

Martin Lemke

Fieldwork at Novae 2014

Światowit : rocznik poświęcony archeologii przeddziejowej i badaniom pierwotnej kultury polskiej i słowiańskiej 12 (53)/A, 193-203

2014

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

MARTIN LEMKE

FIELDWORK AT NOVAE 2014

Keywords: Lower Danube limes, military camp, *Moesia inferior*, Roman army

Novae is located on the Danube in northern Bulgaria, not far from modern Svištov. This Roman legionary fortress of the *legio I Italica* and Late Antique town in the province of *Moesia inferior* has been investigated since the 1960s.¹

The 2014 campaign (4 August – 4 September) was the fourth one at Sector 12 (Fig. 1), where fieldwork was initiated in 2011.² The task is to establish whether the principal structure was the building of the *immunes*, legionary barracks (possibly of the first cohort), the house of a high-ranked officer, or something altogether different. In 2014, the investigated area (Fig. 2) was enlarged by around 260 m² towards the north, east and south, divided into 16 trenches, and now it measures ca. 1200 m² in total.

The year 2014 brought merely few remains of architecture from the wooden phase of the camp,³ but some extraordinary small finds from the 1st c. will be discussed below.

The first phase of stonework, dating to the late 1st c., when the *legio I Italica* consolidated its fortress, incorporates medium and larger limestones of a yellowish colour and a whole system of aqueducts and sewage channels investigated in the previous campaigns. These sewers and a small basin were all further investigated.

A small basin (Fig. 3) discovered and partly excavated in 2013⁴ has now been completely uncovered; its surface measures ca. 7 m², including the eastern part now damaged by a Late Antique wall. This wall is preserved to a considerable height to the south of the basin; it was made of rather small stones and white lime mortar. East of the



wall, the limits of the basin are visible as a negative on the ground. Also on the eastern side, remains of the entrance (?) were discovered in form of a terracotta and mortar platform measuring 70×70 cm, heavily disrupted by the later wall. The basin is rectangular in shape, with an added apse on its western side. The side walls measure 25 cm at the top, widening downwards. The bottom was made of extremely hard, grey hydraulic mortar. The walls were built of *bessales* measuring 19×19 cm, as well as broken *tegulae* and bricks, covered with mortar. There are two plugholes in the northern wall, measuring 11 and 9 cm in diameter. The lower drainage runs through a clay pipe, while the upper hole was simply framed with fragments of *tegulae*. The inside surface of the basin walls was clad in a nearly white hydraulic mortar with a shade of pink, containing a considerable amount of ceramic addition. The walls and bottom show traces of new layers of mortar being added, a process that probably raised the ground level within the basin and made a second, higher plughole necessary.

¹ Our research is kindly supported by the University of Warsaw and the National Science Centre (Narodowe Centrum Nauki), within the project: “Obóz legionowy i miasto późnoantyczne – kontynuacja badań. Baraki I kohorty i późna zabudowa” (Legionary fortress and Late Antique town – continued research. Barracks of the 1st cohort and late architecture), N N109 182140.

² For the first three campaigns and further reading on Novae see: M. LEMKE, *Fieldwork at Novae 2011*, “Światowit” IX (L)/A (2011), 2012, 195–200; idem, *Fieldwork at Novae 2012*,

“Światowit” X (LI)/A (2012), 2013, 151–156; idem, *Fieldwork at Novae 2013*, “Światowit” XI (LII)/A (2013), 2014, 189–196.

³ Cf. M. LEMKE, *Fieldwork at Novae 2013...* For the discussion regarding the garrison see: M. LEMKE, *What if It Wasn't the Eighth Legion? Remarks by the Devil's Advocate*, (in:) T. Sarnowski (ed.), *Novae. The Moesian Base of the Eighth Augustan Legion*, forthcoming.

⁴ M. LEMKE, *Fieldwork at Novae 2013...*, 192–194.

