

## MOSAICS

In the course of archaeological excavations in the imperial palace over 350 m<sup>2</sup> of mosaic pavements have been uncovered. The pavements belong to different building phases in the palace; the earliest is dated to the end of the third century, and the most recent phase to the middle of the fourth century. The majority of the pavements are geometric polychrome mosaics (known as “geometric carpets”) which are typical of the late Roman Empire. The mosaics are executed in the western style and have analogies with the mosaics in Diocletian’s Palace in Split.

The mosaics are worked in the technique known as *opus tessellatum* (consisting of small square pieces of stone - *tesserae*); the decorative motifs employed are geometric, floral or various guilloche and cable patterns. Only one mosaic with a figural representation is preserved, of the god Mercury.

The mosaics from the palace complex are the best examples of this type of pavement found in Sirmium to date. Their high quality attests the superior standards of workmanship which are typical of tetrarchic architecture in the Balkans.



## PROJECT FOR COVERING THE IMPERIAL PALACE AND VISITORS’ CENTER

The project for covering the Imperial Palace and Visitors’ Center is important as the first systematic approach for preserving and presenting an ancient archaeological site in Sirmium. The solution to cover the structure was the result of the intent to protect the entire area of the archaeological site, an area of approximately 2,680 m<sup>2</sup>. The architecture of the new construction is visually compatible with its urban environment and functionally allows for the conservation and preservation of the archaeological site. The Visitors’ Center has three levels. The entrance to the site is located on the ground floor, and there is an art gallery on the upper level. On the ground floor there is also a souvenir shop and cafe. A pathway allows visitors access to the lower level, where the actual archaeological remains are located.

The project was financed by the Ministry for Culture and the Ministry for the Economy and Regional Development and the City of Sremska Mitrovica. The project was executed by the professional staff of the Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Monuments, Sremska Mitrovica and its Director, Ljubiša Šulaja. Project design and presentation was the work of architects Adrijana Škorić and Ivan Filipović.



# PALATIUM IMPERIALE

## SIRMIUM

The remains of the once prosperous and powerful Roman city of Sirmium are concealed beneath the streets of today’s Sremska Mitrovica. The history of the Roman city begins during the Emperor Augustus’ invasion of Illyricum in 35-33 B.C. and continues all the way to 582 A.D. when the city falls under control of the Avars. The Romans probably occupied Sirmium during Tiberius’ wars in Pannonia (13-9 B.C.), and the city was granted the status of a colony (*colonia Flavia*) under the Flavian dynasty (69-96 A.D.). Sirmium was frequently used as a base for military campaigns against the barbarian groups who continually attacked the frontier in this part of the Empire.

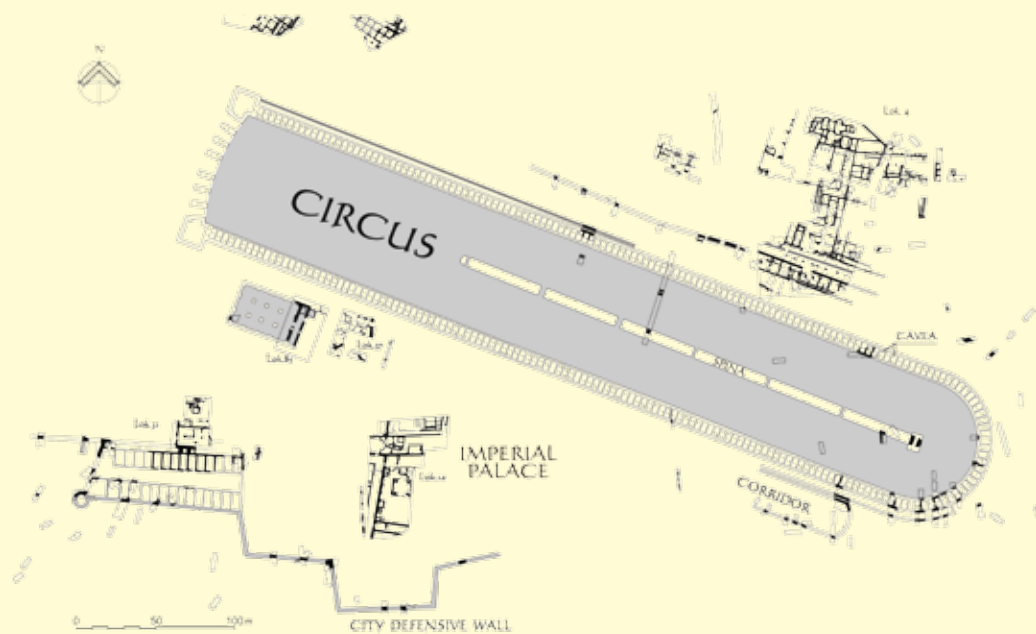
From the time of the granting of colonial status all the way to the end of the fourth century, the ancient literary sources mention Sirmium as a temporary residence for numerous Roman emperors. From the historical sources we know that from the first through the third century Domitian, Marcus Aurelius, Septimius Severus, Maximinus Thrax, Claudius II Gothicus, Probus, Diocletian and the infamous usurpers Ingenuus and Regalian all resided in Sirmium for longer or shorter periods. Five Roman emperors were born in or near Sirmium: Trajan Decius, Aurelian, Probus, Maximianus Herculius and Gratian. The city enjoyed its greatest prosperity at the end of the third and beginning of the fourth century, when it was one of the capitals of the Roman empire and the sometime seat of government for the emperors Diocletian, Licinius, Constantine the Great, Constantius II, Julian, Valentinian, Gratian and Theodosius.

