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Late Roman Lamellar Cuirass from Stobi

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Abstract: *The military successes of the ancient Roman army throughout its history are determined mostly by the perfectness of their weapons and their capability for accepting and developing the weapons which were used by other peoples. In that context a very important segment of the armor was the lamellar armor, whose value is reflected in the fact that it was in use as a defensive armor, especially by Roman army officers, through a long period during Roman history. The example from the ancient Roman city of Stobi was found in the archaeological excavations campaign in 2009 by the NI Institution for Managing of the Archaeological site Stobi – Gradsko, in a closed archaeological context, in the room which functioned as a warehouse in the building that has a working name "The House with a triclinia", which is a part of the VI century settlement.*

Key words: *lamellar cuirass, plates, weapon, armors, Stobi, triclinia.*

The first written sources for the ancient city of Stobi are from the ruling period of the Macedonian king Filip V, but the early Roman city was probably raised in the period during the middle and second half of the first century. In the time of Augustus the city had a status of *oppidum civium Romanorum*, and for a short time gained the status of *municipium*. [1] From this moment the earliest military history of the city can be followed, and respectively the earliest data for the presence of armies in this space. After the end of the Roman civil war in 30 BC, soldiers who inhabited the city by the end of the war, as colonists gained land. At the same time on the outer part of the defensive ditch, graves which are not with Italic origin, but with an indication of the Aegean – Macedonian, region have been found. Probably, according the I. Mikulcic, they were citizens of Macedonia who were involved in the Roman army as auxiliary units, so-called *socii*, although in the frame of the grave context there is no evidence of the presence of weapons or other military equipment which indicates that those are really military graves. [2]

Consequently, on development of the city and its interruption which was caused by natural catastrophes and invasions of barbarian tribes, and the phases of reconstruction,

[1] Plin. Nat. Hist. IV, 10, 34; F.Papazoglou, 1988, 315-318.; J.Wiseman – Dj. M. Zisi, 1971, 395/6. И.Микулчиќ, 2003, 32-36.

[2] И.Микулчиќ, 1999, 163.

the history of the city can be followed in three periods. The early period was from I-III century, when the urbanization of the city according to the Roman urban pattern began. This phase was interrupted with the complete destruction of the city by the invasion of the Heruls and Goths in 267/8 AD.

The second urban development phases were most intensive from the end of the III and IV century. Most of the excavated structures of the city are exactly from this period. In the middle of the V century the city was again destroyed caused by invasions of the Huns in 447 AD, and already in the V and VI century the city lost its urban structure and began to live in the so-called post urban period. [3]

During the archaeological excavations in 2009 part of the excavations was focused on the Episcopal basilica, respectively on the so-called semicircular forum, where previously were detected traces of the last phase of the city i.e., the so-called post-urban phase whose main characteristics are modest houses that are incorporated in older houses with construction of partition walls. In one part of the excavations of the layers that contains stone ruins and layers of tegulas and imbrexes, where two pithoi were also detected, a lamellar cuirass was found, whose fragments were concentrated in two positions of the excavated room, which according to the presence of the pithoi probably was a function of a storage room. Contrary of the other structures of the post-urban phase this object differs in a way that was a house with triclinia, which could be an indication that the owner of the house probably enjoyed a higher status in the city? The finding of the lamellar cuirass in this context could be a confirmation of this thesis.

After the conservation process was finished, 336 iron plates or fragments that with certainty were identified as parts of the lamellar cuirass were evidenced.

Part of the plates from which the cuirass is constructed is fully preserved, and the larger part is preserved in fragments. Besides that, and according to the preserved parts, four types of plates can be separated, which mainly differs with dimensions, shape and by the pattern of the perforation through which the plates were sewn between each other.

Of the first group there are six fully preserved lamellae with dimensions 12.5 x 2.5 x 0.27cm. The weight cannot be determined precisely but according to the lamellae with a preserved core the approximate weight is 29.02 g. The shape of those plates is rectangular with curved sides, according to the perforations, and on the upper side of the plates and in the middle there are four which are parallel, two on the left and two on the right side in the shape of a square and on the lower side there is only one perforation (T I – fig.1).

The second group consists of twenty-seven fully preserved lamellae. Dimensions are 11 x 2.5 x 0.28 см. The approximate weight, the same as the previous group according to the lamellae with most the preserved core is 27.60 g. Their shape is also rectangular, the upper side is flattened and the lower side is curved. Perforations are deployed in three places. On the flattened upper part there are fourand in the middle

[3] Ф.Папазоглу, 1957, 239; И.Микулчиќ, 1999, 247-253, 225/6.

