Title: **GONIO (APSAROS) IN ADJARA: EXCAVATION OF A ROMAN FORT INTERIM REPORT ON THE FIRST SEASON OF THE POLISH–GEORGIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION**

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**ABSTRACT:** The Roman fort of Apsaros in Gonio (Adjara, Georgia) still holds answers to many issues connected with the Roman military presence on the Chorokhi river in ancient Colchis. In 2014, a Polish team joined the Georgian expedition to carry out excavation in two sectors directly east of the centrally located principia. The sites were chosen based on a study of the results of geophysical prospection carried out in 2012. Two phases, dated to the early and late Roman periods respectively, were recorded. The early Roman architecture was interpreted as part of the installations and structures of a large bathhouse (*balnea*), including a mosaic floor in one of the rooms. The building was destroyed at least twice, most likely in a catastrophic fire. The article discusses the stratigraphy and the dating of the early Roman *balnea* based on glass artifacts and coins.

**KEYWORDS:** Georgia, Gonio, Apsaros, Roman army, fort, bath, *balnea*, glassware
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GONIO (APSAROS) IN ADJARA: EXCAVATION OF A ROMAN FORT
INTERIM REPORT ON THE FIRST SEASON OF THE POLISH–GEORGIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION

Radosław Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski¹ and Shota Mamuladze²
with Piotr Jaworski³ and Marcin Wagner⁴

¹, ³, ⁴ Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw, ² Gonio-Apsarus Archaeological-Architectural Museum Reserve

Abstract: The Roman fort of Apsaros in Gonio (Adjara, Georgia) still holds answers to many issues connected with the Roman military presence on the Chorokhi river in ancient Colchis. In 2014, a Polish team joined the Georgian expedition to carry out excavation in two sectors directly east of the centrally located principia. The sites were chosen based on a study of the results of geophysical prospection carried out in 2012. Two phases, dated to the early and late Roman periods respectively, were recorded. The early Roman architecture was interpreted as part of the installations and structures of a large bathhouse (balneae), including a mosaic floor in one of the rooms. The building was destroyed at least twice, most likely in a catastrophic fire. The article discusses the stratigraphy and the dating of the early Roman balneae based on glass artifacts and coins.

Keywords: Georgia, Gonio, Apsaros, Roman army, fort, bath, balneae, glassware

Apsaros is a known and well published site (Plontke-Lüning 2003; Kakhidze 2008), not the least the remains of ancient Roman fortifications (Geyer and Mamuladze 2002; Khalvashi 2002: Fig. I; Geyer 2003: Pls 2, 3, 5; Kakhidze and Mamuladze 2004: Figs 1–3, 9, 10; Kakhidze 2008: Figs 3, 10–12). Even so, many questions remain concerning Roman military presence on the Chorokhi river (see Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski and Kakhidze 2015). Aiming to address some of these issues, a Polish–Georgian team directed by Prof. Shota Mamuladze from the Gonio-Apsarus Archaeological-Architectural Museum Reserve (Batumi, Georgia) and Dr. Radosław Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski from the Institute of Archaeology and Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, opened test trenches in July 2014. Two areas (marked as 4 and 5 on the plan) were selected based on an analysis of the results of a geophysical survey carried out in 2012 by Prof. Krzysztof Misiewicz from the University of Warsaw (Misiewicz and Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski 2013) [Fig. 1].
Fig. 1. The site of the Roman fort at Gonio (Apsaros): location of trenches in sectors 4 and 5 excavated by the Polish–Georgian team in 2014 (trenches in sectors 1, 2 and 3 excavated by the Georgian team, see Mamuladze et al. 2016, in this volume): 1 – southern gate forefront; 2 – southeastern sector; 3 – southwestern sector; 4 – eastern trench (NO 11, Squares 89, 90, 99, 100); 5 – western trench (NO 01, Squares 95, 96, 97); 6 – location of the principia (“central trench”); dashed line marks the presumed area of the early fort. Inset, map showing the general location of the site (After Geyer 2003; adaptation R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski; drawing J. Kaniszewski; inset map K. Misiewicz)

Dates of work: 28 June–26 July 2014

Co-directors: Prof. Shota Mamuladze (Gonio-Apsarus Museum and Sanctuary, Batumi, Georgia) and Dr. Radosław Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw)

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Student-trainees: Dominika Gawęda, Krystyna Kania, Oskar Kubrak, Dorota Krzyżaniak, Ilona Nowak, Katarzyna Prystupa, Paulina Stachowicz, Patrycja Śpiołek, Daria Trzos, Anna Zydler (all Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw)

