

An early Roman eschara from Serdica (Abstract)

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The article presents the newly discovered eschara of rammed clay from Serdica. The structure was investigated in situ at an elevation +536.37 m.a.s.l. (Fig. 1) during rescue excavations in 2011 in the limits of the underpass under Knyaginya Maria Louisa Blvd., at the intersection with Pirotska Str. in Sofia. It is in the southwestern part of the excavated area, where the remains of an Early Christian basilica were uncovered, along with buildings from 2nd-6th c. AD (Fig. 2). The context of discovery indicates the eschara belonged to the interior of a dwelling. The preserved part of the structure is with dimensions 0.72 by 0.67 m. It was almost square, with geometrical decoration of double parallel lines (Fig. 3). The double lines shaped the ornamental frame of the eschara, and the opposite corners were also linked with double parallel lines that intersect in the centre. The state of preservation allows only for a hypothetical reconstruction of the decoration (Fig. 4). All double lines were impressed with a cord that is clearly visible in the southern part of the double frame (Fig. 5). The surface of the eschara consists of a thin layer of polished fine clay with brown-blackish to beige colour after firing. The eschara's core consists of pure gray clay and river gravel and on top of it there is a layer of clay with larger admixtures and brown colour. Probably, the eschara was slightly raised above the ground. Immediately to the east of it, a small fired

spot was investigated, almost round in plan and with dimensions 0.50 by 0.45 m (Fig. 6). It was probably a small fireplace or place for collecting the burnt remains from the eschara. On the grounds of the coin that was discovered in immediate proximity, the other finds, and the stratigraphic position of the structure, the eschara should be dated to the middle or the third quarter of the 1st c. AD.

The ornamental scheme of the eschara from Serdica belongs to Type IV-D after Makiewicz, Type I after Pirovska, and Type II-1 after Krasteva. Similar are the geographically closest escharai from Potsarmentsi, Bosnek, and Negovantsi that are earlier. The discovery of a 1st c. Eschara in Serdica raises questions, both regarding similar structures from the Roman Period and the existence and the character of an earlier, pre-Roman settlement on this place. Regardless of the longstated opinions of the existence of a Thracian city before the foundation of Roman Serdica, the latest large-scale investigations did not reveal traces of habitation before the 1st c. AD. This fact allows for placing the interpretations of the eschara in a broader range of possibilities. In the context of the new political situation, the creation of such a structure could be related not only to a Thracian, but also to a Celtic or other ethnos with representatives in the early community of Serdica.