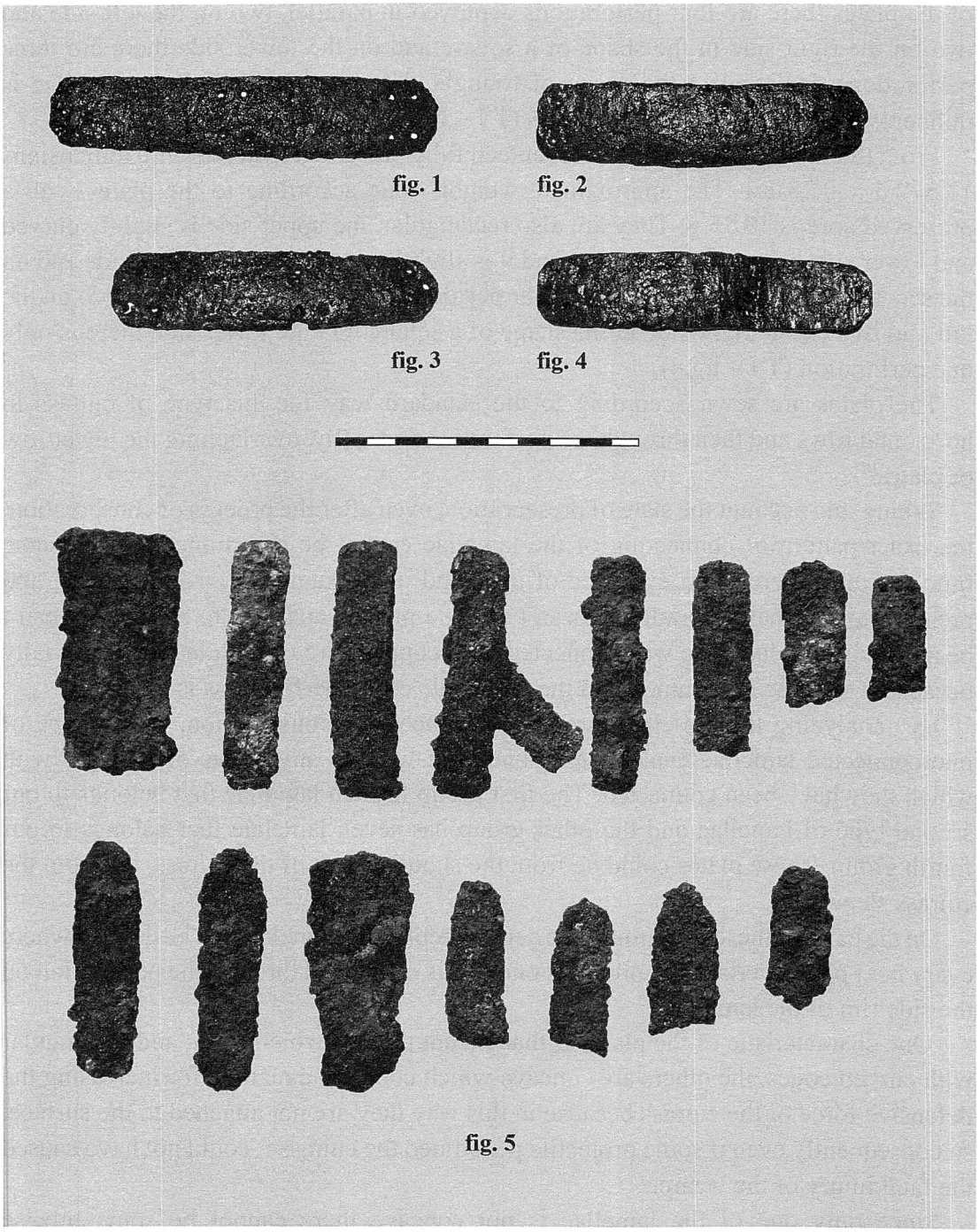

fig. 1 fig. 2

fig. 3 fig. 4

fig. 5

of lamellae there are also four perforations, deployed in parallel, two on the left and two on the right side in the shape of a square and on the lower side there is only one perforation (T I – fig.2)

The third group consists of six fully preserved lamellae with dimensions 11 x 2.5 x 0.26. The approximate weight of the lamellae with a preserved core is 11.92 g. Their shape is rectangular with both curved sides. On the upper side and on the second half

of the plates there are four perforations deployed in parallel, two on the left side and two on the right side in the shape of a square and on the lower side there are three perforations deployed in the shape of triangle. The iron sheet of those lamellae is thinner when compared to other groups (T I – fig.3).

