

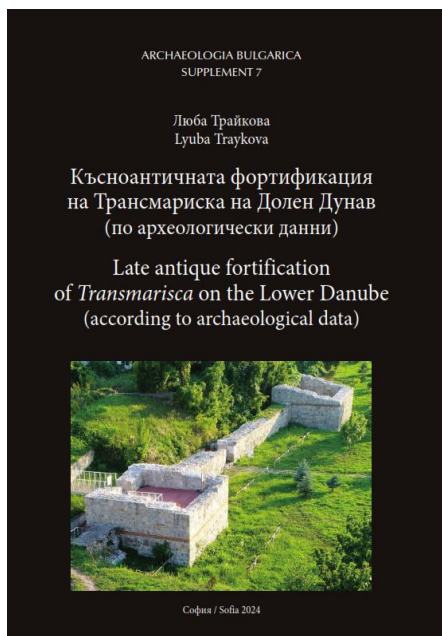
Люба Трайкова, *Късноантичната фортификация на Трансмариска на Долен Дунав (по археологически данни)*, София 2024/ Lyuba Traykova, *Late Antique Fortification of Transmarisca on the Lower Danube (according to archaeological data)*. *Archaeologia Bulgarica*, Supplement 7 /Sofia: NOUS Publishers, 2024. Pp. 195 (incl. 33 figs., 43 tabs., Summary in English), hardback. Open access PDF. ISSN 2683-0477, ISBN 978-619-92330-9-2 (print), 978-619-7782-00-4 (pdf)

The publication is presented with outstanding graphic quality, with all images reproduced in full colour in the hard-copy edition. What is truly remarkable is that it is available in open-access format both on the *Archaeologia Bulgarica* page<sup>1</sup> and on the author's *Academia.edu* account.<sup>2</sup>

At a time when monographic publications have become a relative rarity, particularly one dedicated to a complex fortification such as the one at Transmarisca, Lyuba Traykova systematically and comprehensively synthesises 50 years of archaeological research across six dedicated chapters.

Chapter 1. - *Увод / Introduction* (pp. 7–8), offers a succinct overview—rather than a detailed discussion—of the archaeological site's location, the area's geomorphology, the etymology of the settlement's name, the research objectives and methodology. This chapter also includes acknowledgements to the team and supporters of the 2018–2019 archaeological campaigns, effectively serving as a transition to the subsequent sections.

Chapter 2. - *История на проучванията / History of Research* (pp. 9–13) reviews the principal published findings from the archaeological investigations, providing essential context for understanding the periods, scope, and execution of the archaeological research conducted at Transmarisca between 1970 and 2022. The excavations focused on two sides of the fortification: the northern and southern sectors. The research outcomes demonstrated that the site was initially occupied by a



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.archaeologia-bulgarica.com/archaeologia-bulgarica-supplement/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://bas.academia.edu/LyubaTraykova>

Thracian population prior to the mid-1st century AD, when the first Roman settlers arrived. Furthermore, between the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, the location served as the base for a military unit alongside a civilian settlement. The author reviews the earliest mentions and plans of the ruins, starting from 1905 (K. Shkorpil), specifies the fortification's area of 6.1 hectares, and notes that the city wall was erected between 292 and 309/310 on the orders of Emperor Diocletian, who visited the site in 294.

Crucially, the author highlights that the northern and southern walls remained poorly published until the research commenced in 2018. She identifies a lack of graphic or photographic documentation for the investigated sectors and an inconsistency in the available information, leading her to conclude: "Upon concluding this historiographical review, I can state that a significant portion of the information obtained about Transmarisca, following 12 seasons of excavation in the northern and 11 seasons in the southern part of the fortress, remains at the level of preliminary reports." (p. 13)

Chapter 3. - *Фортификацията на Трансмариска / The Fortification of Transmarisca* (pp. 14–41), is structured into four sub-chapters, each of which is further subdivided into distinct sections.

Sub-chapter 3.1. - *Източната крепостна стена / The Eastern Fortress Wall* (p. 14), describes and analyses the eastern wall based on existing bibliography, which the author deems unsatisfactory in terms of relevant information; nevertheless, she establishes a contemporaneous relationship with the northern wall.

Sub-chapter 3.2. - provides a description and analysis of *Западната крепостна стена / The Western Fortress Wall* (pp. 14–15), drawing upon existing bibliography which, again, the author considers unsatisfactory in terms of relevant information. This structure is only known and investigated over an approximate length of 10 metres.

