

The Stroyno Archaeological Project, Report on the Season 2015

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ABSTRACT

The second year of the Yurta-Stroyno Archaeological Project continued in the excavation of the area selected the previous year. The stone foundations were further uncovered in their continuation both to the east and to the west of the investigated area. Disrupted soil from Rooms A and B, previously excavated by robbers, was cleaned to the sterile soil. The area of the settlement core was selectively walked while creating a geodetic site grid. During the random survey, several areas of outstanding surface concentrations were selected for future investigation. Further, documentation of the finds from the two years of the excavation progressed, with their selection given in this report.

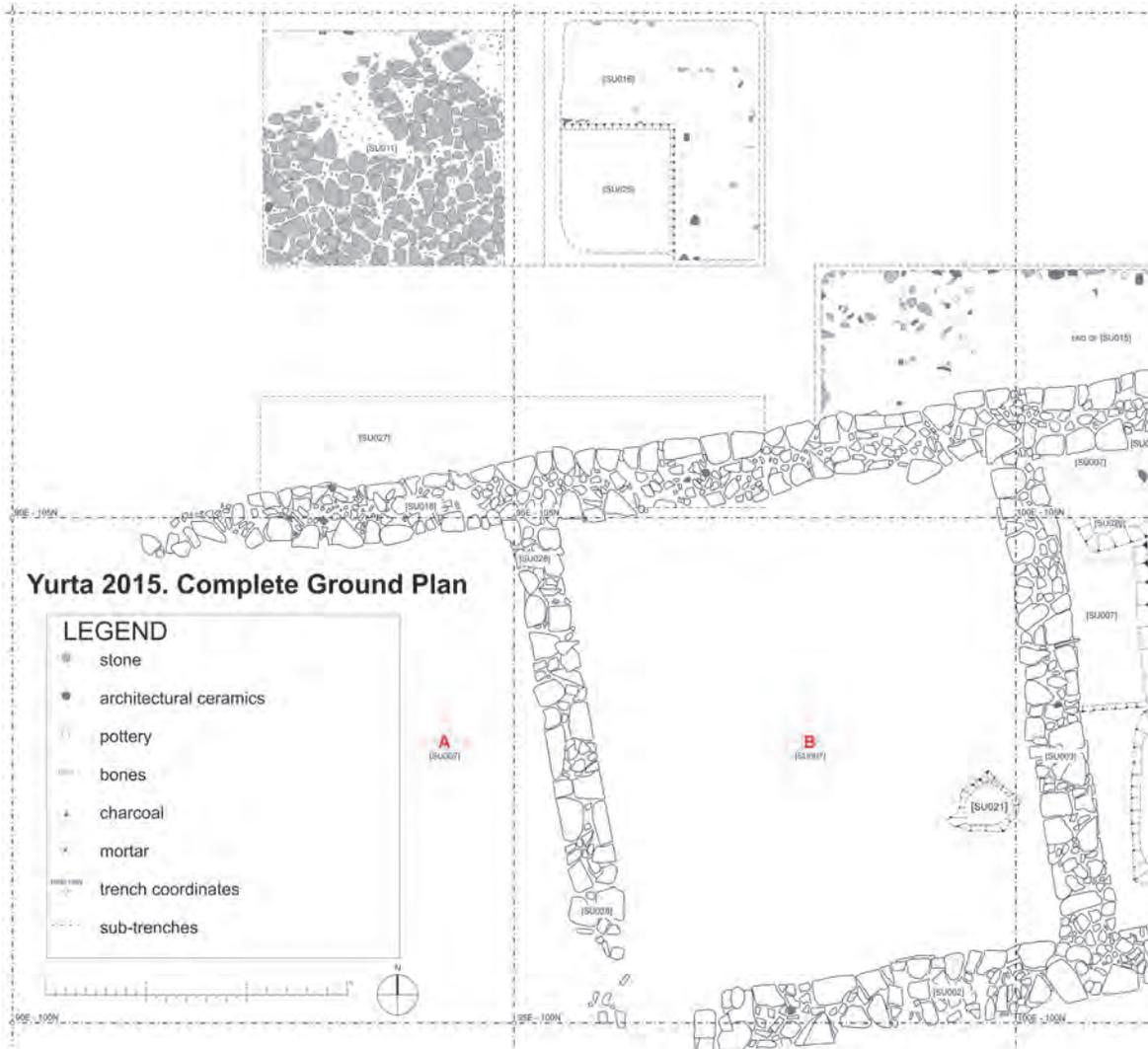
KEYWORDS

Bulgaria; Thrace; Yurta; Stroyno; vicus; terracotta lamps; metals; glass; Thracian horse rider; votive terracotta plate.

This volume of Studia Hercynia is very special to us, being dedicated to a great scholar and our mentor, Prof. Jan Bouzek. He is the one who brought two of the authors – P. Tušlová and B. Weissová – to the Bulgarian archaeology when offering us, as bachelor students, participation on his excavation project in Pistiros. Since then, we have both taken part in different projects in many countries, yet Bulgaria will always have a special place in our hearts and memories. We were very happy to come back to Thrace last year, to start a new project. To our great happiness, prof. Bouzek stands by our side, always ready to help, and to share his infinite knowledge while solving archaeological riddles brought up by the excavations.

INTRODUCTION

The site of Yurta-Stroyno, a vicus of Roman military veterans, is investigated in cooperation of the Regional Historical Museum of Yambol and the Institute of Classical Archaeology at the Charles University in Prague. In the first year of the project, in 2014, the south-western area of the settlement, located near the Dereorman River, was selected for the excavations based on remains of a stone wall visible in terrain. During the following investigations, foundations of a house, running from west to east, were found. Most of the area was however disrupted by treasure hunters who excavated inside individual Rooms of the house seeking for valuable finds by destroying the contexts.



THE 2015 PRELIMINARY EXCAVATION REPORT

The 2015 excavation of Yurta-Stroyno took place during four weeks, from June 15 till July 10, with following three weeks of post-excavation documentation. We enlarged the area investigated in 2014 to the north and to the east, whilst in the western part of the house we cleaned the soil inside Rooms A and B, dug out by robbers within the previous years (Fig. 1). Further, we cleaned the vegetation encircling our trenches and prepared the excavated area for orthophoto, an aerial photograph, which was undertaken after the end of the excavation by our colleagues from the Slovak University of Technology, Tibor Lieskovsky, Alexandra Rašová and Ondrej Trhan (Pl. 10/1). The main purpose of their stay was however establishment of the geodetic grid of the settlement.

Graduate students of archaeology from ICAR FF UK were invited to process part of the material, especially glass, metals, terracotta lamps and epigraphic finds. Their first observations and notes are incorporated into this excavation report to shortly introduce the material they are processing.



Fig. 1: Plan of the Yurta-Stroyno trenches excavated in 2014–2015 capturing the stone foundations of the house with marked Rooms A to E. Drawn by B. Weissová and V. Doležálková, digitalized in CorelDraw by M. Kobierská.