Volunteers: Laura Czebotar, Henryk Kaźmierczak, Ignacy Krzyszczak, Katarzyna Langenegger

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The Gonio-Apsarus Archaeological-Architectural Museum Reserve of the Cultural Heritage Preservation Agency of Adjara, Georgia, partners the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology and the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Warsaw on this project. Special thanks to the Rainbow travel agency for help in organizing transfers for team members.
EASTERN TRENCH
The eastern trench (Sector NO 11, Squares 89, 90, 99, 100, marked as 4 in Fig. 1) was situated closer to the eastern defence wall of the fort. It started out 4 m by 8 m and was subsequently extended. The area that was excavated in the end was 56 m² big.

The area was heavily pitted by digging in Ottoman times, which affected the architectural remains found directly under the topsoil. Excavation led to distinguishing two architectural phases: the first from the early Roman period, the second from late Roman times.

Phase 1 remains comprise the foundations of a room (or rooms) that are hardly identifiable in terms of layout. They consist of two courses of irregular chunks of stone, laid without mortar in a sandy substrate that represents undisturbed subsoil. Later building activities are responsible for the poor preservation of these remains. The foundations are dated generally to the first centuries AD.

A collapsed roof with fragments of ceramic roofing tiles (tegulae) was recorded in a section of the excavated trench. Remains consisted of charred wood and a collection of iron nails which had once secured the tiles [Fig. 2]. Belonging to this phase were two ceramic water pipes present in the northern section and in the southeastern corner of the trench [Fig. 3:1,2]. The pipelines were cut through by a Phase-2 building constructed in this area.

Phase 2 appears to be related to the late Roman period. The foundations from this phase corresponded to clear magnetic anomalies identified on a map of the area. Upon verification they could be interpreted as a rectangular building with two rows of

Fig. 2. Remains of a collapsed roof with fragments of roofing tiles in the eastern trench, view from the west (Photo A. Trzop-Szczypiorska)
squared rooms and a central corridor. The northwestern corner room [marked as 3 in Fig. 3] strongly resembles in plan and dimensions Byzantine barracks, known from excavations in the southwestern part of the fort (Kakhidze 2008: Fig. 11), and it may well have been a barrack of this kind.

No accumulations connected with Phase 2 usage were recorded. An architectural analysis of the north wall of the room, which was at the same time the external wall of the building, led to the conclusion that the building was refurbished at least once during its use. A new entrance seems to have been opened in the north wall. The remaining part of the wall was thickened from the outside as far as the corner of the building and was additionally

Fig. 3. Eastern trench at Gonio (Apsaros): 1, 2 – remains of two ceramic water pipes; 3 – northwestern corner room of the presumed Byzantine barracks (Photo E. Mizak; digitizing J. Kaniszewski)
reinforced with a layer of stone bonded in lime mortar.

In both phases the structures were founded on undisturbed sandy subsoil, requiring the foundations to be shallow but very wide (more than 1 m). The sandy deposit is a coastal dune. Extremely fragile thick-walled pottery and characteristic ceramic “stakes” indicated the presence of a settlement from the Early Iron Age.

WESTERN TRENCH
The western trench (Sector NO 01, Squares 95, 96, 97, marked as 5 in Fig. 1) was located more or less midway between the eastern defence wall of the fort and the area where the *principia* were discovered (see Plontke-Lüning and Geyer 2003: 31; Kakhidze 2008: 319, Fig. 12; Kakhidze and Mamuladze 2014: 161). Its initial size was also 4 m by 8 m, and its longer axis was aligned N–S. It was extended 4 m to the south, reaching a total surface area of 48 m².

Architectural remains were discovered on a deeper level than in the eastern trench, about 0.50 m below the surface; in places, the excavated depth in the trench reached 1.50 m. Investigations had to be stopped frequently because of the remains of a Roman building discovered there previously. Two phases of architectural remains were identified, dated similarly as in the eastern trench to the early and late Roman periods.

Remains from the early Roman phase (Phase 1) were found at the depth between 1.00 m and 1.50 m below ground surface. A fragment of floor, laid with rectangular ceramic tiles either 19 cm or 26 cm square and 4.5 cm thick, was discovered in the northern part of the trench (marked as 1 in Fig. 4). A water runoff channel with the bottom made of bricks lined the southern edge of the floor (the other edges of the floor were outside the excavated area). Farther off to the south, remains of a pool with walls made of rubble stone were found. The bottom and the walls of the pool were waterproofed with hydraulic mortar. The western edge of this container and parts of its northern and southern borders were identified within the borders of the trench (marked as 2 in Fig. 4); its actual size was traced on the geophysical map and could be reconstructed as 6 m by 7 m.

