

Archaeological site of “Sirmium”

Country or territory:
SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO
REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Name of organisation
compiling the information

Local name:
Zavod za Zastitu Spomenika
Kulture Sremska Mitrovica
22000 Sremska Mitrovica
Srbija i Crna Gora.

English name:
Institute for Preservation of Cultural
Monuments Sremska Mitrovica
Svetog Dimitrija 10,
22000 Sremska Mitrovica



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Name and the address of building(s) or site:

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF
“SIRMIUM,”
City of Sremska Mitrovica

Inventory reference number(s):

AN 106 (since 12 December, 1993).

Building type(s):

Archaeological site with 85 localities,
10 being active (elaboration further in
the text), while 75 have been
open/active, researched and closed.

Main dates:

The remains of the ancient city of
Sirmium are under the modern
present-day city of Sremska
Mitrovica.

- 1st - 4th century AD: the city is a very important administrative centre of the Roman province *Pannonia Secunda*. In the 4th century, Sirmium was one of the four major cities of the Roman Empire.
- 1957: systematic archaeological excavations begin
- 1990: the Archaeological site of “Sirmium” is categorized as an “immovable cultural heritage of exquisite significance” by the decision of the Parliament of Republic of Serbia number 224 (26 November, 1990).

Current use(s):

Tourist, educational and scientific significance. Visited by tourists, and excursions of elementary, high school and college students.

Significance:

This ancient city was spacious, surrounded by city walls and water trenches. They provided fortification for the imperial palace, the hippodrome, the public baths (lat. *thermae*), the storehouse (lat. *horreum*), the trades and crafts' centre, the necropolis and other buildings with many movable items, stone statues, inscriptions and sarcophagi. The remains of a *Villa Urbana*, parts of a storage and the remains of the temple of "Sveti Dimitrije" (Saint Dimitri, prim. transl.) have been conserved.

The modern city of Sremska Mitrovica is built on the ruins of the ancient city, with remnants of the old buildings lying buried under buildings, roads, parks and walkways. The systematic excavations and work of investigation and preservation on the sites in Sremska Mitrovica show the pieces of a jig-saw, which all together paint a beautiful and priceless mosaic of the ancient Roman Sirmium.

Locality 1a (the Imperial Palace)

The Imperial Palace is located on the corner of the Pivarska and Branko Radicevic Streets. Protective archaeological excavations have been executed between 1957 and 1960, and additional minor works in 1971 and 1976.

The Imperial Palace of Sirmium was developed around a rectangular courtyard with remains of several rooms with hallways and mosaic floors. A system of hypocausts has been discovered, connected to heating furnaces by a system of canals. The remains of a rectangular edifice, the "*tetrapylon*" have been discovered. A massive wall, built of stone blocks, has been found in the southern part of the area.

The Palace dates from the period between the end of the 3rd and the end of the 4th century AD. It is believed that its original function ceased at the beginning of 5th century. An older structure, part of the city walls dating from the 2nd century AD, has been discovered under the Imperial Palace, as well as remains of structures dating between the 1st Century BC and the 1st Century AD.

Locality 14 (Villa Urbana)

The *Villa Urbana* is located at N.4, Saint Stephen Square (local: Trg Svetog Stefana), the area of the Lapidarium of the Museum of Srem. Protective archaeological excavation was carried out in 1959, 1968 and 1989. The remains of the *Villa Urbana* include a large apsidal room and mosaic floor with geometric composition. The complex dates from the 3rd and 4th century AD.

Locality 28 Wheat Square (Loc. Zitni Trg)

Located in the Wheat Market, this area was used by craftsmen and traders along the southwest city wall of Sirmium. Oriented in a east-west direction, the street was paved with stone blocks and had an advanced sewage system. The excavations were conducted in several phases: 1960, 1961 and 1962. The site dates from the end of the 2nd till the 5th century AD.

Locality 29 The public baths of Licinius

(Loc. Licinijeve terme)

Located on N. 36, Sugar street (Loc. Secerni Sokak), the site was excavated over several years: 1949, 1961, 1962 and 1964 and housed the ancient public baths of Sirmium, built during the time of the Emperor Licinius. Massive and powerful foundations were found, situated between two streets with a *portik*.¹ The *frigidarius*, *tepidarius*, *apoditerius* and two baths have been clearly defined. A mosaic floor with geometrical motifs has also been discovered. A street connecting the baths has been discovered, oriented north-south.