Sub-chapter 3.3. - *Южната крепостна стена / The Southern Fortress Wall* (pp. 15–25), describes and analyses the southern wall based on existing bibliography. The author dedicates considerable attention to the working methods and interpretations of her predecessors, navigating the complex situations identified in this area with meticulous accuracy to provide a clear and precise interpretation. She addresses, in a technical manner, the archaeological contexts encountered in the investigation of the wall as a whole, as well as specific elements such as the towers and the so-called fighting platform. The need for shorter, non-descriptive appellations for the archaeological features/components is evident, which would improve the fluidity and ease of reading the text. This necessitates mapping the terms—such as the old designation 'South-Western Angular Outer Tower' being mapped to 'Tower No. 1'—and creating a corresponding key.

Sub-chapter 3.4. - *Северната крепостна стена / The Northern Fortress Wall* (pp. 25–41), presents the archaeological investigations undertaken in this sector from 1989

to 2019. It details the seven phases of occupation identified, a description of the structure and towers, the gate, the defensive wall, and the structures examined in the wall's vicinity, dedicating a substantial, well-documented, and well-reasoned subsection to the stratigraphy and chronology. The author dates the initial construction of the wall to around the year 300, followed by a reconstruction in the 320s–330s subsequent to a fire that occurred during the first decade of the fourth century. Another fire affected the wall, possessing a terminus post quem of 367/375, which was succeeded by a further reconstruction and subsequent destruction, the latter bearing a terminus post quem of 408/423.

Chapter 4. - *Керамика от археологическите проучвания през 1989-1991, 1995, 1996, 2018-2019 г. / Pottery from the Archaeological Investigations of 1989–1991, 1995, 1996, and 2018–2019* (pp. 42–89), is the most substantial chapter of the volume. The author analyses 311 ceramic fragments, classifying them into eight groups based on their stratigraphic and chronological context. The discussion regarding ceramic types and their distribution is comprehensive and thoroughly documented, supported by an extensive bibliography that examines all discovered ceramic categories, ranging from kitchen wares to transport vessels. The pottery thus provides a broad chronology, beginning in the 3rd–4th centuries AD for Groups 1–3, and extending to the 11th century, the latter corresponding to Group 8, whose material originated from the level of a Pecheneg dwelling. In between, Group 4 corresponds to the period spanning the first and third quarters of the 4th century, Group 5 to the last quarter of the 4th century and the first quarter of the 5th century. Groups 6 and 7 possess broad chronological limits, spanning from the 2nd–1st centuries BC to the 5th–6th centuries AD, a result of contamination dating back to antiquity as well as modern anthropogenic activities.

Chapter 5. - *Дребни находки от археологическите проучвания през 2018-2019 г. / Small Finds from the Archaeological Investigations of 2018–2019* (pp. 90–92), addresses this relatively small category of finds, comprising a bone hairpin and comb, two fibulae, glass bracelets, lids fabricated from amphorae, two ceramic and one stone projectile, an iron knife blade, a buckle, and a lead weight.

The final section of the work, Chapter 6, entitled *Заклучение / Conclusion* (pp. 93–96), summarises the information presented in the preceding chapters. This synthesis results in a well-argued chronology for the Late Roman fortification at Transmarisca, based on both the archaeological data to which the author had access and the investigations she personally conducted.

The volume is supplemented by a *Библиография / Bibliography* (pp. 97–102) and *Приложения / Appendices*, which include the *Каталог на керамиката от археологическите проучвания през 1989-1991, 1996, 2018-2019 г. / Catalogue of Pottery from the Archaeological Investigations of 1989–1991, 1996, and 2018–2019* (pp. 103–125)

and the *Каталог на находките от археологическите проучвания през 2018-2019 г. / Catalogue of Finds from the Archaeological Investigations of 2018–2019* (pp. 125–126). This is followed by a summary, *Late antique fortification of Transmarisca on the Lower Danube (according to archaeological data)* (pp. 127–131), *37 Фигури / Figures* (pp. 133–152), and *43 Табла с илюстрации / Plates with Illustrations* (pp. 153–195).

Viewed in its entirety, the work briefly outlined here represents a significant contribution to the understanding of the defensive system on the Lower Danubian *limes*, owing to the rigour with which Lyuba Traykova addresses and establishes the chronology and planimetry of the Transmarisca fortification. Confronted by incomplete documentation—and in some places a complete lack thereof—the author undertook archaeological investigations across two separate campaigns, successfully generating supplementary information. This enabled her to concentrate the necessary data within this monograph, ensuring it will become a definitive reference point for the study of fortifications along the Lower Danube *limes*.

While the absence of an extended summary in English—or, ideally, a full translation—is noted, thereby limiting the interested audience due to the linguistic barrier, we must nonetheless commend the author for the immense scientific effort and labour invested in documenting and systematising both older and newer information. This work is a remarkable contribution, and we wholeheartedly recommend it to all scholars interested in the study of the *limes* in general, and the Danubian *limes* in particular.

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