

# **BURGI AND TURRES ON THE LOWER DANUBIAN LINES IN THE 4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES**

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*Burgi* and *turres* as technical terms in the Roman military vocabulary<sup>1</sup> can unquestionably be applied directly to particular types of buildings archaeologically identified along the Lower Danube frontier (fig. 1).

The term of *burgus* appears also as included within some toponyms on the southern bank of the river such as: *Stiliburgu*, *Mareburgu*, *Halicaniburgu*<sup>2</sup>. Attempts of identifications with today places have been more or less successfully several times made<sup>3</sup>.

In what follows, we shall focus our attention on the architectural characteristics of these types of installations, as well as on the date of their building and stratigraphic relation with other forts.

**Burgus.** Beside the well-known *qudriburgium*, four towered fortlet, outlined both epigraphically and recently in scholarly investigated<sup>4</sup> the large scale rescue archaeological excavations along the right bank of the Danube have lately paid a due attention to a well outlined type of small sized category of military installations. The standard term to designate them in the modern archaeological literature is that of *burgus*. As *castellum* remains yet a general term for every type of fort smaller than a *castra*, as Vegetius pointed out<sup>5</sup>, *burgus* would be the equivalent of the Greek *pyrgos* and has to be also sought among the types of small installations<sup>6</sup>.

The Mihailovac Blato, Bordjej, and Pesača excavations<sup>7</sup> revealed a specific type of small rectangular building, of the same size, 36 x 36 m = 0.12 ha without corner or curtain towers (Fig. 2 b, c, e). All have a simple gateway and the same thickness of the enclosure wall: 0.70m. The wall thickness shows that they were not too high. All the three buildings were found associated with an interior rectangular tower, symmetrically positioned in relation with the line of the enclosure wall. The identical dimensions and layout of the three installations indicate that they were built in the same time, in the same conception, with the same goals.

The assimilation of this type of enclosure with *burgi* recorded in the epigraphic or literary sources<sup>8</sup> might be temporarily a solution although it is not entirely satisfactory. Except the three above-mentioned cases from Mihailovac Blato, Bordjej, and Pesaca, the archaeological investigations yielded no traces of stone buildings inside. It has been rightly pointed out by the authors of investigations that, considering the reduced thickness of the enclosure wall the superstructure must have been built in timber<sup>9</sup>. The same holds good also for the eventual building in the interior surface.

The actual dating of these enclosure walls raises some real question marks. Bordjej yielded specific 4<sup>th</sup> century artifacts: a bone comb of Germanic type, cruciform brooches, enameled pottery and especially the Valens - Valentinian I and Valentinian II coins<sup>10</sup> pointing toward mid 4<sup>th</sup> century as date of building of this enclosure wall. The stratigraphic position of the Justinian coin, found in the interior surface of the enclosure wall is unclear, the authors of the excavations indicating its discovery into a pit. The general dating of the whole Bordjej complex between 4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> centuries is, therefore, not entirely satisfactory as it is also the supposition that the interior tower was built during the Diocletian's reign and the exterior enclosure during Justinian's reign<sup>11</sup>.

At Mihailovac Blato the artifacts found in the area between the tower and the exterior enclosure datable in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. appears insignificantly represented compared with the one of the 4<sup>th</sup> century: the coins from Valens – Valentinian I, the brooches, the oil-lamps, the bone combs, the belt rings and the stamped brick DRP = D(*aciae*) R(*i*)P(*ensis*)<sup>12</sup>.

**Turres.** Another specific type of installation along the *limes* is the square stone building of smaller in size, lying usually inside wider enclosures, such as *quadriburgia*, the above mentioned precinct walls or even larger forts.

The investigation of a significant number of installations of this specific category assigns them to the well known type of *turris*, recorded in inscriptions or juridical and literary sources. They were military buildings destined to carry out watching and signaling operations between the forts and fortresses.

The dimensions are very much similar e.g.: 19.32 x 19.54 m = 378 sq. m (Mihailovac Blato); 19 x 18.60 m (Slatinska reka)<sup>13</sup>; 19.60 x 19.60 m (Bordjei).

