

REPORT ON THE 1968 EXCAVATION AT MURSA (OSIJEK)

Since the last century there have been frequent occasional or protective excavations of Roman Mursa, but in 1968 a team of experts from the Zagreb Archaeological Museum and from the Museum of Slavonia at Osijek, executed for the first time, what could be called a systematic exploratory excavation, the aim being to obtain new stratigraphic and dating evidence and topographic data for the history of Mursa.

A quiet lane (Bosanska ulica) was chosen for this exploration, where there are small vegetable gardens in front of the houses, while on the opposite side the railway-line going East to Dalj (Teutoburgium) is bordering the lane. Earlier in the year when in this lane trenches for water-supply and sewerage had been cut, remains of Roman walls and building materials were discovered by the museum staff members.

A Franciscan friar and great scholar in the 18th century, M. P. Katančić was witness to the grand planning activity of Austria in this part of Osijek and in one of his earliest scientific papers he left us many notes on what he had seen of Mursa's torso, then still partly lying above the surface and partly in the ground. Along with this, he expressed his admiration for the glory of Roman Mursa, bitter regretting the building activity and spreading of the then modern Osijek over this significant archaeological site (note 1).

Also, in an old 18th century map, traces of Roman houses and walls were seen on the site where our lane now exists and at the west end of it even traces of Mursa's outer defensive walls could be discerned. Katančić's paper and this old map gave us enough encouragement to begin with our task (fig. 1).

In 1968, in the gardens in front of the above mentioned Lane, eight trial trenches had been cut, oriented either East—West or North—South. Trenches No. 1, 3 and 4 were situated in front of houses No. 6, 7 and 8, while trenches No. 2 and 5 in front of houses No. 2a and 2c. When the excavation began, the long trench oriented NS, earlier opened for construction of a water-main in front of house No. 7, was still open, so that its profiles East and West could easily be scrutinized. In one section of it two floors and two walls could be traced and for that reason three more trial trenches, No. 6, 7 and 8 were dug to its west and east side (fig. 2).

The excavation report contains a) a description of the trenches, their profiles and finds (page 3—17), b) stratigraphic explanations (page 17—21), c) a chronologic analysis, based mainly on pottery fragments (page 22—55) and d) a conclusion (page 55—62).

Trench 1 Unfortunately, trench 1 could be illustrated only with a fragment of its northern profile (sketch 1) because, before the research work in it could be thoroughly completed, the earth around the trench started to crack, so that we were alarmed that we were causing damage to the foundations of the near-by houses. Therefore, the trench had to be refilled and covered up in haste, allowing no further work on drawing or photographing the profiles. Nevertheless, the description in the diary of the digging work done, permits to conclude that this trench indicated two floors on two different levels: the elder one lying between 1.4—1.2 m. deep and the younger one between 1.0—0.9 m. In between these floors, a great amount of painted wall plaster came to light. It probably first belonged to the lower floor but later served as a filling-in when the ground had to be levelled for the construction of the upper floor. The painted wall plaster in its motifs and colour composition could best be compared with examples from North Pannonia, which supposedly derive, at the latest, from the first half of the 2nd century (fig. 3:2, plate XVIa and XVIb).

The plaster fragments with the water bird amidst reed, in all probability belonged to the dado of the wall. The upper parts of the walls must have had different genre-scenes within fields or panels framed by thicker or thinner streaks in several colours, as one could judge by the salvaged fragments.

