

## APSAROS. EARLY HEADQUARTERS BUILDING (PRINCIPIA). NEW LOCALIZATION?<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

The *Apsaros* were described for many times (Fig. 1). Antique sources for this site have been compiled and discussed in publications of modern researchers.<sup>2</sup>

Georgian-Polish excavations in the Roman fort *Apsaros* in Gonio, have been conducted since 2014.<sup>3</sup> The project started in 2012 with a geodetic and geophysical prospection.<sup>4</sup>



Fig. 1. Location of the Roman fort of *Apsaros* (K. Misiewicz)

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank for supporting archeological excavations in Gonio in 2016. The Polish-Georgian expedition could work thanks to financial decisions made by the representatives of the University of Warsaw authorities: Vice-Rector Prof. Alojzy Z. Nowak, Dean of the Faculty of History Prof. Elżbieta Barbara Zybert, Director of the Institute of Archaeology Prof. Wojciech Nowakowski, Director of the Centre of Mediterranean Archeology Assoc. Prof. Tomasz Waliszewski, and thanks to the following foundations: The Foundation of University of Warsaw and Varia - the Foundation of the Faculty of History of University of Warsaw. I would also like to thank Marta Bura and Janusz Janowski from the 3D Scanner Laboratory of the Institute of Archaeology of University of Warsaw for help in a very difficult moment.

<sup>2</sup> A. Plontke-Lüning, *Apsaros. Quellen und Geschichte*, (in:) A. Geyer (ed.), *Neue Forschungen in Apsaros (2000–2002)*, Tbilisi 2003, 7–16; E. Kakhidze, *Apsaros: A Roman Fort in Southwestern Georgia, Meetings of Cultures in the Black Sea Region: Between Conflict and Coexistence*, “Black Sea Studies” VIII, Aarhus, 2008: 309–314; R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, E. Kakhidze, *The Roman Fort “Apsaros” in Gonio – early phase. New Discoveries and Perspectives for Investigations*, “Pro Georgia” 25-2015, 179–181.

<sup>3</sup> In Gonio near Batumi (Adjara, Georgia) carry out archaeological research joint expedition of the University of Warsaw (Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology and the Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw) and the Gonio-Apsarus Museum and Sanctuary of Cultural Heritage Preservation Agency of Ajara, Georgia (Director on the Georgian side Prof. Shota Mamuladze and on the Polish side Assoc. Prof. Radosław Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski).

<sup>4</sup> K. Misiewicz, R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, *Gonio (Georgia). Non-invasive surveys of the Roman fort of Apsaros – 2012 Season*, “Światowit” X(LI)/A 2013 (2012), 117–122.

Since 2015 research concentrates on the so-called “western trench” (Sectors NO 01 and NO 11), where early garrison therms have been discovered (Fig. 2: 3).<sup>5</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the preserved relics of the aforementioned therms have made it possible to distinguish two construction phases. Phase 1 was destroyed in unclear circumstances, and its remains are not well preserved and still poorly researched. New baths were erected on the ruins of the building from Phase 1. The building from Phase 2 is different from the previous one in terms of layout, although a part of older foundations and lower parts of the walls were used as foundations in the new building. In one of the rooms it has been discovered that the new floor was laid on the levelling layer, above the earlier floor.

The erection of the therms can be dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (probably already the ruling period of the emperor Vespasian). It is not known when exactly the therms were destroyed for the first time and if they were rebuilt immediately. The final destruction of the therms took place in the first decades of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, probably still at the times of Hadrian’s ruling period, maybe after taking power by An-