As far as the lay out is concerned two types of towers can be distinguished:

a. with four interior pillars (Mihailovac Blato, Bordjei, Mora Vagei, Rtkovo, Donje Butorke)<sup>14</sup> (Fig. 2 a-c, e, g; Fig. 4). This type is also known as widely spread on the *limes Pannoniae* (Budakalasz, Leanyfalu, Veroce, Dunabogdany)<sup>15</sup>;

b. without pillars (Malo Livadice, Lepenski Vir, Hajducka Vodenica)<sup>16</sup> (Fig. 2 d, h; Fig. 3). This type appears largely represented on the *limes Palestinae*<sup>17</sup>.

The location and relation with another surrounding fortification indicates four types:

a. inside larger forts (Dinogetia is the only case known so far)<sup>18</sup>;

b. inside *quadriburgia* Hajducka Vodenica. Donje Butorke, Slatinska reka, Rtkovo)<sup>19</sup> (Fig. 2 f, g; Fig. 3, 4);

c. inside an enclosure wall (Pesaca, Bordjei, Mihailovac Blato)<sup>20</sup> (Fig. 2 b, c, e);

d. isolated towers (Mora Vagei, Malo Livadice, Lepenski Vir)<sup>21</sup>. This type should have been surrounded by a ditch and mote, as the Mora Vagei excavations revealed.

One of the most striking information concerning the *turres* on the line of the river in Dacia Ripensis is the imperial decree of 364, issued by Valens and addressed to the duke of the province, Tautomedes<sup>22</sup>. It stipulated the obligation of the duke to build and repair *sumptu publico* towers in due places, in fact building them *manu militari*. The same law expressly specified that, if the duke did not carry out this obligation during his service, after he left the office he would have been forced to build and repair on his own expenses the same type of installations. It is absolutely certain that, at least partially if not completely, this order was accomplished on a large scale.

The picture of the enforcement of this order depends in the first place on the state of the today preservation of this type of military installations and especially of archaeological investigations. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century surveys and especially the last four or five decades' excavations yielded the existence of a relatively large number of such towers along the right bank of the Danube.

As the Swoboda's surveys<sup>23</sup> revealed, a significant number of towers lie between Porecka reka and Hajducka Vodenica. Their lay out is indicated as having been round from 2 to 10 m. in diameter. Most of these installations are described as having a diameter between 6 and 8 m. The two scholars did not, unfortunately, offer sketches or drawings of the rounded towers. There have been no archaeological excavations carried out to such round towers.

Another type of *turris* is that of a square lay out, of bigger size, and archaeologically investigated. It is interesting to note that, according to the Neudeck's and Swoboda's descriptions the round towers are spread along the border of the Danube outside the forts, while the square ones are usually found (except the Mora Vagei, Malo Livadice and Lepenski Vir)

inside of an enclosure wall. Unlike the round *turres* specific, as it seems, to Dacia Ripensis, the size of the majority of the square ones in Moesia Prima is between 5.10 x 4.90m and 20 x 17.5 m.

In all the known cases of the towers (*turres*) placed inside *quadriburgia*, the archaeological data go to the conclusion that they were built by mid 4<sup>th</sup> century.

As it has been correctly noticed, the four interior pillars and the thickness of the precinct wall, usually between 1.60 m. and 1.80 m., conferred an appreciable heightness and massiveness to these buildings. The Procopius' text refers to *monopyrgia*<sup>24</sup> what would apparently fit very well to this type of building. There is a striking contradiction, however, between the Procopius' text and the archaeological reality that shows that they functioned in late 4<sup>th</sup> or mid 5<sup>th</sup> century at the latest. The term *monopyrgia* is therefore either a mere author's recollection when he wrote the text, they had been out of use for a long time, or the archaeological evidence should be seriously revised. We prefer the first variant.

The reasons for which we consider the Procopius' text slightly anachronistic as far as this type of installation is concerned are two noticeable facts: one on their layout and another on the relation with the wider surrounding enclosure walls. There is a perceivable asymmetry in case *quadriburgia* having *turres* within the fortified area, while the symmetry of the towers within the stone enclosure walls is quite remarkable. This appears even more obvious if we compare this situation with the one on the Pannonian *limes* as regards the same type of mid 4<sup>th</sup> century installations. The Budakalasz and Leanyfalu *turres*<sup>25</sup> have surrounding stone enclosure walls like in the case of Pesaca, Bordjej, Mihailovac Blato. We should therefore accept the idea of a simultaneous building of the towers and their stone enclosure walls in the case of installations in Dacia Ripensis and Moesia Prima.