THE NORTHERN AREA (100E–105N)

Northern part of Room C (100E–105N SE and SW)

The northern (inner) area of Room C was carrying the central section of the 2014 excavation. However, at the beginning of the season 2015 we found most of the section collapsed. Therefore, we decided to excavate here down to the sterile soil [SU007], as we did in the rest of Room C the previous year. Under the former section, dug into the sterile soil, we discovered two different cuts filled with material, and located next to each other ([SU029] and [SU057]). From these we excavated the eastern one ([SU057]), located along the stone foundations of the north-eastern corner of Room C, until the depth of 1.2m. Inside the fill we found a mixture of burned fragments of vessels, great amount of charcoals, several iron nails, lumps of daub, and a coin of Julia Domna (Pl. 10/2:1). The coin, which is very well preserved, is depicting the head of Julia Domna facing right on the obverse, and Demeter sitting on the throne holding



sceptre and two corn-ears on the reverse (*Corpus Nummorum Thracorum* 5124). The coin was issued in Thrace, at the Black Sea coast in *Anchialos* (modern Pomorie) during 198–211 AD.¹

In the same area – north-eastern corner of Room C – another coin was found inside the foundation trench of the northern wall [SU018]. This is an important context which helps us to date the whole building. The coin was luckily preserved inside a strip of a soil along the foundation wall as the robbers did not excavate the inner space of the room completely to the stones. It is a coin of Diadumenian, Caesar and son of the Roman Emperor Macrinus (Pl. 10/2:2). The coin was issued in Cyzicus, province of Mysia, Asia Minor, in 217–218 AD.² It depicts the head of Diadumenian facing right on the obverse and a calf walking right on the reverse.

North of Room C (100E–105N NE)

The whole area on the north of the Room C, outside the foundation wall [SU018], was excavated with particular care since it was not previously disturbed by treasure hunters. It featured about 35–40cm of topsoil followed by a 40–50cm thick layer of ancient levelling compound of very fragmented pottery, architectural pottery, high amount of all-size animal bones, small fragments of glass, pieces of different metals and wasters. A few fragments of wall facing marble slabs and also a marble acroterion ca. 5cm high were unearthed from this layer (Pl. 10/2:3). The mixed character of the fragmented material points to the rather waste origin of this layer, incorporating mostly objects securely dated into the timespan of the 2nd–3rd century AD. Most of the metal objects discussed within the paper relates to this thick layer (see further *Selection of finds*). The latest dated fragment identified in the vast assemblage is, however, a part of terracotta lamp depicting a head of Athena on the discus, which might be according to the parallels from Athens dated from the second half of the 3rd to the beginning of the 4th century AD (Pl. 10/3:1 see *The terracotta lamps*; PERLZWEIG 1961, cat. no. 653 and 659). It is a compound of three fragments which were spread over the same area, but about 22 cm vertically apart.

The levelling layer, located just under the top soil, was lying directly on a paving made of small pebbles and gravel which appeared in the same height as tops of the foundation walls. The paving was then laid on sandy sterile soil.

THE EASTERN AREA (105E–105N; 105E–100N; 110E–100N)

Northern part of Room D and E (105E–105N S)

The northern part of Room D, not disturbed by treasure hunters, revealed repeatedly the same situation with the topsoil followed by the levelling layer lying directly on the pebble pavement. Further, lower half of a terracotta water tube was found sunken in the paving running in parallel with the western wall [SU004] of Room D. Other exceptionality of this area were the foundations of the northern wall of Room D [SU074], which were half as deep – ca. 0.40cm – as those in Rooms A, B and C with the maximal preserved height of 0.80cm (where fully uncovered).

The north-eastern corner of Room D revealed continuation of the house to the east entering Room E. We uncovered only tops of the foundation walls [SU074] and [SU062] of Room E to

1 <http://www.corpus-nummorum.eu/coins.php?id=5124>. Parallels of the coin are also to be found in MOU-SHMOV 1912, Pl. VII/26–27.

2 <http://www.diadumenian.com/cyzicus%20calf.html>. For more references see: Sear 2294, ANS 1944. 100.42854; ISEGRIM 47866; BMC 12 S54, 261; SNG Tübingen 2283; Mionnet Vol. 2, No.224, 547 (<http://www.forumancientcoins.com/numiswiki/view.asp?key=mionnet>).



see its direction and range; due to the time restriction we did not excavate further to the east or down to the sterile soil.

Southern part of Room D and E (105E–100N; 110E–100W)

The previously non-disturbed area of the south-eastern corner of Room D followed the already familiar pattern – top soil, levelling layer, level of the paving and the sterile soil. In this area specifically, it was clear that the paving was laid in the same height outside as well as inside of the foundation walls.

In the south-eastern part of the foundation wall [SU002] of Room D, a relief of the Thracian horse rider was found secondarily incorporated into the wall. The relief is fragmentary, preserving about a quarter of the original size (Pl. 10/4:1 see *The Thracian horse rider plate*). Next to the relief a large stone (55×26cm) was placed directly on the foundation wall. It resembles a threshold although the stone is loose and has no evident marks of being used in such a manner (Pl. 10/4:2).

Surroundings of the eastern foundation wall of Room D and the southern wall of Room E were excavated about 30cm down from the surface. We did not reach the eastern end of the house as the walls still continue in this direction.

One small trench was excavated inside Room E (110E–100N NE), in a cleaning of an area previously disturbed by robbers. No ‘inner’ Room stratigraphy was uncovered here, only a small accumulation of material [SU061] in the north-eastern corner of the sub-trench. It contained fragments of one almost complete cooking pot and body fragments of amphora Dressel 24.

THE WESTERN AREA (ROOMS A AND B: 90E–100N; 95E–100N)

The two Rooms A and B, both completely robbed by the treasure hunters, were excavated to the sterile soil [SU007]. No other distinctive feature, except the cut in the sterile soil with fill [SU021] uncovered the last year in Room B, was found (for the report see: TUŠLOVÁ – WEISSOVÁ – BAKARDZHIEV 2014, 19). The decontextualized pottery from Rooms A, B, as well as C – where the soil excavated by the treasure hunters was removed last year – was kept and counted for statistics. Its low degree of fragmentation points to its probable primary deposition, with pieces of individual vessels spread by the robbers all over the inner space of the three Rooms. Except the pottery, only few small finds were discovered here. The most exceptional one is a votive terracotta plate found in the robbers’ soil of Room B (Pl. 10/2:4–5, see *The votive terracotta plate*).

A large amount of Laconian roof tiles has been found mixed within the robbers’ soil, mostly thrown on the bottoms of their trenches. Despite the fact that some had fresh breaks, they were very well preserved, normally up to a half or 2/3 of the original size. The maximal dimensions of the best preserved tile are 58.5cm (not complete) × 41cm (complete) × 3.4cm (complete).

The excavations followed the wall of the westernmost Room A until roots of a tree growing in the north. The south-western wall and part of the north-south perpendicular wall disappeared without any traces. Supposedly, this was the last Room of the house, located just next to the Dereorman River, which flows few meters next to it. The river does not leave much space for the house continuation. We may also expect the main entrance of the house was located on the eastern side of the structure, rather than on the western – river side.