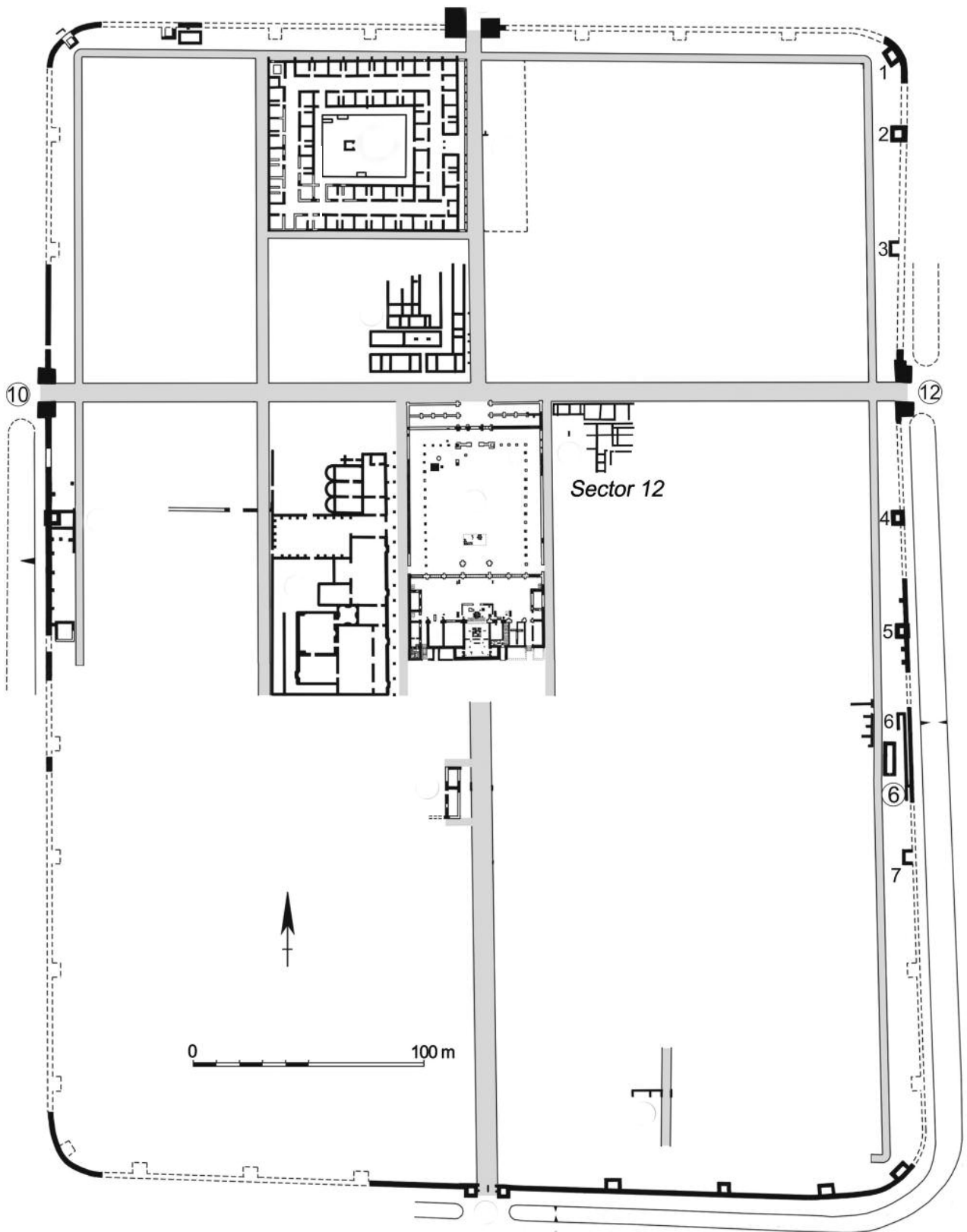


Fig. 1. Novae. Plan of the legionary fortress in the 2nd and 3rd c. AD (Based on an outline plan by J. Kaniszewski, supplemented by T. Sarnowski, L. Kovalevskaia, P. Zakrzewski, P. Dyczek, M. Lemke).

Ryc. 1. Novae. Plan obozu legionowego w II i III w.