Motifs, such as water birds in reed set in a river or swamp scenery (in which Hungary and this part of Slavonia abound) on dados and genre-scenes on panels bordered by multicoloured streaks in upper parts of walls, were dis-

covered in Hungary on the site of Balácapusztá near Nemesvámos and were dated at the latest with the midsecond century (see E. Thomas, *Römische Villen in Pannonien*, Budapest Akadémiai Kiadó 1964, 73—107, 374—375, plate L and LII). Since trench 1 (and also trench 3, see sketch 3) in depth of 1.4—1.2 m showed traces of burning, it should be assumed that once fire was set to the houses here, followed by plundering and destruction, which could have happened in the Marcomann wars during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Trench 1 also yielded a great amount of building materials, such as bricks, tiles, imbrices, mortar, nails, semicircular tiles from hypocausts (see plate XV), a box-tile (to lead the hot air through), a piece of veined green marble and lots of pottery sherds (plate I—IV).

The clay layers with traces of burning being broken and misplaced, were not found undisturbed in both sections of trench 1, so that the two visible horizons could not quite clearly and continuously be followed.

Trench 4 The pretty wall plaster in trench 1 stimulated us to search for more plaster and for the related to it walls, from which it had dropped. For this purpose, trench 4 was cut to the West of trench 1. Our expectations did not come true. Here in the depth of approximately 1 m, we uncovered a pavement of marly stone rubble, which was perforated in a circular shape, as though in the more recent time people drilled here in order to find a well. In all probability, no water whatever was found and so the pit had to be covered up again. Therefore its Roman finds were mixed up, the layers did not indicate any chronologic continuance, nor did the profiles show any other horizon except the one with the pavement, which in its part clearly corresponded with the upper horizons in trench 1 and 3. The pavement might have belonged to a courtyard outside the house, of which obvious traces have nearby been discovered (see sketch 2, fig. 3:4).

Trench 3 It clearly demonstrated two horizons : a lower, lying on a layer of yellow clay, containing building rubbish, burning and ash traces between 1.4 and 1.2 m deep, which obviously belonged to its devastated architectural parts. The younger horizon is related to lumps of mortar with crushed brick particles and remains of wall plaster over it (sketch 3). This trial trench yielded the greatest amount of Roman ceramics (plate V). In its lower parts, a crushed amphora was uncovered, of which the upper part could be pieced together (plate XXII-1). Among the building material, a piece of a thin marble plate was found, with violet veins, probably part of some revetment. Also iron objects were uncovered, such as two keys, two nails and two curved bars (plate XXVI).

The water-main trench Special attention was given to the trench in front of house No. 7 which served, as was mentioned above, as a junction for the water-main. In its profiles one could easily discern traces of two floors and two walls, of which one, wall B, had completely been destroyed, having left in situ 1 m deep, only a small part of its outer wall plaster. Wall A, also built of bricks and also 0.5 m wide, had been devastated and disturbed, too, while the floors beneath it became slightly curved by its pressure. The traces of a Roman floor on the higher level to the North of wall B, between 0.6 and 0.8 m deep, belonged to a later building activity. Beneath the floor levels, traces of a trough-shaped hearth were discovered, approximately 0.35 m wide, on the bottom of which thin layers of baked clay and ashes lay (see sketch 4 and fig. 4:1 floor traces in the water-supply trench; fig. 4:3 the devastated wall A; fig. 4:4 the hearth).

Because of these stratigraphic data obtained in the profiles of the water-supply trench, East and West in the line of both its wall traces, new trial trenches have been cut, in order to follow these traces and get some more knowledge of Roman houses on this site.

Trench 6 In its middle, it demonstrated traces of a demolished partition wall, which was oriented East-West in the direction of wall B in the water-main ditch. To its southern side in room I, two floors on two different levels, approximately 1.0 and 0.8 m deep, could be ascertained. To its northern side in room II, traces of three floors could be discerned, which were best manifested in the western profile of the trench. The lowest floor, 1.3 m deep, consisted of beaten clay onto which the building rubbish had fallen; the second floor, only 1.1 m deep, survived in the layer with traces of burning and rubble over it, and so did the third floor with fire traces, too, 0.8 m deep. The latter two upper floors

