

Late Roman baths in the Northern appendix of Serdica

Nadezhda Kirova

Subject of this article are the baths to the north of the fortified town of Serdica - the so-called Northern Appendix of the town - excavated in 2004. A cruciform building consisting of a central space (Chamber № 5) and four chambers in every shoulder of the cross (Chambers №№ 1, 3, 4, 6) was unearthed. The entire building was made of bricks except for Chamber № 2, which was made of stone. This chamber abuts the building to the west. The building had a symmetrical ground plan. Chambers №№ 3 and 1 end with apses to the east and west respectively. Chamber № 6 has an irregular plan; it is an octagon, inscribed into a square.

The floors and walls of Chambers №№ 1, 4, 5 and 6 were heated by a hypocaust evidenced by remains of piers, tubuli and nails, which fixed the marble slabs on the walls. The hypocaust was constructed on the ground level and not beneath it due to the high level of the water-table in Serdica. The building's foundations were laid on a sand layer, which served as a drainage facility.

Chamber № 3 was interpreted as a swimming pool. It was probably part of the frigidarium (cold bath). Chambers №№ 4 and 5 functioned as tepidarii (warm baths), and Chamber № 5 was used as a caldarium (hot room). This space is the nearest one to Chamber № 2, the latter functioning as a praefurnium. Chamber № 6 could be interpreted as a sudatorium, a steam room.

The baths were constructed in the late 3rd or early 4th century AD over the remains of an earlier building, which has been dated to the second half of the 3rd century AD. In a certain moment the praefurnium stopped functioning, the connection between Chambers №№ 2 and 1 was closed and the building changed its function. Judging from the pottery - amphorae and green-glazed ware - the functional change could be dated to the second half of the 4th or early 5th century AD. In 17th or 18th century a new building was erected on the same spot (it is not certain if it was public or private one), dated by the late Medieval pottery and faience found in it.