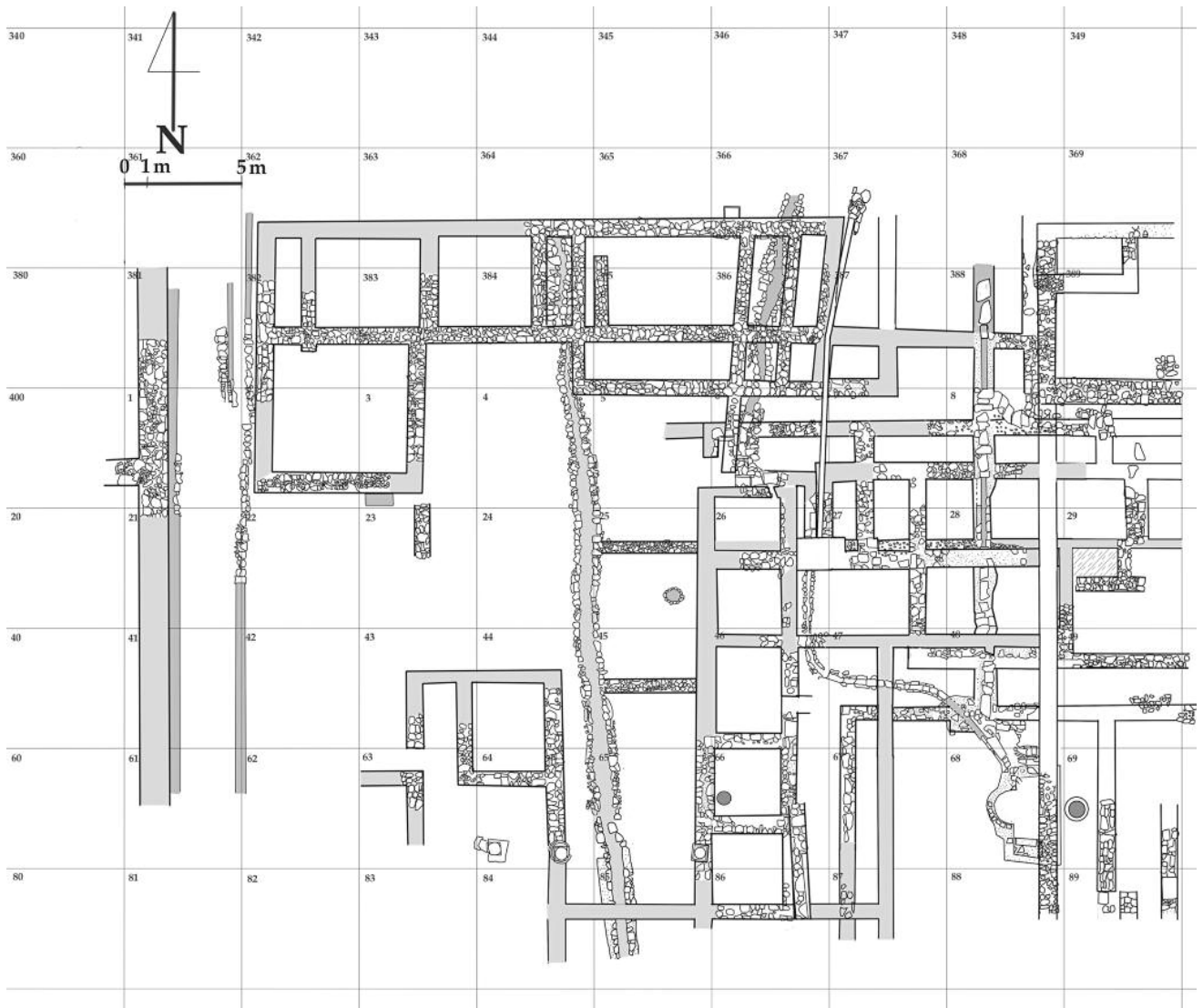


Fig. 2. Sector 12 after the 2014 campaign (Drawing M. Lemke, P. Dyczek, M. Różycka).

Ryc. 2. Sektor 12 po kampanii w 2014 r.

