church (C), and isolated building or find (IS).

Habitation sites (H) could cover a wide range of dwellings, and maybe it would be most useful to assign the commonly used term settlement. This could include numerous sub-categories such as farmstead, hamlet, village, *vicus*, *villa*, etc. The sub-category of farmsteads and hamlets is found across all periods, while *villa* is a unique appearance connected with the Roman period. One category could take a totally different appearance in the Roman or medieval period or even modern times, from which parallels are often derived. If we take into account the factor of size, the equivalent of a modern village would have been a hamlet in the 19th century, and even earlier, in the medieval period, it would have been little more than a single farmstead[8].

The hinterland of *Felix Romuliana* is clearly a rural landscape. Aside from *Felix Romuliana*, the only other potentially larger site, at least in Late Antiquity, is the site of Kostol[9]. Since it was destroyed by the modern development of the town of Zaječar, a specific function cannot be attributed to it. Because of the limitations in the survey material, as well as the fact that the size of scatter often constitutes the only criterion for tentative assignations of site-types in the data-record, this project purposefully does not ascribe any such detailed sub-categories. The only

6 Conducted by the RGK in autumn 2008 and the summer campaign of 2009 but did not provide clear anomalies that could indicate sub-surface structures.

7 Kapuran / Škundrić 2009, 245–263.

8 Roberts 1996, 17.

9 In 1891, a rectangular fortification with circular towers on the corners was visible (Dimić 1891, 21 tab. II), suggesting that it served as a centurium or Late Antique *villa* (Jovanović 2004, 175–177).

division employed is into habitation sites and other-purpose sites. The latter cover a range of categories which are not used for living, such as sacral buildings (churches, temples), graveyards, and technical sites (roads, wells, quarries, etc.). One final group are isolated buildings or find-spots whose attribution to the previous categories is difficult or impossible.

With regard to the category of graves / cemeteries (G), it is remarkable that there is no data to indicate Neolithic or Eneolithic burials, especially so since Neolithic material was detected at *Felix Romuliana* for the first time in the last few years and together with the Eneolithic material represents a noticeable proportion of the total surveyed material (6.5 %). The survey data increases the total count of identified Bronze Age burial sites to possibly five, including the necropolis on the Magura hill with its extension near the Tetrapylon with several tens of burials[10]. The earlier survey record implies that there is a possibility of more Bronze Age necropolises existing at the villages of Gamzigrad and Zvezdan, represented by finds of urns and bone fragments, while some finds possibly indicate a further necropolis near the northern gate of the palace[11]. There are no reliable indicators of any Iron Age burials. For the Late Roman period, aside from the well-known burials on the hill of Magura that are associated with the Emperor and his mother[12], there are several graves which could be dated to the end of 4th up to the mid-5th century situated south of the walls of the main site[13]. Recent archaeological campaigns north of the palace, in the so-called sector of the *villa*, indicated the existence of a further Late Antique necropolis[14]. Yet another necropolis may exist at one site recorded during the survey in 2001. A large early medieval necropolis was excavated on the banks of the Seliški stream east of the palace[15], and three more locations can be brought into connection with funeral practices of the medieval period.

Although the category tumulus / mausoleum (T/M) clearly is also a sacral site such as grave / necropolis, it was established as a separate category in order to distinguish it as a unique and rare appearance in the landscape, dated to late 3rd–early 4th century. In the territory of Upper Moesia, a possibly contemporaneous mausoleum was found at the site of Šarkamen.

The category technical site (T) is represented in significant number. There are traces of granaries, kilns as well as water pipes which could be very useful for a reconstruction of the water supply system of *Felix Romuliana*. Especially interesting is the proximity of a quarry, placed 1.3 km to the SE. It appears that this quarry was exploited from the Bronze Age onwards since a large site dated to this period is located just at the entrance, on the western side of this natural depression. However, a greater volume of usage was probably achieved from the second half of the 3rd century onwards, when the stone was used as building material for the palatial complex at *Felix Romuliana*.

For the church category (C), there is evidence of ten possible sites: five basilicas within the complex of the main site; three new basilica-like buildings, discovered through geophysical prospection, and two more churches in the surroundings. This reflects the growing influence of Christianity in the post-Tetrarchic periods, especially in the rural areas, and will be further discussed within the following section dealing with settlement patterns. *Table 1* gives the distribution of all site categories summarised above according to period of occupation.

Here, it is visible that the proportion of settlements changes markedly over time, reaching its peak in the Bronze Age period for prehistory. However, the number of uncertain categories of sites (namely habitation sites) grows towards the more recent periods. The number of technical sites is mostly detected from Late Antiquity onwards, highlighting the technological input and infrastructure development within the landscape. As stated above, the survey produced little indication for occupation during the Early Roman Empire (1st–2nd century). From the medieval period onwards, the data shows a semi-deserted landscape in the surroundings of the palace, with small scattered households. While temporarily this may correspond with the abandonment of the palace complex, after the 11th century, the hinterland appears finally to fall into decay. Isolated sites are very small in size and produced low quantities of material which cannot be connected with any of the previous categories with certainty. These could have taken the form of seasonally used houses, huts, storehouses, accidentally brought material, or other.

For the size of the sites, five arbitrarily based categories were established: 1. small isolated features or find-spots, 2. small sites (< 0.5 ha), 3. medium sites (0.5–2 ha), 4. large sites (2–5 ha), and 5. major sites (> 5 ha). The relation between occupation periods and the size of sites is laid out in *Table 2*.

10 Srejović / Lazić 1997, 228–229.

11 More numerous burials in the Bronze Age as well as in the Late Roman / Early Medieval periods could indicate a growth in populations, but further research is clearly necessary in order to refine conclusions in this regard.