Towers and the outer enclosures might hypothetically be considered as a whole, denominating a *burgus*, i. e. a building complex in which the tower as an essential active element of watch and signaling activity is surrendered by a precinct wall. A small garrison of some dozen of soldiers provided by the nearest auxiliary fort could have been accommodated into timber barracks along the walls.

An issue not very easy to answer is why only some of the towers had such enclosure walls and why others (Mora Vagci, Lepenski Vir, Male Livadice) did not. Will it have been a request closely related to the military architecture, tactical requirements or was it a failure of completely fulfill the architectural copybooks sent to the dukes of Dacia Ripensis ? The surrounding stone precinct walls around the towers might have been a substitute for the more elaborated and robust *quadriburgia* that required more work and engineering. The area of c. 0.1 ha (= 36 x 36 m.) of the enclosure walls which is close to many of the size of *quadriburgia* speak for itself in favor of this idea.

On the other hand, one can question what impact the provisions of the 364 imperial decree had along the *limes*. It supposedly had a larger area of enforcement and application and must foresee similar imperial laws addressed to dukes of Scythia, Moesia Secunda and Moesia Prima. For Scythia, at least, is recordable the tower built in the middle of the Dinogetia fort (Fig. 5).

How long the provisions of the 364 imperial law lasted is another problem. It is hard to believe that it received enforcement only during the Tautomedes office and we must think to a longer period.

Finally, it appears obvious that the unitary architectural layout will have been the result of some architectural regulations that functioned along the Danubian *limes* and proved by the archaeological reality from Pannonia to Scythia.