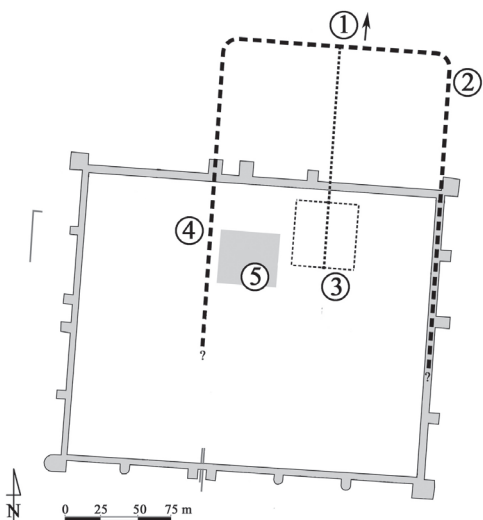


Fig. 2. Gonio (*Apsaros*). Site plan (after Geyer 2003, adapted by R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, drawing O. Kubrak): 1 – settlement beyond the defensive walls (*vicus*) – probable location; 2 – outline of early fortifications of the fort of *Apsaros*; 3 – “western trench” (Sectors NO 01 and NO 11); 4 – supposed courses of the western line of early fortifications (new proposition, cf. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, Kakhidze 2015); 5 – Georgian-German trench “*principia*”.

<sup>5</sup> Reports see: R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, S. Mamuladze, *Gonio (Apsaros) in Ajara – Excavations of the Roma Fort. Polish-Georgian Archaeological Expedition. Season 2014*, “Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean” XXV (forthcoming); R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, S. Mamuladze, *Gonio (Apsaros) in Ajara – Excavations of the Roma Fort. Polish-Georgian Archaeological Expedition. Season 2015*, “Światowit” XIII(LIV)/A (forthcoming); First description early Roman Bath’s see: R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, S. Mamuladze, *Early Roman Baths in Apsaros (Gonio, Adjara)*, (in:) Proceedings of the 7th International Symposium on Kartvelian Studies, Javakhsivili Tbilisi State University, October 17<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> 2016 (forthcoming).

toninus Pius. A group of archaeological finds points to the conclusion that the suggested dating is correct. The finds are: fragments of glass, *sigillata* type vessels and amphorae, discovered on the surface of the mosaic floor, directly under the surface of broken roof tiling. This surface remains after the roof of the *therms* collapsed; the roof was never rebuilt. Two silver Hadrian coins, found in other rooms, in the layers connected with destroying the *therms*, make it possible to specify dating of the building.

Before the *therms* were erected

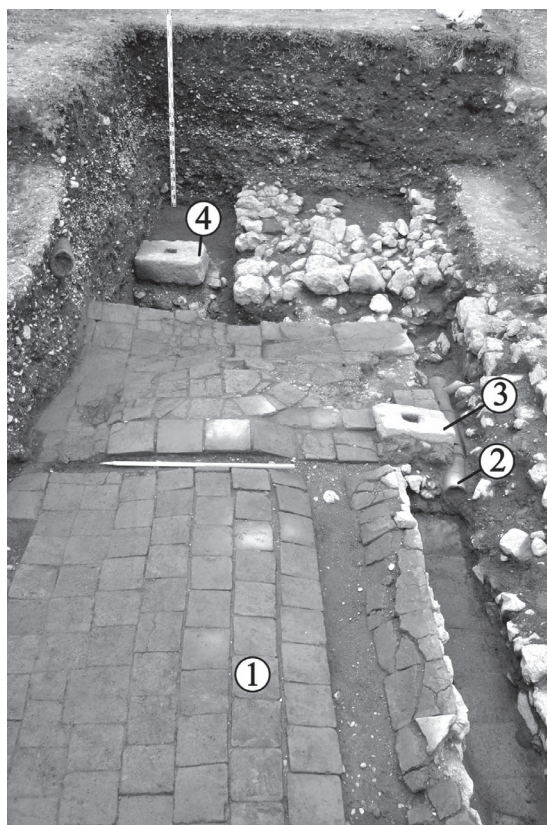


Fig. 3. Gonio, “western trench” (A. Trzop-Szczypiorska): 1 – a floor made of ceramic tiles (Phase 1), probably the remains of *apodyterium*; 2 – a pipe and a canal, probably a part of an outflow duct from one of the pools (Phase 1); 3 – an architectural detail used secondarily in the floor; 4 – the same detail in situ (a plinth on portico’s foundations?), probably a part of the remains of a building older than the *therms*.

