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GERDA VON BÜLOW / SOFIJA PETKOVIĆ  
(HERAUSGEBERINNEN)

# GAMZIGRAD-STUDIEN I

ERGEBNISSE DER DEUTSCH-SERBISCHEN  
FORSCHUNGEN IM UMFELD DES  
PALASTES ROMULIANA





GERDA VON BÜLOW / SOFIJA PETKOVIĆ  
(HERAUSGEBERINNEN)

GAMZIGRAD-STUDIEN I

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# Gamzigrad-Studien I

## Ergebnisse der deutsch-serbischen Forschungen im Umfeld des Palastes *Romuliana*

HERAUSGEGEBEN VON  
GERDA VON BÜLOW UND SOFIJA PETKOVIĆ

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STEFAN POP-LAZIĆ, ANA PREMK, CHRISTOPH RUMMEL, TIM SCHÜLER,  
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# Summary

By Gerda von Bülow

Following an agreement between the Romano-Germanic Commission (RGK) of the German Archaeological Institute, Frankfurt a. M., and the Archaeological Institute in Belgrade, preliminary geophysical and archaeological investigations were carried out in the surroundings of the Late Roman palace complex of Gamzigrad, eastern Serbia, in 2004. The unexpectedly clear results of the geophysical survey in particular led the two institutions to draw up a cooperation agreement for the joint research project ‘Geoarchaeological investigations in the surroundings of the Late Antique palace *Felix Romuliana*’, which initially ran for five years (2005–2009) and was then extended for a further three years until 2012.

Between 2005 and 2012, interdisciplinary research was carried out within the framework of the agreement, resulting in fundamental new insights on the settlement structure and history of the archaeological site at *Felix Romuliana*-Gamzigrad.

Through GIS-assisted topographic and geomorphological approaches, the natural environment was reconstructed in order to identify possible criteria for the construction of the palace at this site. It could be shown that the palace is located on a slightly raised alluvial fan in a landscape strongly shaped by solifluction, which provided unique topographical preconditions for a large-scale construction project. In addition, there were indications for a devastating natural catastrophe. This created an erosion gully, still about 5 metres deep today, which destroyed existing buildings and was probably formed shortly before the erection of the Galerius palace (see contribution TÓTH / SCHÜTT).

Today, the entire area around the fortified complex is in agricultural use, so that any remains of buildings will have been destroyed by ploughing over time and are no longer visible on the surface. The geomagnetic survey covered an area of about 5 km<sup>2</sup> in total. The surroundings of the palace proved to be particularly conducive, as the subsoil basically consists of fine sediments. The archaeologically relevant features provide a strong magnetic contrast to

this, as timazite, a strongly magnetic hornblende andesite which occurs naturally in the vicinity, was used as a building material alongside fired bricks. As a result, more than 50 previously unknown stone buildings could be identified, mainly to the west and north of the palace. South of the fortified complex, two weakly pronounced structures and many small anomalies could be identified, while the contour map shows an enclosed area with several large structures on the first hill terrace outside of the palace’s east wall.

Geophysics also revealed buildings within the palace precinct for the first time, in spite of an extensive rubble layer covering them. Soil resistivity measurements using 10-channel continuous DC current equipment were carried out here in order to determine the thickness of the cultural layer. A thickness of about 4 metres can be deduced, followed by an area with rather variable distributions of soil resistivity, indicating differing water contents in the soil. The generated geoelectrical profile was then related to a trench excavated next to the surveyed area. As shown in section, several superimposed building remains were revealed to a depth of around 4–4.5 metres. Due to water incursions, it was not possible to excavate any deeper (see contribution SCHÜLER / OPELT).

With reference to the geomorphological investigations and the geophysical survey, a traditional archaeological surface survey was carried out across an area of approximately 6.25 km<sup>2</sup> in the hinterland of *Felix Romuliana*-Gamzigrad. This succeeded in verifying 67 already known archaeological sites, as well as discovering 24 new ones. The sites cover all periods from the Neolithic to the Middle Ages. However, it is striking that among the Roman finds, very few date to the first to third centuries, suggesting a form of ‘settlement hiatus’ during the existence of the palace of Galerius. In contrast, the volume of finds increases markedly for the fourth to seventh centuries. This is followed by a renewed reduction in finds of the eighth and ninth centuries, before a further rise in evidence

for tenth and eleventh century settlement (see contribution ŠKUNDRIĆ-RUMMEL).