## NOTES

1. On *burgus* see: O. Seeck, RE V 1897 col. 1066-1067 s.v. *Burgus*; E. de Ruggiero, s.v. *Burgus* in: Dizionario Epigrafico di Antichità Romane, vol. I Roma 1961, col. 1053-1054. On the origin of *burgus* see also E. Pennick, *L'origine hellénique de burgus*, Latomus IV 1940-1945 p. 5-21. There is also a huge literature on this particular type of military installation of which we mention here: F. Winckelmann, *Die Römischen burgi in der Harlach bei Weissenburg i.B bei Heglohe und Steinsdorf*, Germania 2, 1918 p. 54-59; A. Hild, *Spätromischen rätischen Grenzbürgus zu Hörbranz, Vorarlberg*, Germania 16, 1932 p. 292-296; P. Reinecke, *Nueue burgi an der Spätromischen Grene Rätians*, Germania 19, 1935, 1 p. 32-36; J. Garbsch, *Die Burgi von Meckatz und Untersaal und die Valentinianische Grenzbefestigung zwischen Basel and Passau*, Bayerische Vorgeschichtsblätter 32, 1967 p. 51-82;; T. Bechert, *Der Spätromische Burgus (Asciburgium)*, Rheinische Ausgrabungen 12, Beiträge zur Archäologi des Römischen Rheinlands III 1972 p. 186-187; S. Soproni, *Der Spätromische Limes zwischen Esztergom und Szentendre*, Budapest 1978; *Burgi* were usually built for the frontier defence as Isidor of Seville IX 4 shows: *burgarii a burgis dicti, quia crebra per limites constituta habitacula burgus dicunt*, cf. Anon. *De Rebus Bellicis* 21. This seems to be confirmed by an inscription in Pannonia of AD 185 (ILS 395): *ripam omnem burgis a solo extructis item praesidiis per loca opportuna ad clandestinos latrunculorum transitus oppositis munivit*. *Burgi* were also erected for watch and signaling activities, in which case they were called *burgi speculatorii* (CIL VIII 2494, 2495).
2. Proc. *De Aedif.* IV 6, 18.
3. *Mareburgu* has been commonly identified with the today Rtkovo-Glamija I (M. Gabricević, *Rtkovo-Glamija I. Une forteresse de la Basse Epoque. Fouilles de 1980-1982*, in: Đerdapske sveske III 1986 p. 71-94), while *Halicaniburgu* would go with Usce Slatinske reke (A. Janković, *Podunavski deo oblasti Akvisa*, Beograd 1981 p. 41; Al. Jovanović, M. Korać, Đ. Janković, *L'embouchure de la rivière Slatinska reka*, Đerdapske sveske III 1986 p. 378-400; A. Jovanović, M. Korać, *Ušće Slatinske reke. Un castellum de la Haute Epoque Byzantine*, Đerdapske sveske II 1984 p. 194-201. For attempts to locate ancient sites along the Danube see in general V. Beševliev, *Zur Deutung der Kastelnamen in Prokops Werk, De Aedificiis*, Amsterdam 1970.
4. M. Zahariade, *The Tetrarchic Building Activity at the Lower Danube: I. Quadriburgia*, in: *Der Limes an der unteren Donau von Diokletian bis Heraclius. Vorträge der Internationalen Konferenz Svištov, 1-5 September 1998 Sofia 1999* p. 3-16.
5. Veg. IV 10: *castellum parvulum quem burgum vocant*.
6. *Burgi* could have had different layout and size if we judge after the inscription IGLR 233 from *Cius* where the late 19<sup>th</sup> century surveys revealed a quasi-rectangular fortlet. CTh. VII 19, 1 dedicates a special paragraph entitled: *De burgarii*, while Proc. *De Aedif.* IV 7, 10 refers to *Saltupyrghos* alongside with IV 6, 18: *Mareburgu, Stiliburgu, Lucernariaburgu, Burgonovo, Laccoburgu, Burgualtu* or IV 6, 36 *Lucernariaburgu*. Quite a few fortifications of a significant size surprisingly appears as *pyrgoi* in the 6<sup>th</sup> century: IV 6, 2: *Pincus, Cuppis, Novae*, 3: *Literata*, 21: *Iudeus*, 28: *Onus (pyrgos monos)*; 7, 1: *Maxention pyrgos*, on the assimilation in terms of *burgus = pyrgos* see Penninck, *op. cit.*, p. 5, 7.
7. Mihailovac Blato: M. Tomović, *Mihailovac "Blato". Une forteresse de la Basse Antiquité*, Đerdapske sveske III 1986 p. 408-431; Bordej: A. Cermanović-Kuzmanović, S. Stanković, *Bordej. Fortresse de la Basse Antiquité. Fouilles de 1980*, Đerdapske sveske II 1984 p. 219-223; Pesača: D. Minić, M. Kovacević, *Pesača. Antično utvrđenje I srednjevekovna nekropola*, Arheološki Pregled 10, 1968 p.101-102.
8. See note 6.
9. See note 7.
10. A. Cermanović-Kuzmanović, S. Stanković, *op. cit.* p. 219.
11. *Ibidem* p. 220.
12. M. Tomović, *op. cit.* p. 412.
13. Al Jovanović, M. Korać, Đ. Janković, *op. cit.* p. 380.
14. A. Cermanović-Kuzmanović, *Donje Butorke, Kladovo-antički kastel*, Arheološki Pregled 6, 1964 p. 52-53; eadem, *Starinar* N. S. 28-29, 1979.

15. S. Soproni, *op.cit.* p. 63, 65, 66.
16. A. Jovanović, *Hajdučka Vodenica, kasnoantičko i rannovizantijsko utvrđenje*, Starinar 33-34, 1982-1983 p. 319-331 ; D. Piletić, *Velike i Male Livadice, anticika ostramaticnita i kastel*, Starinar 33-334, 1982-1983 p.187-192.
17. M. Gichon, *Towers on the Limes Palestinae*, in: Actes du IX<sup>ème</sup> Congres International des Etudes sur les Frontières Romaines, Bucureşti, Köln 1974, p. 513-524.
18. I. Barnea, *Dinogetia et Noviodunum, deux villes byzantine du Bas-Danube*, Revue des Etudes sud-Est Europeene IX 1971 p. 343-362.
19. For Rtkovo see note 2.
20. See note 7.
21. A. Cermanović-Kuzmanović *La forteresse antique Mora Vagei près de Mihailovac. Fouille 1981*, Đerdapske sveske III 1986 p. 453-466; D. Srejšević, *Lepenski Vir*, London 1972.
22. CTh.15.1.13: *Idem aa. Tautomedi duci Daciae ripensis. in limite gravitati tuae commissio praeter eas turres, quas refici oportet, si forte indigeant refectioe, turres administrationis tempore quotannis locis opportunis extruere. quod si huius praecepti auctoritatem neglexeris, finita administratione revocatus in limitem ex propriis facultatibus eam fabricam, quam administrationis tempore adiuventis militum et impensis debueras fabricare, extruere cogeris. dat. xiii kal. iul. mediolano divo ioviano et varroniano cons.* (364, June 19).
23. E. Swoboda, *Forschungen am Obermoesischen Limes*. Schriften den Balkankommission, Antiquarische Abteilung X Wien, Leipzig, passim.
24. Proc. *De Aedif.* IV IV 6, 18; C Just. I 27, 2, 4 for *burgi* built by Justinian in Africa in the war against the Vandals.
25. S. Soproni, *op. cit.* p. 63, 66.

