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## LEGI[ITAL] AND FAVS ON A ROOF TILE FROM THE LEGIONARY CAMP AT NOVAE (LOWER MOESIA)

**Abstract:** A roof tile, no. 20-23c (Fig. 1), was documented in Sector XII at Novae (Fig. 2). On its surface, it featured two stamp impressions: that of the Italian Legion (LEGI[ITAL]) and the name FAVS, denoting a supervisor at the brickyard. This is the first discovery of the kind at Novae. Analogous items have been previously found in Oescus. This warrants the conclusion that during the preparations for Trajan's war against the Dacians a central brick-making facility functioned there to supply the legionary camps at Novae and Oescus, where at least five teams were employed.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Novae, Oescus, legio I Italica, brick stamps, bricks, tiles, brickyard, Trajan, Dacian war, epigraphy, logistics

Next to fragments of stoneware vessels, stamped building ceramics represents the most commonly discovered type of artefact in the Danubian fortress of Novae, which is due to the widespread use of bricks and tiles in legionary construction. Legio I Italica, the unit based there, usually marked their wares with a simple stamp containing its abbreviated name, e.g. LEGIITAL, LEGITALI, etc.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, more than 90% of the stamped building ceramics discovered at Novae since 1960 by all Bulgarian and Polish archaeological expeditions bears the stamp of that very legion.<sup>3</sup> For instance, of the 993 stamped bricks and roof tiles found in Sector XII between 2011 and 2024, 932 (94%) featured the stamp of legio I Italica, while only 61 (6%) were marked differently. In the latter group of finds, there are stamps of legio XI Claudia, legio I Minerva,<sup>4</sup> names (e.g. MARC), *tria nomina* (C. ATON. M)<sup>5</sup> or single letter sequences (PCP; QCO).<sup>6</sup> Roof tiles and bricks with more than one stamp imprint are even rarer. Even so, those documented to date had the same stamp on the surface,<sup>7</sup> and it was only at the late Roman fort at Iatrus (Krivina), a few kilometers east, that a tile with four different variant stamps of legio I Italica has been discovered.<sup>8</sup> However, until now, no tile or brick originating from Novae itself has been found to be marked with two completely different stamps, likely due to the fact that most are discovered in fragments. Based

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<sup>2</sup> To date, three typologies of building ceramics from Novae have been developed: SARNOWSKI 1983; GUDEA 2003; MATUSZEWSKA 2006.

<sup>3</sup> On the history of archaeological research at Novae see DYCZEK 2008, pp. 31–70.

<sup>4</sup> SARNOWSKI 1987, pp. 107–122; DUCH 2019, pp. 7–19.

<sup>5</sup> SARNOWSKI 1983, p. 41, Fig. 18; MATUSZEWSKA 2006, p. 60, Pl. XII; ŻELAZOWSKI 2015, pp. 249–256.

<sup>6</sup> DUCH 2017, p. 114.

<sup>7</sup> SARNOWSKI 1983, p. 32, Fig. 16; Inv. no. 24-12c; 41-13c; 143-13c; 42-16c; 75-16c; 31-17c; 25-18c; 03-22c; 20-23c.

<sup>8</sup> SARNOWSKI 1983, pp. 32–33.



Fig. 1. Roof tile with impressions “LEGIITAL” and “FAVS” (20-23c) (photo and drawing M. Duch).

on analogous discoveries from Oescus<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 3), it may be legitimately assumed that the fragments of roof tiles with MAX and VETIA<sup>10</sup> imprints from Novae would additionally contain the LEGIITAL imprint, if preserved in their entirety. The specimen discussed in this paper—20-23c (Fig. 1)—is the first of its kind to have survived in such a state; moreover, besides the LEGI[ITAL] imprint it features a previously unknown inscription, namely FAVS. This presents an excellent opportunity to publish a new type of stamp from Novae and a double-stamped tile, as well as recapitulate the most relevant historiographical views on such artefacts, highlighting their role in the research concerned with Novae.