During the first season of excavations (2014), a part of the floor of an unidentified room was discovered (Fig. 3: 1).<sup>6</sup> A floor made of ceramic tiles is remains of one of the rooms of the first *therms* (Phase 1). The room was used in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. After the baths rebuilding (Phase 2), the room was situated outside the outlines of the renovated bath house. Stratigraphy clearly demonstrates that in this place a road paved with layers of gravel existed. During the same excavation season a stone plinth was discovered, which was placed secondarily

<sup>6</sup> R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, E. Kakhidze, *The Roman Fort “Apsaros” in Gonio – early phase. New Discoveries and Perspectives for Investigations*, “Pro Georgia” 25-2015, 194, fig. 3: 1.



Fig. 4. Gonio (Sector NO 11, Square 37), the remains of a furnace used for heating hypocaust cellars (*praeefurnium*). The view after finishing exploration (A. Trzop-Szczypiorska).

in the aforementioned floor made of ceramic tiles (Fig. 3: 3). Provided context pointed to the conclusion that this architectural detail must come from the previous building.

However, no trace of older buildings on the area of the fort have been identified.

In the summer of 2016, eastwards from the so far uncovered rooms, remains of oven used to heat hypocaust cellars (*praeefurnium*), together with a part of the cellar under the room which was situated further to the north, was discovered (Fig. 4). The furnace was probably built in Phase 1, and supports (*pilae*) in the adjacent cellar were subsequently rebuilt in Phase 2 (see above: information about the therms in Introduction). In the construction of both the oven and the supports in the hypocaust cellar, a number of architectural details

were secondarily used, which were made for a different (older) building. A number of details can so far be distinguished: a few very well worked ashlar (Fig. 5A and B: 1),

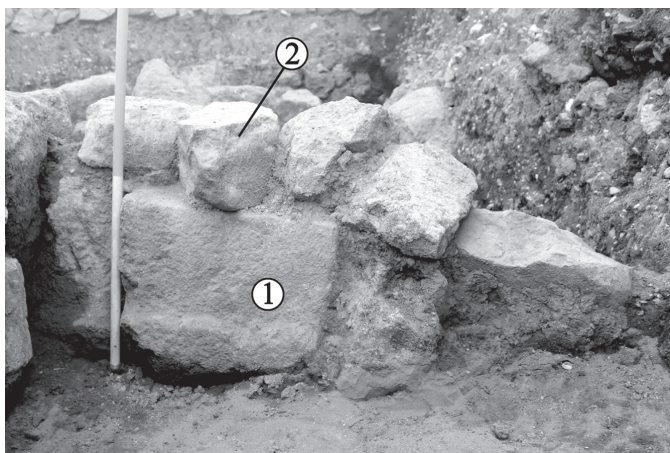


Fig. 5 A.



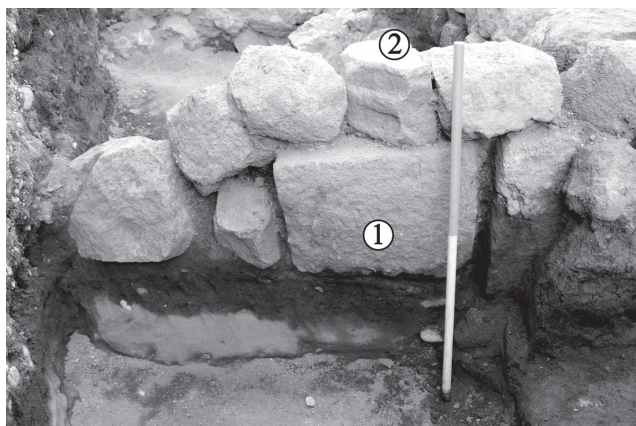


Fig. 5 B. Gonio (Sector NO 11, Square 37). Architectural details used secondarily in the construction of a hypocaust cellar: 1 – ashlar, 2 – a head of a column or a consola. A – the view from the east (A. Trzop-Szczypiorska), B – the view from the west (A. Trzop-Szczypiorska).

where the above mentioned bases were linked to the shafts of the column, they had the following diameters: 25 cm (Fig. 8: 2) and 25-28 cm (Fig. 8: 3). The condition of the two preserved bases (they were strongly burnt) makes it impossible to precisely estimate their dimensions. As far as what seems to be the aforementioned capital of a column, its surface (poorly worked) adapted for linking to the shaft of the column had a diameter of about 24 cm (Fig. 8: 1).