12 Srejović / Vasić 1994.

13 Petković 2010, 187–189.

14 See the contribution by Vulović et al. in this volume, pp. 287–304.

15 Jovanović 2000.

Period	N sites	H	G	T/M	T	C	IS
Neolithic	6	5 (1)					
Eneolithic	7	4 (3)					
Bronze Age	48	26 (10)	4 (4)				5
Iron Age	32	22 (5)	(2)				5
Roman / Early Byzantine	54	14 (14)	2 (3)	1	11 (1)	2	16
Medieval	12	3 (2)	3		(1)	2 (1)	1

Tab. 1. Distribution of the settlement categories according to periods. The numbers in brackets represent uncertain affiliations.

Period	Isolated features	< 0.5 ha	0.5–2 ha	2–5 ha	> 5 ha	Unknown
Neolithic		1	2	1	1	1
Eneolithic					1	3
Bronze age	3	8	8	10	3	15
Iron Age	3	5	8	7	2	6
Late Roman / Byzantine	10	6	8	6	2	18
Medieval	1		1			6

Tab. 2. Relative correlation between periods and size of sites.

Although an arbitrary category[16], the size of a material scatter can help point out relative changes in site size over different periods, which in turn could indicate population growth, change in production, supply, and consumption, etc. The record shows that we are dealing with both small and big settlement types in the area studied. The first thing to stand-out is the growth of settlements in the Bronze Age (categories 4 and 5). However, maybe here the larger detected sizes are simply a product of successive usage over several periods or higher populations[17].

From the Late Roman and medieval period onwards, it seems that sites are getting reduced in size. An obvious exception will be the so-called "Galerius palace" which, if looked at as a complex whole with its sacral monuments on the adjacent hill of Magura, is of the largest size in the record.

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS IN DIFFERENT PERIODS

In case of the surroundings of *Romuliana*, it appears that prehistoric activity exceeds that of the later periods[18]. The earliest traces of human activity from the survey belong to the Neolithic period with five sites[19] *(fig. 2a)*. Newer excavation data-sets indicate the presence of Neolithic material at *Romuliana*[20], possibly dating to the Early and Middle Neolithic period, or Starčevo culture[21]. In general, for the Neolithic period around *Romuliana*, it can be said that sites gravitate more towards the west of the catchment area and are placed on elevated plateaus in the tributary valleys of the Crni Timok. Any other locational pattern cannot be discerned because of the small number of sites which would make any conclusion on this matter premature.

Eneolithic or Copper Age material was detected at four sites in the vicinity of *Felix Romuliana* and one uncertain location *(fig. 2b)*. The topographic positions of settlements in

16 The size can be also affected by disturbance and possible repositioning of surface material.

17 Wandsnider 2004, 52.

18 For more information about the material related to prehistoric periods see the contribution by Kapuran in this volume, pp. 59–82.

19 Lazić et al. 2002, 66.

20 Kapuran et al. 2010, 23.

21 Kapuran / Škundrić 2009, 257; Kapuran et al. 2010, 23–24.

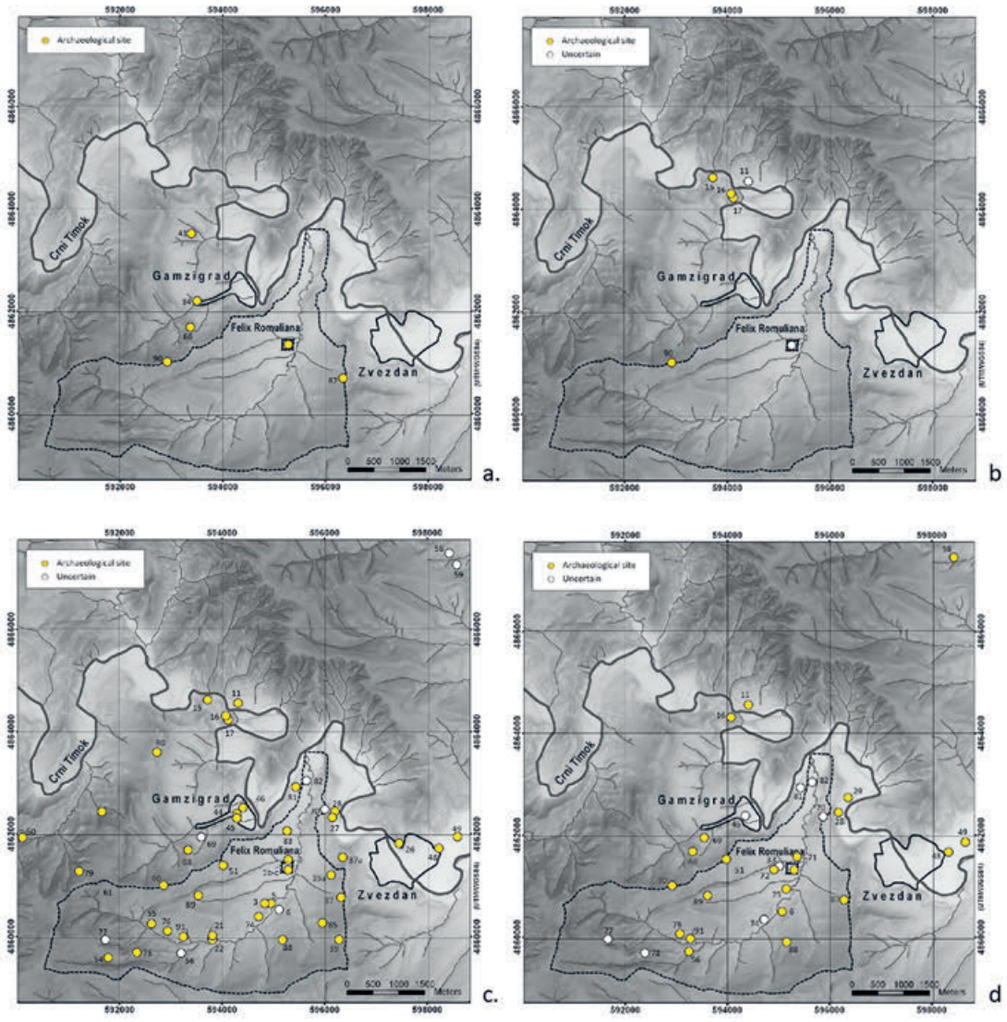

Fig. 2a–d. Distribution maps of the archaeological sites from Neolithic to Early Iron Age recorded in the vicinity of *Felix Romuliana*.

the hinterland of the Danube, their high elevation (200–340 m), placement on plateaus or hilltops, nearness to grazing fields and water sources, small numbers of building structures (houses?), usually with stone and pebble bases, upper constructions probably made from wood, and with poor inventories, all suggest that these could have been temporary or seasonal settlements[22].

