

REPORT: Timok Region Archaeological Project (TRAP), funded by the Julie Herzig Desnick Endowment for Archaeological Field Surveys, August 2017

BY: Sarah Craft, Visiting Assistant Professor in Classics at Carleton College; Courtesy Appointment in Classics at Florida State University

The Timok Region Archaeological Project (TRAP) undertook its first field season as a regional landscape survey of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Romuliana (Gamzigrad) in eastern Serbia from 7-26 August 2017 with the permission of the Serbian Ministry of Culture and the National Museum of Zaječar. The international team of six was made up of participants from Florida State University, the Archaeological Institute of Belgrade, the National Museum of Zaječar, the National Museum of Čačak, and an independent consultant and local guide from the nearby village of Gamzigrad (Figure 1).

The first season of TRAP took place with the goal of better situating the late Roman imperial palace of Felix Romuliana within a broader geographical and diachronic understanding of the surrounding landscape outside its walls. Our investigation strategies combined remote sensing, archaeological surface survey, and targeted excavations, in order to analyze the patterns of spatial organization at different scales: the global (the Roman empire), the regional (the Timok River watershed), and the local (Felix Romuliana, as well as other archaeologically identified activity).

Building upon earlier endeavors both methodologically and in geographical extent, the team took a combined approach to fieldwork and recording during the 2017 season. We focused our efforts along the course of the Draganov stream to the north and south of the palace, revisiting and recording points of interest that had been observed in earlier scholarship in the region (Figure 2). Though we did not identify a definitive crossing point with which to anchor the course of the Roman road, we did record diachronic activity along the length of the stream, complementing earlier surveys' identification of sites along the waterway.

Previous work in the region had relied on the identification of 'sites,' which were otherwise undefined. At this preliminary stage, TRAP recorded 'features' (designated as F in the database) at points or areas of interest characterized by the presence of ancient finds not otherwise dense enough to convincingly label a 'site'. One of the more notable records was the F_a021a-k series of eleven Roman lime kiln and processing stacks identified in the profile of a cut made in a hillside by the construction of the modern major east-west highway through the region (Figures 3 & 4), which provides a compelling picture of Roman building activity on a scale previously unseen outside the palace. A total of 81 features were recorded, and where intensive survey was not possible, finds collected and associated with 29 of those sites. The iGIS application for iPad, relying on an internet connection provided by a SIM card, was used to map all features (Figure 5).

Where possible with regards to both topography and time, we undertook intensive, systematic surface survey in those areas that we visited during extensive survey, to a total of 74 survey units (Figure 6). One particularly notable find collected was a broken but recognizable ground stone axe head (recorded in situ as F_a019) (Figure 7) in an unharvested cornfield to the northwest of the palace (SU_a010), directly comparable to a known Eneolithic example in the Knjaževac Museum, located 40 kilometers south. This find is one among many to enrich our understanding of the diachronic history of the landscape beyond the identification of 'sites'.

Additionally, we employed a combination of extensive and intensive survey at areas of interest (AOIs) noted during analysis of the Plaeides-1 satellite imagery and previous references, including the proposed fort site at Kostol (F_a061-a066, SU_a071-SU_a074) and Rgotski Kamen (F_a067-F_a081). High-density surface finds recorded through a combination of intensive and extensive survey contributed to the

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evidence regarding 19th-century claims that there was once a Roman fort at Kostol (Figure 8). Rgotski Kamen, hilltop site in the Bor region (to the north of Zaječar) has been heavily looted; the almost ubiquitous presence of iron slag is recorded in the pits suggest that the looters relied on metal detectors to identify places to dig. The looted pit F_a075 produced among other finds a bone comb, which, along with a Roman nail collected at the same site, was sent to the National Museum of Čačak for conservation.

All survey units (SUs) were recorded in the project database through the iPad database application Expo (<https://expo.io/>) and mapped through the iPad GIS application iGIS (<http://www.geometryit.com/igis/>), which were later exported into the project GIS environment, operated for the time being through ArcMap 10.3. All finds were washed, inventoried, photographed, and handed over to the National Museum of Zaječar, excepting those from Rgotski Kamen, which will be handed over to the appropriate museum authorities in Bor region (including those in conservation at the National Museum of Čačak) after conservation.