During excavations carried out nearby the above mentioned floor made of ceramic tiles, another plinth was discovered, this time it was *in situ* (Fig. 3: 3). Stratigraphical context clearly demonstrates that the plinth was installed on a foundation (maybe

among them one secondarily altered block with rustication (Fig. 6), two poorly preserved bases of columns with plinths, adapted for connecting them to the wall of the building, (Figs. 7: 1, 8: 2,3) and one initially worked column head (or a consola) (Fig. 5A and B: 2). In the place

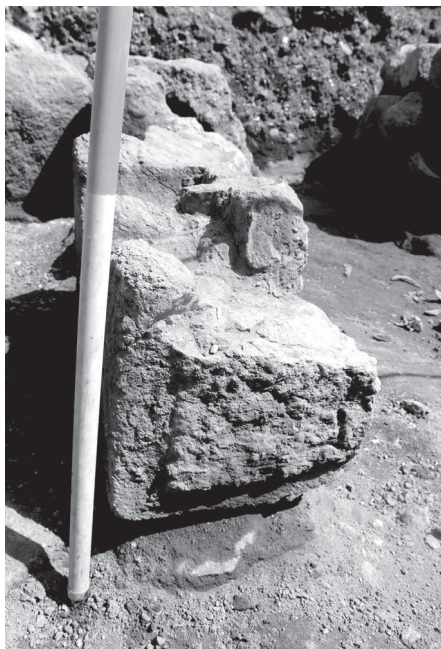


Fig. 6. Gonio (Sector NO 11, Square 37). A block ornamented with rustication, used secondarily in the construction of the furnace (*praeefurnium*) (A. Trzop-Szczypiorska).



Fig. 7. Gonio (Sector NO 11, Square 37). A column basis with a plinth (?), used secondarily in the construction of the furnace (*praefurnium*) (A. Trzop-Szczypiorska).

on the portico's stylobate?), placed directly on a layer of sand, i.e. much below the surface laid with tiles. Because of the context and its location (outside the building of the therms), the supposed portico must be a part of the remains of another (older!) building.

All mentioned architectural details were worked incomparably more precisely than the material used for erecting the therms. In the view of the author of this article, one of the column bases discovered in the hypocaust cellar (Fig. 7: 1) reminds the monumental basis for a square column, found in the Georgian-German trench, in the building referred to as „*principia*” (Fig. 9: 4). Both bases can be remains of a group of details prepared for the same

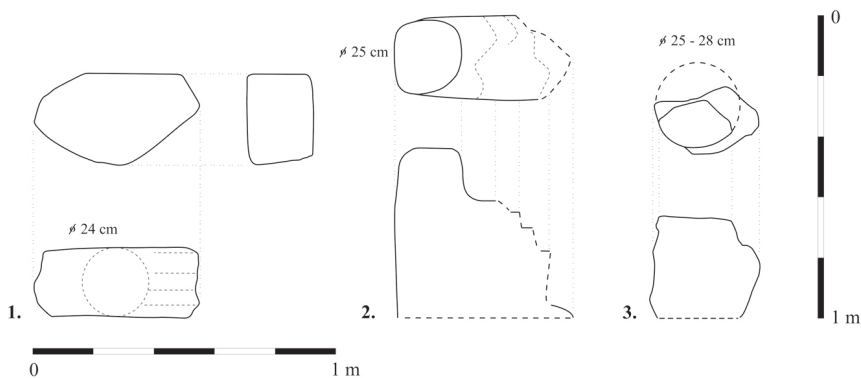


Fig. 8. Gonio. Architectural details used secondarily in the construction of the therms (drawing A. Gołębiewska digitizing M. Marciniak): 1 – a head of a column or a consola, 2 i 3 – column bases made together with plinths.

building or the same room. However, at the present stage of research it remains uncertain. To confirm the above thesis, further field work and comparative analysis of the findings are needed.