represent rather two building activities in a shorter interval of time than two different cultural horizons. The lowest floor in room II was perhaps related to a wall which totally disappeared and not even survived in any traces of the profiles. The middle floor chronologically corresponded to wall B, which was demolished but beyond doubt could be stated in the profile, while the third floor was constructed upon the levelled ground over the middle floor in the upper horizon. The middle floor consisted of a three cm thick layer of white mortar upon layers of beaten yellow clay and red baked clay, in all 35 cm thick. — In the southern part of trench 6 in a sterile layer 1.6 m deep, traces of a perhaps prehistoric hearth became visible (see sketch 5 and fig. 5:2). — As was to be expected, this interesting trench yielded an abundance of pottery sherds such as of 6 mortars, of two cult bowls (for burning incense) and of two oil lamps (plate VII). There were also glass fragments (fig. 7:1, 2, 3), one knife and an iron peg (plate XIII-4, 5; sketch 5 in which are shown: the western profile, the ground plan of the middle floor in room II and its profile; fig. 5:2 with floor traces).

Trench 8 In it, a demolished floor could be stated, corresponding in line and width to wall B in the aqueduct ditch and to the partition wall traced in trench 6; in addition, the floor levels next to this wall, corresponded to the ones in room I and II in trench 6. In the southern part of trench 8, a floor, 1.3 m deep, was visible, which presumably belonged to another exploited wall of which bricks appeared even down to 1.4 m of depth (see sketch 6, fig. 5:4). In trench 8, beside fragments of bricks, tiles, mortar and ceramics, also iron objects were found (see plate XIII 6, 7, 8).

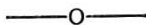
Trench 7 It demonstrated on a surface of 1.5 m² cca 0.7 m deep a layer of red baked clay, 4—10 cm thick. Close to it, only slightly deeper (0.8 m), a quantity of large tiles with impressed elliptic and concentric lines were uncovered (plate XV-2). Thicker and thinner layers of yellow and red clay appeared deeper again, so that one must assume a disturbance of horizons also in this trench. In the depth between 1.4 and 1.7 m, three pits, 18—20 cm in diameter, in an East-West line with intervals of 1 m could be stated (fig. 5:3). In the same depth, traces of a white mortar floor could be followed. Close to the middle of the three pits 1.4 m deep, two firm-lamps, some pottery fragments, a handle of a bronze casserole, a bronze ring, two bone hair-pins, one bone needle and several glass fragments were found in a heap. They were studied separately because they gave some dating evidence belonging to the early imperial times (see plate VIII-1—8, plate XXV-1—12 and fig. 7:4,5). In the profiles of trench 7, the horizons did not show up as well as they could be spotted horizontally in the digging process. The red baked clay, the floor mortar, the painted wall plaster and lots of bricks and tiles in several levels, induced us to assume that at least two cultural horizons existed, belonging to the early and late imperial times. The pits in the lowest levels might have derived from timber posts which once supported a porch or an open corridor, and to it probably belonged the white mortar floor. The upper layers of the trench did not remain untouched, yet judging by the bulk of pottery sherds in them, they belonged to the later imperial times.

Trenches 2 and 5 stratigraphically differ from the group of trenches to the East of this site. Sketch 7 illustrates the profiles of **trench 2**, with these essential elements: a) on the west side a 20 cm high hearth over a layer of rubble and burning traces was visible 1.1 m through to 1.5 m deep; b) in the middle of the trench 1.4 to 1.6 m deep a rubbish pit was uncovered; c) in the eastern section of this trench a large cavity from 1.6 through to beyond 2 m deep and over 2 m wide showed up, containing rubble, bricks, tiles, mortar etc. that highly probably derives from a completely demolished mighty wall. The objects found on and near the hearth, were studied separately, and so were the finds from the cavity. All other finds from the rest of the trench were treated with no regard to chronology, as they came from layers of thrown up earth and rubble (see sketch 7, fig. 6 : 1,2 and plate IX, X). Significantly enough, the objects from the hearth could be dated with the late first century, by means of pottery fragments.