Water was disposed of from the basin by means of a narrow channel made of reused roofing tiles running north-west in turns. Below this “meandering” channel,⁵ a small probing trench was dug to reveal a layer with ceramic material from the 1st c. (Pannonian fine ware) above virgin soil at 45.32 m a.s.l., possibly a refuse pit. The pink mortar of the small basin may point towards a Late Antique date of construction, when the area was transformed into a probably civilian workshop with various features in the 4th c. Then again, the basin sewer was set as deep

as the remaining 1st c. water channels, considerably below other Late Antique conduits, upholding the suggested possibility of an early dating.⁶ The fact that the basin was cut in half by Late Antique walls is also an argument supporting the latter possibility.

In any case, the area was intensively used in Late Antiquity. Remaining from this period is a number of ghost walls and nearly dismantled walls, forming a large, rectangular structure. These walls cut through the earlier structures, all the way down to the foundations, which is

⁵ A name chosen to distinguish it among the various water conduits of the site, see: M. LEMKE, *Fieldwork at Novae 2013...*, 193.

⁶ Cf. M. LEMKE, *Fieldwork at Novae 2013...*, 193–194.



Fig. 3. Basin with a drainage junction and a Late Antique ghost wall (Photo M. Lemke).

Ryc. 3. Basen z rozwidleniem kanałów odpływowych i późnoantycznym negatywem muru.

especially visible in the damaged water channels. Right next to the legionary main sewer, a discarded column base was found, a proof that the adjoining layers have been thoroughly upset as late as in the 4th c. The ghost walls were probably part of the civilian buildings, which from the second half of the 4th c. onwards commonly occupied the centre of the camp.⁷

This poses an interesting problem in stratigraphy, as there appears to be a large gap between layers of the same chronology. This can be seen when looking at a further water conduit (**Fig. 4**), discovered in its southern run already in 2013⁸ and further explored in Trench 1 in the northern part of the area, running along a N-S axis. The channel running here on a level of 48.00–47.60 m a.s.l.

⁷ M. LEMKE, *The Dwindling Legion. Architectural and Administrative Changes in Novae (Moesia inferior) on the Verge to Late Antiquity*, (in:) R. Collins, M. Symonds, M. Weber

(eds.), *Roman Military Architecture on the Frontiers: Armies and Their Architecture in Late Antiquity*, Oxford 2015, 90–97.

⁸ M. LEMKE, *Fieldwork at Novae 2013...*, 196.

was built with Late Antique roofing tiles and bricks with a stone cover and ended in a small, almost completely destroyed basin.⁹ Apparently the water was drained from there into the still functioning “meandering” channel, which is located more than 1 m below the level of this conduit, however. The width of the construction measured 70 cm, the width of the conduit itself 30 cm, the height 20 cm, with an overall height of 40 cm.

Overall, the unearthed architectural layout at Sector 12 has become more complex, but not necessarily clearer. The stratigraphy is very dense, and unlike, for

instance, Sector 4, where the subsequent phases add up to more than 5 m in height, the increase in altitude throughout the centuries appears much slimmer and with more intensity on each level. On the other hand, the stratigraphy of the Late Antique phase spans a notable height difference. In terms of levels, the modern surface lies at a height of ca. 49.50 m a.s.l., the bottom of the small basin at 46.88 m, the bottom of the ceramic (“meandering”) sewer at 46.19 m a.s.l., while virgin soil occurs beneath the earliest 1st c. layers at around 45.30 m a.s.l.



Fig. 4. Late Roman water conduit above legionary structures (Photo M. Lemke).

Ryc. 4. Późnorzymski wodociąg nad zabudową legionową.

⁹ M. LEMKE, *Fieldwork at Novae 2012...*, 155–156.



Fig. 5. Applique depicting a male actor sitting on an altar: a – side view; b – front view (Photo M. Lemke).

Ryc. 5. Aplikacja przedstawiająca aktora siedzącego na ołtarzu: a – widok z boku; b – widok *en face*.

