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HEAVY MILIARENSIS OF CONSTANTIIUS II FROM THE EASTERN NECROPOLIS OF REMESIANA

Abstract: This paper deals with a silver coin discovered within burial no. 16 at the eastern necropolis of Remesiana. It deals with the rare rare example of the heavy miliarensis of Constantius II which was discovered within the closed context during the systematic archaeological research, by which its significance overcame the simple numismatic value. The coin was recovered from the double burial excavated in 2019 which was placed within the walls of memoria built by stone in drywall technique. It has been archaeologically confirmed that the grave of an adult was reopened to bury the child.

Interestingly, the coin, together with other objects like glass bottle and silver fibula has been discovered as an inventory of child burial, since it is most likely that those were part of one or more donativa. The position and type of the burial, just like the choice of the object placed within the grave, leads us to believe that these objects could be regarded not only as luxurious but also symbolically significant. Furthermore, they may represent the "family heirloom" which was placed in the grave together with the remains of the last (male) member of a late Roman family from Remesiana.

Key words: Remesiana, Late Antiquity, Constantius II, heavy miliarensis, burial.

The ancient city of Remesiana has been a subject of researchers' interest for more than 130 years now. The first graves discovered on the left bank of the Nišava River were already mentioned in the first issue of *Starinar*, when local archaeology enthusiasts sent their reports to Mihajlo Valtrović, the first editor of the magazine.¹ Since then, a large number of archaeological explorations have been performed in the area of Remesiana,

¹ Јелинић 1884; Валтровић 1885; Сабовљевић 1887.

which is present-day Bela Palanka, with the participation of numerous institutions (Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, National Museum of Serbia, Archaeological Institute, Republic Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Niš and others). Thus, the outline of the ancient city was defined,² the ramparts,³ the basilica at the forum, the public baths,⁴ necropolises⁵ and a number of structures in the immediate vicinity explored,⁶ mostly during the second part of the 20th century. The most recent large-scale exploration was performed during the construction of a new segment of the motorway (2011-2014), when focus was placed on the immediate vicinity of Remesiana.⁷

The exploration of the eastern necropolis of Remesiana has been going on since 2018, in the area directly adjacent to the Hotel Esperanto (Bela Palanka).⁸ A little more than 50 graves were discovered during this exploration alone, while a number of individual graves and tombs were discovered during the previous decades.⁹ The majority of graves were revealed to be in a good state of preservation, as were the items found in them. A total of 83 specimens of Roman coins have been discovered in the necropolis so far, all but one made of bronze, and some of which are seriously damaged and indiscernible.¹⁰ A smaller number of coins (34 pieces) were discovered in unresearched grave units. Mostly one or two coins were found in each of the individual graves, while 14 were discovered in one (G36). Rulers spanning the period from Litinius (308-324 AD) to Valentinian II (375-392 AD) appear on the obverse representations, while the most frequent at this time are coins of Constantius II (337-361 AD).

During the first exploration campaign, in 2018, structure 1 – a *memoria* was discovered, but was explored in entirety only the next year, in 2019 (Fig. 1). It is a rectangular structure of dimensions 5.1 × 4.5 m, built from large stones in the dry-wall technique, with the entrance on its eastern side. Two double graves were discovered within the *memoria*, which mutually differ both in the building method and in the quality and quantity of grave goods in them. In the south-eastern part of the *memoria*, closer to the centre, a separately interred grave was discovered (G9) in which an older woman and a child are buried, laid in an east-west direction with the heads towards the west. The movable grave goods consisted of one bronze coin

2 Gušić 1995.

3 Мано Зиси и Поповић 1959; Пејић 2015.

4 Гушић 1987.

5 Петровић 1976, 98.

6 Мано Зиси и Поповић 1959; Ружић и Сладић 2013; Пејић 2015; Продановић-Ранковић 2017.

7 Ружић и Лазих 2015; Ружић и Цвијетић 2017; Ружић 2017; Цвијетић 2017; Лазих 2017.