Autopsy at the aforementioned excavation site made it possible for the author to establish that the preserved relics of early walls, which could exist at the same time as the therms mentioned



Fig. 9. Gonio. The Georgian-German trench opened to the public – ruins referred to as “*principia*”. A general view (A. Trzop-Szczypiorska): 1-4 – placed above the aforementioned ruins, bases of columns of a late-Roman building (?) of unknown purpose.

earlier, were not solid enough to be a part of the building supported by similar columns. Excavations in the therms, mentioned in this text, demonstrated that the external walls of the building, whose thickness is less than 1m, were additionally strengthened by buttresses from the outside. The walls were supported, although there is no evidence that the therms were monumental buildings. According to these observations, foundations on the area of the alleged military headquarters seem not to be thick enough; they were not additionally strengthened either! Therefore, it can be suggested that they are remains of an unidentified building, other than *principia*. Context clearly suggests that the above mentioned two square column bases were used secondarily (Fig. 9: 3,4; 10: 2,3). Together with the bases of the adjacent columns, made of different material, they are remains of a large building (Figs. 9: 1,2; 10: 4–7), a part of which could also be a courtyard, located further to the west. The architectural complex is much later than the therms and, according to the author, it can be dated to the turn of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century at the earliest<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> cf. R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, E. Kakhidze, *The Roman Fort “Apsaros” in Gonio – early phase. New Discoveries and Perspectives for Investigations*, “Pro Georgia” 25-2015, 183–185.



In this situation, the bases of the monumental square columns, as well as architectural details discovered during excavations in the early therms, must come from another place (another building). All those elements were probably made for an older building than the therms, which are dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and the beginnings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

The unidentified building could be headquarters building, but it could not be located on the parcel where the so-called „*principia*” were discovered. The Georgian-German trench is nearby the western line of the Roman fort’s early earthwork. The remains of these oldest fortifications are visible in the form of embankments, on the outside of the northern line of the preserved defence walls (Fig. 2: 2). The alleged headquarters building would almost touch the above mentioned early fortifications (Fig. 2: 4,5). The author does not recall any headquarters building in a Roman fort located in such a manner. *Principia*

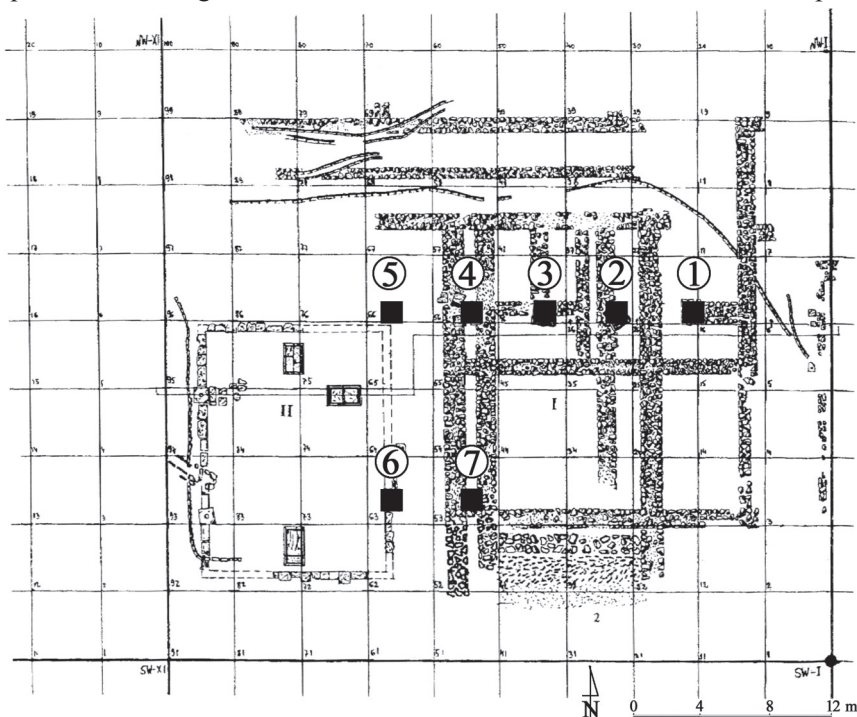


Fig. 10. Gonio. „Plan of the *principia*” (after E. Kakhidze 2008: fig. 12, adapted by R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, drawing O. Kubrak): 1-7 bases of columns of a late-Roman (?) building visible in the area open to the public. The suggested original location inside the unidentified building.