However, the significance of the building is also stressed by the particular abundance of high quality finds in 2014. In Trench 8, a small bronze applique (Fig. 5, 6.5×4.5 cm) depicting a male actor sitting on an altar was found in a layer of grey loess soil with fragments of pottery and mortar. The actor plays the role of a fugitive slave, who found asylum by sitting on the altar.¹⁰ He wears a mask and holds an object, possibly a music instrument (*sistrum*) in his left hand. On the backside, a slit gives proof that the figurine served as an applique, probably for a wagon or a piece of furniture, like the example from Pistiros

mentioned below. The comic slave on an altar was a common iconographic theme, with roots in Hellenistic art, which in turn portrays a scene from literature. The slave taking refuge this way is a motif appearing in works by both Menander and Plautus (*Perinthia* and *Mostellaria*, respectively). Initially the slave would have been depicted in context with his master and other elements, but eventually became a stand-alone motif.¹¹ Interestingly, a comparable figurine which was formerly part of a throne-like chair was found in Pistiros in Thrace, a city of Hellenistic origin,¹² while a sophisticated variation on this theme is

¹⁰ Personal communication Norbert Franken (Berlin). I am very grateful to Dr Franken for sharing his observations on this applique and the two following *togates* with me.

¹¹ A. OLIVER, *An Incense Burner in the Form of an Actor as a Slave on an Altar*, (in:) J. Arce, F. Burkhalter (eds.), *Bronces*

y Religion Romana. Actas del XI Congreso Internacional de Bronces Antiguos, Madrid 1993, 332–333.

¹² J. BOUZEK, *New Contributions to Black Sea Iconography*, “Ancient West & East” 14, 2015, 238–239.

Fig. 6. *Thymiaterion* in the form of a comic actor sitting on an altar, first half of the 1st c. AD, bronze with silver inlay. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (E. TOWNE MARKUS, *Masterpieces...*, 115).

Ryc. 6. *Thymiaterion* w formie figurki przedstawiającej aktora siedzącego na ołtarzu. Brąz, pierwsza połowa I w., Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



a *thymiaterion* dated to the first half of the 1st c. AD from the Getty collection (Fig. 6).¹³ In this splendid piece of artisanship, the actor sits upon an altar decorated with erotes and garlands forming the body of the incense burner. He wears the typical costume and mask of a Greek New Comedy slave. We can trace this and other elements of this fine example in our somewhat cruder but still lively version from Novae.

In Trenches 8 and 9, two more bronze figurines were discovered (Fig. 7) in a rubble layer containing burnt

clay, pieces of pottery, mortar, ashes and charcoal. Interestingly, both pieces were initially cast from a figurine mould and later adapted for usage in a relief, as seen by the marks on the backside.¹⁴ Such *togates* are another common motive in Roman figural art, but even though it has been established that many examples were part of a larger relief, there is no absolute clarity regarding the significance of these figurines yet.¹⁵ Both men are clad in togas and have their right hands stretched out downwards. This characteristic gesture is sometimes interpreted as placing single pieces of incense in a sacrificial flame, thus the scene depicted

¹³ A. OLIVER, *An Incense Burner...*, 331–335; E. TOWNE MARKUS, *Masterpieces of the J. Paul Getty Museum: Antiquities*, Los Angeles 1997, 109.

¹⁴ We owe this interpretation to Norbert Franken who kindly consulted the finds.

¹⁵ U. KREILINGER, *Römische Bronzeappliken*, Heidelberg 1996, 95.