In 2011, archaeological investigations were launched in Sector XII, located east of the principia on the *via principalis*. There, legionary barracks, *tabernae* and a stately building designated as the Peristyle House or “Centurion’s House” were discovered.<sup>11</sup> The tile fragment 20-23c (Fig. 1) was found in the debris layers in the south-western part of the latter structure (Fig. 2). Also, an interesting food cistern cooled by a lead pipe was identified at a lower stratigraphic level in the same location. Archaeological data only allow a broad determination of when tile 20-23c was manufactured, i.e. from the early second century to the early third century. However, the stamp of legio I Italica on the surface of the tile makes it possible to narrow down the dating, as will be discussed below.

Tile, inventory no.: 20-23c (Fig. 1);

Dimensions: 0.24 x 0.145 x 0.029 cm;

Sector XII; Hectare XVIII; Square 205; South 0.28; East 3.43; Depth 48.28 m.a.s.l.

LEGI[ITAL] stamp dimensions: 0.07 x 0.036 cm;

FAVS stamp dimensions: 0.069 x 0.03 cm.

<sup>9</sup> IVANOV 1981, pp. 42–48; IVANOV 2002, p. 17, Fig. 5.

<sup>11</sup> DYCZEK 2018, pp. 27–71.

<sup>10</sup> SARNOWSKI 1983, p. 39, Pl. VII, Type XXIII,1; DUCH 2019, p. 112, Fig. 14.



Fig. 2. Plan of section XII of Novae showing the location of the 20-23c tile discovery (prepared by B. Wojciechowski)

The artifact in question has been preserved fragmentarily, but in sufficient condition to identify similarities with analogous finds from Oescus (Fig. 3), where next to an identical stamp of the legion one finds the following names: FIR(mus), MAX(imus), PROCV(lus) and VETIA(nus).<sup>12</sup> Also, the FAVS stamp was applied close to one edge of the tile, while the mark of the legion was placed in the centre. The repetition of the pattern suggests the existence of specific stamping rules at the brickyard. As noted in the introduction, this is the first tile discovered in Novae with two different stamps on its surface. To date, nine roof tiles with multiple imprints of the same stamp

<sup>12</sup> IVANOV 1981, pp. 42–48; AE 1985, 0736; IVANOV 2002, p. 17, Fig. 5: The tiles were discovered as having been secondarily used in the construction of a burial chamber

in the eastern necropolis of Oescus, and were discovered together with the legio XI Claudia tiles.