should be located in the centre, not on the outskirts (!), of an area surrounded by fortifications. It was the case even in untypical forts (irregular plan), e.g. on Aj-Todor Cape nearby Yalta (Crimea), or in Bewcastle (Cumberland, England).<sup>8</sup>

In the early *Apsaros* fort, the centre of the area surrounded by fortifications was more or less on the area where the Polish-Georgian expedition discovered the therms (Fig. 2: 3). Further research will certainly provide more information on the location of the earliest headquarters building. However, we already possess first findings which confirm the suggested location. One of them is the aforementioned portico's stylobate, built earlier than the preserved relics of the therms from Phase 1 (Fig. 3: 4). The

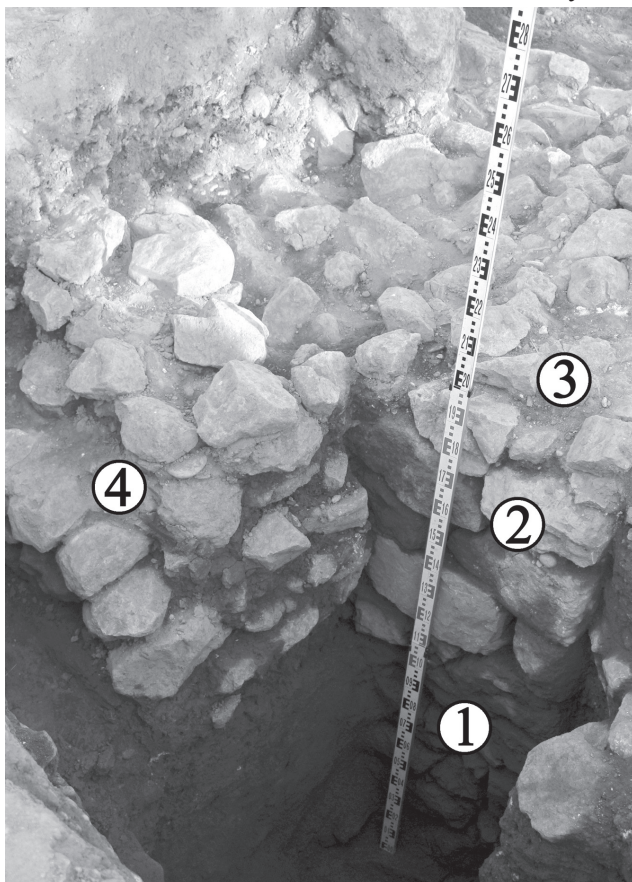


Fig. 11. Gonio “western trench”. The junction of the walls W 2 and W 16 (Fot. A. Trzop-Szczypiorska): A corner of an unidentified building used as a part of foundations of the later therms: 1 – the foundations of the building, 2 – the remains of the walls, 3 – the therms wall, 4 – a buttress added to the therms wall in Phase 2.

<sup>8</sup> R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, *Forty i posterunki rzymskie w Scytii i Taurydzie w okresie pryncypatu*, “Światowit” Supplement Series A: Antiquity, vol. XV, Warszawa 2015, 83–110, fig. 43; R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski, *The Roman Fort on Aj-Todor cape (Charax) and Its Surroundings...*, “Światowit” XIII(LIV)/A (forthcoming); A. Johnson, *Römische Kastelle*, Mainz 1987, 316, fig. 217.

other trace is a part of deeply laid foundations, together with the remains of the lower parts of the wall, both of them discovered in 2016 (Fig. 11: 1,2). The quality of brickwork significantly exceeds that of all fragments examined in the walls and foundations of both phases of the therms. As was already mentioned, the foundations were laid much deeper than other recognised fragments of the therms foundations. The bottom of the foundations is placed about 1.80 m below the mosaic floor from Phase 2 of the therms. The unidentified building, from which comes the described wall, was erected from the level of 0.60 m below the mosaic. This means that the foundations were 1.20 m deep at the time of the construction.