INTERPRETATION OF THE 2015 EXCAVATION

Two main phenomena appeared during the excavation. The first is the 40–50cm thick layer located just under the topsoil, filled with very fragmented and diverse material. The heterogeneous character of the layer suggests it consists of waste material, perhaps taken from settlement dump, where it had been accumulated for several decades. The layer is located everywhere where we excavated. We found it in the north, outside the foundation walls, as well as on the eastern part of the house, covering the foundation walls and the inner part of Room D. It seems, it was spread in a single act over the entire house and its surroundings, since joining pottery fragments stemming from the layer were found as much as 15m apart. To give an example, one shard was found outside the house to the north, joining one from Room D in the east of the excavated area. Another example comes from the trench 100E–105N NE where fragments from one vessel were found around the same spot, but about 0.40m one above the other.

The second noteworthy phenomenon is the disturbance of the soil in Rooms A, B and C by treasure hunters. The fragmentation of the finds located within the soil differs significantly in comparison with the thick waste layer discussed above. The pottery, and especially the Laconian roof tiles, are much less fragmented, again with individual pieces spread in wider area, but this time always within the three Rooms. The secondary dispersion of material was caused by treasure hunters digging one room after another, mixing the material from the three Rooms all together. The low fragmentation of the material suggests a primary deposition with the roof tiles lying *in situ* covering the pottery and other (now robbed) house equipment.

THE HOUSE AT YURTA-STROYNO

The house, as excavated so far, has five Rooms, designated A, B, C, D and E, from west to east. This year excavation clarified possible differences in original use of the individual Rooms and brought suggestions as to its final destruction.

The inner space of Room D, investigated this year, preserved pebble paving with sunken terracotta water tube. Interestingly, the stone foundations here were half the depth (0.40cm) of those in the other Rooms (0.80cm). Therefore, the function of Room D seems to be rather utilitarian, with the foundations possibly not carrying such a heavy superstructure as the other parts of the house. In contrast, Rooms A, B and C revealed high amount of roof tiles and pottery, indicating roofed – living – areas. The character of the easternmost Room E is not clear, as only a small portion was excavated this year.

The different original character of the Rooms may be reflected also in robbers' behaviour. Whereas the robbers dug out Rooms A, B and C literally from wall to wall, they 'conducted' only a small trench in Room D. The robbers got perhaps disappointed while digging inside Room D, not finding the material-rich contexts they encountered in the other Rooms, which discouraged them from further action.

The house abandonment does not seem to have had a violent character, as no signs of fire or any kinds of weaponry have been found. Consequently, we rather tend to connect the collapse of the structure with direct proximity of the Dereorman River, especially in relation to the missing corner of the building in the area of the westernmost Room A. In addition, regular strolls along the river stream clearly testified to the existence of many worked stones and architectural ceramics on both sides of the riverbed. The river must have been heavily meandering in the past – as it is also today – changing its flow and destroying areas in its direct



vicinity. Most likely, it also undermined the already mentioned south-eastern corner of the foundation wall of the house and caused subsequently collapse of the entire building. The area was probably evaluated as unsuitable for further habitation and levelled with settlement waste.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE EXCAVATED AREA

Putting the above information into a time frame, a *terminus post quem* for the erection of the foundation walls of the house is the deposition of the Diadumenian's coin (Pl. 10/2:2), which was issued in 217–218 AD. As for the abandonment date, the material found within the thick waste layer covering the foundations is composed mostly of objects dated within a relatively wide range of the 2nd–3rd centuries AD. The latest clearly datable find from this levelling layer is a terracotta lamp with depiction of Athena (Pl. 10/3:1) from the turn of the 3rd and 4th century AD. There is no indication of more than one settlement phase, pointing to a single period habitation of this house. However, that period might have stretched over a century, from the early 3rd to the early 4th century AD.

RANDOM SURFACE FINDS

The scatter of surface finds connected with Yurta-Stroyno covers ca. 31ha. Out of this area only 3.3ha, situated in the southernmost part of the concentration, right next to the Dereorman River, are not regularly ploughed but overgrown with dense vegetation. The remaining territory (almost 28ha) is situated in the field and succumbs to agricultural activities. Thereby, the actual surface scatter is considerably larger than the respective settlement, having been distributed to the north by ploughing. In addition, the western part of the currently overgrown area was also deeply ploughed at some point in the past, which means that only 2.6ha were kept from agricultural activities.

During 2015 excavation season, we therefore focused on random preliminary coverage of this specific area, verifying its potential for further research. The approach brought to light several outstanding finds as well as an alarming ascertainment regarding the preservation of the whole area, heavily disturbed by treasure hunters.

Concerning the surface finds, apart from the dense scatter of pottery shards and architectural ceramics, the most appealing discoveries include a concentration of melted glass and several pieces of raw glass situated in the north-eastern part of the area (see *Raw glass and glass production waste*). Moreover, large concentration of big pieces of slag in the south-eastern part of the site points to the possibility of metal processing undertaken on the site. Among other surface finds belongs part of the simple shaft of a column without fluting (ca. 80 × 30cm; Pl. 10/6).

Based on the exceptional finds cumulated on the fields, we decided for the next year to explore the entire area in a systematic way, expecting not only more single finds but whole clusters of diverse materials, enabling to explore spatial distribution of the habitation. With a great help of colleagues from the Slovak University of Technology and by means of a total station we prepared the grid of polygons, each 20 × 20m. The targeted area of 2.6ha thus encompasses 65 polygons, which are planned to be systematically surveyed in 2016.



SELECTION OF FINDS

All of the finds from Yurta-Stroyno are processed in the course of the excavations. Most of them, however, came from un-stratified contexts: either from the areas disturbed by robbers, or from the thick levelling layer made up of settlement waste. The objects presented in the following text come from both excavation seasons, 2014 and 2015, and are the ones which could be identified, classed and dated based on the known typologies and/or parallels from the Roman provinces, especially from Thrace and Moesia Inferior. The introduction to lamps is given by Robert Frecer; metals and glass by Viktoria Čiřtáková and epigraphic finds by Petra Janouchová.

TERRACOTTA LAMPS

The two years of excavations yielded a total amount of 74 terracotta lamps, mostly in fragmentary state. The following report summarizes the material and types, and discusses their stamps and marks.

Of the 74 lamps discovered, a single lamp can be considered complete. From the rest, 24 fragments have an identifiable discus or shoulder part, 13 have an identifiable base, 15 include nozzle fragments and 16 fragments are handles. These numbers, naturally, may overlap; however, 13 fragments were considered entirely non-diagnostic as simple wall fragments that could nevertheless be attributed to lamps based on firing, clay structure and presence of mould-made markings.

Lamp distribution

The lamps were distributed throughout the excavated portion of the site with three clusters of note. Trench 100E-100N, covering roughly Room C, shows a concentration of 12 lamps. A total of nine lamps was discovered in the trench 95E-100N over Room B to the immediate west. The highest number of lamps was however recovered from the north-eastern sub-square of the trench 100E-105N, where 25 fragments were found within the thick levelling layer; 27 lamps were uncovered from the topsoil affected by robbers [SU001]; and filling of a cut in trench 95E-100N [SU021] in Room B included three important fragments: imitations of Loeschcke type I/IV Augustan lamps, and Broneer type XXVII, Group B Greek lamp of Athenian manufacture.