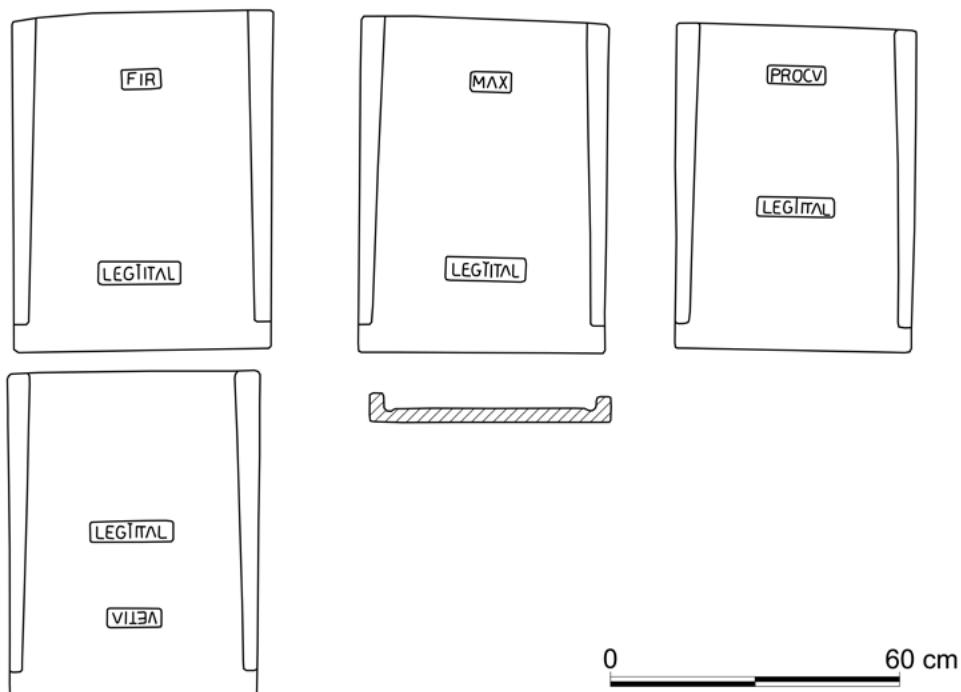


Fig. 3. Roof tiles from Oescus with stamps impressions LEGIITAL with FIR, MAX, PROCV, VETIA (IVANOV 2002, p. 17, Fig. 5).

have been documented in Sector XII at Novae; eight bore stamps of legio I Italica (Fig. 4) and one was marked by legio I Minerva (Fig. 5). In this group, the particularly interesting tile was stamped four times with LEGIITA but it also shows imprints of a left and right military boot (*caliga*), the likely result of soldiers playing in the brickyard (Fig. 6).

The preserved LEGI[ITAL] imprint (Fig. 1) does not possess any distinctive features, belonging to one of the most widespread types in Novae: a simple text placed in a rectangular frame without any ornamentation. The first three letters are visible: LEG and the number I. Letters G and L are smaller than E. G has a rounded body (so-called bowl). Its stem curls upwards and is not aligned vertically with its upper cap. All letters and the numeral are sans serif. These features enable the identification of other tiles and bricks marked with the same stamp. With the tiles from Oescus (Fig. 3), one can also reconstruct the stamp in its entirety. It can be classified as type VI-117 in Tadeusz Sarnowski's typology.<sup>13</sup>

A number of tile specimens bearing the same legio I Italica stamp have been preserved in situ in Sector IV at Novae, making it possible to date them. Tile no. 31-98c (Fig. 7) was discovered in the pavement of the legionary hospital courtyard, next to the temple of the healing deities, in its construction phase II, dated to the governorship of T. Vitrarius Pollio.<sup>14</sup> Further specimens, no. 33-01c and 46-01c (Fig. 7), were part of the intercolumnium of the south portico, in which a jug dated to the time of Antoninus Pius was found.<sup>15</sup>

Further, very similar stamp impressions—differing only in the presence of the crossbar in A—were discovered in Sector XII. These include tile 26-23c, part of the bottom of a well, and tile 78-12c (Fig. 7), used as cladding at the pool in the west wing of the so-called Peristyle House.<sup>16</sup> The largest quantity of such stamped ceramics was found in situ in the hypocaust system of that

<sup>13</sup> SARNOWSKI 1983, p. 37, Pl. 5.

<sup>14</sup> RECLAW, ŻELAZOWSKI 2012, p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> DYCZEK 2002, p. 124.

<sup>16</sup> DYCZEK 2018, p. 60.