8 The exploration is being carried out by the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade under the leadership of Dr Marko Janković, with the project financed by the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia and the Bela Palanka municipality. During 2019, when grave 16 was discovered with a silver *miliariensis*, the team consisted of the following members, besides the leader: Dr Vladimir D. Mihajlović (Department for History, Faculty of Philosophy – University in Novi Sad), Dr Aleksandar Bandović (curator, National Museum of Serbia), Tamara Šarkić, MA (Laboratory for Anthropology, University in Belgrade – Faculty of Medicine), Dimitrije Marković, MA (Laboratory for Bio-archaeology, University in Belgrade – Faculty of Philosophy) and students Ana Gavrilović, Nevena Pantić, Predrag Đerković and Petar Golubović. Dr Gordana Jeremić of the Archaeological Institute in Belgrade is the consultant in the project.

9 Пејић 2015, Јанковић и др. 2021.

10 This number also includes the coins that have not been published so far, discovered during the exploration campaigns of 2021 and 2022. The coins discovered in the exploration campaign of 2023 have not been included in the statistics because they are still being processed.

specimen from the time of Valentinian II and fragments of a glass vessel.¹¹ A second dual grave was discovered in the north-western corner of the memoria (G16) which greatly differs from the one mentioned previously, in which the *miliarensis* that is the subject of this paper was found. Namely, the grave is made from bricks, its dimensions are 2.40 × 2.00 m and it was covered with a massive layer of mortar and large rocks. It contained the skeletal remains of an older male and a child, also laid in an east-west direction with the heads towards the west (Fig. 2). It is important to point out that burials in G16 were not simultaneous. Namely, explorations have shown that the grave was first closed with bricks when the older person was interred, in order for the bricks to be removed directly after that for the burial of the child. The grave was closed again after the second burial – this time with large unworked rocks and covered with mortar.

However, besides being architecturally solid, unlike the first one, this grave also contained some more movable items, which one can characterize as luxurious. An almost perfectly preserved glass bottle was found above the older male's head, while another, extremely fragmented, was discovered next to the same person's feet. Besides the glass vessels, one silver cruciform fibula (Fig. 3) was found next to the child's skeleton, iron rivets for footwear and the silver *miliarensis* that is the subject of this paper. The silver fibula belongs to the cruciform type with an arch with a trapezoid base and a short lip,¹² belonging to the type 34A, according to the typology of S. Petković, which is most often dated in the period from 284 to 324 AD.¹³ The heavy silver *miliarensis* was discovered in the area of the child skeleton's clavicle (Fig. 4).

The inventory of grave 16, albeit without a direct analogy on the site, is certainly not the only one that can be treated as luxurious – items made from precious metals have been discovered in other graves in the necropolis,¹⁴ while glass vessels are frequent in graves of deceased adults. Still, grave 16 (together with grave 9) is the only one located within the memoria and which has a solid tomb made from bricks. A large number of subsequent burials are located along the external walls of the memoria, which is also evidence of the fact that the memoria was most probably visible. A coin of Theodosius I was discovered in the layer directly above the memoria, which dates it most probably in the period at the end of the 4th century.

Obverse: CONSTANTI-VS PF AVG

Bust in armour, draped in a paludamentum, facing right. A laurel diadem and a rosette on the head

Reverse: GAVDIVM POPVLI ROMANI

Within the wreath: SIC / X / SIC / XX

Mint mark: SIS U

Weight: 5.32 g;

11 Јанковић и др. 2021.

12 Јанковић и др. 2021, 238.