A corner of a room was discovered to the south of the pool in the southern part of the trench. Its floor was paved with a mosaic (marked as 3 in Fig. 4), made of irregular tesserae, mainly grey, yellow and brown, forming an unpatterned composition [Fig. 5]. The room extended to the east and south. Part of the west wall of the room, with the mosaic, and part of the wall between this room and the pool (within the borders of the trench) were destroyed by Ottoman-period pits.

Architectural analysis of the remains suggested an identification with a large *balnea* or bath. Based on the geophysical results, the complex of the baths may be estimated at more than 1100 m². The units from north to south can be interpreted as an apodyterium and a pool in the frigidarium. Nothing can be said about the function of the room with the floor mosaic.

The excavated remains of two layers of roofing tiles imply that the building was destroyed at least twice. Other evidence shows that it was repaired at least once, and it was then that the presumed apodyterium went out of use. A layer below the brick floor, containing an abundance of gravel, could be interpreted as a hardened
street surface. The presence of a street here had been suggested by the geophysical results. The remaining rooms (with pool and with mosaic floor) were still in use.

Glass finds from the drainage channel have dated the phase to the 1st/2nd century AD (see below), linking it to the early stages of Roman presence in this area.

In Phase 2, the area seems to have been largely abandoned. Excavations revealed one section of a N–S wall above the remains of the pool (marked as 4 in Fig. 4), connected possibly with a room that stretches to the east of the present trench. Since this wall is founded on a much higher level, it is likely that it belonged to a building from the late Roman period.

DISCUSSION OF STRATIGRAPHY

A complex sequence of layers was associated with the architectural remains discovered in the western trench (Sector NO 01, Square 97) [Fig. 6]. The excavated rooms of the bathhouse were built evidently in one go. Two separate levels of rubble containing broken roofing tiles indicated that the balneae was destroyed at least twice, once in a conflagration.

The bath originally included the room with a floor made of ceramic tiles and a drain running along the south wall which separated it from the pool. With time this room went out of use. Layers 8

Fig. 4. Remains of a balneae in the western trench: 1 – apodyterium(?) and channel draining water from a neighboring pool; 2 – part of a pool in the frigidarium; 3 – corner of an unidentified room with mosaic floor; 4 – fragment of a wall belonging to a Byzantine structure (Photo E. Mizak; digitizing J. Kaniszewski)
Fig. 5. Fragment of a mosaic floor after discovery, view from the south (Photo E. Mizak)

Fig. 6. Sector NO 01 (Square 97): top, eastern section; bottom, western section (Drawing and digitizing M. Marciniak)

1–2 – topsoil down to the lowest reach of human interference in modern times
3 – tentative street surface with abundant gravel
4 – wall remains from Phase 2
5 – layer of pure clay (from the upper parts of the bath wall), Phase 1 after repairs
6 – fill layer (rubble) related to layer 5 (Phase 1), second level of destruction
7 – street surface with gravel, from after the first destruction and subsequent reconstruction of the balnea
8 – stone rubble and charcoal, corresponding to the first destruction of the bath (Phase 1)
9 – layer with fine charcoal above paved tile floor
9a – fill of channel draining water from the pool in the frigidarium
10 – floor of ceramic tiles
11 – bedding layer of coarse-grained pure sand
12 – bottom of channel paved with ceramic tiles (only in the western trench)
13 – channel walls of rubble stone
14 – stone block with openings (reused aqueduct connector made of ceramic pipes)
15 – ceramic pipe draining water to the channel
16 – remains of wall separating room with paved floor (apodyterium) from pool (frigidarium)
17 – presumed edge of the balnea after reconstruction and installation of a paved floor
18 – layer of hydraulic mortar inside the pool
and 9 attest to the destruction (intentional dismantling?) of the walls. These layers are deposited not only above the ceramic tiles and the channel, but also on top of the remains of the northern face of the wall which separated the room from the pool in the adjacent room. They also filled part of the channel, indicating that some of the building materials, like the stone covering of the drain and some of the ceramic tiles, were salvaged from the room after it had been abandoned.

A gravel street surface (layer 7) was introduced on top of the leveled ground (layer 8). The presence of a street running on the northern side of the balneae was suggested by the results of the geophysical survey. Superimposed on this street surface and the reconstructed (thinner) north wall of the pool were layers related to the next and final destruction of the bath (layers 5 and 6). A layer of pure clay (layer 5) may have come from the upper parts of the external (north) wall of the bath, which was made of raw clay on a wooden frame. This destruction layer also filled the interior of the pool in Square 96.