From the fourth group there are seventeen fully preserved lamellae with dimensions 11 x 2.5 x 0.28 см. The approximate weight value according to the plates with a preserved core is 19.35 g. They are also rectangular, the upper side is slightly curved and lower side has an angled profile and it is slightly curved. On the upper side and on the second half of the plate there are four perforations deployed in parallel, two on the left and two on the right side in the shape of a square. On the lower side there is only one perforation (T I – fig.4).

The plates are sewn according to the standard way for this type of cuirass in horizontal rows and then through the perforation vertically, overlapping the lower row of plates.[4]

Taking into account the state of preservation, even after the process of conservation, the exact pattern of connecting of the lamellae cannot be determined. At the same time, because there is no evidence of any kind of the material for connecting, and preservation of the perforations doesn't allow a precise analyses to be done, it can't be attested if the lamellae was connected with copper wire or with leather, especially because it can't be determined that the inner side of the perforations is smooth.

By analyzing the lamellae through the process of conservation, two groups of interconnected lamellae can be determined but without any traces of material with which they have been connected. The first group has ten lamellae that belongs to our second type of lamellae and the other group has seven lamellae that belongs to our fourth group. These plates could be from the shoulder part of the cuirass, i.e. from the cuirass sleeve.

On the basis of these two groups the deployment of the lamellae can be defined where every next plate overlaps the previous one and is connected through the perforation on the side rim of the lamellae.

One characteristic of the plates is that except the one which is flat and rectangular with curved edges, the others are concave which could be a manner for increasing the defensive force of the cuirass because in this way they are not attached to the surface, so consequently even if some projectile penetrated the cuirass it could not have caused the fatal injury of the wearer.

Since only one of the lamellae is not concave there cannot be some precise assumption in a way to define if it is a matter of some special characteristic of this lamellae or simply the cuirass was comprised from several lamellae of this type, but in our case only one is preserved. In the context of this curiosity there is one analogy with one lamellae of the cuirass from Svetinja.[5]

[4] H. Russell Robinson, 1967, 7.

[5] Ibid, 2005, 163.

Concerning the analogies the closest is with the cuirass from the archaeological site Viničko Kale in the eastern part of the Republic of Macedonia.

Namely, this cuirass is not conserved but the similarity of the plates is evident in the way of shape, perforations and especially because this cuirass has the same lamellae like lamellae from our fourth group which are with an angled profile (T I – fig.5).

The other analogies can be followed with the cuirasses from Svetinja with the distinction that most of these lamellae are different in shape and dimensions.

Large numbers of Svetinja lamellae have a curved incision on the one side and there are no such pattern examples from the Stobi cuirass. Also, the dimension of most of the lamellae from Svetinja is not under 8.5 см in length and 1.8 см in width, while the lamellae from Stobi are 11 and 12.5 см in length and width which is from 2.5 – 2.8 см.[6]

In this way there is one more analogy with the plates that are found in Avarian grave on the archaeological site *Szegvár – Sapoldal* in Hungary with a chronological date in the early Avarian period.[7] Lamellae from this grave are also with a curved incision on one side, which is not the case with lamellae from Stobi. There is a similarity also with the examples from Niederstotzingen in Germany, especially with a dimension of 11.5 см in length, which is very close to the plates from Stobi.[8]

Beside these there is also another analogy which only confirmed the unique value and dispersion of these types of cuirasses, which are especially characteristic for nomadic and barbarian peoples, primarily Avars and Germans, but certainly also with examples that have Byzantine provenience.[9]

This type of cuirass was part of defensive military equipment, especially in the cavalry, besides the fact that the main military forces of the barbarian people who wore this type of cuirass were cavalrymen. In addition, and the same time, this cuirass is part of the heavy equipment of the cavalry of the Byzantine army, the so-called *kataphraktarioi*.[10]

Some authorities looking at the origin of this type of cuirasses in Assyria argue this thesis on the basis of reliefs in Nineveh and Nimrud made in honor of victories of Ashurnasirpal and Ashurbanipal which are chronologically dated in VII century BC.

At the same time this type of cuirass is known from one Etruscan statue of the god Mars from the IV century BC.[11] Lamellar cuirass was part of standard defensive military equipment of the Scythian army in the VI century BC and was part of the military equipment of the Sarmatians in the III century BC.[12] Accordingly, this entire conclusion can be made that the origin of this type of cuirass is from the east and in the space of Europe, the Scythians and Sarmatians transferred it.

[6] I. Bugarski, 2005, 162.

[7] F.Daim, 2003,463-571, *Pl.* 4

[8] Paulsen 1967: 127, Taf. 21.

[9] I. Bugarski, 2005, 169.

[10] Ibid, 173.