The valley of the Timok river provided good conditions for settlement through time, and the earliest settlement traces in the surroundings of *Felix Romuliana* date to the Early Neolithic. In addition to agriculture, the rich mineral resources in the wider river catchment apparently also formed an important economic basis for these early settlers. Particularly in the Bronze Age, this led to settlement intensification in the region, further facilitated by the wet and warm climatic optimum of the early second millennium BC. The remains of a Bronze Age settlement were discovered within the later palace walls of *Felix Romuliana*, and a Bronze Age burial site came to light under the Late Antique burial mounds on the Magura heights, east of the palace. The cemetery comprised urned cremations, some with bronze objects, which are interpreted as showing social differentiation. In the late second millennium, partly as a result of a climatic downturn, settlement decreased dramatically, also in the Timok valley. It was only in the Early Iron Age that a few single settlements were slowly re-established in the surroundings of Gamzigrad, as well as in the south-eastern part of the later palace area. Settlement activity around Gamzigrad appears to have remained limited during the Later Iron Age. As the archaeological survey has shown, this trend continued until after the arrival of the Romans (see contribution KAPURAN).

It is only once the Romans had to retreat from the Dacian provinces north of the Danube in the third quarter of the third century that the Moesian provinces south of the river gained in strategic and economic importance. In the course of the reorganisation of the Empire's defences, the restored or newly constructed military posts along the southern banks of the Danube, in the area of the Iron Gates, played an important role. In the hinterland of this section of the limes lie the so-called Serbian Ore Mountains, whose rich copper, iron and precious metal resources constituted a desperately needed replacement for the Dacian mineral deposits, now inaccessible to the Roman military economy. Modern-day Gamzigrad is centrally located in this area and boasts connections to the middle and lower Danube, as well as roads leading southwards to the Adriatic coast and south-eastwards to Constantinople. It is possible that a fortification with representative interior buildings was constructed near the modern-day village as early as the reign of Aurelianus, with an enclosed area with several large buildings constructed to the north of it. Our topographical investigations have shown that these appear to have stood for only a short time before being damaged or largely destroyed by a natural catastrophe. Small-scale archaeological excavations north of the palace have yield-

ed coin finds which provide initial indicators that this catastrophe took place as early as the late third century, even before Emperor Galerius took up residence in the palace and the site reached the apex of its importance (see contribution VON BÜLOW, Nordfläche).

So far, there are no archaeological indications that the damaged structures in the enclosure north of the fortified site were reoccupied after this event, but it could be shown that several new buildings were constructed in the area after the catastrophe. The pottery from this part of the site even indicates that use continued into the early fifth century. The pottery assemblage is dominated by grey kitchen ware, probably partly locally made, while only a few imported vessels have come to light. There is no fine pottery, such as Samian ware. In addition, transport amphorae are represented in only very low numbers, which suggests that the site was not integrated into a central distribution network, but that the inhabitants produced most of their food themselves or sourced it via a local market system (see contribution CONRAD).

The newly identified structures in the area surrounding the palace include a building consisting of a courtyard-like entrance area, five rooms and a corridor that has been interpreted as a "enclosed square villa". It seems to have been constructed in the Galerian period, destroyed in what may have been a natural catastrophe, and to have been partially rebuilt thereafter (see contribution VON BÜLOW, *Villa extra muros*).

The emperor ordered the construction of a new fortification which enclosed the remains of the earlier wall like a ring. The new enlarged interior was filled with numerous representative and functional buildings. These partly reused existing building remains, as suggested by the mosaic floors showing several phases, as well as by the abandonment of an existing, but probably heavily damaged hypocaust heating system in the central building. Several areas within the palace complex are furnished with opus sectile floors. Their decorative schemes show stylistic similarities to those in the palace of Galerius at Thessaloniki (see contribution JEREMIĆ).