Layer 3 covers the ruins of the bath and the layers related to the two-stage destruction of this structure and to later buildings (Phase 2). Judging by the gravel in it, which is similarly abundant as in layer 7, it may be the vestige of another (wider?) street. Layer 3, as is the case of the wall from Phase 2 (Square 96), was preserved all the way up to the bottom of the topsoil.

CONTEXT AND INTERPRETATION OF THE ARTIFACTS

COINS
Two bronze Roman coins were found in layer 3 in Square 97. One was illegible (except for a laurel wreath observed on the reverse), while the other one, although worn, shows the bust of a man on the obverse. It may have been produced in one of the Oriental mints (Antioch?), in the reign of Vespasian.

GLASS
Glass vessel fragments were found in abundance in the western trench, mostly in Square 97 (126 inventory items), compared to just 14 finds from the eastern trench. The glass was mainly of a natural color (pale green, green or bluish-green). Only a small percentage was made of colorless glass or colorless glass with a yellowish tinge. The vessels coming from the baths, including the room with the ceramic floor (in Phase 1), were mostly fragments of balsamaria/unguentaria (Isings 1957: Forms 27 and 28a,b) (compare Kakhidze and Shalikadze 2009: 70–71). They were discovered in the fill of the channel (layer 9a, Inv. Nos 316–318) [Fig. 7 top] and above the floor of ceramic tiles (layer 9, Inv. Nos 224, 225, 229, 231, 238) [Fig. 7 center]. They were also found in layer 8, which corresponds to the first destruction of the balneae (Inv. Nos 246, 253, 292, 293, 295–297, 300) [Fig. 7 bottom]. The finds in these layers formed apparent clusters.

Balsamaria [Fig. 8: Inv. Nos 184, 201, 212] were still found in layer 3 from the time when the bath was already abandoned and dismantled (the two worn Roman coins also originated from this layer). The assemblage also included the feet of bottles or goblets (probably Isings Form 34), which are barely present in the deeper layers.
Fig. 7. Glasses from the western trench, Phase 1 (functioning and first destruction of the bath) (Photos A. Trizop-Szczypiorska; drawing and digitizing M. Wagner)
These, however, did not form any clusters and were more uniformly spread throughout layer 3.

NAILS
Iron nails dominated the assemblage of finds from the eastern trench, associated for the most part with a layer of ceramic roofing tiles, which was identified as the roof of the earlier building phase (Phase 1). The nails are rectangular in section and they can be classified into two major groups: large and small nails. The small nails survived usually as heads, the shanks being merely a few millimeters long, up to 1 cm in some instances. The large nails could have been 10 or even 12 cm long initially. One nail, considerably larger than the others, must have been more than 20 cm long. It may have been used to join construction beams of the roof or of the walls.

Most of the nails were found in the fill of broken roofing tiles and charred fragments of wood, while two of the small nails were discovered in an opening of a ceramic tile. The conclusion is that they were used in roof construction. The large nails were used almost certainly to attach laths (horizontal slats) to the chevrons. The roofing tiles were then placed on the laths. The small nails were used to fix ceramic tiles to the wooden structure of the roof. The thickness of the surviving fragments of the tegulae-type roofing tiles is about 2 cm, which leads to the assumption that the original length of the small nails was not less than 4–5 cm.

Fig. 8. Glasses from the western trench, layer 3 after the abandonment of the bath (Photo A. Trzop-Szczypiorska; drawing and digitizing M. Wagner)
CONCLUSIONS

Remains of buildings from the early Roman and late Roman periods, as well as pits from the Ottoman period (17th–19th century), were discovered in both trenches. In the case of architectural finds from the first centuries AD, two levels of destruction were recorded in the western trench (Sector NO 01) and one with collapsed roofing tiles in the eastern trench (Sector NO 11). In all probability, this one-time destruction of the eastern section of the complex should be related in time to the first (earlier) level of destruction in the western segment. In both places this layer is accompanied by traces of burning and charcoal. Taking into consideration the location of the discussed trenches on the site, one can assume that the finds attest to a fire that consumed a major part of the earliest stone buildings of the fort. Several structures were apparently not reconstructed afterwards (in the eastern trench).

Architectural remains from the late Roman period are superimposed on the early remains, although no precise chronology can be established for them at the present stage of research. In the western trench, they comprise a section of wall with no traces of repair and in the eastern trench the remains of a corner room in the building of the presumed barracks, which was apparently renovated at least once.

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