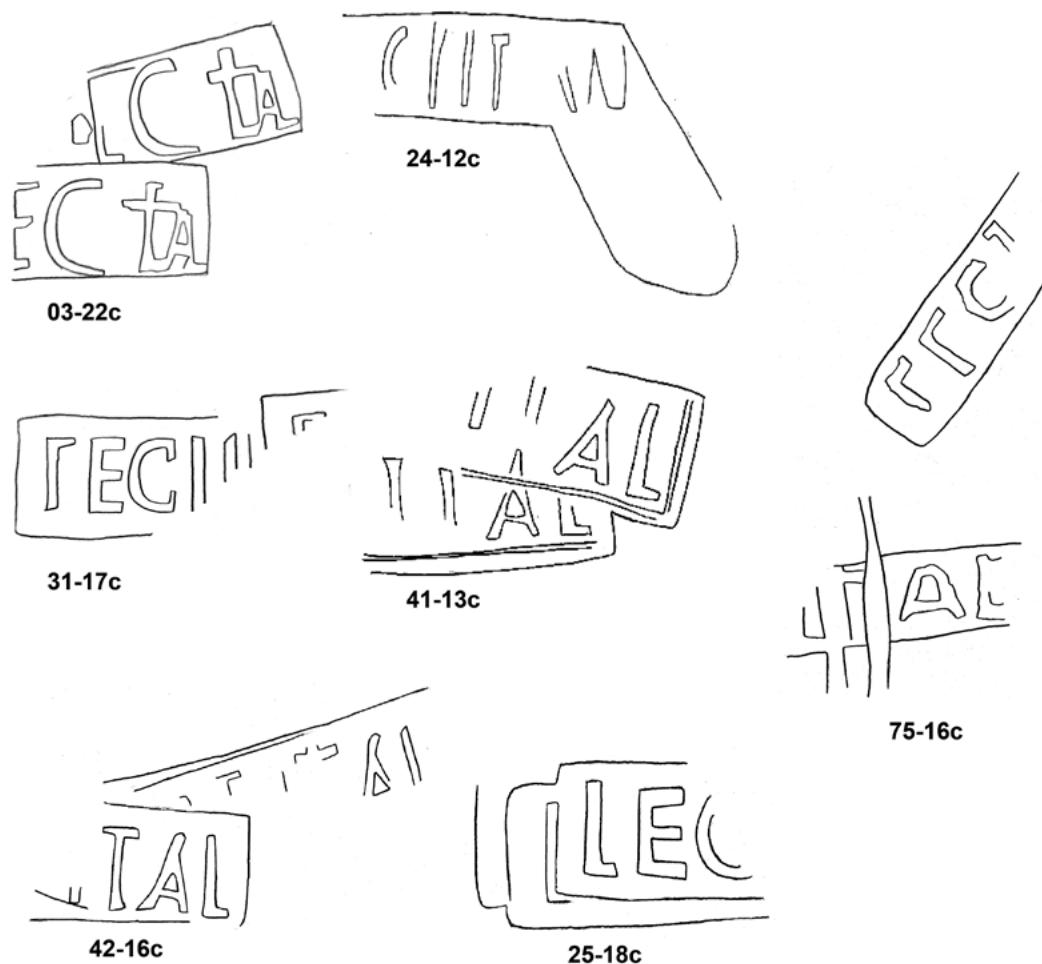


Fig. 4. Roof tiles with multiple stamp imprints (drawing M. Duch).

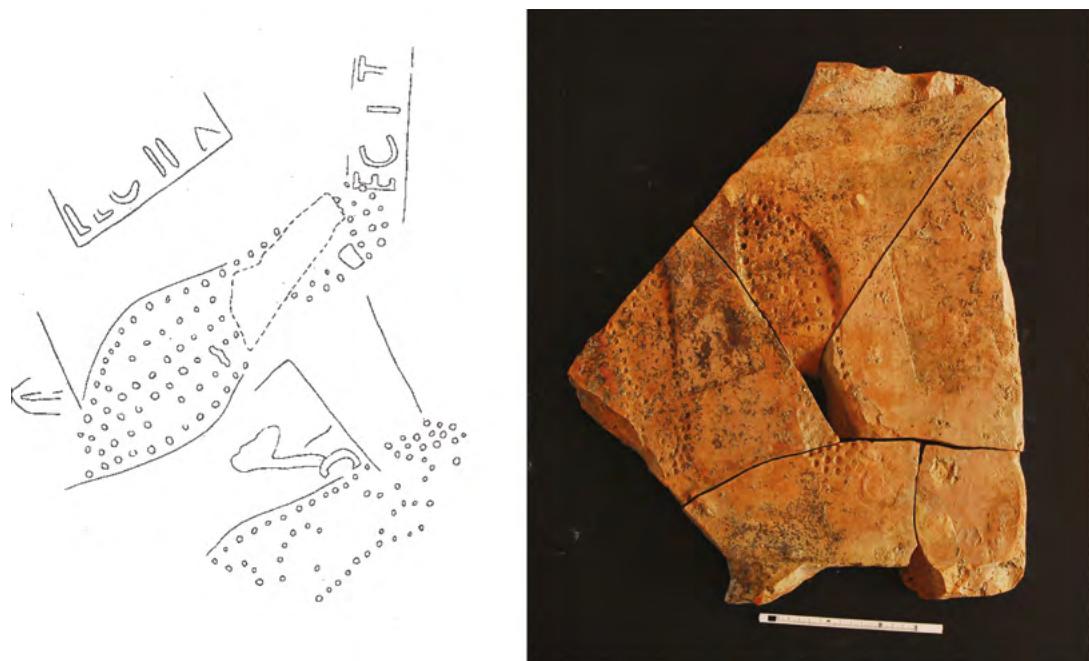


Fig. 5. Double stamped roof tile by legio I Minerva (drawing M. Madej).