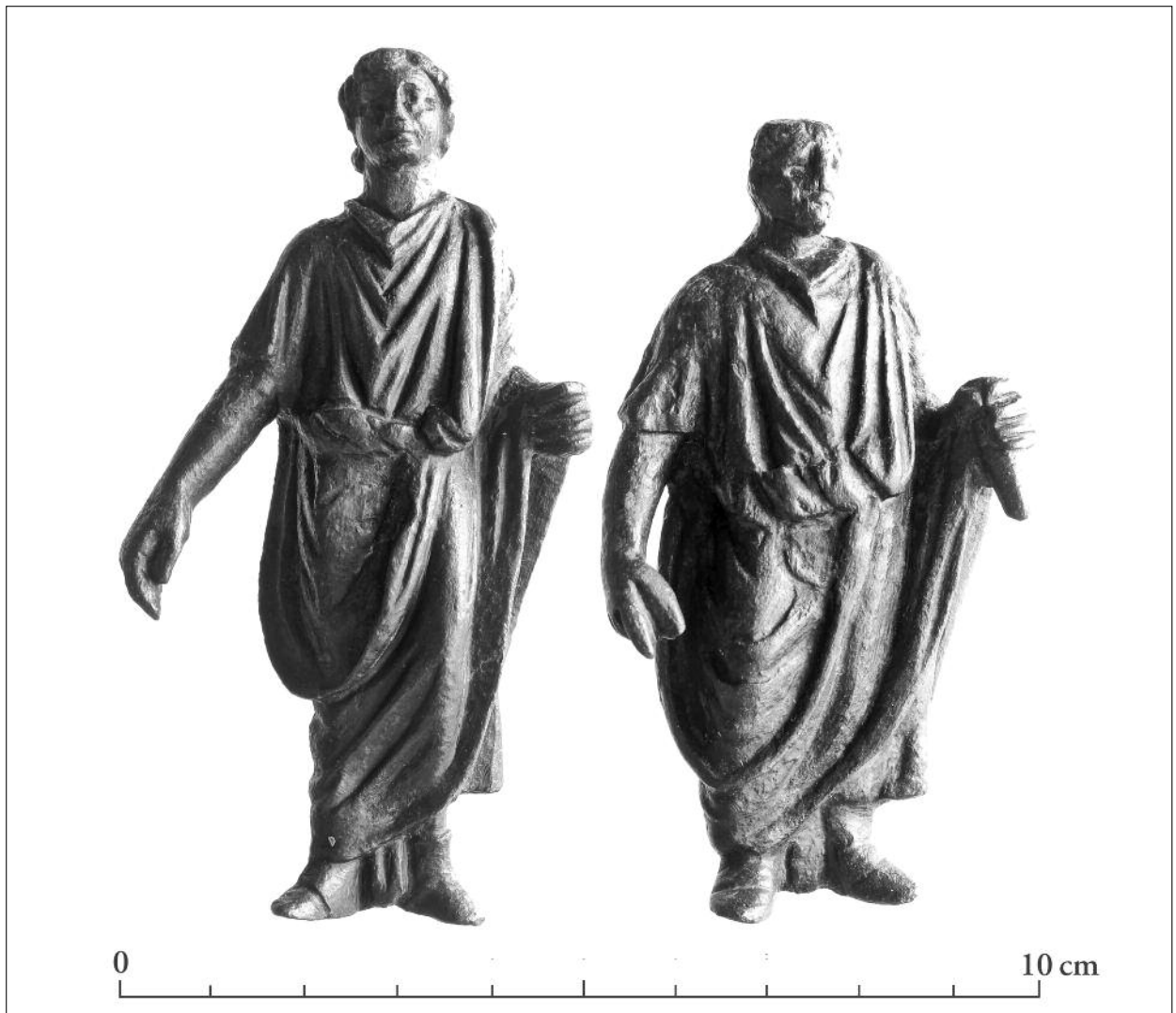


Fig. 7. Two figurines/appliques depicting *togates* (Photo M. Lemke).

Ryc. 7. Dwie figurki/aplikacje przedstawiające ubranych w togi mężczyzn.

would be a ritualistic one.¹⁶ Indeed, men in a comparable pose can be seen for instance in the ritualistic scenes on Trajan's Column (Scene LIV). The left hands of both men are bent at the elbow, holding a small round object, probably a *rotulus*. The taller, slimmer figure (9.3×4.3 cm) looks straight forward, its right hand broke off and was replaced, slightly skewing the proportions of the figurine, while those of the smaller figure (8.5×5 cm) are overall more even. These pieces of small art are predominantly dated into the Early Empire, quite often as early as the first half of

the 1st c. Accordingly, an interpretation linking these apparently standardised figures (just like the *lictors*,¹⁷ another uniform category) with the cult of the emperor is tempting. It is certainly conceivable that such appliques belonged to adornments of official monuments, that is bronze altars, statue bases or statues themselves, furniture and sometimes to bronze inscriptions.