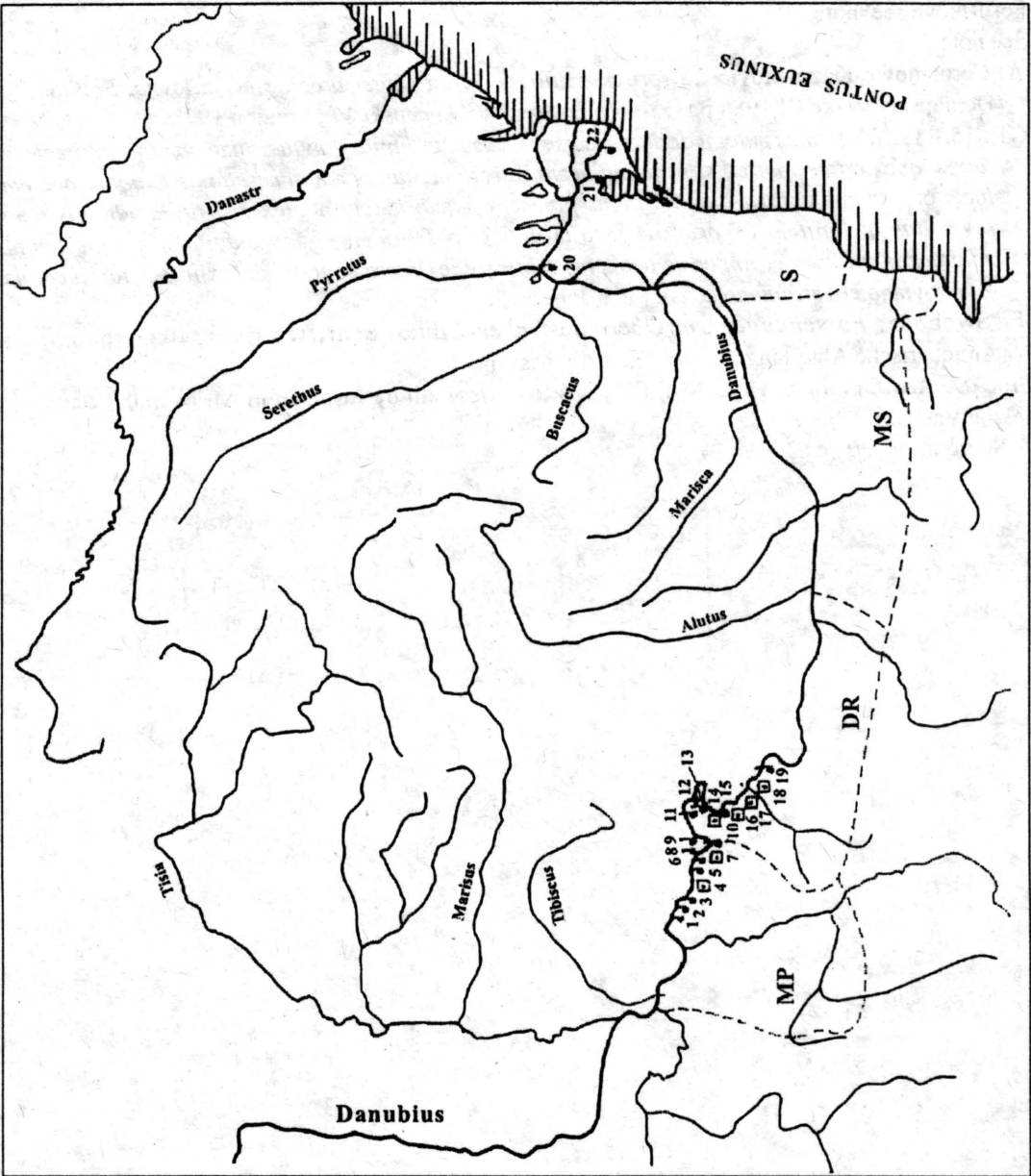
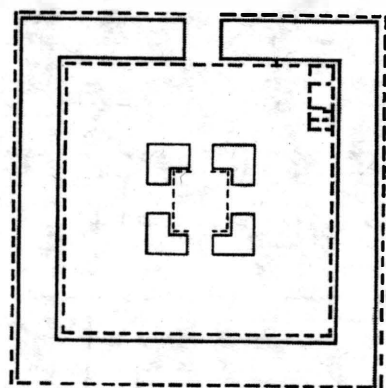
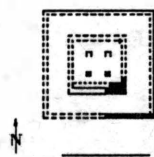