Lamp typology and chronology

The latter lamps mentioned above make up the most striking group excavated on the site: a total of seven lamps that were in all likelihood produced in Roman Athens in the 3rd and early 4th century AD. They belong to Broneer type XXVII and appeared as a distinct unglazed (BRONEER 1930, 85, 96) type in Corinth in the early decades of the 2nd century AD (BRONEER 1977, 64), inspired by the *koine* lamps of the Roman Mediterranean known as Loeschcke type VIII via the production centres of Africa Proconsularis (PERLZWEIG 1961, 7; DENEAUVE 1969, Pl. LXXX-LXXXI, cat. no. 878-898; known as Deneauve type VII-C).

Group B of Broneer type XXVII is known as 'Vine-and-Ray' by the typical alternating shoulder motif, and these lamps were in demand even in nearby centres with a ceramic industry that was already robust – as can be seen from two lamps signed *Sposianou* and *Kallistou*, from the 3rd century AD, Corinthian imports in Athens. Not long after, Athens began manufacturing its own lamps in this style, and their output soon came to surpass Corinth in both quantity and quality (PERLZWEIG 1961, 57, 94, cat. no. 271-274). Athenian production, with finer relief and probably influenced by toreutics (PERLZWEIG 1961, 18), was once thought to have been



ended by the Herulian invasion (267 AD) but is now known to have continued until about 350 AD (BAILEY 1988, 406–408). Corinthian production persisted until at least mid-5th century AD (GARNETT 1975, 190, cat. no. 5–6). A striking example from Yurta-Stroyno (Pl. 10/3:2) has grape bunches and vine leaves in circles connected with spirals in the typical Athenian ‘blurred relief’ style; its best analogies are four lamps from the Athenian Agora (PERLZWEIG 1961, 145, cat. no. 1470–1473), two of them signed Κλάρο|υ and Πρέιμο|υ, respectively, and dated to around 300 AD. These are the only known analogies with corresponding shoulder forms and the vine/grape motifs in a sinusoid spiral. Based on what we know of Athenian lamp shoulder decoration (PERLZWEIG 1961, cat. nos. 646, 707, 714, 726, 750, 757, 777, 784, 805, 908, 924, 1017, and 1022) we can confidently attribute this lamp to the late 3rd or early 4th century AD Athenian workshop producing in a Corinthianizing style. A similar lamp from the RGZM in Mainz has neither provenience nor provenance, and it is simply dated to the ‘Late Antiquity’ (MENZEL 1954, cat. no. 540, Abb. 47:5).

A unique discus fragment with the bust of Athena in full armour was found in the debris layers in trench 100E–105N (Pl. 10/3:1). This lamp is a Broneer type XXVII, Group C (‘Ovule-and-Panel’) of high craftsmanship, called ‘the perfection of lamp making in Greece during Roman Imperial times’ (BRONEER 1977, 66). Much the same dating as Group B also applies to this group. The lamps have symmetrical lugs, fixed up like locks, on each side of a central decoration panel. Athens being the primary production centre, these are no longer simply Corinthianizing but original Athenian wares. A series of identical lamps (perhaps from the same mould as the one from Yurta-Stroyno!) from the Athenian Agora (PERLZWEIG 1961, cat. no. 653–655, Pls. 12, 15, and 36) are the best analogies to our lamp.

Lamps of Broneer type XXVII were not only exported across the Roman world, but also imitated by craftsmen elsewhere in the Roman provinces. Greek wares of this type were found in Dalmatia, at Nicopolis near Epirus (BUSULADŽIĆ 2007, cat. no. 62); in Noricum, at Lauriacum (DERINGER 1965, 116–117, cat. no. 349); in Italy, at Aquileia (DI FILIPPO BALESTRAZZI 1988, 403–404; cat. no. 1113–1117); in Pannonia, at Intercisa and Arrabona (IVÁNYI 1935, 98, cat. no. 873–874); as well as in various other centres in Greece itself and in Asia Minor (BRUNEAU 1965, cat. no. 4658–4659; see BRONEER 1977, 65 for a more detailed list). Imitations of Group B were found in Djerba, Tunisia (ZEISCHKA 1997, cat. no. 182); Group C and D were imitated in Noviodunum (BAUMANN 2009, 247–249; tip XI, cat. no. 99–109: 13 items dated to the 3rd century AD); an interesting and early variation from Cnidus on this type also deserves to be mentioned (BAILEY 1988, 341–342, Q 2735, Q 2737, 344, Q 2760). A group of lamps from Yurta-Stroyno (Pl. 10/3:3), while similar to true Corinthian Group B wares (such as BRONEER 1977, 75, cat. no. 2974), might be of this kind.

Three lamps found together in the fill of the southeast quadrant of trench 95E–100N (Room B, [SU021]) are interesting imitations of Loeschcke type I/IV Bildlampen: with the volute merely suggested by an incised line, with a relief ring around the discus in the manner of Firmalampen, and with a prominent relief half-circle on the nozzle (Pl. 10/3:4). Although lamps of Loeschcke types I to IV were produced in Italy from the Augustan age to about 100 AD, plenty of provincial imitations exist – with similar incised volutes, no less (BAUMANN 2009, 230, cat. no. 29), or incorporating a similar relief ring on the discus (GOETHERT-POLASCHEK 1985, Taf. 76). The lamps from Yurta-Stroyno must be dated to the 2nd century AD at the earliest, but due to an absence of analogies, an upper date cannot be specified.

Finally, a group of seven lamp fragments with varying clay structure but united by relief rays on their rounded shoulders (Pl. 10/3:5) best recall Dalmatian and Thracian local variations on Loeschcke type VIII round lamps. Two examples, from Zagreb (VIKIĆ-BELANČIĆ 1971, 162, cat. no. 238) and Pavlikeni (VLADKOVA 2011, 126, cat. no. 30) may serve as illustrations. These



crude and rare lamps have an uncertain date range; usually they are attributed to the 3rd and 4th century AD. Their existence should come as no surprise – after the 2nd century AD, the Loeschke type VIII *koine* lamp of the Mediterranean is more of an umbrella term for various round shapes that were widely distributed and copied than a specific type itself.

Almost no producers' stamps or workshop marks survive on lamps from Yurta-Stroyno; however, one is a prominent exception with an incised swastika on its base (Pl. 10/3:6). Unfortunately, like another lamp with a decoration of incised rays on its base, it was found in soil contaminated by robbers' activity. The two possible base fragments of Firmalampen may show faint signs of firm marks; both are beyond recognition.

METALS

In course of the excavation, many different metal objects were found, mostly made of iron and bronze. Based on their function, we may preliminarily class them into several general groups: metal tools; constructional elements; costume decorations; bronze fittings; fittings of bronze vessels and parts of military equipment. Some examples of these groups are introduced in the following paragraphs.