Archaeological excavation in Sirmium has revealed, in addition to the imperial palace and adjacent circus, a number of other monumental public buildings, including the so-called “Licinian Baths,” a granary (*horreum*) and commercial and industrial areas. Luxuriously appointed urban residences have been discovered, as well as multi-storied apartment buildings (*insulae*) where the poorer elements of the population lived. The city was protected by a circuit of strong defensive walls and supplied with water by an aqueduct from the Vranjaš spring in Fruška Gora. The city streets were paved, flanked by porticoes and drained with sewers. Coins were struck in an imperial mint in the city and workshops produced various objects in precious metals, glass, and pottery. Bricks were also manufactured there.

The well known Roman historian of the fourth century, Ammianus Marcellinus, described the city as “the famous and populous mother of cities”.

## PLAN OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE WITH IDEAL RECONSTRUCTIONS OF THE FLOOR MOSAICS

## GUIDE IMPERIAL PALACE



### THE IMPERIAL PALACE

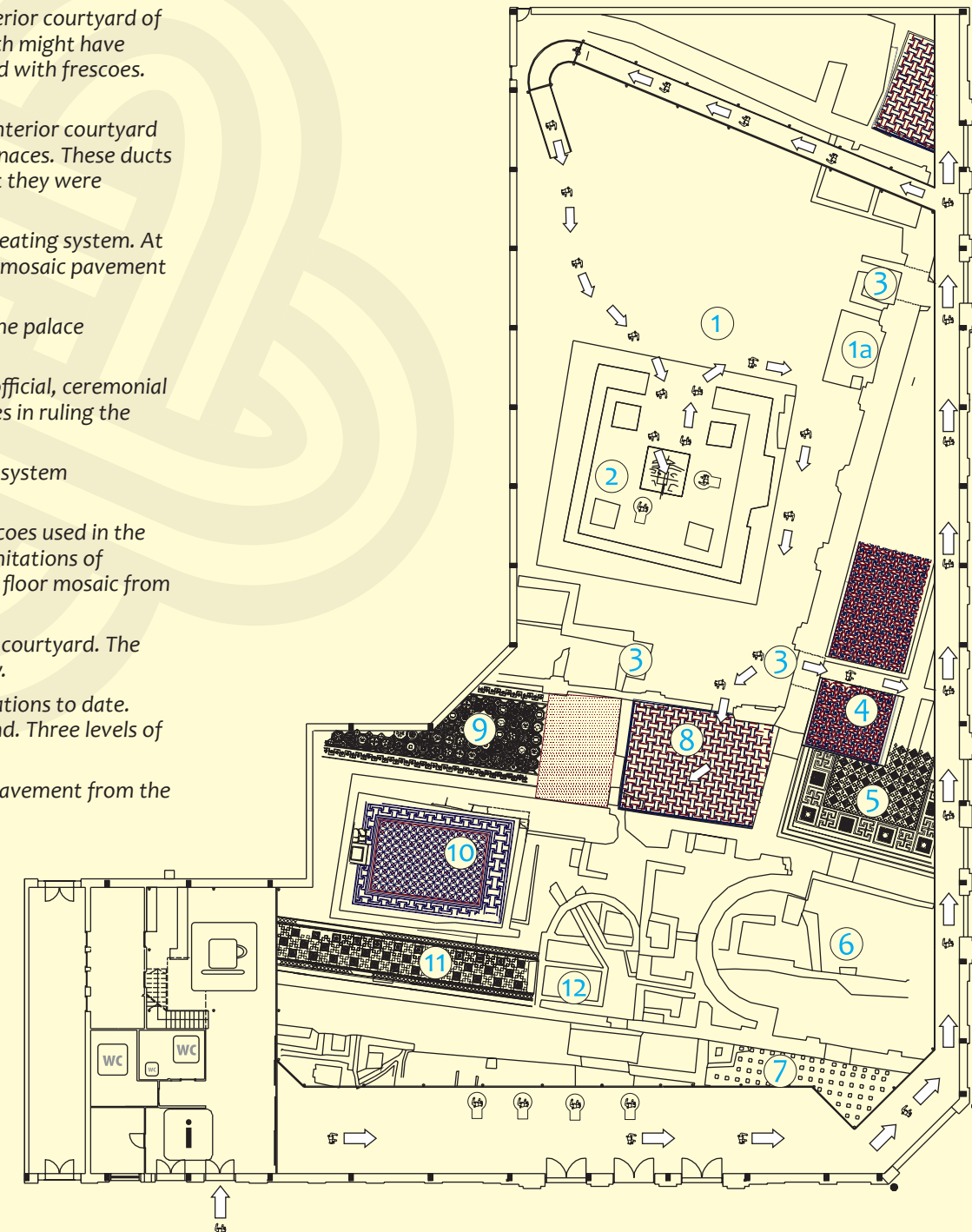
The first archaeological excavations in Sirmium began in 1957, at the Imperial Palace (Archaeological Site 1a). The site was discovered accidentally during construction of an apartment building on that location. Work was initially stopped temporarily, then permanently when massive walls, a system of radiant heating and floor mosaics were uncovered. The later discovery of the Roman circus (a hippodrome in the Greek-speaking part of the Empire) immediately adjacent to the palace provided conclusive evidence to identify the structure as an imperial palace.