As a pair, these figures also bear a close resemblance to the *Two togate magistrates*, a find of unknown provenance, kept in the Getty Museum.¹⁸ Two men wearing

¹⁶ U. KREILINGER, *Römische Bronzeappliken...*, table 45 and 222–228.

¹⁷ U. KREILINGER, *Römische Bronzeappliken...*, 99–100.

¹⁸ E. TOWNE MARKUS, *Masterpieces...*, 115; D. SCOTT, J. PODANY,

Ancient Copper Alloys: Some Metallurgical and Technological Studies of Greek and Roman Bronzes, (in:) M. True, J. Podany (eds.), *Small Bronze Sculpture from the Ancient World*, Malibu 1990, 45, table 3, 46–47, fig. 12:a–c.



Fig. 8. *Lunula* (a) and *phalerae* (b–e) from a horse bridle. An attachment for leather straps is visible on the backside of specimen “e” (f) (Photo J. Reclaw).

Ryc. 8. *Lunula* (a) oraz *phalerae* (b–e) od uprzęży końskiej. Mocowania dla rzemyków skórzanych są widoczne na odwrocie egzemplarza „e” (f).

togas turn to look at some action to their right. In this case, they are remains of what was once a larger bronze relief frieze. The stylistic features of the clothing and hairstyles have been dated to the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero.¹⁹

Among other high quality finds from a comparatively small area in the south-eastern part of the trench range

a bronze leg from a piece of furniture in the shape of a lion's paw, numerous *phalerae* and a *lunula* from a horse bridle (Fig. 8), the bottom part of a marble statue group (Fig. 9) and a very well preserved pear-shaped bronze lamp of Loeschke XXI Type. The cast bronze lamp (Fig. 10) has a raised rim around the discus, with a ring handle and a slightly bent but otherwise intact crescent handle

¹⁹ E. NICHOLSON, R. LANE (eds.), *The J. Paul Getty Museum Handbook of the Collection*, Los Angeles 2015, 52.