Fig. 6. Roof tile with multiple stamp imprints and caligae (drawing M. Duch).

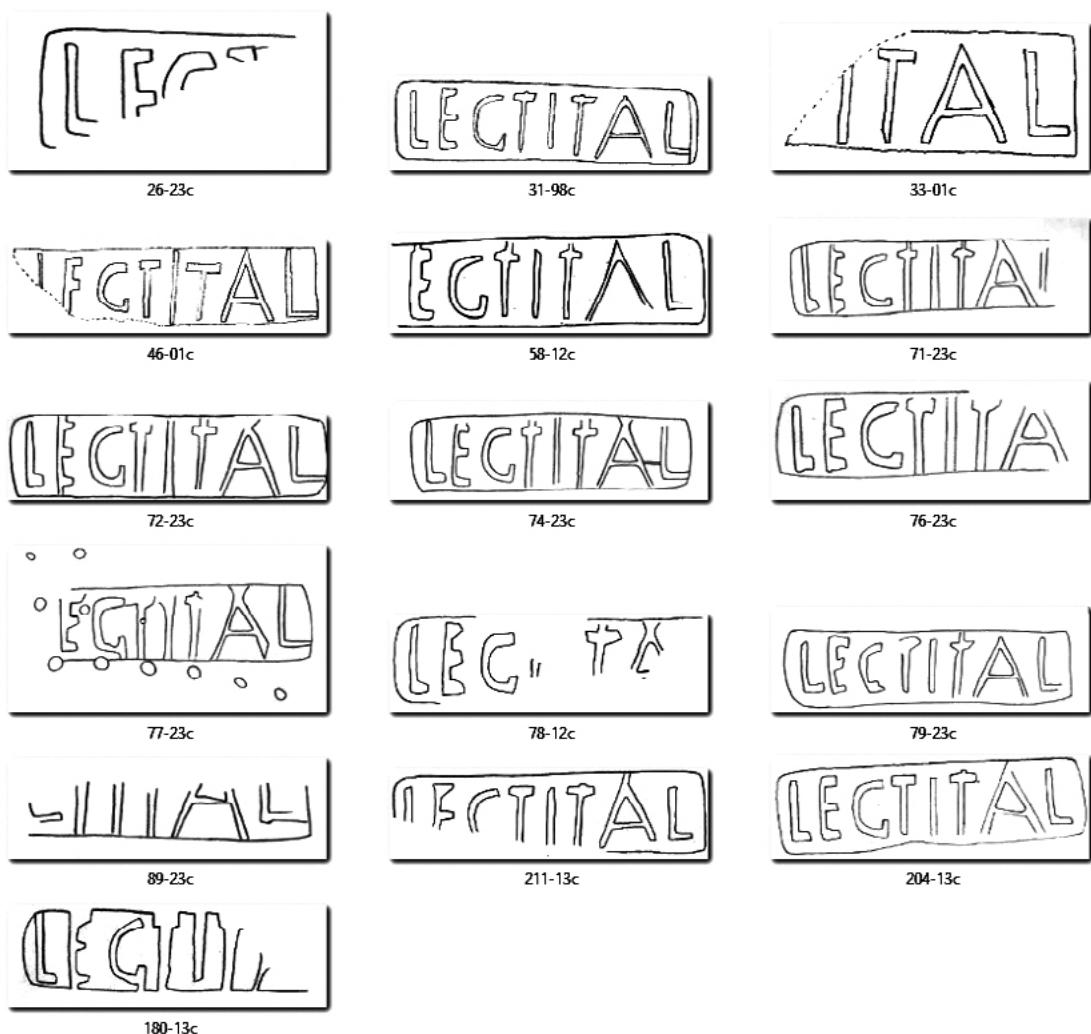


Fig. 7. Stamps LEGIITAL in a rectangular frame (prepared by M. Duch).

