The Archaeology of Rome and the Roman provinces

Novae - History and geography
Dobrudja
Evolution of the province

c. AD 70

c. AD 150

c. AD 212
Lower Moesia: geography and limes sites
Capidava
River crossing of 1877
Dobrudja campaign in 1916
Building a pontoon bridge in Svishtov, 1916
Novae is being excavated since 1961 by a joint Polish-Bulgarian team.
Investigated areas at Novae
- scamnum tribunorum, (E. Gencheva, BAN)
- principia (T. Sarnowski, IA UW)
- thermae (A. Biernacki, UAM)
- valetudinarium (P. Dyczek, OBA UW)
- canabae (A. Tomas, IA UW)

Moreover: some barracks, the gates, streets, towers, etc.

And still there are more white than black spots on the map!
The ("official") history of Novae in a nutshell

- Roman military presence in the Lower Danubian region started in the middle of the 1st century AD. Around AD 45 legio VIII Augusta, which took part in the suppression of the Thracian uprising, founded its castra, probably at the place where the Danube has its southernmost bend. This particular genesis of Novae is debated by some scholars, though. At the same time the province of Moesia was created.

- After the death of Nero, the dislocation of many legions within the Empire resulted in replacement of legio VIII Augusta by legio I Italica, which stayed in Novae at least to the 430s.

- During the Claudio-Neronian and Flavian periods the fortress was built from dried brick and wood – such building phases were confirmed in excavations of the headquarters (principia), defensive walls and the officers’ houses at scamna tribunorum.

- In AD 86 the province was divided and Novae, together with Oescus and later Durostorum became one of three legionary bases within the borders of Moesia Inferior.

- During the campaigns of Trajan the old constructions of wood and dried brick were replaced by stone. Apart from the new defensive walls, the monumental building of headquarters (principia) with the new Trajanic basilica, and the new building of a hospital (valetudinarium) was built at the place of the former Flavian baths (thermae).

- In AD 250 Novae was attacked by the Goths of Kniva. In the second half of the 3rd century Novae was systematically attacked and destroyed by barbarians. The eastern line of the new defensive walls enclosed the additional area of more than 10 hectares, possibly creating a refuge for the civilians.

- From the 4th century onwards when the legion were divided into detachments occupying small forts and fortolets, civil buildings constitute the main part of internal buildings of Novae. The canabae and the legionary base become one, late Roman urban complex.

- After the Hunnic invasion in 441, Novae was left by the legion.

- In the late 5th and 6th centuries Novae was a bishopric. The cathedral and neighbouring buildings were built west of the former legionary headquarters. The last period of prosperity was during the reign of Justinian (527-565) when the defensive walls were rebuilt and reinforced, but the attacks of Slavs and Avars eventually end the existence of the ancient town. In 9th – 11th centuries the church and a cemetery existed in the western part of the town.
The army camp
The central region of the Via Principalis with the buildings for the command staff was called the Principia (plural of principium). It was actually a square, as across this at right angles to the Via Principalis was the Via Praetoria, so called because the praetorium interrupted it. The Via Principalis and the Via Praetoria offered another division of the camp into four quarters.
Legionary headquarters (principia) at Novae (Steklen), c. AD 213

The principia was the administrative and religious centre of the fortress. This example from Novae is smaller than many others, covering only 0.6ha. In particular, it lacks the ranges of rooms that often surround the central courtyard or forum militare. Originally erected under the Flavian emperors, the basilica appears to date from Trajan’s reign, but there was extensive rebuilding in the early years of the 3rd century AD, following an earthquake. The rooms behind the basilica had a monumental façade, reflecting the importance of the building. The centrally placed chapel, or aedes, was raised above the level of the neighbouring offices; archaeologists found evidence of the burning of bones, perhaps of sacrificial animals, hinting at the ritual use of the building. Amongst the finds of stone inscriptions and sculpture was a fine marble head of the emperor Caracalla, who visited the fortress c. AD 213–15.
Basilica

Forum militare

Groma

Well in the principia
Novae
Novae
For sanitary facilities, a camp had both public and private latrines. A public latrine consisted of a bank of seats situated over a channel of running water. One of the major considerations for selecting the site of a camp was the presence of running water, which the engineers diverted into the sanitary channels. Drinking water came from wells; however, the larger and more permanent bases featured the aqueduct, a structure running a stream captured from high ground (sometimes miles away) into the camp. The praetorium had its own latrine, and probably the quarters of the high-ranking officers. In or near the intervallum, where they could easily be accessed, were the latrines of the soldiers. A public bathhouse for the soldiers, also containing a latrine, was located near or on the Via Principalis.
Thermae
Natatio at Novae

Water cascade from the legionary bath at Novae

Djebel el Oust. A parallel from Africa Proconsularis
Fiavian bath under the Trajanic hospital
Thermae (flavian)

P. Dyczek, Flavian baths of legio I Italica from Castrum Novae, Limes XX, eds. Ángel Morillo, Norbert Hanel & Esperanza Martín, Anejos de Gladius 13, Madrid 2009, 1477-1485
Across the central plaza (principia) to the east or west was the main gate, the Porta Praetoria. Marching through it and down "headquarters street" a unit ended up in formation in front of the headquarters. The standards of the legion were located on display there, very much like the flag of modern camps.