The *thermae* date from the 4th century AD. Earlier structures from the 2nd and 3rd century AD, as well as graves of Avars from the end of 6th and 7th century have been found on the same locality.

Locality 30 (Lat. Horreum)

The *horreum*² (storehouse) was found in correspondence to N. 7-11, King Peter Street I, in the area of the back garden. The excavations were conducted in 1961, 1962 and 1963.

The *horreum* was part of the public palace, from the western side of the forum. The building *horreum* had dimensions of 44 x 22 m, with five sections separated by vertical columns. The north and south sides are flanked with *portiks*, while the east side is bordered by a stone-paved street with sewage system. The complex dates from the end of 2nd till the end of 4th century AD.

Locality 31

This *horreum* (storehouse) is situated immediately along the hotel "Sirmium." Protective excavations were carried out in 1961, 1962, 1973, 1975 and 1976. Located along the south city wall, the *horreum* was probably the commercial part of the imperial palace. Two parallel sets of rooms are symmetrically distributed along a wide mosaic covered hallway. The rooms open to the hallway from both sides, each having its own entrance. The southern set of the rooms face the southern city wall, which contains one tall circular tower.

The structure dates from the 4th Century AD, the remains of the older city wall from 2nd Century AD, with some traces of older remains beneath from 2nd and 3rd Century AD.

Locality 59 The Temple of Saint Dimitri (local Svetog Dimitrija).

The Temple of Saint Dimitri is located in N. 10, King Peter I Street, in the present courtyard area. Excavations were conducted in 1978. The church was a three-aisled basilica, measuring 21 x 7,80 meters with apse and counter-apse on the east side, containing also the seats for the priests. The church was built on the foundations of an older building, dating from 427 to 441 AD, by the prefect Leontius (Loc. Leontije). Only the middle section of the church with the altar apse has been conserved.

Locality 85

This locality was researched in July 2002. The research included one excavation of 5 x 11 meters at the area of the city parking, which now includes also the property of the demolished city jail on the corner of the Vuk Karadzic and Saint Sava Streets. The idea for the opening of this sounding was based on the great opportunity offered by the empty area for the investigation of the still unknown northwestern part of the Imperial Palace. So far, some remains have been uncovered in stages in the period between 1957 and 1975, which can be seen today out in the open at the corner of Pivarska and Branka Radicevica Streets.

¹ Local term for a stone walkway and entranceway to the public baths from the street. It has stone columns supporting arched or trigonal overhead.

² Roman equivalent of the silos, a place to store wheat.

Categories of Significance:

Of outstanding national importance

The archaeological site of Sirmium has outstanding national importance because of its rich history involving the Romans, Ilirs, Avars, and many others, and its unique geographical location.

At the time of the division of the Roman Empire on the tetrarch provinces, Sirmium became the Imperial residence and the administrative centre of the Province *Pannonia Secunda*. The city received several Roman emperors, some of whom were even born in Sirmium. The city became also an important Christian centre well before the official recognition of Christianity in 317 AD. Sirmium witnessed then persecutions against the Christians, and became a centre of Arian heretism. From Sirmium, the Roman armies departed to war battles over the Danube, and then later during the Great Migrations, it served as a defence shield on the way towards Western Europe and Rome. Sirmium existed for six centuries before the arrival of the Avars in 582 AD.

Category of ownership or interest:

Although the site is not related to contemporary religious or ethnic groups, it emphasizes and testifies to the continuity of human civilization in these areas from the time of the Romans.

Documentation and bibliographical references:

Documentation

Documentation related to the systematic research of Sirmium is found in the national Academy of the Sciences, the Archaeological Institute, Belgrade, the Provincial Institute for Preservation of Cultural Monuments, partially the Museum "Srem" and the Institute for Preservation of Cultural Monuments Sremska Mitrovica.

Bibliography

1. Popović, A Survey of the Topography and Urban Organisation of Sirmium in the late Empire, Sirmium I, Beograd 1971.
2. O. Brukner, Prilog prou~avawu urbanog razvoja Sirmijuma, Gra~a za prou~avawe spomenika kulture Vojvodine XI-XII, Novi Sad 1982-83.
3. P. Milošević, Topografija Sirmijuma, Novi Sad, 1994.
4. Popović, Sirmijum grad careva i mu~enika (Sabrani radovi o arheologiji i istoriji Sirmijuma), Sremska Mitrovica, 2003.
5. Edicija Sirmium. Sveske. I-XII.