A more than life-sized portrait head of the Emperor, made in Egyptian porphyry, had come to light in the ruins of baths in the south-east quarter of the palace complex. Further fragments of porphyry sculptures were unearthed during excavations. A new study of all extant pieces has shown that they belong to a group of at least two larger than life-sized statues of emperors, who are being crowned with a wreath by two small winged victory figures (see contribution BERGMANN).

During the excavation of the *villa extra muros* a marble sculpture of a boar was discovered. It depicts the ani-

mal being brought down by a dog, its front legs buckling. Breaks in the marble, and the remains of a horse's hoof and lower legs indicate that the sculpture would originally have been part of a roughly life-sized statue of a so-called "Thracian horseman / Thracian heros" (see contribution VON BÜLOW, Marmorskulptur).

The field-walking survey suggested increased settlement activity in the former palace area and its immediate surroundings, and this was confirmed by archaeological investigations in the interior of the southern tower flanking the later west gate of *Felix Romuliana*. In this area, seven successive cultural layers were revealed and dated from the second half of the fourth to the beginning of the seventh century on the basis of coins and small finds. In the second half of the fourth and the first half of the fifth century, this part of the site was used for large-scale metal working, as evidenced by seven smelting and forging furnaces. The layer covering these contained two burials dated to the second half of the fifth century which may be connected to the disruption of life in *Felix Romuliana* caused by the invasion of the Huns and other barbarian tribes (see contributions by PETKOVIĆ / VASIĆ).

Further archaeological evidence that the former palace area was intensively settled even after the death of Galerius is provided by several cemeteries that surround it *extra muros*. These include eight burials excavated to the southwest of the palace. Six of these are inhumations in various orientations, while two contained skeletal remains with traces of burning. Twelve coins were recovered from the surroundings of these graves, including issues from Diocletian to Justinian I.

Three graves found in the surroundings of the palace stand out from the others through their position and grave goods. The oldest of them lay within a walled enclosure; some of the few skeletal remains which are preserved show traces of burning. The grave goods show that this was the burial of a high-ranking Roman officer, as they include several intentionally damaged weapons and parts of a horse harness, as well as a golden crossbow-brooch, the bronze pin of which had been removed. In addition there were five bronze coins. The two which could be identified

were minted in the last third of the third century (Aurelianus, Probus).

A further grave with a west–east oriented skeleton in a simple pit was discovered immediately adjacent to the outer face of the southern enclosure wall. The gravegoods include a bronze shield boss and a gilded crossbow-brooch, as well as a satchel containing six Valentinian bronze coins. This, and the unconventional location of this interment, also suggest a higher-ranking member of the military.

The third isolated grave is also an inhumation with a well-preserved skeleton, placed in a west–east orientation inside a roughly rectangular grave pit located near the outer face of the northern enclosure wall. The anthropological analysis has revealed pathological changes to the bones which characterise this male individual as an archer or horseman in military service. Three gold coins found next to his right arm indicate that this soldier also occupied a higher military rank. The coins date the burial to the sixth decade of the fifth century (see contribution VULOVIĆ et al.).

As an overall conclusion to be drawn from the synopsis of the contributions collected in this volume, we can retain the following: the geomorphological, geophysical and archaeological surveys have substantially improved our knowledge of the archaeological landscape surrounding the palace of Galerius, covering several chronological levels from the Neolithic to the Middle Ages. The Late Roman imperial palace of *Felix Romuliana* fits seamlessly into this picture. In addition, the archaeological excavations in conjunction with specialist analyses have led to a further differentiation of the topographical context of the palace itself, as well as integrating it into the wider settlement history and contributing to a refined chronology of the *Felix Romuliana*-Gamzigrad site. At the same time, this has thrown open new questions, concerning for instance the character of the built-up area north of the palace and its functional connection with the palace itself and its predecessor, or the function of the earlier fortification within the Late Antique communication and economic system in the Balkans.

(Translation: D. Hofmann / Ch. Rummel)