



New discoveries by the Gonio–Apsaros Polish–Georgian Expedition (2024)

The 2024 excavation season at the Roman fort of Apsaros was notably extended, running from mid-May to the end of July. During this period, a collaborative archaeological expedition involving Polish and Georgian teams took place, directed by Assoc. Prof. Radosław Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski (Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, UW) and Dr. Lasha Aslanishvili (Cultural Heritage Protection Agency of Ajara). The expedition led to several exciting discoveries.

A gold votive plaque



Gold objects are an unusual rarity at the Apsaros excavations. This year, a gold votive plaque was discovered for the first time. It is a small, thin plate, fitting in the palm of the hand, with embossed decorations and an inscription in Greek. The object was a gift to Jupiter Dolichenus, a deity popular among Roman soldiers.

The find adds to a growing collection of objects related to the Dolichenus cult that have been found at Apsaros. Such gifts were usually deposited at places of worship, providing important evidence for the existence of a Dolichenus shrine at or near the fort. – “Perhaps in the next few years we will be able to find the remains of the shrine itself,” suggests Prof. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski.



A set of kilns used for firing amphorae

Polish-Georgian excavations have uncovered an unknown face of Roman Apsaros. – “We can say with certainty that during the period from the mid-first to mid-third centuries AD, and later from the mid-sixth century, the Roman and Byzantine armies were stationed at the site only from time to time. In the absence of the garrison, the site was taken



over by civilians, who primarily carried out manufacturing activities there,” explains the expedition director. This is evidenced by the discovery at the fort of several kilns for firing amphorae, i.e. ceramic vessels used for transporting and storing wine. – “Particularly intriguing is the discovery of a kiln filled with amphorae, which, for unexplained reasons, the potter did not remove after firing”, the archaeologist emphasizes.

The remains uncovered in the field, supported by physical and chemical tests, prove beyond doubt that so-called Colchean amphorae were produced at Apsaros. This is the first scientifically confirmed production center for this pottery. Until now, researchers were not able to pinpoint the origins of these transport vessels although they were among the most popular used in the Black Sea area in antiquity.

The discovery is connected to another finding. In recent years, the Polish-Georgian expedition uncovered the remains of a wine-pressing facility, also dated to the first centuries AD, just outside the fort's walls.

Prof. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski explains that – “It seems that the wine produced in Apsaros was placed into amphorae made on-site and then exported by sea to various ports around the Black Sea. The primary recipients of Apsaros wine were likely the Roman military.”



The story of the Apsaros mosaics unfolds further



The most spectacular discovery of the Polish-Georgian expedition to date are mosaic floors found in the house of the garrison commander of Apsaros. This unique residence is sometimes referred to as Arrian's house because it can be assumed that the governor of Roman Cappadocia, Flavius Arrian, resided there for some time around 135 AD. – “He was a friend of Emperor Hadrian, a well-known intellectual, to

whom we are indebted, among other things, for editing one of the surviving versions of the history of Alexander the Great's expedition based on earlier sources.” – Prof. Karasiewicz-Szczypiorski adds.

In 2024, archaeological and conservation work commenced on the third mosaic discovered in this house. A significant portion of the damaged floor was stabilized and left in situ for now. This decision was made after confirming that the mosaic extended beyond the current excavation area, which necessitated an expansion of the research site to complete conservation efforts. The most endangered sections of this mosaic had already been transferred to the local museum's storage facility in 2023. This year, some of those fragments underwent conservation and have been temporarily placed in the museum's new exhibition. The entire project was carried out by a conservation team from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, led by Dr. Julia Burdajewicz.

- Read more about the research conducted by the PCMA UW in [Gonio-Apsaros](#)
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Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw (PCMA UW) coordinates Polish archaeological research in the Eastern Mediterranean since 1959 (since 1990 under the present name). In recent years, it broadened its scope of interest into the Arabian Peninsula and the Caucasus. Currently about 20 projects are ongoing in Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Cyprus, Lebanon, Kuwait, Oman, Georgia and Armenia. The PCMA UW also runs Research Centres in Egypt, Sudan, Cyprus and Georgia.

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