13 Petković 2010, 259.

14 Јанковић и др. 2021, Јанковић и др. 2023

Diameter: 27.3 mm;
Axis: 12 h.
Place of discovery: Remesiana, eastern necropolis, G16 (child burial), neck/
chest (below the chin)
RIC VIII, p. 353, No. 48 (Siscia)

The coin finds in the graves of Antiquity are most often viewed as a standard type of grave goods and are interpreted as “Charon’s obol”, the fee for transfer into the world of the dead.¹⁵ The results of more recent analyses of coins as grave goods in several large ancient necropolises raise questions about this accepted notion. The analyses of coins from the necropolises of Viminacium have yielded the following results: in the Pećine necropolis, 19.13% of the explored graves contained coins,¹⁶ while this percentage was 33.74% in the *Više grobalja* (Several Cemeteries) necropolis,¹⁷ and that is one of the highest percentages of graves with coins in such analyses in the territory of the Roman Empire that have been published so far.¹⁸ The very percentage of graves where coins were present is an indication of the fact that the inclusion of “Charon’s obol” was not a mandatory part of the funerary ritual, or even particularly common. The analysis of the position of coins discovered in graves in relation to the skeletal remains, shows that the custom of including “Charon’s obol” was actually quite rare compared with the accepted opinion in the professional public. If we take into consideration only the coins that were found next to the head of the deceased or in its immediate vicinity, the presence of “Charon’s obol” can be confirmed in 19.65% of the total number of graves in the Several Cemeteries necropolis of Viminacium,¹⁹ and in 7.56% of graves in the Pećine necropolis.²⁰

The heavy miliarensis was found in grave G16 in the location that should have been between the neck and the chest of the deceased,²¹ which allows for the assumption that it was a “Charon’s obol”. Although initially a pagan custom, the inclusion of coins as Charon’s fee continued in subsequent Christian times, and not just during the initial centuries of Christianity as the officially recognised religion.²² The depositing of coins in a grave (in the role of the obol), and Roman coins at that, has also been confirmed in medieval necropolises, right up to the 15th century.²³ On the other hand, studies of material culture from the necropolises of early Christianity show that traditional, i.e. pagan rituals and customs were often observed simultaneously with the Christian ones.²⁴ Such situations can indicate the simultaneous functioning of different religious communities, as well as the possible integration of old customs

15 Зотовић 2000, 11. For the mentioning of “Charon’s obol” in sources, see: Brown 2013, 60-61, 62, 67-70; Alföldy-Gazdac, Gazdac 2013.

16 Vojvoda i Mrđić 2017, 11-12, Tabela 3.

17 Vojvoda i Mrđić 2015, 12, Tabela 3.

18 Vojvoda i Mrđić 2017, 12-13, ref. 11.

19 Based on Vojvoda i Mrđić 2015, 22-23.

20 Based on Vojvoda i Mrđić 2017, 21-22.

21 The skeletal remains are very poorly preserved due to the characteristics of the soil.

22 Ferreri 2020, 220-223.

23 About finds of ancient coins in medieval graves, see: Љубинковић-Ђоровић 1958, 327; Бајаловић-Бирташевић 1960:14; Ђорђевић и др. 2007: 190; Симић и Јанковић 2009: 327.

24 Elsner 2003.

into new religious concepts. This is why the presence or absence of the custom of including the obol in graves of the 4th century cannot be taken as a reliable indicator for distinguishing between Christian and non-Christian burials.²⁵

The heavy *miliarensis* discovered in the G16 dual grave in Remesiana is nowadays considered one of the more rarely seen specimens.²⁶ Moreover, *miliarenses* were not frequently minted during the 4th century, either, so this coin specimen and the silver cruciform fibula can truly be considered as exclusive and luxurious grave goods. By all accounts, *miliarenses* were issued on occasions that were important for the emperor or the empire, and were an integral part of the *donativa* that that were given on such occasions.²⁷ The special occasions on which they were received from the emperor as a gift, such as particular jubilees and celebrations,²⁸ allow one to assume that the people who received such coins took better care of them, unlike they did with common coins. This is also indicated by the overall better state of preservation of medallions and *miliarenses* than that of the smaller denominations in the hoards they were part of.²⁹

The high value and particular way of treating the *miliarenses* is also indicated by the fact that they were seldom found outside of coin hoards.³⁰ This additionally supports the earlier assumption about the particular care that was dedicated to them by their holders, who received them as *donativa*, the reason for which could have been both symbolic and practical.