METAL TOOLS

An iron hammer was found within the fill [SU057] at the north-eastern corner of Room C together with the coin of Julia Domna. It has small dimensions (70 × 18mm) with front working part shaped as a chisel and its back part in a form of a hammer (Fig. 2:1). These morphological features class the tool under the 'hammer-chisel' type I after Cholakov (also known as Gaitzsch type II/2: CHOLAKOV 2008, 109). In general, hammers were universal instruments, used (depending on their size and shape) for metallurgy, stone-, metal- and wood-working. Our example, based on its smaller proportions, could be used as blacksmith equipment for detailed work. In the territory of Bulgaria there are 25 published finds of similar hammers with a majority dated to the 3rd century AD, while only few examples come from earlier or later contexts (CHOLAKOV 2008, 112).

BRONZE FITTINGS

The bronze belt/strap fittings, belt plates and similar decorative plates belong to another significant group of metal small finds found in Yurta-Stroyno. The ones presented here were all found within the waste levelling layer in the north-eastern part of the square 100E-105N.

Bronze boss

A small bronze boss (16 × 18mm) could be identified as a belt/strap circular fitting (Fig. 2:2). This type of fitting belongs among frequent finds from places connected with the Roman military, particularly with cavalry. One of the richest collections of similar bronze fittings from horse harness was found in the castell of Zugmantel, while single finds are known also from Alkofen, Feldberg, Niederbieber and Saalburg (SCHLEIERMACHER 2000, 167, 174-176). As suggested by the finds from Zugmantel, fittings with a central boss could be originally fixed to the straps of the horse harness. However, they could also be used as parts of waist-belt decoration. Corresponding finds from Germania Superior and from the Rhaetian Limes are mainly dated between mid-2nd and mid-3rd century AD (OLDENSTEIN 1976, 165-166).

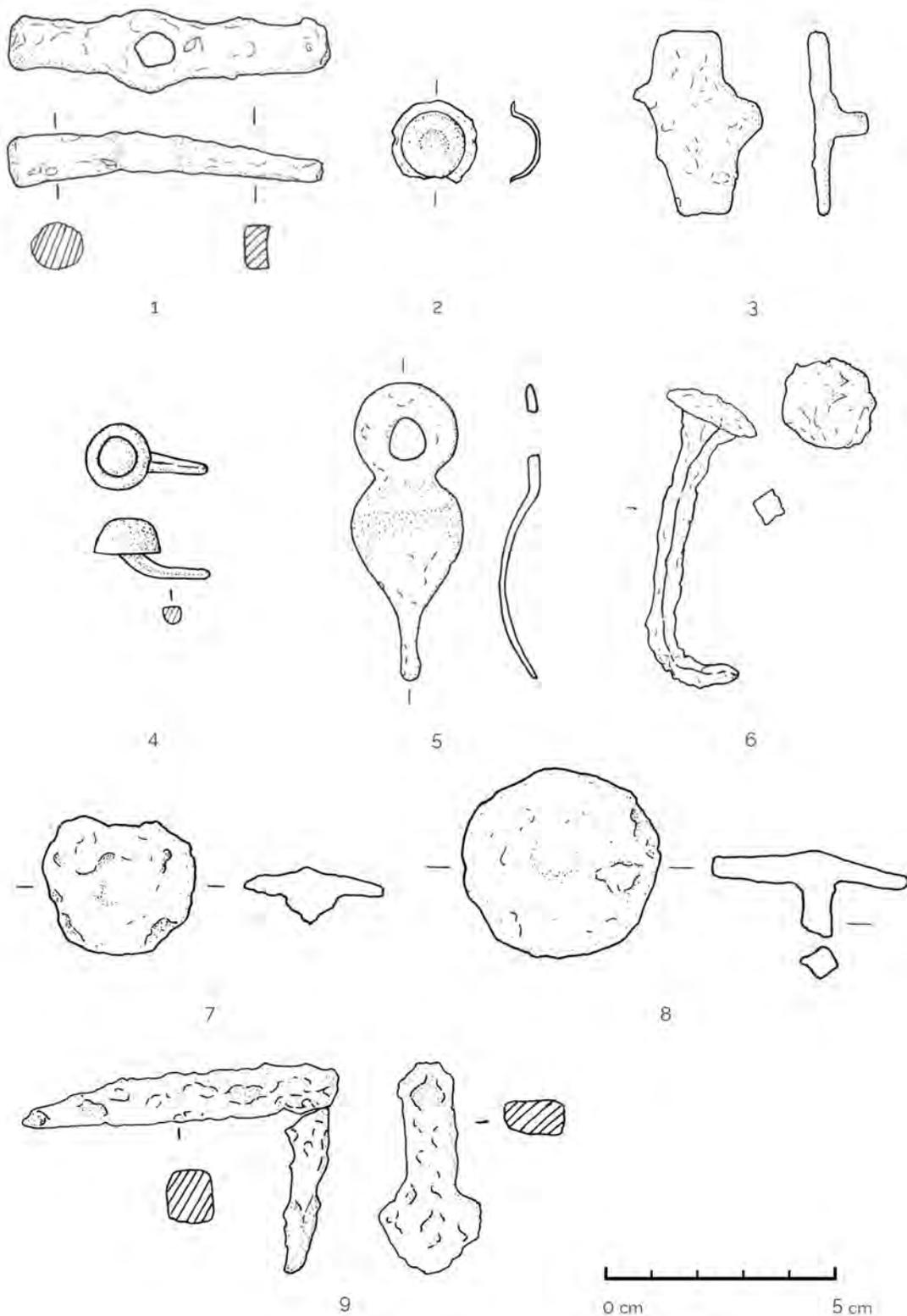


Fig. 2: Metal finds. 1 - iron hammer; 2 - small bronze strap or belt fitting with a central boss; 3 - bronze bridle-fitting, used as part of horse gear; 4 - bronze decorative nail/stud; 5 - bronze heart-shaped fitting from cauldron; 6 - iron nail, probably from an architectural structure; 7 and 8 - nails with a flat massive head; 9 - an L-shaped iron clam or bracket.



Bronze bridle-fitting

A bronze bridle-fitting has an atypical irregular rectangular shape (38 × 22mm) with lateral protrusions (Fig. 2:3). The bridle-fittings are commonly used as a part of the Roman horse gear and belong to finds connected with the presence of Roman military units, or more precisely, of cavalry (RADMAN-LIVAJA 2009, 1501–1503).

Bronze decorative nail

Another object that could be identified as a decorative element or part of a fitting is a small bronze nail/stud (13 × 26mm; Fig. 2:4). Such nails/studs had functional as well as decorative purposes. The head was usually ornamentally shaped, used as a decorative element on household utensils, wooden furniture (often chests) and building elements. Finds of these nails/studs are relatively frequent in urban settlements, for example at the agora of Nicopolis ad Istrum in Moesia Inferior, northern Bulgaria (GENCHEVA 2013, 201). Similar copper-alloy nails/studs were, however, used also for decoration of the horse harnesses, waist-belts or leather equipment (OLDENSTEIN 1976, 168; CRUMMY 1981, 115–119).