The culmination of prehistoric settling, in terms of peaks in site numbers and the largest amount of surface material, occurs in the Middle Bronze Age with 47 recorded sites *(fig. 2c)*. All sites produced large quantities of material which helped to define the local Bronze Age group, previously known as "Gamzigrad culture"[23]. Some locations had positions which offered very good visual communication with adjacent sites, especially with the hill-top settlement of Banjska Stena. There seems to be a clustering along the Seliški stream, but sites can also be found close to the source or confluence of tributaries to the main water course. It appears that the largest sites are always placed on higher elevated points, above the floodplains. It could be that these represent larger villages while some isolated sites may represent farmsteads. Isolated scatters may be the product of outbuildings of larger farmsteads, but it cannot be excluded that some settlements may also represent short-lived phases or seasonal occupation (e. g. camps) such as in the above mentioned situation observed for the Eneolithic period.

22 Nikolić 1998, 106–107.
23 Srejović / Lazić 1997, 228–230; Kapuran 2009, 246.

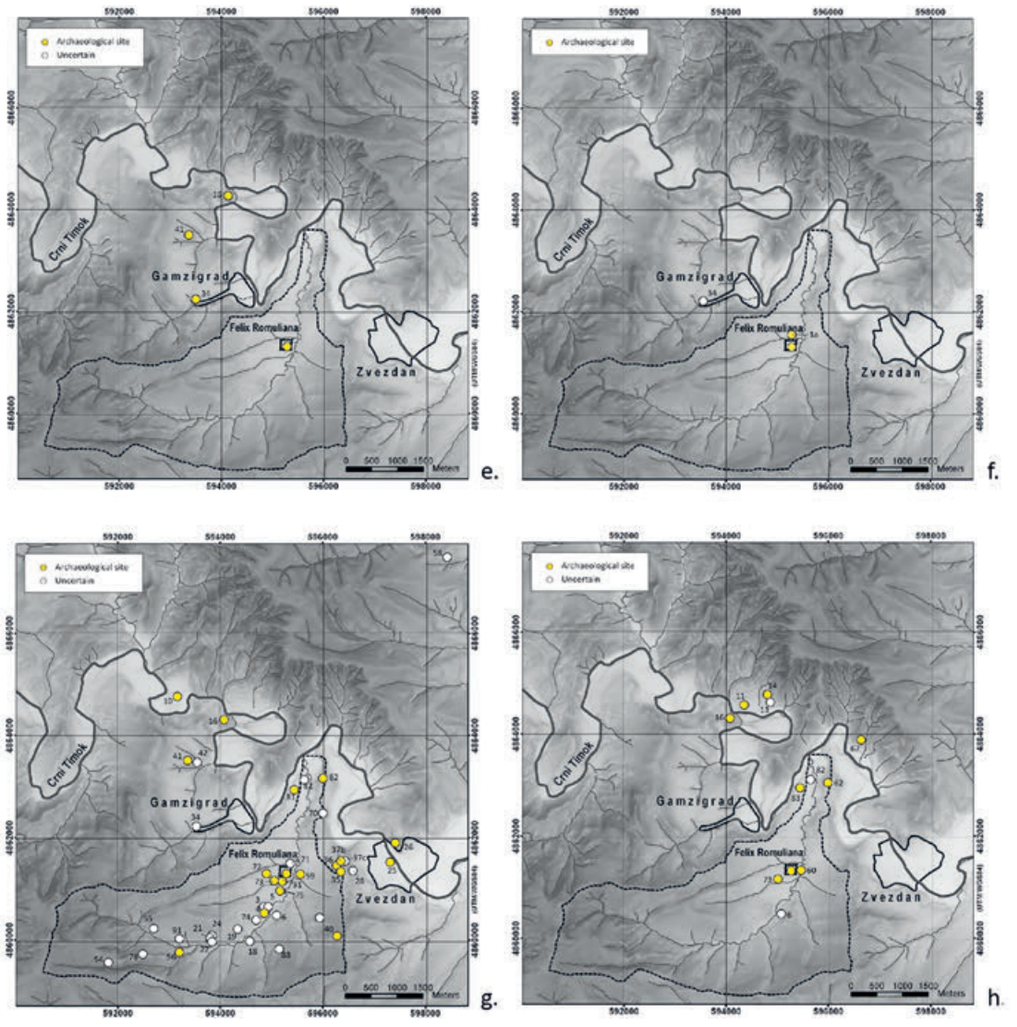

Fig. 2e–h. Distribution maps of the archaeological sites from Late Iron Age to Medieval period recorded in the vicinity of *Felix Romuliana*.

There are markedly fewer Iron Age sites. Site numbers drop to 31 in the Early Iron Age *(fig. 2d)* and further decrease to only three sites – Kravarnik, Višicina bašta, and Banjska stena – which have material that could be dated to the Late Iron Age or La Tène period *(fig. 2e)*. The sample of surface material was generally small, often less than ten sherds per site, which made precise chronological divisions very difficult. In the hinterland of *Felix Romuliana*, the La Tène period can be seen as a marker for the start of a general decline in settlement numbers, or depression of the population, which continued until the second half of the 3rd century AD. Here, it is important to highlight recent researches which suggest that some materials which could be considered to belong to the Early Iron Age clearly were used in the La Tène period, therefore suggesting that Hallstatt material could even be present until the Roman conquest of the area[24]. If the extended chronology of some find groups is proven, the hinterland of Romuliana need not have been as semi-deserted as our survey seems to indicate at present. Instead, up to *c*. 30 sites could have extended far into the 1st century AD, the time which shows an apparent long hiatus.

