Chronology of the Late Antique Fortifications of Deultum (Archaeological Data)

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Abstract: New archaeological data provides information about the development of the Late Antique (4th – 6th c. AD) fortifications of the Roman colony of Deultum, situated in the southeast corner of Bulgaria.

Key words: Deultum, Roman colony, fortifications, chronology, Late Antiquity.

INTRODUCTION

The Roman colony of Deultum (colonia Flavia Pacis Deultensium) is located by the village of Debelt, Sredets municipality, and 15 km to the southwest of the western Black Sea city of Burgas (Balabanov / Nenova-Merdjanova 2006). Deultum is the oldest Roman city in the territory of Bulgaria, founded in AD 70 (Драганов 2006, 27; Vagalinski 2008) as one of the two Roman colonies (together with Apri) of Thracia (fig. 1). Recent archaeological excavations revealed parts of Late Roman (fig. 2 / sites 9-10, fig. 7) and mostly of Early Byzantine (fig. 2 / sites 1-3, 7-10) fortifications. Up until now, four Early Byzantine gates have been uncovered, either entirely (fig. 2 / sites 1, 2; Вагалински 2006) or partially (fig. 2 / sites 7, 8; Вагалински 2013). The richest data concerning the chronology of the Late Antique fortifications of Deultum was obtained at sites 9, 10 (fig. 2, fig. 3, fig. 7, fig. 9; Вагалински 2016; 2018).

CHRONOLOGY

The cultural layer of sites 9 and 10 is about 5 m thick (fig. 4, fig. 10):

1. The north Roman (?) curtain wall (fig. 3/1) and a brick (stone-brick at some places) building with arches and a hypocaust system (fig. 3/2-2a, fig. 4/19-21) were built at site 9. It is not clear which of the two is older. The first habitation on site 10 was burnt down soon after AD 161 (fig. 10/15). A clay water-main (north-south) is the only structure of this settlement period (fig. 9). A solid building (a bath?) was built (some parts in opus mixtum) after AD 161 and before AD 268 (fig. 9/2). It cut the water-main. Walls in the south end of the nearby site 9 were erected in the same way (fig. 3/2-2a). All of them perhaps belonged to one and the same large architectural complex (villa urbana?) at the city’s north end.

2. Destruction after AD 268 (fig. 10/11, 11a) resulted in a Late Roman north curtain wall with a solid tower in the middle (fig. 3/3, fig. 5, fig. 6, fig. 9/3, fig. 11, fig. 12). Both were built before AD 383.
Fig. 1. Map of Thracia with the location of Deultum (map after J. J. Wilkes/Cox Cartographic Ltd. in Hammond 1981, map 24)
This curtain wall demolished and partly mounted the supposed *villa urbana* (fig. 9/2, 3).

3. Two consecutive enemy attacks followed – after AD 383 (fig. 10/8) and after AD 395 (fig. 10/5). The latter can correspond to a raid after AD 402/450 attested at site 9 (fig. 4/16).

The chronology upwards follows field results of sites 1, 8, 9 (fig. 2, fig. 3, fig. 8).

4. An Early Byzantine reinforcement (fig. 3/4, fig. 4/2, 14, fig. 9/4) adjoined after AD 457/474 and before AD 491/518 the vulnerable north Late Roman curtain wall (fig. 3/3, fig. 9/3). The new Early Byzantine fortress narrowed vastly from east and west the protected city area of *colonia Flavia Pacis Deultensium* (fig. 2). Thus, the colony still had control over a vulnerable terrace to the north and its river port to the south, which connected Deultum with the Black Sea via Mandrensko Lake. These two strategic reasons defined a much prolonged plan of the fortress (fig. 2) whose protected area covered about 46000 m² with a circumference of ca. 1100 m. This settlement period ended by fire soon after AD 491/518 (fig. 4/11, 13).

5. The last period of the Late Antique fortress of Deultum then began (fig. 4/9c). The north curtain wall was repaired and stone-adobe buildings with tile roofs adjoined it (fig. 3/5, fig. 4/9b). A conflagration eventually demolished the fortress of ancient Deultum soon after AD 574 (fig. 4/9). Perhaps Avars and Slavs were the invaders. Then a small fort was built on a hill ca. 1 km to the southwest. It defended local people until the beginning of 13th c. AD. Probably, it was the stronghold of Deultum that the Bulgarian ruler Krum captured in AD 812.