Condition:

Very bad condition: Locality 1a (Imperial Palace)

In 2003, with co-financing from the Ministry of Culture and Media, and the Provincial Secretary for Education and Culture, the conservation of the northern part of the site was accomplished. The remaining part of the site requires immediate consolidation and preservation of the walls and the mosaics. A project is currently being prepared for building a dome over the Imperial Palace, which would prevent the deterioration of the structure from rain and snow. Additionally, the construction of a paved walkway through the site is planned to improve the visitation to the site. However, lack of funding prevents the implementation of these projects.

Poor condition: Locality 14 (Villa Urbana)

The structure of walls is stable; Need for restoration of the mosaic on the floor.

Very bad: Locality 28 (Wheat Market/Zitna Pijaca)

In 2003, the Committee for Project Development and City Development of the city Sremska Mitrovica has initiated works to improve the presentation of the site, including some conservation. The project should be completed during 2004, depending on the availability of funding.

Locality 29 (The Thermae of Licinius) - condition extremely bad.

Risks: slow decay and deterioration. No solution due to lack of funding for conservation.

Locality 30 (Horreum) - condition extremely poor.

Locality 31 - condition good (locality is conserved). The owner and user is known.

Locality 59 (the Church of Saint Dimitri) - condition is good (locality is conserved). The owner and user is known.

Locality 85 (Imperial Palace)--Currently under research.

The archaeological sites of Sirmium have not been affected by the war.

Risk:

The biggest risk is further deterioration of the open archaeological sites resulting from lack of financial means for conduction of conservation and restoration of these sites.

Condition risk:

Conservation and restoration works are currently being conducted at three archaeological sites: 1a (the Imperial Palace), 28 and 85.

Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric; solution agreed but not begun.

Locality 1-a: condition can be described as alarming. The large part of the locality is characterized by destruction of the walls and the degradation of the mosaic floor. During 2003, the consolidation and conservation of the northern part of the locality, which included coarse and fine cleaning, leveling of the base for the hipocausts, remaking of the bottom part and the restoration of the columns of hipocausts, were carried out, as well as the cleaning and consolidation of scattered parts of canals and walls. The area was also treated with herbicides. However, the remaining 75% of the site requires immediate intervention.

Slow decay; solution agreed but not begun.

Locality 14

Locality 28

Slow decay; no solution agreed.

Locality 29

Locality 30

Building(s) in good condition, but without use or user.

Locality 31

Locality 59

Under repair or in fair to good repair, but no user identified or under threat or vacancy.

Locality 85

Technical assessment and costing:

Locality 28: As part of the restoration of the city square, and with a view to re-using the site for the Festival of Speech, the Committee for Creative Planning of City of Sremska Mitrovica, has initiated the reconstruction of the site and the construction of an amphitheatre.

Locality 1a (Imperial Palace): According to the "Elaboration of Conservation and Reconstruction" of the existing locality of 1a, the Imperial Palace of Sirmium in Sremska Mitrovica, disposed of the following budget:

-First phase of works done in 2003: 6.800 Euros (funding by Ministry of Culture and Media of republic of Serbia and the Municipality of Sremska Mitrovica.

-Second Phase of works, to be done in 2004: the preliminary cost of planned works will be 38.000 Euros, however, these funds are currently unavailable.

Ownership:

All the localities are in public use, owned by the government of Serbia and Montenegro.

Occupation:

All the localities (except 29 and 30) are used as facilities for tourists, and educational and scientific purposes.

Management:

All the localities are managed by the Institute for Cultural Preservation Sremska Mitrovica, except locality 14, which is managed by the Museum "Srem" in Sremska Mitrovica.

If funding is to be made available, the Institute for Cultural Preservation Sremska Mitrovica would be responsible for administering the funds and overseeing the works.

Summary:

The modern Sremska Mitrovica rests on the foundations of ancient Sirmium, which was an important administrative and strategic centre at the time of the Roman Empire. The scientific research of Sirmium, 47 years after the initial systematic archaeological excavations, has finally enabled the understanding of the layout of this incredible ancient city.

The urgency of the reconstruction and consolidation of the archaeological sites in Sirmium derives from their exposure in the open, subject to climatic degradation. Further plans and funding will therefore be directed to consolidation and preservation from further decay. Especially important are the Imperial Palace, the Horreum, the Thermae of Licinus and the Villa Urbana. These sites together constitute a significant testimony to the beauty of ancient Sirmium, which can not be allowed to vanish.

Priority intervention level is *high*.

Sign. and date:

Ms. Zorka Pejovic, archaeologist
March 10, Sremska Mitrovica