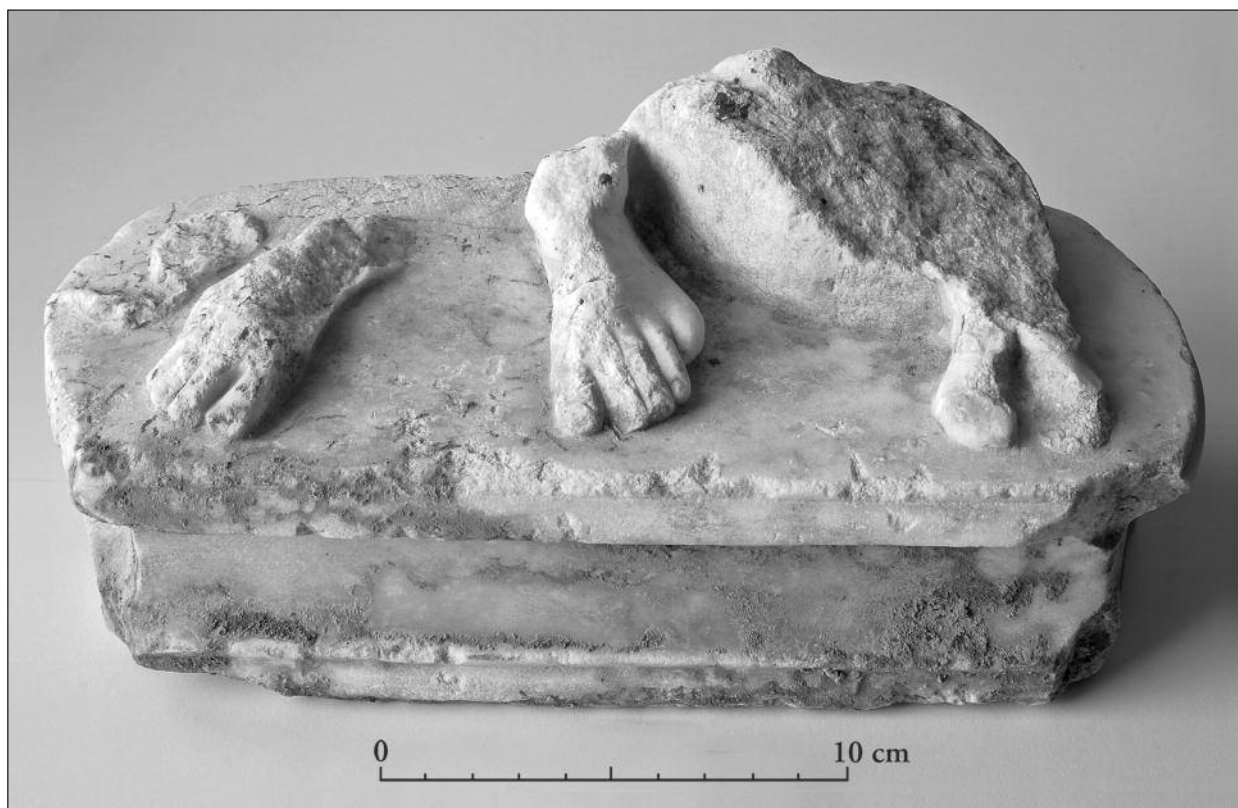


Fig. 9. Bottom part of a marble statue group (Photo M. Lemke).

Ryc. 9. Dolna część marmurowej grupy rzeźbiarskiej.



Fig. 10. Bronze lamp of Loeschcke XXI Type (Photo J. Reclaw).

Ryc. 10. Lampka z brązu typu Loeschcke XXI.

ornament (*lunula*). Two attachments for a bronze chain are also visible at the front. Loeschcke XXI lamps usually occur in military contexts and are dated to the 1st/2nd c. Moreover, a fragment of an inscription on limestone was found, but the preserved letters hardly allow for a reading.

The pottery consisted of shards commonly found at Novae: a multitude of imperial Roman amphorae, Butovo Ware, kitchen and tableware of different types including Legionary and Pannonian pottery, as well as Dobrudja Ware. Other finds and pottery from the earliest phase included glass, some bits of jewellery and Italic *terra sigillata*, mostly from garbage pits.

Regarding the overall complexity and quality of the small finds from the 1st and 2nd c., it seems highly probable that the principal structure of the legionary camp standing here was indeed the residence of a high officer in the *I Italica* legion.

Dr Martin Lemke
Antiquity of Southeastern Europe Research Centre
University of Warsaw
m.lemke@uw.edu.pl

MARTIN LEMKE

WYKOPALISKA W NOVAE W 2014 R.

W 2014 r. przeprowadzono czwarta kampanię wykopaliskową w sektorze 12, w prawym *latus praetorii* po wschodniej stronie *principia*, na południe od *via principalis* (Ryc. 1, 2). Kontynuowano eksplorację szerokopłaszczyznową powiększając przebadaną powierzchnię o 260 m², do ok. 1200 m² obszaru odkrytego od początku prac w 2011 r. W tym miejscu, zgodnie ze standardowym planem rzymskiego obozu wojskowego, powinno się znajdować *praetorium*, koszary dla *immunes* lub też baraki, być może pierwszej kohorty, albo rezydencja któregoś z wysokich oficerów legionu. Kontynuowano eksplorację obiektów wybudowanych przez legion I Italski, z kanałami odprowadzającymi

wodę, oraz małym basenem (Ryc. 3), który prawdopodobnie był częścią prywatnej łaźni. Natrafiono też na późnorzymski kanał ściekowy (Ryc. 4).

Na szczególną uwagę zasługują trzy statuetki z brązu (Ryc. 5:a,b, 7), z których pierwsza ukazuje siedzącego na ołtarzu aktora komediowego, podobnego do bardziej wyrafinowanego przedstawienia z *thymiaterion* z Getty Museum (Ryc. 6).

Odkryto też sporą liczbę innych zabytków wysokiej jakości, w tym dolną część marmurowego posągu (Ryc. 9), lampkę z brązu (Ryc. 10) oraz liczne *phalerae* (Ryc. 8).