The weight of our denomination indicates that it belongs to the coinage of the so-called 'heavy *miliarenses*', which are a rare find and have usually been discovered within coin hoards, while individual finds were much less frequent.³¹ Even in Great Britain, which is the source of information about the majority of surviving hoards of silver coins from the 4th and early 5th century due to the specific method of registering, the finds of *miliarenses* outside of hoards are rare.³²

The silver cruciform fibula can also be presumed to have been part of the *donativa*,³³ perhaps the same ones within which the *miliarensis* discovered in the child's grave was donated. It was located in the place that would correspond to the position of the upper right part of the chest / right shoulder of the deceased, i.e. in the place that matches its function. Luxuriously made cruciform fibulae, or made from precious metals, were an integral part of the donation in the 4th century, a symbol of

25 Janković 2021, 168-169.

26 Besides the known specimens listed in RIC VIII, No. 48, p 353, we encountered one more sample that was offered on sale at the 2016 auction Numismatica Ars Classica, Auction 92, Lot 707 (<https://www.acsearch.info/search.html?id=3108121>). It is important to mention that the specimen from the 2016 auction weighed 5.09 g, which is notably less than ours (5.32 g), i.e. than the specimens listed in RIC VIII (5.16, 5.26 and 5.55 g).

27 Adelson 1957, 127; Ball 2017, 178-179; Rammskold and Gautier 2017, 1-2.

28 About the special occasions on which fibulae made from precious metals were received as the emperor's gift, cf. Васић 2001, 196.

29 Adelson 1957, 127.

30 Ball 2017, 176.

31 Guihard 2020, 53.

32 Ball 2017, 176, note 3.

33 S. Petković pointed out that this very type of fibula (34/A) includes the highest percentage of fibulae made from precious metals in relation to all other types of fibulae found in Serbia, which speaks in favour of their official use (Petković 2010, 261/)

military service and could only be made in imperial workshops,³⁴ but also became a kind of *ornamenta dignitatis* for the broader part of the public.³⁵

It is hard to conclude the reasons for the depositing of the heavy miliarensis and silver fibula in a child's grave, but it is tempting to think about them. The two objects, the heavy miliarensis and silver cruciform fibula, could certainly not initially belong to the child whose earthly remains they were discovered next to, but rather to his father or another adult relative who buried the child. The miliarensis from grave G16 was minted between September 9th, 337 and spring of 340 AD, while the time of making the silver cruciform fibulae like the one found in the same grave is dated approximately in the period from 278 to 324 AD.³⁶ Several possible reasons could have led to these two objects being included as donativa to the deceased child, but we will mention only a few: a) the fibula and miliarensis were part of the donativa to two different generations, at different times, to the same person who was the relative of the buried child.³⁷ It seems as though the child buried in grave G16 was the last male descendant of the family whose member/members received the silver fibula and miliarensis as donativa, and that these carefully preserved family heirloom objects were 'withdrawn from use' by their deposition in the grave. This is because it should be born in mind that each object deposited in the grave of a loved one would have to be selected by an individual, so these objects also convey a personal message of the person who chose it, bringing us closer to the common man, his beliefs and affinities.³⁸ The assumptions we put forward should be viewed primarily as guidelines for further consideration, rather than final conclusions.

Finally, we must underscore the rarity and importance of the find of the miliarensis in grave G19 of ancient Remesiana. Besides the rarity of this concrete coin specimen in the numismatic sense, a particularly important fact is that it was found in a grave, i.e. within controlled archaeological explorations and with a completely clear and defined context. We have already pointed out that miliarenses were primarily found within coin hoards, while individual finds were extremely rare, and the find from Remesiana is the only one we know of that is accompanied by completely precise information about the conditions of discovery,³⁹ i.e. that it was found within an unresearched grave unit.⁴⁰ This gives an additional dimension to this find, because it enables the reading of new information about what the heavy miliarenses were used for and provides new guidelines for recognising the importance this denomination could have had in Late Antiquity.

34 Васић 2001, 196.