feature: 71-23c, 72-23c, 74-23c, 76-23c, 77-23c, 79-23c, 89-23c (Fig. 7). The finds from the so-called ceramic conduit, which cuts Sector XII nearly in half, are crucial to the dating of that stamp type. The tiles in question (58-12c, 211-13c, 204-13c, 180-13c – Fig. 7) were discovered there together with the tiles of legio XI Claudia and legio I Minerva, which determines the *post quem* date.

The above analogies include only those examples which, in palaeographic terms, do not raise any doubt about their stamp type classification. Consequently, it may be presumed that the tiles marked with such a stamp were produced between the reigns of Trajan and Antoninus Pius. Considering the numerous presence of such stamps on roof tiles and the analogous finds from Oescus (which ceased to be a legionary fortress after the Dacian War),<sup>17</sup> the tile discussed here should be dated to the reign of Trajan, most probably to the period of preparation for the war, when the construction of the legionary hospital at Novae completed in 100–101.<sup>18</sup>

While the legionary stamp on the tile in question is by no means unusual and commonly occurs in Sectors IV and XII, the FAVS stamp is fairly unique. The previously cited parallels with Oescus FIR(mus), MAX(imus), PROCV(lus) and VETIA(nus) leave no doubt that FAVS also denotes a name and should be read as:

- FAVS(tus)
- FA(BI)VS
- FA(bian)VS
- FAVS(tinus)
- F(l)AV(ianus)S

According to Rumen Ivanov, the combination of the stamp of *legio I Italica* and four different names (FIR, MAX, VETIA, PROCVL) from Oescus should be attributed to the overseers of individual workshops (*officinae*) operating within one military brickyard, which is borne out by the uniform quality and colour of the fired clay.<sup>19</sup> Tadeusz Sarnowski shared that view<sup>20</sup>, adding that such a supervisor did not have to be a high-ranking officer, but a soldier acting as *immunis figlinae* or *in figlinis magister*.<sup>21</sup> This is corroborated by an inscription from Drobata (Dacia) in which *in figlinis magister* had 60 soldiers under his command.<sup>22</sup> Renate Kurzmann drew attention to two inscriptions: from Mainz, mentioning *custos castelli figlinarum*, and from Bonn, which referred to two *immunes figlinarii*. Following extensive analysis of the various schools of research into stamped building ceramics, Kurzmann concluded that the stamping procedure remained at the discretion of ordinary soldiers working in the brickyard. The occasional use of name stamps suggests that those practices varied depending on the period and the location.<sup>23</sup> Jerzy Żelazowski, who analyzed C ANT MAGN [Caius Antonius Magnus] stamps from Novae put forward an interesting theory. Specifically, he argued that name stamps were not necessarily relevant to the manufacturing process as such, but had more to do with the purpose of the building material, i.e. specific undertakings. According to Żelazowski, the stamps may have featured the names of those responsible for a particular construction project rather than the manufacturing supervisors.<sup>24</sup>

It is also possible, although admittedly unlikely, to consider the hypothesis that the names of the governors of Lower Moesia were imprinted on the tiles. For example, the FAVS stamp discussed in this article could potentially refer to:

- Quintus Fabius Postuminus, governor in 102–103,
- Caecilius Faustinus, who held the office of governor in 103–105,

<sup>17</sup> BOJANOV 2008, p. 69.

<sup>18</sup> CIOŁEK, DYCZEK 2011, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> IVANOV 2002, p. 17; IVANOV 2006, p. 135.

<sup>20</sup> SARNOWSKI 1983, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> SARNOWSKI 1983, p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> IDR II 1, 107: “Aurelius Mercurius milis c(ohor)tis I Sagitt(ariorum) in figlinis magister super milites LX”.

Authors of *IDR II* admit that “LX” may also be read as “IX”, which would mean 9 persons instead of 60.

<sup>23</sup> KURZMANN 2006, p. 228.