The palace-circus architectural complex is one of the most important archaeological discoveries in Sremska Mitrovica. It was built at the end of the third or beginning of the fourth century in the southeast, elite section of the city, along the Sava river. A new city defensive wall protected this part of the city.

Imperial palaces in the Roman empire had formal spaces for the emperor's administrative functions (the official part) and also private quarters where the emperor and his family lived (the residential part). The circuses built right next to the palaces represent the official structure for the ceremonial presentation of the ruler to his people. Chariot (bigae, quadrigae) races, the most popular sport in the ancient world, were held in the circuses. Roman circuses are known from all over the Empire, but the Sirmium circus is the only one discovered so far in Serbia.

On the archaeological site today only part of the imperial palace complex can be seen. The walls and pavements preserved there represent for the most part the residential quarters of the palace. Evidence of the luxurious interior decoration there is provided by the fragments of frescoes, mosaic pavements and architectural ornament in various kinds of stone which were imported from different parts of the empire: Egypt, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy. Installations for a radiant heating system were uncovered beneath almost every floor in the palace. The long duration and frequent use of the palace are documented by the numerous structural repairs, mosaic pavements in several levels and the large quantity of archaeological artifacts recovered.

1. Only part of the interior courtyard of the imperial palace has been uncovered. Around the courtyard are located other spaces whose floor levels are approximately 1 meter higher. This allowed for the installation of the radiant heating system (hypocaustum). Remains of stairs which led into the palace were uncovered in the courtyard (1a).
2. A monumental structure built with large stone blocks is located in the interior courtyard of the palace. This structure has square bases at each of its four corners which might have supported a cupola. The inside walls of the structure were richly decorated with frescoes. The exact function of the structure at present is unknown.
3. The furnaces (praefurnia) for the heating system are located around the interior courtyard of the palace. The ducts for the heating system were connected to the furnaces. These ducts are preserved only at the foundation level of the palace; it is assumed that they were covered with brick vaults.
4. Passing through the **praefurnium** we enter a duct which was part of the heating system. At one time this duct was located beneath the floor of a long corridor with a mosaic pavement from the middle of the fourth century.
5. Part of a mosaic pavement which belongs to an earlier building phase of the palace (beginning of the fourth century).
6. It is assumed that the space with the large apse functioned as one of the official, ceremonial parts of the palace where the emperor performed his administrative duties in ruling the empire. In an earlier phase there were baths (thermae) in this location.
7. A larger space with the preserved supports (pilae) for the radiant heating system (hypocaustum) which probably belongs to the official part of the palace.
8. There are preserved frescoes on the walls of this space. Typical of the frescoes used in the palace are rectangular fields with vegetal motifs; these are framed with imitations of architectural elements (columns or marble panels). Also found here was a floor mosaic from the fourth century.
9. A portico (porticus) was located in this area which faced onto the interior courtyard. The floors were decorated with mosaics from the middle of the fourth century.
10. This is the best preserved space which was uncovered in the palace excavations to date. Along its east wall a fountain decorated with marble revetments was found. Three levels of mosaic pavements were uncovered here.
11. A corridor which led towards the staircase was decorated with a mosaic pavement from the beginning of the fourth century.
12. In this space with a small apse there was a semicircular staircase which led to an upper storey in the palace.



Imperial Palace is open every day from 9:00 - 18:00.  
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Most of the Imperial Palace is wheelchair accessible.