The same stands for the period of the late 1st–2nd century, for which we also lack finds in the vicinity *(fig. 2f)*. As different research approaches have shown, the pace of development of an urban network, as observed in many other

24 Mladenović 2012, 10. – The Iron Age site Krševica, which shows a continuation of Hallstatt material into the La Tène horizon, could serve as an example (Popović 2005, 161).

provinces, especially in the west, was very slow in *Moesia*. According to Andrew Poulter, the data from *Moesia Inferior* show that it seems to be one of the latest urbanised provinces where the pastoral economy of the native peoples could not have supported urban development[25]. This could have caused such developments to be concentrated along the main river courses: Morava, Sava, and Danube, where the flow of goods and people was more frequent and fertile land more available. Given the relative isolation of *Felix Romuliana* and that its soil is of limited agricultural worth, it is not surprising that there appears to be a contrast to rest of the province.

The first traces of Roman settlement activity in the study area predate the building of the so-called Emperor's palace *(fig. 2g)*. Sites were identified as part of the recent programme of geophysical prospection and verified through excavations. Structures of this period are located both within the fortification as well as outside, placed to the north of *Felix Romuliana*. Preliminary dating places this complex in the mid-3rd century, with some indications of having a military character or perhaps being a *villa* site[26]. Our survey cannot provide proof of any clear connection of site dependence on the surrounding landscape in this period. However, it is important to bear in mind the richness of the region in metal ores and the possibility that the site may have played a role in the distribution thereof[27].

As noted above, it was impossible to delineate precisely between site categories in the survey discussed above. However, in the region, aside from *Felix Romuliana*, there are villas at Krivelj – one of the rare ones to have been systematically excavated –, Gornjane, Luka, Sumrakovac, Brestovac, Kostol, etc.[28]. There is a significant amount of discrepancy between the number of documented villas in the whole of the territory of Serbia in different scholarly publications[29]. This difference is of course the result of over 40 years of research, and application of different methodology, and of wildly different criteria for villa identification (e. g. presence or not of luxurious elements, mosaics, hypocausts, or even solely size of the site). However, studies in other provinces show that villas do not necessarily need to be associated with luxurious features. For example, no mosaics and little remains of wall painting were attested in Dacian *villa* sites[30]. Villas are also frequent in the Bulgarian part of the Roman Empire[31] or the province of Valeria[32]. The work of A. Poulter in the region of Veliko Tarnovo (BG) and *Nicopolis ad Istrum* (BG) produced interesting results in this respect. A number of rural sites were detected in large scale surveys in those areas and after more detailed sampling, almost all of them turned out to be villas, rather than villages[33].

The '*villa*'-like site at *Felix Romuliana* appears to grow further into an imperial domain, by shifting of the building activity to the south. It is not clear when activity north of the main complex ceased to exist, i. e. whether it was abandoned immediately before the construction work of the palace started or it coexisted with it, at least for a certain amount of time. Geomorphological processes acting in the vicinity, especially gully erosion, could have affected these northern structures.

The first clearly dated occupation for the site is the building of the well-known fortification in the time of Tetrarchy. The monumentality and richness in decoration of the building complex stand in high contrast to the apparently "depopulated" hinterland. Details of contemporary support networks to supply *Felix Romuliana* remain unclear, as the recovered surface material shows little diagnostic material. However, considering that this so-called peak period lasted only 30 years (and the main palatial complex *c*. 20 years), it is hardly plausible that any close association of individual sites would be traceable solely on the basis of surface finds.

For the post-palatial period (end of 4th century–beginning of 7th century), 42 locations were recorded in the vicinity *(fig. 2h)*. Exactly half of these were identified on the basis of very small amounts of material which do not permit closer identification of function and were categorised as uncertain. It is possible to identify a NE-SW spread of locations placed along the Seliški stream. It is not clear, however, whether this distribution reflects a planned occupation linked to the development of the palace. Also, in this period, it appears that *Felix Romuliana* may have functioned as an administrative, religious, and economical centre, as indicated by a Late Roman necropolis south of the fortress, several basilicas both inside and outside of the ramparts, and industrial activity in the shape of different workshops (metallurgical, textile, possibly bone workshop, etc.). Significant concentrations of iron slags and

25 Poulter 1983, 84–85.

26 Srejović 1983, 21–23. For the results of recent research in this area see von Bülow et al. 2009.

27 It has been suggested that a number of *vici metalli* and *vici* existed which were directly related to the mining activities (Mangin et al. 1992, 190–193). Some of the larger sites which could have served this purpose are Rgotina, Lukovo, Kučajna, Voluja, Majdanpek, and more than 20 smaller recorded sites (Jovanović 2004, 183).

28 Jovanović 2004, 187–191.

29 Two (Vasić 1970), six (Mulvin 2002) or 80 *villa* sites (Mladenović 2012).

30 Oltean 2004, 148–149.

31 More than 30 possible sites are recorded (Dinčev 1997, 115–137 map 1; 2).

32 251 sites were listed that could be *villae* or *vici* (Visy 2001, 174).

33 Poulter 2004, 235.

blooms recovered during the archaeological survey also indicate that metal processing took place close to the palace. In this way, it appears that for the first time the main site is actively supported by its immediate landscape.

Another important aspect for the post-palatial period is the spread of ecclesiastical influence. Some of the landowners may have been responsible for the construction of first estate churches, and it is possible that they obtained their elite identity through Christianity, rather than on the basis of previous manifestations such as baths, mosaics, reception rooms, etc. As Kim Bowes points out, transformed Late Roman villas 'may represent a new currency of power', not solely as building complexes but also as a whole together with the Christian communities attached to them[34]. A further aspect is the possibility of the deliberate construction of churches within the former palace of Galerius. Such a public "desacralisation" of the pagan cult of the divine emperor would have had a powerful message on the surroundings[35].