In trench 5 the covering of thrown up earth lay more than 1 m deep, while in this depth on the eastern side, a fundament of beaten clay with pieces of mortar appeared. As sketch 8 illustrates, in the sterile level 1.5 m deep, a

timber floor had been constructed, so that upon the levelled surface timber posts, 8—10 cm in diameter, were laid in intervals of cca 0.4 m (in the profile only 5 dark traces of rotten timber were visible). They supported a timber floor which entirely disappeared yet could be traced. On this floor a 25 to 30 cm wide layer was found, mixed up with ashes, burning traces, mortar, bricks and pottery sherds. Approximately 1.1 m deep, the second timber floor could be spotted, which was seen slightly climbing near the fundament of beaten clay. The wall on this fundament may also have been of timber, belonging probably to the lower floor. In this case, too, it might be supposed that they, wall and floor, had been erected before the Marcomann wars, but were in the course of the war destroyed by fire and later reconstructed (see sketch 8, fig. 6 : 4 and plate XI, XII).

Trenches 2 and 5 yielded the greatest amount of animal bones such as of cattle, horses, wild boars, pigs and of smaller ruminants.



The pottery fragments are shown on plates I—XII by drawings and on plates XVII—XXV by photos. In the text they are described and determined in a fixed order according to quality, beginning with a) terra sigillata; b) varnished pottery; c) painted pottery; d) grey and black pottery, influenced by La Tène ceramics; e) coarse, locally produced pottery; f) red and yellow ceramics of the Roman type; g) glazed late imperial pottery. For the referred to literature see notes 6—18, 22—46, 48—56, 58—64.

To avoid repetition, only the sherds from trench 1 are given in details on plate I—IV, separating the pottery of the lower layers belonging to the elder horizon from the one of the upper layers belonging to the younger horizon. The rest of the sherds from all the other trenches is shown only with more significant examples, but the separation of the elder and younger horizon was maintained, if possible. As in some cases, as was already referred to, the layers indicated disturbances, it was no wonder that some early imperial finds appeared in the upper layers and a few late imperial ones in the lower. — As regards the coin evidence only two worn out coins came to light: in trench 1, one of Claudius Gothicus and in trench 7, one of Valens (see plate XXVII), but they could not be of any dating help because they derived from disturbed layers.

In the conclusion it is stated that the excavation in 1968 brought new **topographic** data for the spreading of the colony Mursa on this particular site. Also some hints or indications have been obtained that the Romans had settled here already in the second half of the first century which might have been during the military occupation of this land, while in the first half of the second century, when in 133 Mursa was by Emperor Hadrian given the status of a colony and started to develop as an urban settlement, houses were built here apparently partly with hypocausts, with mortar floors, painted wall plaster, perhaps open corridors and so on. The **stratigraphic** evidence ascertained some new historic facts, namely that war terrors, fire and plunder did not spare Mursa in the Marcomann wars. Further, evidence was obtained, that the houses here were reconstructed or adapted, as soon as the wars were over. Then, what we know better from other sources and evidences, a general flourishing period developed in Mursa in the time of the Severi in the first half of the third century.

The analyses of all the finds together gave some additional data to the cultural history of Mursa : the **building material** permitted to anticipate, though fragmentary, some knowledge of the equipment of houses, their fundaments, walls, floors, and so on; the **pottery** fragments allowed to get an idea of the outfit of Roman households at Mursa, with various types of imported or locally produced pottery. They distinctly offered dating evidence.

As regards the demolished walls and floors in trench 2 and 5 we are confident that we have come across Mursa's late imperial defensive construction, but more evidence is needed to prove it for certain.

The research in 1968 nearly exclusively (except for the few prehistoric traces) proved that this particular part of Mursa was intensively inhabited through four centuries and that no life whatever existed here after the decline of the Roman Empire up to the present century, when this Lane came into being.