BRONZE HEART-SHAPED FITTING

Bronze heart-shaped fitting (62 × 23mm) with an oval-shaped hole for the handle (Fig. 2:5) might be associated with different bronze vessel types, but most frequently with buckets and cauldrons. The fitting found at Yurta-Stroyno corresponds the best to the ones of bell-shaped bronze cauldrons, common in the Danubian provinces, especially in Noricum and Pannonia (SEDLMAYER 1999, 102–109). For the area of the Lower Danube and Balkan Peninsula a special sub-type Raev 3, typ 'Balchik', was assigned to these cauldrons. In Bulgaria, they were found e.g. at Novi Banovtsi, Sliven, Sofia, Kaloyanovec, Stara Zagora and Balchik, all in the contexts of the 2nd–3rd centuries AD (RAEV 1977, 628–630).

Production centres of bronze vessels in Thrace and Moesia Inferior are known from Augusta Traiana, Pautalia, Philippopolis, Marcianopolis and Odessos (NENOVA-MERDYANONOVA 2008, 43–44). Local workshops produced basic types of bronze vessels, with simple elements which could be easily manufactured. Nevertheless, in context of the provinces of Moesia Inferior and Thrace even simple bronze vessels were considered as higher quality household equipment (NENOVA-MERDYANONOVA 2008, 32–44).

CONSTRUCTION ELEMENTS

The biggest group of metal objects found at Yurta-Stroyno consists of functional elements and/or decorative fittings from architectural constructions; these were spread all over the excavated area. Iron nails of different dimensions and variable sizes and shapes of nail-head are presented, indicating their different purpose and use. For example, high amount of bigger size nails (up to the height of 83mm) points to the presence of an architectural structure with a robust wooden construction and/or roof (Fig. 2:6). Nails with flat massive heads (Figs. 2:7–8) could be interpreted both as decorative as well as construction elements; fastening and decorating bigger wooden structures such as an entrance gate (GENCHEVA 2013, 204–206). Another significant group of metal objects is constituted by iron clamps or L-shape brackets (Fig. 2:9) which were frequently used from the 1st to the 3rd century AD for fixing bigger architectural items, mainly massive doors, gates or walls (CRUMMY 1981, 120–121; GACUTA 1993, 89).



GLASS

The majority of glass fragments found during the excavation of Yurta-Stroyno comes from the thick waste layer and from the soil disturbed by the robbers. Both of these contexts are secondarily deposited which caused high fragmentation of the fragile glass, making the identification of objects and reconstruction of vessel shapes difficult.

However, basic classification of functional groups can be conducted: glass vessels (mainly small shapes: cups, bottles, jugs, *unguentaria*, thin walled beakers and bowls with polished or fire rounded rims); personal decoration objects (such as beads or a part of a ring); objects of daily use (game tokens) and window glass. During the 2015 season raw glass as well as glass production waste was discovered creating a group of finds on its own.

Most of the glass fragments came from colourless or naturally coloured free-blown vessels, although a few of them do not exclude mould-blowing. Several fragments have traces of wheel cut geometric decoration; plastic decoration with relief trails is less frequent, but also present. Window glass is mainly naturally coloured (with blue or green tint) or colourless.

GLASS BEADS

Several different types of glass beads were collected within the excavations, all of them highly corroded: four cylindrical beads with hexagonal section (ca. 17×4mm): all opaque, one of white and three of light blue colour; three flat round beads (d. from 6mm to 12mm) of light blue colour; and one annular bead with eyes (Pl. 10/5:1 see below).

The cylindrical beads with hexagonal section as well as the flat round beads were widely spread over the territory of the Roman provinces during the 2nd and 3rd century AD; their popularity continued until the Late Antiquity when their amount even increased (SWIFT 2000, 90–94).

The annular bead with eyes

This is a unique single find of round shape bead of dark blue mass decorated by light blue and yellow dots (16×10mm; Pl. 10/5:1, typologically it relates to *Tempelmann-Maczyńska Group XX/198; Benea IX; Gopkalo polychromic beads I/10*). It was found within the thick levelling layer of a square 100E–105N in the north-eastern area.

In the context of the Balkan lands, occurrence of these beads is dated into the period after the Marcomannic Wars, from the last quarter of the 2nd century AD to the Late Antiquity (TEMPELMANN-MACZYŃSKA 1985, 47–48; BENEA 2004, 107–110; GOPKALO 2008, Tabl. I). Workshops of these beads have been found in Dacia (Tibiscum and Porolissum), and Moesia Inferior (Novae). In Dacia both workshops were located in a *vicus*, while in Novea *vicus* production was only suggested (STAWIARSKA 2014, 30, 47, 56). From Tibiscum several dozen inscriptions are known mentioning names of Palmyrian citizens, soldiers and, especially, craftsmen, who seem to have been engaged in glass making activities in Tibiscum from the time of Hadrian until the Late Antiquity (even after the abandonment of Dacia in 271 AD: BENEA 2004, 144–145; STAWIARSKA 2014, 30).

GLASS VESSELS

The majority of identifiable glass fragments came from basic types of glass vessels: cups; jugs; thin walled beakers and bowls; flagons – *unguentaria*; bottles and flasks. Most of the fragments have an opaque white powdery superficial corrosion level which which might have been caused



by the low quality of the raw glass, chemical additives and/or the soil conditions affecting the deposited fragments *in situ*. Many pieces also feature high concentration of bubbles within the glass matrix which generally reflects poor processing of the material. The most frequent colour of the glass is 'natural' blue-green indicating the natural presence of iron oxide without using decolorizers (antimony trioxide and manganese oxide), to which glass owes its transparency and colourlessness (SHEPHERD 1999, 301; HENDERSON 2013, 300-301).

Colourless thin fragments with low percentage of bubbles create also a numerous group of finds. The colourless vessels became fashionable during the late 1st and at the beginning of the 2nd century AD and were commonly used until the Late Antiquity, when the quality of glass production declined (SHEPHERD 1999, 301; SHEPHERD - WARDLE 2009, 9, 57). Intentionally coloured glass is rare in our assemblage, covering all of the glass beads discussed above and several orange-brown coloured vessel fragments.

Regarding surface treatment, several fragments have marks of wheel-cut linear decoration which was popular from the 1st to the 3rd century AD (WHITEHOUSE 1997, 221); just few fragments have relief decoration made by mould blowing technique (Pl. 10/5:2). Several bases of beakers (with flattened hollow tubular base ring) could be dated, according to analogous finds from Nicopolis ad Istrum, to the 2nd-3rd century AD (SHEPHERD 1999, 324). Individual group of distinctive glass vessels is represented by *unguentaria*, small toilet bottles used for perfumes (Pl. 10/5:3). Such containers were very common all over the Roman Empire. The ones uncovered in Yurta-Stroyno can be related to the group of 'candlestick *unguentaria*' (Isings 82 B1-B2) dated from the 1st to the mid-3rd century AD (ISINGS 1957, 97-99).

RAW GLASS AND GLASS PRODUCTION WASTE

Three pieces of raw glass (65×35mm; 55×25mm; 55×25mm; Pl. 10/5:4) of blue-green colour were found on the surface next to the freshly excavated ditch, in the north-eastern part of the site, 120m north-east of the excavated area (Pl. 10/6). They were dug out by the robbers while searching for more valuable finds. The raw glass surface find was accompanied by discarded fragments such as threads and trails from various stages of glass-working process such as adding handles or trail decoration or testing the viscosity of the hot glass itself (Pl. 10/5:5). The group of mentioned finds could be identified as glass waste, usually generated by glass workshops (SHEPHERD - WARDLE 2009, 39; PRICE 2005, 168).