Information on architectural relics older than the therms, which can supposedly be related to scattered stone details present in later buildings, come from a small trench (Fig. 11). The remains of the mysterious building need further investigation.

### Interpretation

The described stratigraphical context and the dating of the early garrison therms suggest a possibility of astonishingly early dating of the alleged headquarters building. It would be a trace of very early presence of the Roman army in *Apsaros*.<sup>9</sup> Maybe the first fort (along with *principia*) was erected still in the ruling period of Nero? Maybe it was due to the preparations made for a military expedition to Caucasian Albania?<sup>10</sup> Such dating of the oldest discovered architectural relics and relating them to unfulfilled plans of the last representative of the Julio-Claudian dynasty would explain why started investment was probably never finished. The collected building material was later used for other purposes. After Vespasian strengthened his position on the throne, changes in the deployment of legions took place. New garrisons converted (or built anew) the strongholds which they have been removed. Similar changes were as well observed during excavations in *Novae*.<sup>11</sup> In the period in question, the Eighth Augustus' Legion

<sup>9</sup> cf. E. Kakhidze, *Apsaros: A Roman Fort in Southwestern Georgia, Meetings of Cultures in the Black Sea Region: Between Conflict and Coexistence*, "Black Sea Studies" VIII, Aarhus, 2008: 304–306.

<sup>10</sup> Tac. *Hist.* (I: 6).

<sup>11</sup> T. Sarnowski, *Wykopaliska w południowo-wschodniej części principia w Novae, Kampanie 1995, 1996*, "Novensia" 11, 123–124; K. Domżański, *Terra sigillata z komendantury w Novae. Wypełnisko jamy nr 4*, "Novensia" 11, 134; R. Karasiewicz-Szczypiński, *Ceramika kuchenna z komendantury w Novae. Wypełnisko jamy nr 4*, "Novensia" 11, 191.

left, and it was replaced by the First Italic Legion. Architectural investments started by the new unit almost entirely covered the signs of presence of the previous legion. Maybe the same political reasons were the basis for changing the plan of building development of the early fort in *Apsaros*? Let's hope that next excavation seasons will provide answers to many questions concerning the beginnings of the presence of the Roman army at Colchis' gates.

### *Apsaros*. Early Headquarters Building (*principia*). New localization?

Georgian-Polish expedition in Gonio (*Apsaros*), have been investigated remains of Roman therms since 2014. The erection of the building can be dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (probably already the ruling period of the emperor Vespasian).

In the summer of 2016, were discovered remains of oven used to heat hypocaust cellars (*praefurnium*). In the construction of both the oven and the supports in the hypocaust cellar, a number of architectural details.

A number of details can so far be distinguished: a few very well worked ashlar among them one secondarily altered block with rustication two poorly preserved bases of columns with plinths, adapted for connecting them to the wall of the building and one initially worked column head (or a consola). Because of the context we can suppose that details must be a part of the remains of another (older) building.

On the north of the building discovered fragments of stylobate with one of preserved in situ plinth. At the southern end of the complex of therms under the foundation of the building it is also located deeper remains of the another building. These foundations are the remains of an older building, which could also come discovered architectural details. The location of these relics in the center of the early fort suggests that may be the remains of the headquarters building (*principia*). Based on previous research suggests that the first fort (along with *principia*) was erected still in the ruling period of Nero. Maybe it was due to the preparations made for a military expedition to Caucasian Albania. Most likely, after the death of Emperor construction stopped. Later, during the reign of Vespasian (or his successors), the collected building material was used for other purposes, among other things, for the construction of the hypocaust cellars and furnace in the therms.