One more location, Zanjevačka crkva, indicates the existence of another Byzantine church which may have had earlier layers and community around it[36]. Inside the former palace complex as well as in the towers, workshops and houses appear while the survey in the surroundings recovered material on eight sites. It seems that settlements now gravitate more towards the main course of the Crni Timok and that the basin of the Seliški stream did not offer suitable settling conditions. It may well be that the focus of activity shifted to the main river course and the valley of Zaječar further east.

Across the whole of *Moesia Superior*, an increasing number of sites can be observed from the late 3rd century to the 6th century, many of which were newly founded. The period sees more fortified sites, not only on higher elevations but also at valley sites[37], as *Felix Romuliana* itself illustrates. The distribution of sites shows that they are no longer limited to main river courses and roads but were placed deep in the hinterland. After a period of destructions, another wave of building activities occurred in the late 5th–early 6th century, especially with the renovation of a number of settlements under Justinian[38]. Over 200 fortifications, occupied in the 6th and 7th century, have so far been identified in the territory of Serbia[39]. The settlement at *Felix Romuliana* probably ceased to exist from the end of the 7th century until the 10th century[40]. By the end of the 11th century, *Felix Romuliana* was occupied by Slavic people. After the 11th century, the site was abandoned and only rare and sporadic finds from the late 14th and early 15th century show that it may have been used occasionally or as a shelter[41]. With the shift of settlement focus towards the Crni Timok and the valley of Zaječar (with the settlement name mentioned first in the Turkish documents of the second half of 15th century), it is possible to trace the settlement patterns of the post-medieval period and origins of the modern village network where proximity to major routes played an important role. The side valley of *Felix Romuliana* apparently was not attractive enough. Nowadays, the two modern villages of Gamzigrad and Zvezdan exist to the north and east, both close to Crni Timok. In the catchment area of the Seliški stream, only six isolated households exist next to several summer shepherds' cottages and sheds.

To sum it up, it is possible to show that settlement activity occurred before the Roman period on a high level and went into decline under the Empire. By the mid-4th century, it left a sparse population, while from the late 4th and early 5th century, it slowly increased again. In general, this survey complemented the one from 2001, it broadened the chronology of the region, provided a closer correlation between the natural / cultural landscape, and highlighted doubts in the premature association of finds and function of sites. However, after obtaining such conclusions and defining patterns that operated in the hinterland of *Felix Romuliana*, it is crucial to compare these with visible patterns in other areas. The only comparable survey project in the territory of Eastern Serbia to date is the one conducted in the district of the village of Ravna, but its results remain yet to be published. Across the whole territory of Knjaževac, it may be possible to track similar patterns as those observed around *Felix Romuliana* – with a rise of settlements in the Late Antique / Early Byzantine period – although medieval sites appear to be more numerous than in Zaječar district[42].

The question arises which driving forces triggered the Late Roman recovery and underlay the evolution of settlement patterns. Assuming that there was no distinct change

34 Bowes / Gutteridge 2005, 413.

35 Currently, the earliest basilica within Palace I is dated to the late 4th century, and, if correct, this would make it one of the first churches within fortifications in the central Balkans (Špehar 2011, 35).

36 The dating of the depictions on the fresco fragments found during the excavation could be tentatively placed in the 14th century (Stričević / Subotić 1959, 312). Some recent revisiting of the church suggested even earlier Byzantine phases (correspondence with Dr. Sofija Petković, Archaeological Institute, Belgrade).

37 Mladenović 2012, 44.

38 Barišić 1955, 65; Mócsy 1974, 303.

39 Milinković 2010, 222 fig. 282.

40 Janković 2010, 201.

41 Janković 2010, 212.

42 Data were obtained from the survey project in the vicinity of the fortress in Ravna – *Timacum Minus* (30 km SE from *Felix Romuliana*). These are likely to provide interesting parallels, as the sites lie in the same region and follow similar developments (surveys conducted by Bojana Ilijić, Custodian of the Town Museum of Knjaževac).

in soil quality and natural resources, than there must have been an acting secondary force. It seems that the strongest input may have come from developments in ore processing and distribution, then from the short living tetrarchic ideological input, and later from the growing church influence; a new power that attracted a community to form around it. In the light of the discovery of up to eight churches in and around *Felix Romuliana*, it does indeed seem that the latter was a strong influence in the formation of the cultural landscape. An interesting aspect that deserves discussion is the connectivity of the site to its hinterland and beyond. This may be important for all aspects mentioned above as well as for our initial 'centrality' question. There is not a single ancient source that could provide an insight into the road network in the immediate surroundings of *Felix Romuliana*. We also need to bear in mind that such communications need not have been built or paved roads but could have taken the simple form of known and regularly used dirt tracks or paths. Observations based on topographical features combined with excavations are the only guidelines for reconstructing local communications available at present.

COMMUNICATION ROUTES IN THE VICINITY OF *FELIX ROMULIANA*

In order to assess the communication network of *Felix Romuliana*, the nearest town of Zaječar and its wide valley with three big streams, the Beli Timok, the Crni Timok, and the Veliki Timok, need to be looked at. The Crni Timok River is the closest to the site of *Felix Romuliana*. It flows through several morphological units: three basins and two gorges[43]. *Felix Romuliana* is located in a small tributary valley in the Baba Jona gorge before the river reaches the modern village of Zvezdan. Approximately 1.5 km east of the site, the Crni Timok flows into the Zaječar basin. This can be seen as a sort of "gateway", the most suitable access route to travel towards the west. The rivers Crni and Beli Timok join north-east of Zaječar, an ideal strategic position for a possible outpost or fortress to control this important natural crossroads. Indeed, there are testimonies about the existence of Roman structures in Kostol, near Zaječar[44]. An early tentative identification of these remains was that they belonged to a *municipium Aureliani* or *Aureliana*, centre of a metallurgical region *metalli Aureliani*. As no material or documentary evidence for this site remains and modern research focused on the sites of Ravna – *Timacum Minus* and *Romuliana*, there have been some attempts to identify the municipium Aureliani with the later sites. If there had been a significant Late Antique centre in Kostol, it would throw a different light on the development of *Felix Romuliana*: the necessity for two strong fortified sites to exist a mere 9 km apart from one another would need strong reasons indeed. While a potential site at Kostol would have been placed in a far better strategic and economic position, lying directly at the confluence of two rivers in the valley, *Felix Romuliana* was placed in a fairly removed side valley.