35 Popović 2007, 107, Petković 2010, 263.

36 Petković 2010, 259.

37 As M. Vasić presumed in the case of finds from the Baranja district and Starčevo, cf. Васић 2001, 194.

38 Црнобрња 2006, 66.

39 Only one miliarensis exists among several thousand published coin finds on the necropolis of Viminacium, but it was discovered in a cultural layer (cf. Vojvoda i Mrđić 2015, 251, Cat. 1700).

40 M. Vasić published one miliarensis of Constantine II as a grave find from Viminacium, discovered in grave G-1284, but without stating the exact necropolis (Васић 2008, 209, Cat. 190). Colleagues M. Vojvoda (Archaeological Institute Belgrade) and D. Spasić-Đurić (National Museum Požarevac) have told us that the coin was found in grave G-1284 in the Pećine necropolis, and drew our attention to the information in literature that explains why it was not mentioned in subsequent papers (Vojvoda i Mrđić 2017, 9-11, note. 5).

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ТЕШКИ МИЛИЈАРЕНЗИС КОНСТАНЦИЈА II НА ИСТОЧНОЈ НЕКРОПОЛИ РЕМЕЗИЈАНЕ

РЕЗИМЕ

Иако је источна некропола позната археолозима већ више од једног века, систематска истраживања локалитета су започета тек 2018. године. Током прве две истраживачке кампање (2018-2019) откривена је и у потпуности истражена меморија. Скоро квадратне основе, објекат изграђен од камена у техници сухозида, садржао је у својој унутрашњост две двојне сахране. Гроб бр. 9 је откривен скоро на самом улазу на источној страни и ближе средишту меморије, док је други, гроб бр. 16 откривен у њеном северозападном углу. Гроб бр. 16 је изграђен од опека пре свега за старију мушку особу, да би нешто касније био отворен поново како би се обавила сахрана детета. У гробу је откривено неколико предмета – стаклена боца између остатака главе преминулих, као и сребрна фибула и сребрни новчић уз остатке детета.

Сребрни новчић којим се овај текст бави представља тешки милијарензис, кован у Сисцији у периоду између 337. и 340. г. н. е. у време владавине Констанција II. На аверсу се налази оклопљена биста цара са пребаченим падуламентумом а који носи дијадему од ловора и розету. Натпис на ивици носи име и титуле цара и гласи CONSTANTIN-VS PF AVG. На реверсу је представљен лороворов венац унутар којег стоји натпис SIC/X/SIC/XX, док је на ивици новчића GAVDIVM POPVLI ROMANI. На дну реверсне стране, налази се и ознака ковнице (SIS).

Тешки милијарензис из гроба 16 је изузетно редак налаз и заједно са сребрном фибулом откривеном на истом месту, може се посматрати као луксузан и значајан предмет. Овакав новац је најчешће кован приликом важних пригодних свечаности и даван је од стране цара као донатива за заслуге. Ово такође значи и да новац овог типа није коришћен у свакодневной циркулацији, већ је поред тога што је имао значајну економску имао и изузетну симболичку вредност. Скоро је у потпуности немогуће да су сребрни предмети у гроба 16 оригинално припадали детету, па можемо претпоставити неколико различитих сценарија у којима су ови предмети постали део инвентара дечије сахране. Како се сребрна фибула обично датује у период између 287. и 324. г.н.е. предмет је нешто старији у односу на милијарензис. То нас може навести на то да су предмети били део две различите донативе различитим особама, а које су биле у сродству са преминулим дететом, или да су додељене истој особи у две различите и хронолошки удаљене прилике. Ако претпоставимо да је дете последњи (мушки) потомак једне породице, није тешко ни претпоставити да су ови предмети заправо били део „породичног наслеђа“ које је на крају припало преминулом.

Важно је још једном нагласити реткост налаза милијаренза са Ремезијане. Поред вредности које овај примерак новца има у нумизматичком смислу, овакви новчићи су изузетно ретко откривени у добро познатим и дефинисаним контекстима – у овом случају у гробу, заједно са другим, опет хронолошки осетљивим, предметима. Овакве околности дају нам могућност да осветлимо употребу милијаренза у касно римском периоду, али и на симболичку вредност коју су имали.