<sup>24</sup> ŻELAZOWSKI 2015, pp. 249–256.

- Marcus Iallius Bassus Fabius Valerianus, governor in 162,
- Marcus Servilius Fabianus Maximus, governor in 162–166.

Similarly, it could be speculated that the MAX stamp may be associated with:

- Manius Laberius Maximus, governor of Lower Moesia in 100–102,
- Marcus Servilius Fabianus Maximus, who held that office in 162–166<sup>25</sup>.

As for the PROCVL stamp, the only governor known to bear this name was Titus Pomponius Proculus Vitrarius Pollio. On this basis, a tempting interpretation arises that these stamps may contain the names of governors of Lower Moesia from the early second half of the second century. However, the archaeological data from sections IV and XII concerning the impressions of these name stamps (Fig. 7) are not entirely conclusive, although such a dating cannot be ruled out.

It remains difficult to explain the presence of such roof tiles at Oescus in the second half of the 2nd century, as by that time the site functioned as a Roman colony rather than a military camp<sup>26</sup>. The LEGIITAL MAX and LEGIITAL PROCVL stamps were found together with LEGIITAL VETIA and LEGIITAL FIR stamps, for which no governors of such names are known from the 2nd century. Moreover, these tiles were discovered at Oescus alongside stamps of Legio XI Claudia, which are dated to the early 2nd century. The conclusion, therefore, is clear: these stamps do not refer to the names of provincial governors.

The name (nomen) FIR(mus) or cognomen FIR(mius) is quite common and attested for legio I Italica including centurions.<sup>27</sup> As well as PROCVL(us), for example, Lucius Valerius Proculus had a very prolific military career, he was also a centurion of the I Italic legion.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, this raises the tempting possibility of attributing the LEGIITAL PROCVL stamp to the same category, and thus accepting the conclusion that the stamps FIR, MAX, PROCVL, VETIA, and FAVS represent the names of centurions of the Italic legion responsible for the production of the tiles. Among the names listed, only VETIA(nus) presents a certain problem, as it is a rather rare name—possibly a derivative of the Celtic name Vettius<sup>29</sup> or a reference to the gens Vettia<sup>30</sup>—with the name potentially misspelled by the tile maker. Other interpretations appear much less likely due to the lack of relevant parallels, such as:

- V(exilatio) E(xercitus) T(r)IA(ni) (fecit) – “a detachment of Trajan’s army made [this]”;
- V(exillatio) E(xercitibus) T(r)IA(ni) (fecit) – “a detachment from the forces of Trajan made [this]”;
- (ex) VE(exilationis) T(egu)LA(rium) – “from the tile workshop of the detachment”; however, this interpretation should rather be rejected, as the inscription appears to contain the letter I rather than L, which makes such a reading implausible.

The only inscription TRA’EX on a ceramic pipe from Novae<sup>31</sup> can be interpreted as (tegularia or figlina) TRA(ns)danubiana EX(ercitus), as proposed by Tadeusz Sarnowski.<sup>32</sup> Martin Lemke, however, cautiously suggested that TRA in this inscription might refer to Trajan

<sup>25</sup> On list of Lower Moesian governors see: BOTEVA 1996, pp. 239–247; Stein 1940, pp. 58–111; The short list on Wikipedia is very helpful: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Roman\\_governors\\_of\\_Lower\\_Moesia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Roman_governors_of_Lower_Moesia) (01.10.2024).

<sup>26</sup> BOJANOV 2008, p. 69.

<sup>27</sup> *ILatBulg* 59: Firmus Aspendo veteranus legionis I Italicae ...; *CIL* III 6176: C. Valerius Firmus (centurio) legionis I Italicae; *CIL* III 7514: Firmus (centurio)

legionis I Italicae; cf. *ILatBulg* 63: L. Firmius Velentinus veteranus; *ILatBulg* 178: Firmus veteranus ... legionis XI Claudiae; *ILatBulg* 397: Iulius Firmus; *ILatBulg* 438: Firmus Diophanti;

<sup>28</sup> *ILatBulg* 432.

<sup>29</sup> *CPNRB* – Vettius.