FIGURES



Figure 1. Part of the TRAP team at Rgotski Kamen on our last day of fieldwork

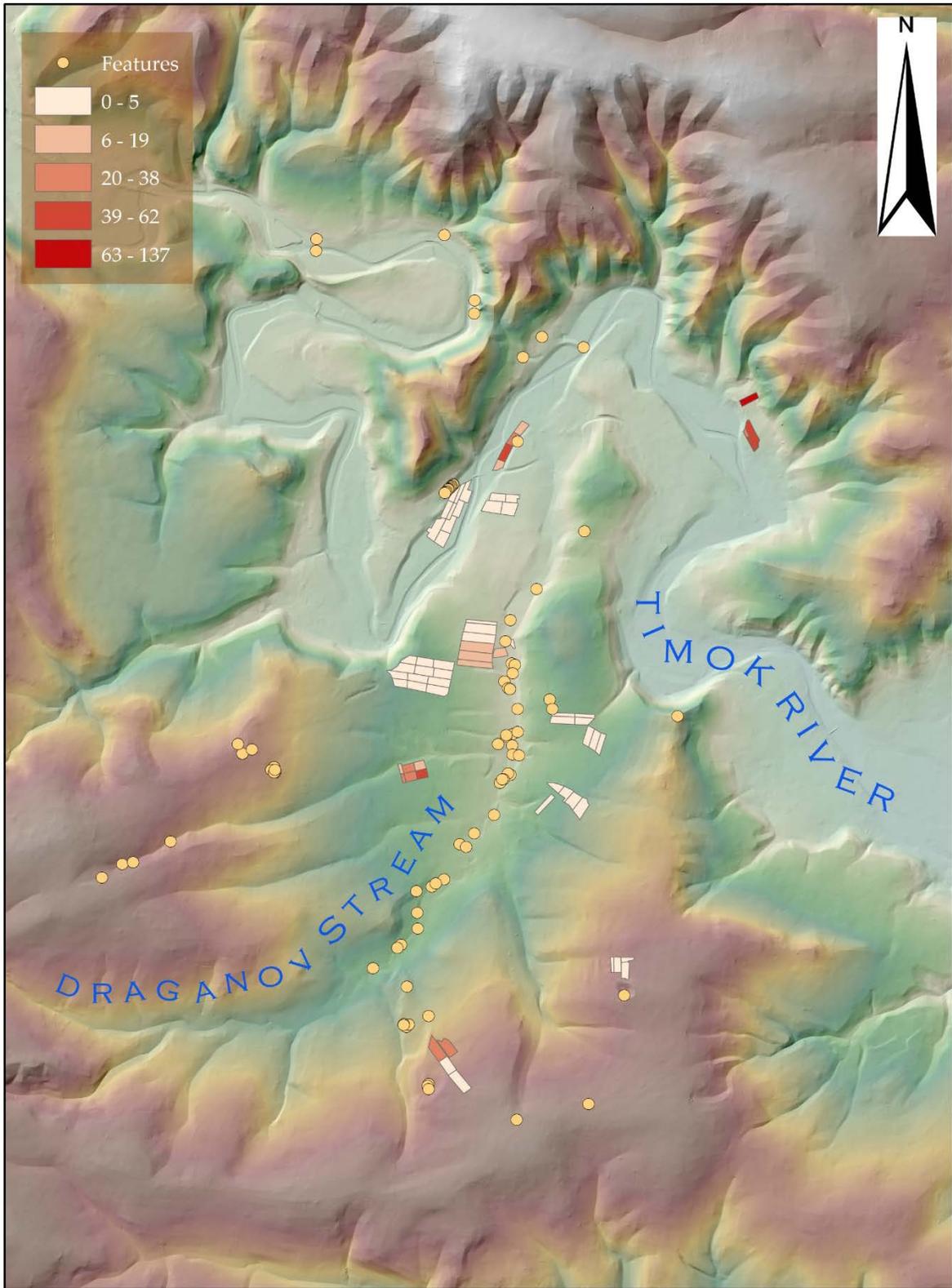


Figure 2. Digital Elevation Model of the area of main focus of the 2017 season, with Features and Survey Units (color-coded by density of ceramic finds)



Figure 3. F_a021 series of lime processing stacks



Figure 4. Kiln with stokehole of Roman bricks at east end of F_a021 lime processing complex



Figure 5. TRAP team members fieldwalking



191.672 m

22.19745, 43.88793

Figure 6. Screen shot of the iGIS live recording of the extent of the quarry (F_a043) to the northwest of the palace



Figure 7. Finds from SU_a010, including F_a019, a broken but recognizable ground stone axe.



Figure 8. Survey units (color-coded by density of ceramic finds) and features identified at Kostol, on the eastern side of Zaječar