The quantity of the raw glass and the discarded fragments is not large, but simply the fact of their presence might very well indicate existence of a glass workshop at the settlement. We expect to find more evidence during the future campaigns while excavating in the area of their accidental discovery. So far only few glass production centres of the Roman period are known within the territory of Bulgaria, mostly in Moesia Inferior: *Novae*, where several furnaces were found (OLZCAK 1978, 176-177); *Odessos* (MINCHEV 1988, 51); *Oescus*; *Sandanski*; *Gabrovsokoto Gradishte* and *Dichin* (CHOLAKOVA 2008, 472; CHOLAKOVA 2009, 282-284).

EPIGRAPHIC FINDS

Only few fragments bearing an inscription, or being part of an inscription, were uncovered during the last two years of the excavations. Putting aside graffiti and Greek letters scratched secondarily on the pottery, this group includes two objects: a fragment of a Thracian horse rider plate (Pl. 10/4:1-2) and a half of votive terracotta plate (Pl. 10/2:4-5).



THE THRACIAN HORSE RIDER PLATE

A part of a marble relief depicting Thracian horse rider (Pl. 10/4:1) was found in the southern foundation wall [SU 002] of Room D. It was secondarily incorporated into the wall, with the relief side facing up (Pl. 10/4:2). The preserved right corner of the plate (17×17×4.5cm) represents approximately 25 % of the original size of the relief. The fragment depicts human feet, a horse hoof and possibly a piece of an altar/a tree/a frame (?) in a shallow relief. In comparison with similar depictions, we can reconstruct a picture of the horse rider sitting on a galloping horse facing right (OPPERMANN 2006, type B).

One third of the known Thracian horse rider representations is accompanied by Greek or Latin inscription which could be both dedication to deity or a funerary text (DIMITROVA 2002, 210). The lower part of the plate, which normally bears an inscription, does not carry any signs of carving in our case. However, two other fragments of marble plate depicting Thracian horse rider were previously found at Yurta-Stroyno with one of them bearing an inscription stating Roman family name *Avilii* written in Greek (BAKARDZHIEV 2008, 471–472; BOYANOV 2008, 214).

The depiction of the horse rider became the most popular in the Roman Thrace during the 2nd and 3rd century AD (KAZAROW 1938; OPFERMANN 2006; BOTEVA – DIMITROVA 2002) with large amount of analogous plates known from the Yambol District: Bolyarsko, Bezmer, Yambol, Botevo, Savino, Meden Kladenets, Drama, Dryanovo, Svetlina, Topolovgrad, Duganovo, Mramor, Ustrem, Razdel, Malomirovo, Bolyarovo, Elhovo, Boyanovo, Robovo, Kamenets, Zornitsa, Chelnik, Lyulin, Nedyalsko, Palauzovo (KAZAROW 1938, nos. 117, 170, 299; OPFERMANN 2006, 233; nos. 499, 750–753).

THE VOTIVE TERRACOTTA PLATE

A very unusual combination of a relief representation and an inscription was found during the 2015 season (Pl. 10/2:4–5). It is a terracotta plate found out of context, within the soil excavated by the robbers [SU 001] inside Room B. Roughly ca. 50 % (6×4×1cm) is preserved of the plate's original dimensions with the lower part missing.

The A side (Pl. 10/2:4) of the relief plate depicts a scene of a temple with a person standing *in antis*. Two *boucrania* are depicted inside the temple, each above one shoulder of the person. A round object can be seen in the middle of the temple's pediment, perhaps the Sun (Helios). The standing person, likely a deity with long hair, is wearing a *polos* hat. On her/his right shoulder a small object in the shape of a bird is depicted. The image can be interpreted as representation of a deity, to whom the plate was dedicated.

The B side (Pl. 10/2:5) of the terracotta plate was inscribed in Greek alphabet before firing. The text can be read as ΠΥΤΝΙΟΥ, ΠΙΤΝΙΟΥ, or ΠΗΝΙΟΥ which are genitive cases of Greek male names Pytnios, Pitnios or Penios. Names Pytnios and Pitnios have not yet been attested anywhere else, but the word stem *Pyt-* and especially *Pyth-* is very common in the Greek speaking world (FRASER – MATTHEWS 2005, 295). Name Penios or Penias occurs as personal name in Macedonia and Thessaly, with connotations to the river deity Peneus.³ The text can be interpreted either as a name of the plate dedicant, or as a deity to whom the dedication has been made, and which could be displayed on the A side.

Several similar depictions of standing deity in the middle of a temple were found in Bulgaria, none of them however bears an inscription. The parallels include terracotta moulds and

3 The connection of the inscription on our plate with the river deity Peneus and therefore with Thessalian origin of the artist creating this plate was suggested by Nicolay Sharankov.



bronze plates, all dated into the timespan of the first three centuries AD. They were found in the north-western and the south-eastern parts of Bulgaria: terracotta moulds from Montana (DREMSIZOVA-NELCHINOVA – TONCHEVA 1971, no. 130-133) and a bronze plate from south-eastern Thrace (TACHEVA-HITOVA 1983, 177). Moreover, similar iconography can be found also on coins from Hadrianopolis and Deultum issued from the late 2nd to the first half of the 3rd century AD (Hadrianopolis: *Corpus Nummorum Thracorum* 4488; 4550; Deultum: *Corpus Nummorum Thracorum* 6035).

CONCLUSION

The habitation timespan of the settlement at Yurta-Stroyno was originally determined, based on the previous excavations, to span from the 1st to the 4th century AD (BAKARDZHIEV 2007; 2008). However, the chronological classification of the finds uncovered during the last two years of the excavations covers only the 2nd and 3rd century AD. Some of the objects may admittedly overlap to the 1st and/or 4th century AD, none of them can, however, be dated exclusively to either of these two centuries. We are therefore inclined to narrow down the chronology of the area investigated within our project to the 2nd-3rd century AD only.

However, in our trenches we are dealing with an exceptional situation of a house levelling undertaken in antiquity, most likely intentionally. Consequently, by the turn of the 3rd/4th century AD, there must have been some population left responsible for this action. Continuity of the settlement might be then expected in some, perhaps limited, parts of the habitation.

Currently, the settlement is heavily destroyed by treasure hunters and the majority of finds comes from un-stratified contexts or even from surface finds. Nevertheless, the uncovered objects still offer a wide range of knowledge enabling better understanding of the settlement character and the people who lived in.

Some of the bronze fittings point to the presence of military equipment on the site, increasing the number of finds related to the army, on base of which the site of Yurta-Stroyno was interpreted as a *vicus* of Roman army veterans. Some of the single finds discussed within the text convey higher status household equipment of the inhabitants. The marble wall facing, as well as the column, suggest more elaborate architecture, such as administrative buildings or/and houses for upper class. Contacts with distant centres are confirmed by imports from the Aegean attested by the Athenian lamps of high quality, although local (Balkan) lamp imitations were also found.