6. After a certain hiatus (fig. 4/9a) Early Medieval dwellings were constructed on and among the Late Antique ruins at site 9 (fig. 4/5-7). Later they were set on fire (fig. 4/8). Their preliminary date is 7th–8th c. AD according to the pottery only. Like the Late Antique residents (fig. 4/11a, 12, fig. 10/10), the Early Medieval inhabitants reused the previous constructions, thus disturbing (sometimes rather deeply) the stratigraphy of the site. The last lootings of the Late Antique walls date back to the 20th c. (fig. 4/4, fig. 10/2).

**Conclusions**

This short paper is aimed at presenting reliable information about the chronology of Deultum’s Late Antique defenses based on precise stratigraphic results. Nevertheless, our knowledge of the colony’s fortress throughout the centuries is definitely not sufficient for the following reasons:

1. Reliable archaeological data about the Roman fortifications of Deultum is not yet available;

2. The plan of the Late Roman fortress built between AD 268 and AD 383 is yet to be revealed;

3. The plan of the Early Byzantine (second half of the 5th c. – 6th c.) fortress of Deultum lacks completeness.

This is why the current paper is just a small step towards the long process of enriching our knowledge about the history of Deultum.
Fig. 2. Plan of the Early Byzantine fortress of Deultum: site 1 – east Early Byzantine gate; site 2 – Roman thermae; site 3 – so-called / supposed Roman imperial cult temple; site 7 – west Early Byzantine gate; site 8 – west Early Byzantine gate; site 9 – Late Roman curtain wall with a massive turret reinforced during the Early Byzantine period; site 10 – Late Roman curtain wall with a corner (?) turret reinforced by an Early Byzantine wall with a staircase (by A. Kamenarov)
Fig. 3. Plan of site 9: 1 north Roman (?) curtain wall; 2 a brick building with arches and a hypocaust system 2a; 3 north Late Roman curtain wall with a massive turret; 4 Early Byzantine wall that strengthened the Late Roman one; 5 buildings of the 6th c. (by A. Kamenarov / L. Vagalinski)
Fig. 4. Cross-section at site 9, see fig. 3/A-B: 1 soil with humus and scattered small broken stones; 2 Early Byzantine reinforcement adjoined 3; 3 Late Roman north curtain wall with a solid tower; 4 dug over remains of the curtain wall; 5 Early Medieval burnt clay floor connected with 6 and 7; 6 Early Medieval brick structure (a hearth?); 7 bricks arranged without mortar; 8 destruction by fire that belongs to 5-7; 9 conflagration, AD 574 as *terminus post quem*; 9a possible hiatus; 9b wall of 9c; 9c clay floor; 10 pit for looting 9b; 11 destruction by fire, AD 491/518 as *terminus post quem*; 11a dug over destructions; 12 a pit; 13 a layer of charred grain and coals; 14 clay floor of 2; 15 building trench for the foundation of 2; 16 destruction by fire, AD 402/450 as *terminus post quem*; 17 clay floor; 18 conflagration of 19, AD 383/408 as *terminus post quem*; 19 a wall; 20 - clay floor of 19; 21 building waste of 19 construction (mortar and small shards of bricks; 22 pure dark brown clay (by L. Vagalinski).
Fig. 5. Late Roman massive turret, inside, looking south; see fig. 3/3
(photo: L. Vagalinski)

Fig. 6. Late Roman massive turret, inside, northern front wall with two embrasures
(photo: L. Vagalinski)

Fig. 7. Plan of sites 9 and 10 (by A. Kamenarov / L. Vagalinski); see fig. 2, fig. 3
Fig. 8. Plan of the east Early Byzantine gate at site 1 (by A. Kamenarov / L. Vagalinski); see fig. 2
Fig. 9. Plan of site 10: 2 Roman building; 3 north Late Roman curtain wall with an embrasure; 4 Early Byzantine wall with a staircase (by A. Kamenarov / L. Vagalinski)

Fig 10. Cross-section at site 10, see fig. 9/A-B (by L. Vagalinski)
Fig. 11. Late Roman tower, 3D reconstruction, view from the outside (by S. Sabkova)

Fig. 12. Late Roman tower, 3D reconstruction, cross-section, view from the outside (by S. Sabkova)

Bibliography


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