The Via Principalis went through the vallum in the Porta Principalis Dextra ("right principal gate") and Porta Principalis Sinistra ("left, etc."), which were gates fortified with turretes ("towers"). Which was on the north and which on the south depends on whether the praetorium faced east or west, which remains unknown.
Fortification walls (vallum)
Width: 2-3.5 m
Height ca. 5-6 m.

The base (munimentum, "fortification") was placed entirely within the vallum ("wall"), which could be constructed under the protection of the legion in battle formation if necessary. The vallum was quadrangular aligned on the cardinal points of the compass. The construction crews dug a trench (fossa), throwing the excavated material inward, to be formed into the rampart (agger). On top of this a palisade of stakes (sudes or valli) was erected. The soldiers had to carry these stakes on the march. Over the course of time, the palisade might be replaced by a fine brick or stone wall, and the ditch serve also as a moat. A legion-sized camp always placed towers at intervals along the wall with positions between for the division artillery.

Intervallum
Around the inside periphery of the vallum was a clear space, the intervallum, which served to catch enemy missiles, as an access route to the vallum and as a storage space for cattle (capita) and plunder (praeda). Legionaries were quartered in a peripheral zone inside the intervallum, which they could rapidly cross to take up position on the vallum. Inside of the legionary quarters was a peripheral road, the Via Sagularis, probably a type of "service road", as the sagum, a kind of cloak, was the garment of soldiers.
Legionary barrack block at Noviomagus (Nijmegen), c. AD 100
Sector XII — „the centurio’s house”

Aqueducts of Novae

S. Stefanov, Rimskite vodoprovodi na Nove, IAI 6, 1930/1931.
The location of limes sites in Lower Moesia near the mouths of Danube tributaries

M. Lemke, Towards a military geography of Moesia inferior, Limes XXII, 845-852
End reservoir to the west of the fortress
Legionary fortresses in Lower Moesia

Oescus

Durostorum

Novae

Troesmis
Aqueducts of Novae

S. Stefanov, Rimskite vodoprovodi na Nove, IAI 6, 1930/1931.
Castellum aquae, I-II AD, of the western aqueduct
Filter cistern (II AD) near the via sagularis

Picture credit: T. Sarnowski and B. Matuszewski

J. Kolendo, T. Kowal, Stamps on ceramic pipes from Novae (Moesia Inferior), Novensia 22, 2011, pp. 67-76.
Sector XII – „the centurio’s house”

M. Duch, „Flawijskie” stemple na cegłach i dachówkach łaźni legionowej w Novae (Moesia Inferior), w: Studia Flaviana II, pod red. L. Mrozewicza, Poznań 2012 ["Flavian" Stamps on Bricks and Tiles of Legionary Baths in Novae]
Channels for fresh water and sewers occur in a variety of forms:

Depth: 20-110 cm
Width: 15-60 cm
Hydraulic mortar, *opus signinum* (from the locality *Signia* in Latium)
- Usually pink or yellowish color
- Contains sand and fragments of ground ceramics
- Preparing hydraulic mortar was a rather sophisticated process in comparison to common mortar.
Technical and chronological analogies

Sector XII, 2013/2014

Both channels have a cover made of large limestone slabs, ca. 90 x 45 x 12 cm and slightly smaller ones, 40 x 40 x 12 cm. The depth measures ca. 60 cm, the width of the drain 20-30 cm. The width of the entire construction measures around 60 cm.

Sector IV, 2007
Canabae

Fig. 1. Three aqueducts of Novae on satellite image of the Danube valley between Belene and Vardim.

Fig. 2. Surroundings of the Roman legionary base at Novae. Circle with a centre at central point (groma) in the fortress and radius of a leuga (= 2,22 km) refers to the area *intra leugam* under direct military control. (A. Tomas)
Late Roman Novae
Figure 8.2: Novae: the military hospital with the courtyard house visible on the left and the principia and surrounding area to the right. Sector 12 lies at the top. Image credit: courtesy of M. Pisz
Selected finds
LECTITAL
OAPIDVSVSSEBIC
M.SHAS:
LEGVIITAL
ENTRECENA