[11] H. Russell Robinson, 1967, 7/8.

[12] Kory 2004: 376–381; H. Russell, 1967, 9.

It was in use by the Huns during their invasion through Europe in the period of the V century AD and later it was adopted by the Byzantine army where its development was connected with war tactics that were promoted by the nomadic tribes, especially using composite bows whose penetration force is much stronger than standard Roman bows.[13]

Lamellar cuirass from Stobi can be precisely dated according to the three coins of Maurice from 583-584 AD.[14] In this time those types of cuirass are present in the early Byzantine sites. The example of Svetinja is dated at the same time as the cuirass from Stobi also with the coins of Maurice.[15] Namely, those were the last years of the existence of the city before the Avars – Slavic attacks in the context of their march on Thessaloniki in 587 AD.[16]

The owner of the cuirass from Stobi was probably a soldier, who besides the house, which differs from the model of last post-urban building phase of Stobi, had some higher military status.

In the context of its production it was probably not made in the local armory considering that there is no evidence of such manufacture in Stobi so far.

Namely, there is evidence of a mint on the space of the southern part of the structure of the so-called *Domus Fullonica* that according to Z. Gorgiev is an indicator for the existence of the armory, which is an argument with the find of unused row iron, sulfur, smelters tools, iron shield bosses and iron caltrops which were used for disabling the enemy cavalry.[17]

In the connection of the aforementioned, there are iron caltrops, but there is no find of iron bosses. The only single find of bosses is from the so-called military grave number 2674 from the western cemetery. This is a cremation grave that belongs to the earliest burials in the western cemetery of Stobi that cannot be connected with the aforementioned bosses. Around the assumption of the armory's existence conclusions can be made that according to the quantity of traces of weapons from the objective period there is a possibility in the mention of a mint for the repairing of armor in the period of late antiquity, but according to the typology of the examples of weapons that are found in Stobi, it can be assumed there was manufacturing, and especially in this case we should expect finds that are in a typological way close to Roman, i.e. early Byzantine samples of offensive and defensive weapons.

[13] J. Werner, 1956, 46-48; J. Ковачевић, 1977, 116; Е. Манева, 1985/86/ 87.52/53.

[14] The coins are elaborated by the proper institution NI for managing of archaeological site Stobi – Gradsko.

[15] М. Поповић 1987: 28-29, 35; I. Bugarski, 2005, 163.

[16] З. Георгиев ,2012, 49.

[17] Ibid,50.

Доцноримски ламеларен оклоп од Стоби

Резимé

Првите пишани документи за античкиот град Стоби датираат од периодот на владеењето на македонскиот крал Филип V, додека раноримскиот град, најверојатно, се развил во периодот кон средината и втората половина на I век пр.н.е. Во 2009 година, во рамките на археолошката кампања за истражување на просторот над Епископската базилика, во рушевински слој на една од просториите биле откриени остатоци од оклоп за кои, по процесот на конзервација, е потврдено дека се работи за ламеларен тип на оклоп. Врз основа на димензиите, формата, тежината и перфорациите на сочуваните делови можат да се издвојат четири типови на ламели од коишто бил составен оклопот. Од увидот во материјалот пред процесот на конзервација, може да се забележат две групи на меѓусебно поврзани ламели. Карактеристика за плочките е тоа што со исклучок на една, која е правоаголна и со заоблени краеви, сите други се конкавни. Што се однесува до аналогиите, најблиската е со оклопот откриен во една просторија, станбен објект на археолошкиот локалитет Виничко кале, којшто временски се датира во периодот на доцната антика. Други аналогии може да се следат кај оклопот од Светиња, со таа разлика што повеќето плочки од кои бил составен овој оклоп се разликуваат по форма и по димензија од стобските. Овој тип на оклоп бил составен дел од одбранбената воена опрема, особено на коњицата, со оглед на фактот дека главната воена сила на варварските народи коишто го носеле биле коњаниците, а истовремено се среќава и како дел од тешковооруженaта коњаница во византиската војска *kataphraktarioi*. Во основа, може да се заклучи дека неговото потекло е од Истокот, а во Европа бил пренесен од страна на Скитите и Сарматите. Ламеларниот оклоп од Стоби може прецизно да се датира врз основа на три монети од Маврикиј, 583-584 година. Ламеларниот оклоп од Стоби, најверојатно, бил во сопственост на некој војник кој со оглед на куќата каде што е откриен, уживал некаков повисок воен статус, а во поглед на изработката, оклопот, најверојатно, не бил произведен во локална работилница, со оглед на тоа што во градот Стоби, и покрај некои индиции, не е евидентирано постоење на оружарница.

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