Regarding the manufacture, the raw glass and glass production waste indicate a possible presence of a workshop on the site. Similarly, the large amount of slag, found within the excavation, as well as cumulated on the surface, might suggest metal production/working taking place in the settlement.

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Pl.10/1: An aerial photograph of the excavated trenches at the end of the 2015 season. By Ondrej Trhan, Slovak University of Technology.



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2



3



4



5



Pl. 10/2: Selection of small finds: 1 - bronze coin of Julia Domna issued in Anchialos on the Black Sea coast in 187-217 AD, 2 - bronze coin of Diadumenian issued in Cyzicus, Mysia, Asia Minor in 217-218 AD, 3 - marble acroterion, 4 and 5 votive terracotta plate depicting temple with deity (4) and inscribed name in Greek (5).



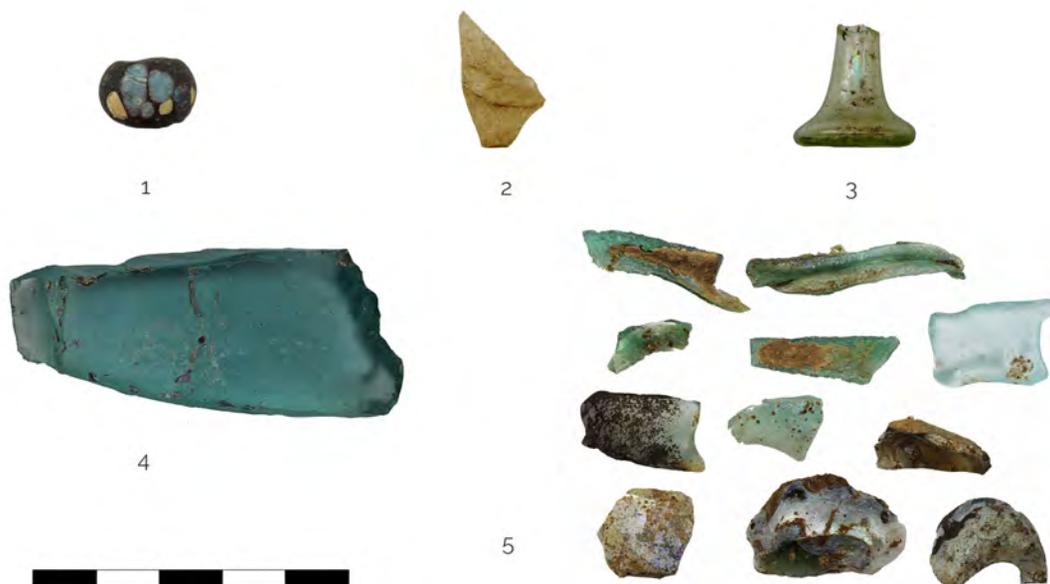
Pl. 10/3: Terracotta lamps: 1 - discus of a terracotta lamp depicting Athena in helmet with spear leaning on her right shoulder, 2 - lamp shoulders with alternating motif of grape bunches and vine leaves, 3 - a representative piece of group of lamps similar to Corinthian Group B wares (Broneer type XXVII), 4 - perhaps a local imitations of Loeschcke type I/IV Bildlampen, 5 - representative pieces of group of lamps the best recalling Dalmatian and Thracian local variations on Loeschcke type VIII, 6 - lamp base with incised swastika.



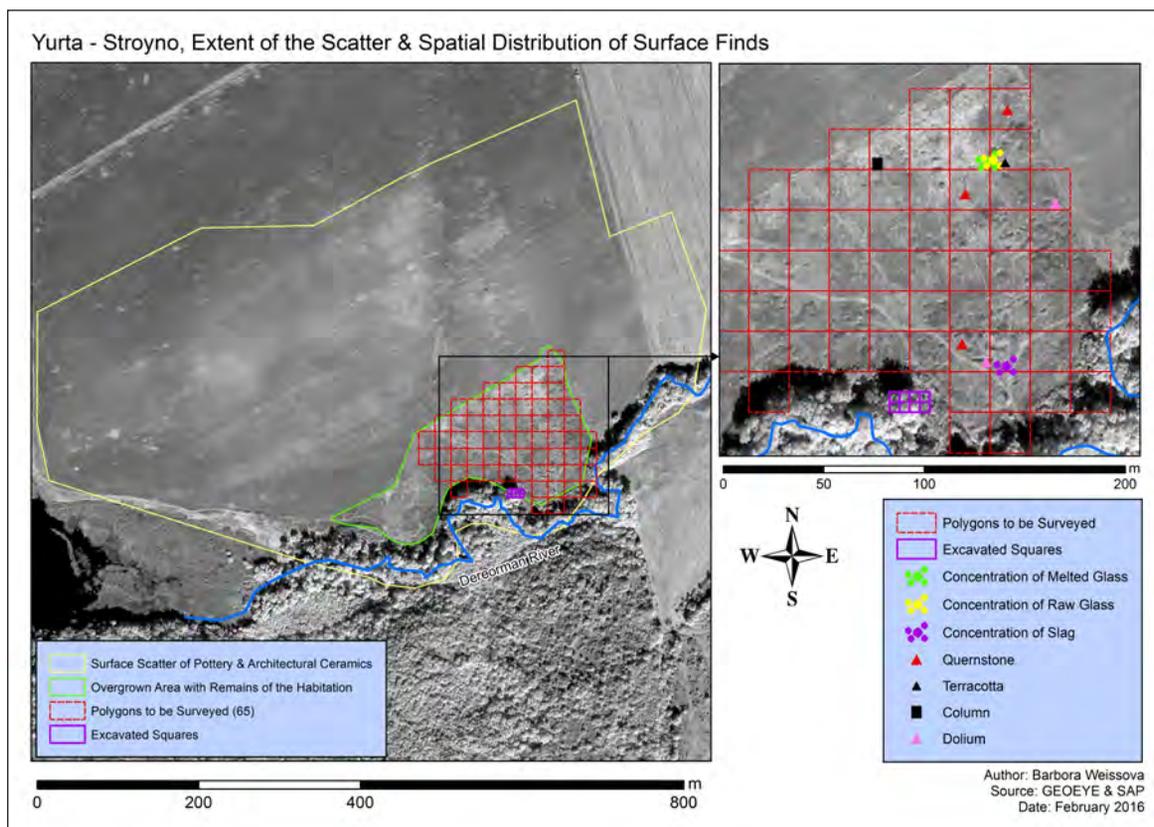
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Pl. 10/4: Thracian horse rider plate: 1 - fragment of a marble relief plate depicting Thracian horse rider - human feet, horse hoof and possibly a piece of an altar/a tree/a frame (?) in a shallow relief, 2 - the relief in situ, found secondarily incorporated into the foundation wall.



Pl. 10/5: Glass: 1 - annular bead with eyes, 2 - fragment with relief decoration made by mould blowing technique, 3 - base of unguentarium, 4 - one of the raw glass pieces, 5 - glass production waste.



Pl. 10/6: Map of the Yurta-Stroyno marking the pottery scatter; core of the site; geodetic grid; the excavated trenches and selection of the surface finds.