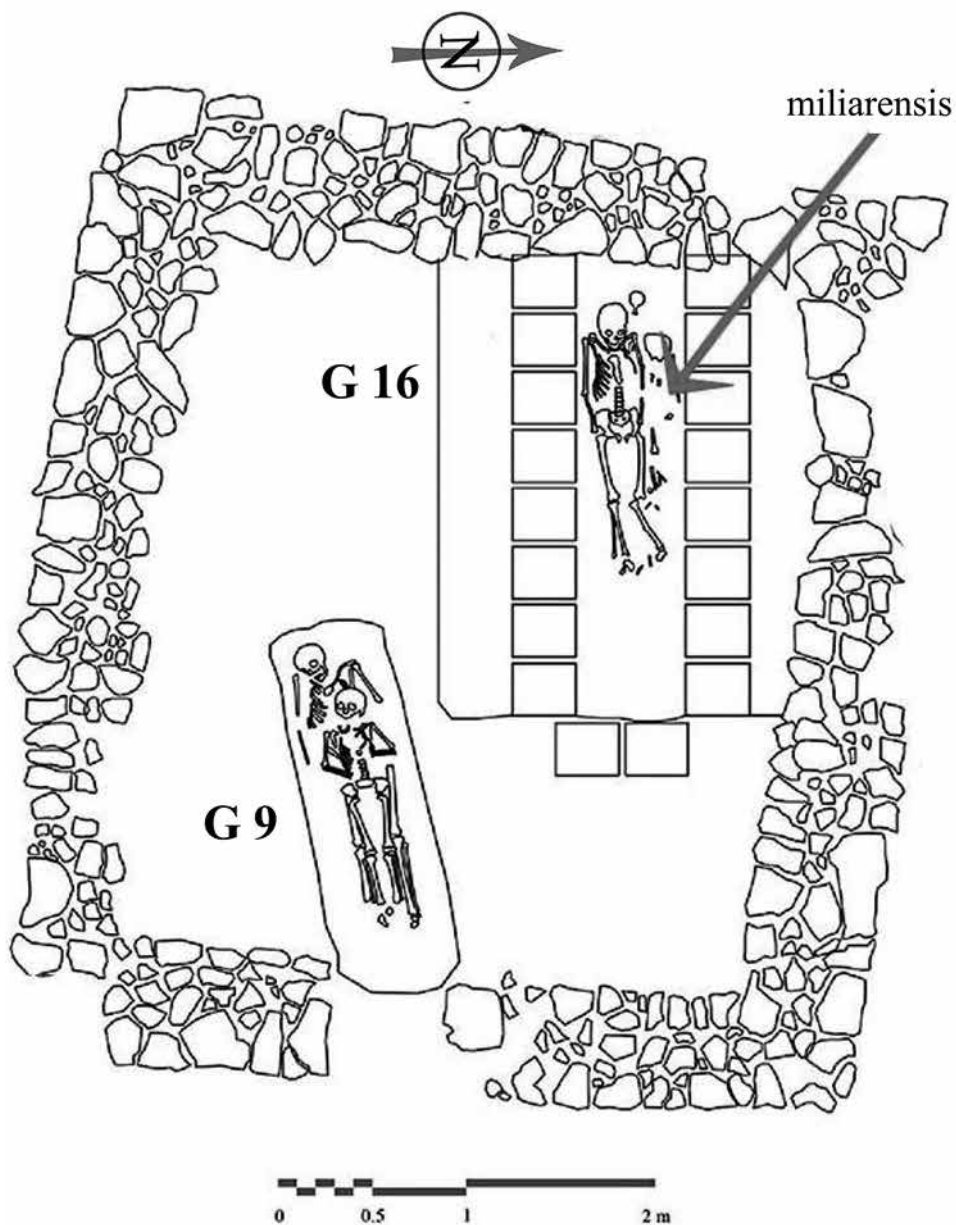


Fig. 1 – Memoria (Object 1) at the Eastern Necropolis of Remesiana
 Сл. 1 – Меморија (Објекат 1) на источној некрополи Ремезијане