Yet there are indicators that fortified outposts may have existed on nearly all of the hills surrounding the Zaječar basin, a number of which could have been used to control access to it. These include Vratarnica[45], Vlaški Do[46], Vrška Čuka (RS, BG)[47], Grljan, Prlita, Vražogrnac, Halovo[48], and *Felix Romuliana*, whose exposed part of the site on the Magura hill with its sacral complex and tetrapylon would have served as a key landscape marker *(fig. 3)*. As such, it appears plausible that Kostol served as a site of direct control, while *Felix Romuliana* was an administrative centre, not directly exposed but easily reachable over the saddle of Magura, which acted like a guard-post or indirect control point. From Kostol to Zvezdan, the road could have followed the left bank of the Crni Timok. To the village of Zvezdan, the local topography would have forced any road to cross the river and continue on its right bank. This would have led the road past the modern villages of Gamzigradska Banja, Metovnica, and then towards Valakonje from where it would have led to *Horreum Margi*[49]. Such a communication, following natural routes, however, would not have passed by *Felix Romuliana* directly.

The internal organisation of *Felix Romuliana* itself is relevant to communications in its hinterland: the site is divided in two by a main thoroughfare *(decumanus)*, while the high level of architectural decoration of the eastern gate implies that it served as the main entranceway, i. e. that the main approach to the site was from the east. The

43 Petrović 1970, 12.

44 Dimić 1891; Kanitz 1904, 168.

45 The strategic importance of this gorge was identified by Felix Kanitz in 1904. The narrow gorge is 4 km long and forms the easiest connection between the Timok and Danube, i. e. the route Naissus-Zaječar-Negotin-Vidin (Kanitz 1904, 164–165).

46 Scatters of ceramic finds and remains of walls indicate the existence of a Late Roman or Early Byzantine fortified site with a very good strategic position overlooking the Zaječar basin.

47 Kanitz also mentions a "castell" at this border crossing (Kanitz 1904, 157).

48 Lalović 1981, 79–82.

49 Čanak-Medić 1978, 20–21.

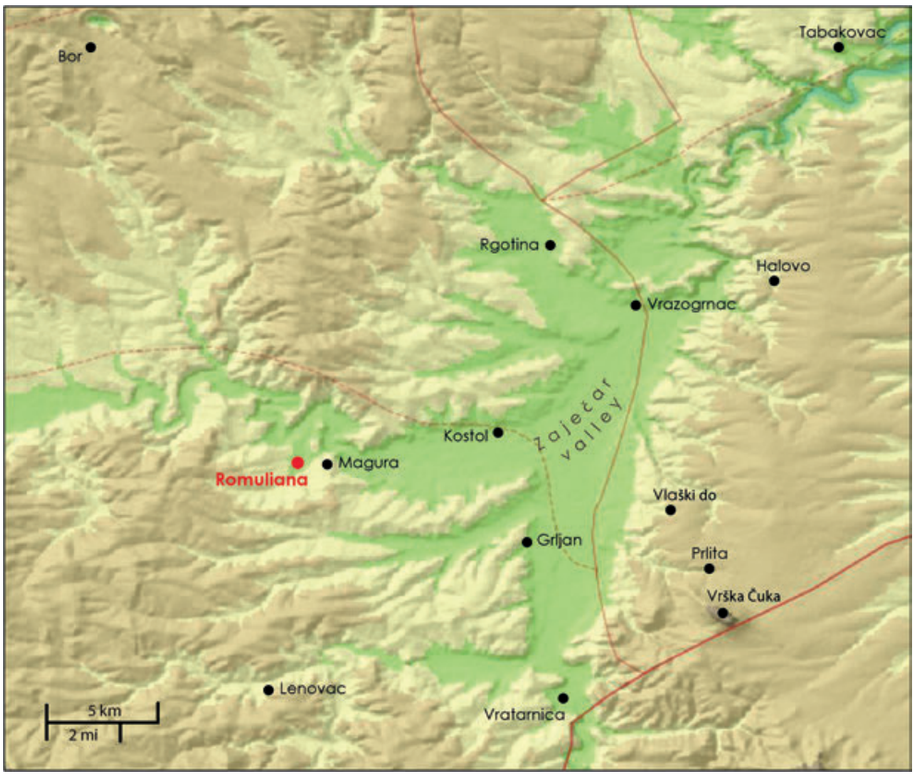

Fig. 3. Zaječar basin and numerous fortified sites which could have been used to control access to the valley.

current network of village roads surrounding the fortified palace may have been used in the past, but some of them are certainly of newer date. For example, the current main link between the palace and Magura hill was newly created in 1992, using a large amount of building material that was removed between the towers as part of archaeological excavations and levelling and drainage works[50]. To any current observer, this road appears to be the most natural and economical communication route towards the east. It is often assumed that ancient roads remained in operation throughout subsequent periods as they followed the most convenient natural configurations. As the example at *Felix Romuliana* shows, however, this is not always the case[51]. The main communication towards the east is generally assumed to have run across the Magura hill, starting from the village of Zvezdan at the bottom of the hill, towards the tetrapylon on a saddle *c*. 230 m north of the mausoleum complex at the top of the hill. The route from Zvezdan up the Magura hill follows several natural terrain steps that would have made it possible to drive a road up this steep slope, although the modern terrain makes it a fairly difficult route. From the tetrapylon, one stretch of the road is believed to have led to the eastern, main gate of the palace, while another gave access to the sacral complex[52]. The precise route down the hill from the tetrapylon has not been traced so far. As part of this project, an attempt was made to identify natural conditions suitable for a road or pathway. Half-way towards the eastern gate of the palace, however, the terrain levels out so that it is impossible to locate a route on natural factors alone. In addition, to date no trace of a bridge construction or ford to cross the Seliški stream has been identified.