<sup>30</sup> GAFFIOT 1934, Vettianus.

<sup>31</sup> KOLENDOWSKI, KOWAL 2011, p. 72, Figs. 7–8.

<sup>32</sup> SARNOWSKI 2016–2017, p. 62.

(TRA)<sup>33</sup>, similarly to the stamps from Leyon bearing the inscription DEC'TRA, which can be read as DEC(ius) TRA(ianus).<sup>34</sup>

Keeping the above in mind, regarding LEGI[ITAL] FAVS and also LEGIITAL MAX, LEGIITAL VETIA, LEGIITAL FIR, and LEGIITAL PROCVL roof tiles, one must agree with Rumen Ivanov and Tadeusz Sarnowski. FAVS is an abbreviated name of the supervisor of a workshop at the brickyard, which operated as a distribution center for the legionary camps at Oescus and Novae. The practice whereby the supervisors additionally marked the tiles already stamped as legio I Italica product with their names was short-lived rather than enduring. First, it is observed only with one type of LEGIITAL stamp, which was often found on tiles in the ruins of the *valetudinarium*. This hospital was built for Trajan's Dacian War, between autumn 100 and spring 101.<sup>35</sup> Oescus continued as a military base until the end of that conflict. All that suggests that a centre which manufactured building ceramics, with at least five workshops (FIR, VETIA, PROCVL, MAX and FAVS) to supply Oescus and Novae, functioned immediately before Trajan's Dacian War. The example of Novae attests to the high demand for building materials at that time, as the camp underwent major construction works: the so-called Flavian baths were demolished and a hospital was built, the commandant's headquarters were rebuilt and many canals were extended.<sup>36</sup> The undertaking required an enormous amount of labour and well-organized logistics, especially during such a period of history. The brickyard that supplied Novae and Oescus had to be in a strategic location with deposits of high-quality clay and fuel (wood) at hand. Transport by road and even more so by river was not an obstacle, as evidenced by the fact that many bricks of legio I Italica are discovered—in contexts linked to Trajan's Dacian War—far north of the Danube.<sup>37</sup>

## Summary

A tile documented as no. 20-23c (Fig. 1) was discovered in Sector XII at Novae. On its surface two different stamp impressions were determined: one of legio I Italica (LEGI[ITAL]) and the other featuring the name FAVS, which may be read as: FAVS(tus), FA(BI)VS, FA(BIAN)VS, FAVS(tinianus), or F(I)AV(ianus)S. This is the first tile fragment discovered at Novae to bear that type of stamp impression. Very similar specimens have been discovered at Oescus, with the same stamp of legio I Italica, as well as other—albeit different—names, i.e. FIR(mus), MAX(imus), PROCVL(us) and VETIA(nus). These analogies warrant the conclusion that FAVS refers to an overseer at a brickyard where at least five teams were employed to supply the construction undertakings at Novae and Oescus during the preparation for the war with the Dacians under Emperor Trajan.

<sup>33</sup> LEMKE 2021, p. 186.

<sup>37</sup> ZAHARIADE, DVORSKI 1997, p. 19.

<sup>34</sup> KURZMANN 2006, pp. 250–251.

<sup>35</sup> CIOŁEK, Dyczek 2011, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> PARNICKI-PUDEŁKO 1990, p. 65; GENČEVA 2002, p. 122; DYCZEK 2011, pp. 103–116; SARNOWSKI 2001, pp. 31–37.

## Abbreviations

CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> , ed. TH. MOMMSEN <i>et alii</i> , Berlin 1863–.
CPNRB	Paul Russell, Alex Mullen, Celtic Personal Names of Roman Britain < <a href="http://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/personalnames/index.php?id=3">www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/personalnames/index.php?id=3</a> > [accessed 28 November 2024].
IDR	<i>Inscripțiile Daciei Romane I. Diplomele militare și tablile cerate</i> [Inscriptions of Roman Dacia I. Military diplomas and wax tablets], ed. I. I. RUSSU <i>et alii</i> , București 1975.
ILatBulg	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae in Bulgaria repertae</i> , ed. B. GEROV, Sofia 1989.

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