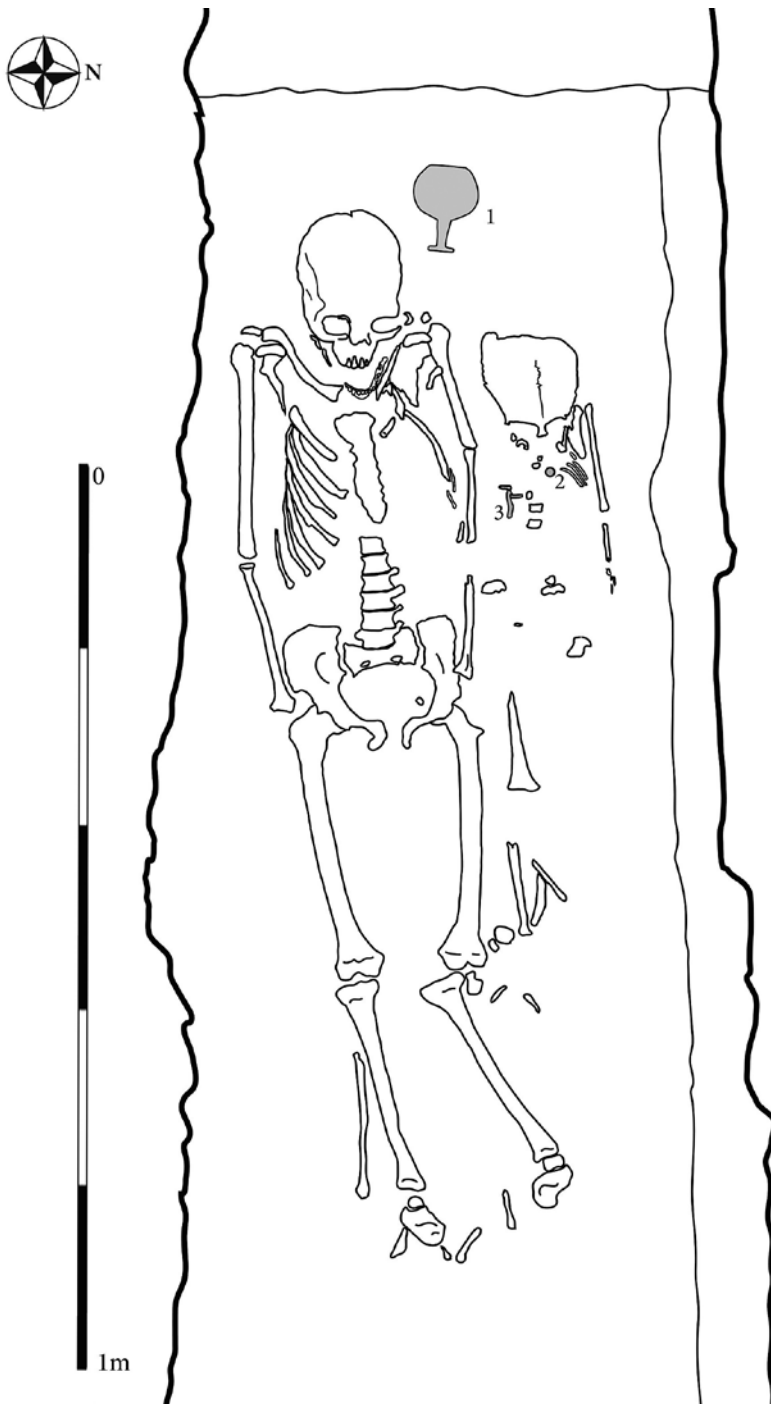


Fig. 2 – Grave G16 inside the memoria at the Eastern Necropolis of Remesiana
Сл. 2 – Гроб Г16 унутар меморије на источној некрополи Ремезијане