It is equally possible that the road from Magura actually led to the eastern gate of the newly discovered structures in the north of the palace. Such a route follows the local relief more closely, and the road would have had to have turned slightly to the north and after crossing the stream

50 Vasić 1997, 20.

51 The same applies to the modern main road that runs along the Crni Timok to the northwest of *Felix Romuliana*, and it is connected with the site by a 3 m long access road which is an artificial creation, built in the 1950s.

52 Wulf-Rheidt 2007, 78.

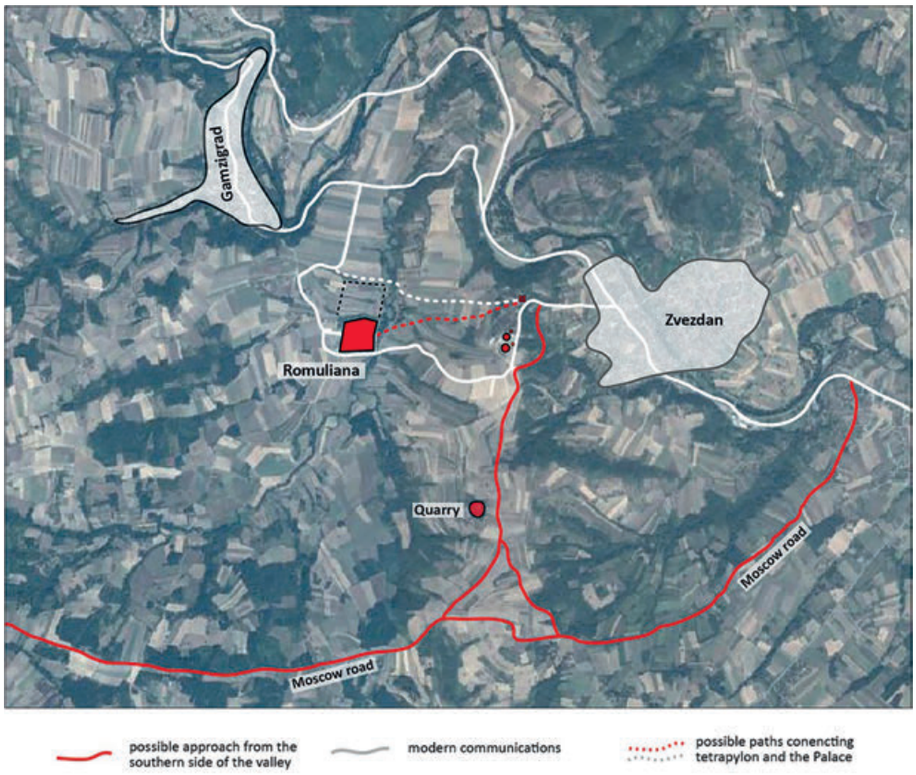

Fig. 4. The road communications in the nearest surrounding of *Felix Romuliana* with white lines showing the modern roads used nowadays while the red represents possible approach to the valley from the direction of south.

could have led south to the east gate of the actual palace *(fig. 4)*[53].

A further road, locally called the 'Moscow road', located *c*. 2 km to the south of *Felix Romuliana*, could have served as a route providing access to more western areas[54]. Stevan Mačaj referred to this as an 'ancient road'[55]; however, no such identification has been proven to date. If such a road existed, it would have provided direct access to the mining centre in Lukovo, c. 30 km SW of *Felix Romuliana*[56], as well as the fort at Vratarnica, c. 15 km to the southeast[57]. From this road, it is possible that one line led north, passing the Roman quarry and connecting it with the eastern gate of the palace further in the west. In terms of the topography of the landscape, this would have been the easiest and most convenient way to approach the site.

In all the above cases, the modern road, or an ancient more southerly route, or the 'Moscow Road', the site of *Felix Romuliana* remains hidden from sight until the very last minute. As such, the complex clearly does not try to dominate the landscape in any way. If *Felix Romuliana* needed to be recognisable as a prominent place in a particular period of history, it would make sense that landmark indicators that could reflect parts of that meaning to anyone approaching would have been attached to it. However, such a concept only becomes probable when all remains around the palace are seen as a whole. The importance of the palace is then reflected by particular combinations and relationships between monuments in the immediate surrounding, rather than any one of them (e. g. the palace complex) in isolation. Following such a line of thought, the tetrapylon, which would have been noticed first (from an easterly approach at least), would have signalled importance to anybody approaching and directed movement first to its position and then onwards to the

53 The military topographical maps of the area from 1967 (Military-Geographic Institute, Belgrade) show the village path that was visible and in use at that time and corresponds to this possible link between Magura and new structures to the north.

54 Srejović 1983a, 12.

55 Mačaj 1892, 99.

56 Čanak-Medić 1978, 22. St. Mačaj identifies five roads radially placed around Lukovo. One of them follows the stations: Lukovo, Boljevac, Gamzigrad, Rgotina, Šarkamen, Prahovo (Mačaj 1892, 100).

57 Kanitz 1904, 361; 371–372.

'sacred hill' and residence[58]. To a passer-by this particular landscape was shaped – and still is, to some extent – by a unique arrangement of objects: a rich complex surrounded by walls and towers centred in a valley, guarded by high hills in the back and to the south, with the uniquely shaped mountain peak of Rtanj clearly visible on the horizon as shown in the painting of Felix Kanitz. If approached from the northwest, i. e. the modern village of Gamzigrad, the scenery framing the palace would have been significantly less grandiose. From this direction, the palace remains hidden from view until the last hundred metres or so. This suggests that there was only one key way to approach the area that would have conveyed a concept of imperial prowess and in which the Magura ridge, purposefully developed to be seen and to act as a landscape marker, plays a central role.

SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROJECT

The aim of this study was to examine the landscape surrounding the site of *Felix Romuliana* in order to see how its integration within wider contexts varied in different periods of its history. Beyond this, it tests the hypothesis that this key tetrarchic site acted as a central place for its surroundings through an analysis of the reasons and possible motivations for such an association and the impact it had on the region. The specific nature of *Felix Romuliana*, as one of the grand luxurious tetrarchic sites that emerged because of a specific socio-political constellation at a specific time and in a specific region and only survived in this format for a short period, apparently did not allow for the development of any hierarchies on a local level. As said before, the sheer existence of a luxurious site such as *Felix Romuliana* is a pre-condition for the development of centrality, but here it is probably misinterpreted as centrality in itself. If the centrality did not have time to develop, then it is not surprising that we do not find its traces in the archaeological record.

Through the material recovered in the survey, we were able to highlight the stark contrast between large-scale elite building activity at the core site of *Felix Romuliana* and the contemporary depopulation, if not desertification, of its hinterland. Throughout all periods of occupation, *Romuliana* and its surroundings underwent cyclic changes and probably evolved between the roles of centre and periphery. Previously, it was generally understood that after sparse activity in the Eneolithic, a major Bronze Age settlement existed in the Seliški stream catchment area with an associated necropolis on the nearby Magura Hill. The fieldwork carried out as part of this project, however, has shown that settlement activity in the area began as early as the Neolithic period and that the Bronze Age occupation of the study area was significantly more extensive than previously thought. While earlier models of Iron Age settlement activity were largely proven, this work identified a clear hiatus during the Roman Empire with the existence of far fewer sites than suggested in earlier work. A local network of supporting sites dependant on the 'central' palace had always been assumed for the tetrarchic period, but the survey clearly showed that at present there is no evidence for such a network. As noted above, it appears that the erection of the palace, and the structures which directly precede it, did not lead to any significant development of the surrounding landscape.

The analysis of locational aspects of the site's position is also interesting. If seen on a local level, the site does not lie directly on a main communication route, making its grandiose appearance seem almost ephemeral. However, within the valley of the Crni Timok River, its placement highlights the potential strategic role within a wider system of Late Roman sites in the valley that may have controlled communications through the gorges or openings to valleys. This topographic positioning opened up a discussion of functionality issues of the site and indirectly pointed out possible movement directions, regardless of whether they could be considered part of a central place system or some other network. Several factors which are likely to have had a formative effect on the main site and the surroundings could be highlighted: the emergence and widespread usage of metallurgy in the prehistoric period, continuity of a cult centre, a favourable position as a secondary road station in the hinterland of *Moesia Superior*, and an abundance of natural resources in the vicinity of the main site. In addition, the study also identified factors that undoubtedly had a negative impact on site development, such as natural events with possible destructive forces.

The importance or centrality of a site such as *Felix Romuliana* appears to emerge from arbitrary triggers or a behavioural factor such as fashion or imitation of other contemporary palaces and residences, and that is why the range of influence is very limited or we cannot recog-

58 Srejović / Vasić 1994, 118–119. A study of such spatial organisation shows that the *mausolea* on the Magura hilltop are only clearly visible from the eastern side, approaching from the direction of Zaječar. From the palace of *Felix Romuliana*, they are not so representative, as the view is obstructed by the tumuli (Wulf-Rheidt 2007, 78 fig. 16).

nise it on the local level. However, the mere construction of a large fortified palace in Late Antiquity shows that at this time a network of supporting sites dependant on the central place (palace) was meant to be developed at least conceptually. This development was sudden – an artificially created phenomenon for which there was no natural triggering cause. Thus, even if a system was planned, there was not enough time for a hinterland to develop and gravitate towards the palace. As long as the large network of tetrarchic sites of the late 3rd and early 4th centuries AD existed, the palatial complex at *Felix Romuliana* fulfilled a practical purpose.

The situation presented here represents an important step in the study of *Felix Romuliana's* hinterland, showing cyclical growth and decline of the hinterland. However, it does not have to be equivalent to developments beyond the catchment of the survey area, which is much smaller than a region. The question of whether this is a solitary example or whether parallels exist elsewhere is a matter for future surveys in East Serbia. Furthermore, a more systematic study of the regional distribution of finds from excavations at major sites should be undertaken, as survey projects of this kind desperately need basic datasets for comparison. We can only conclude that even if *Felix Romuliana* appears ephemeral in economic terms on this micro-regional level, its ideological 'area of influence' could have extended far beyond the Crni Timok region.

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Fig. 1: Base map: J. Tóth. – *Fig. 2:* Base map: J. Tóth. – *Fig. 3:* Base map source: Ancient World Mapping Centre, 2014. – *Fig. 4:* Base map: Google Earth, 2013.

ABSTRACT

In 2008 and 2009, an archaeological and geomorphological survey was conducted in the hinterland of *Felix Romuliana*-Gamzigrad which contributes to the existing knowledge about the site by providing more quantitative evidence for its occupational history and widespread settlement patterns across the area presented. New data gathered during these surveys, represents the first integrated landscape study conducted in the vicinity of this important site and in the Crni Timok valley. This work also challenges the longstanding assumption that during certain periods of occupation at *Felix Romuliana*, e. g. Tetrarchy, the site had a crucial role for the development of its surrounding cultural landscape. We have shown that other factors appearing in different periods than that of the Tetrarchy might have had bigger formative effect on the surrounding cultural landscape.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

2008 und 2009 wurde im Umland von *Felix Romuliana*-Gamzigrad ein archäologischer und geomorphologischer Survey durchgeführt, um auf Basis quantitativer Daten zu einem besseren Verständnis der Nutzungsgeschichte und Siedlungsmuster dieses Gebiets beizutragen. Dieser neue Survey ist die erste integrierte landschaftsarchäologische Untersuchung des Umlandes dieses wichtigen Ortes im Tal des Schwarzen Timoks *(Crni Timok)*. Die neu erhobenen Daten stellen die bestehende These, dass *Felix Romuliana* während bestimmten Nutzungsperioden wie der Tetrarchie eine zentrale Rolle für die Entwicklung der umliegenden Kulturlandschaften spielte, in Frage. Es scheint sogar, als hätten Faktoren und Anstöße aus anderen Epochen als der Tetrarchie teilweise deutlich wichtigere formative Einflüsse auf die Entwicklung der Kulturlandschaft gehabt.