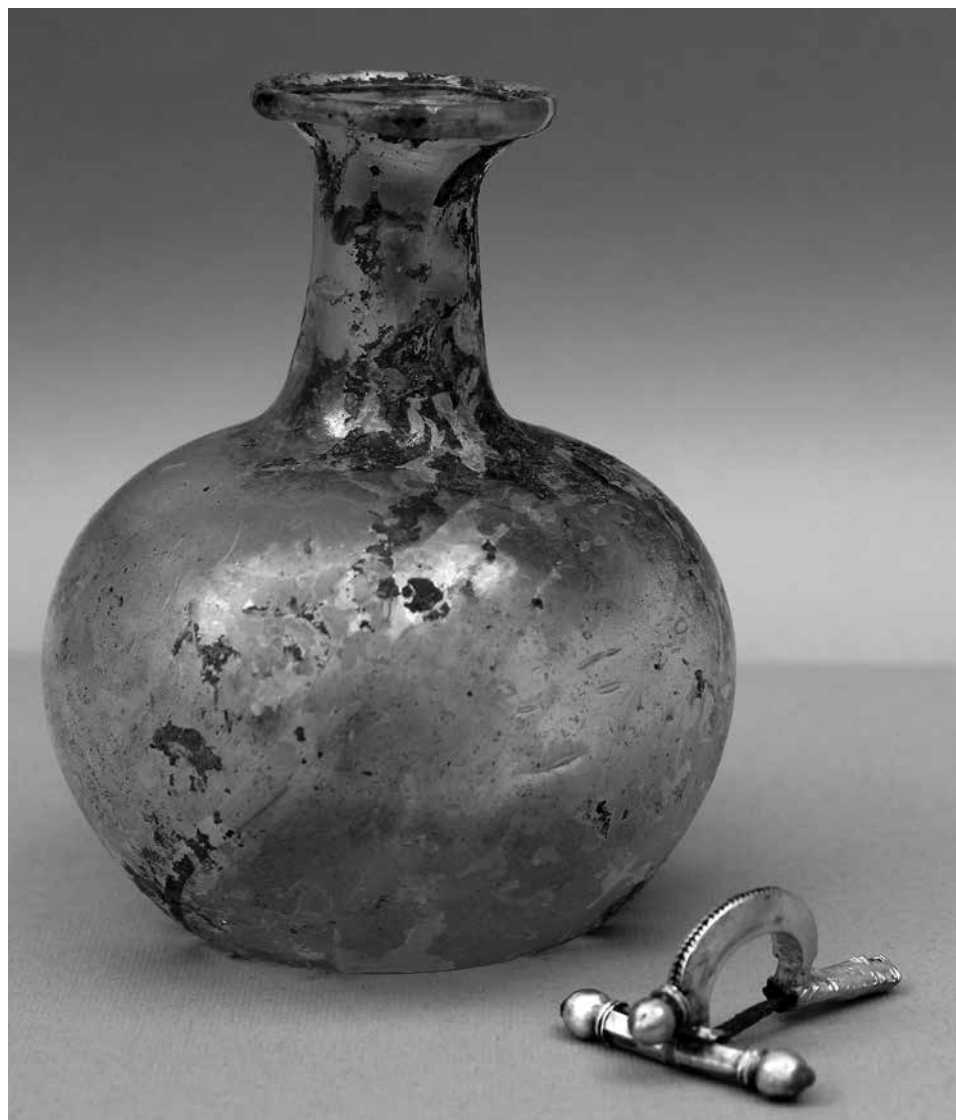


Fig. 3 – Glass vessel and silver cruciform fibula from grave G16
Сл. 3 – Стаклена посуда и сребрна крстообразна фибула из гроба Г16



Fig. 4 – A heavy miliarensis of Constantius II discovered in the grave G16 (1:1 and 2:1)
Сл. 4 – Тешки милијарензис Констанција II откривен у гробу Г16 (1:1 and 2:1)