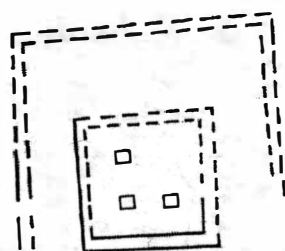
Fig. 1



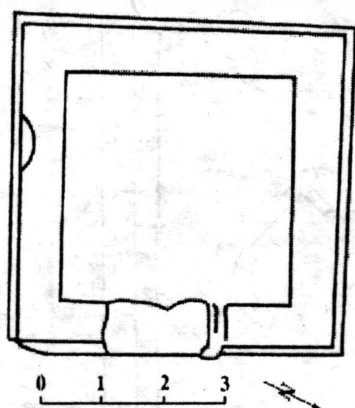
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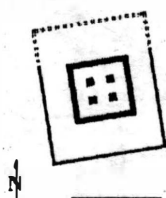
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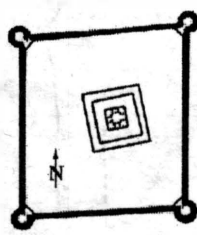
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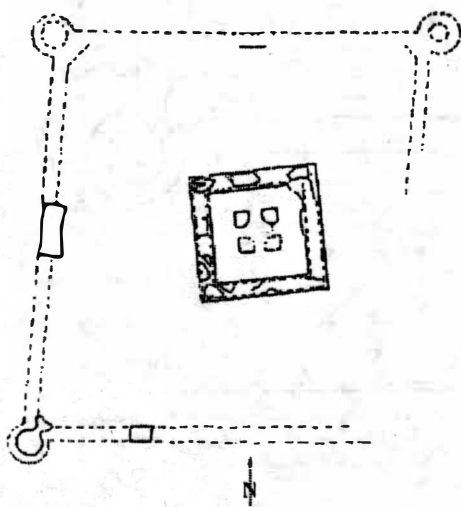
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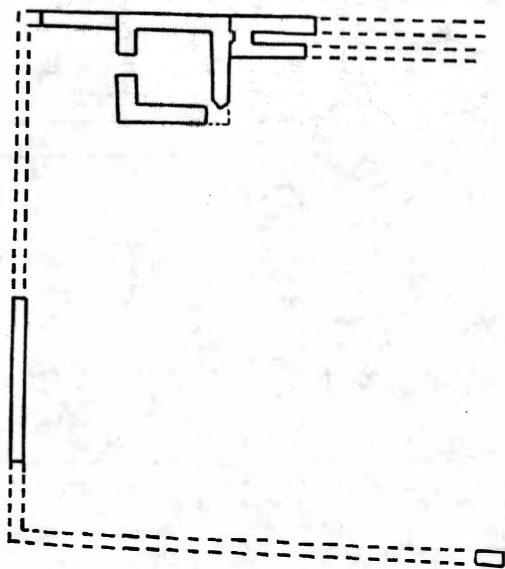
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Fig. 2

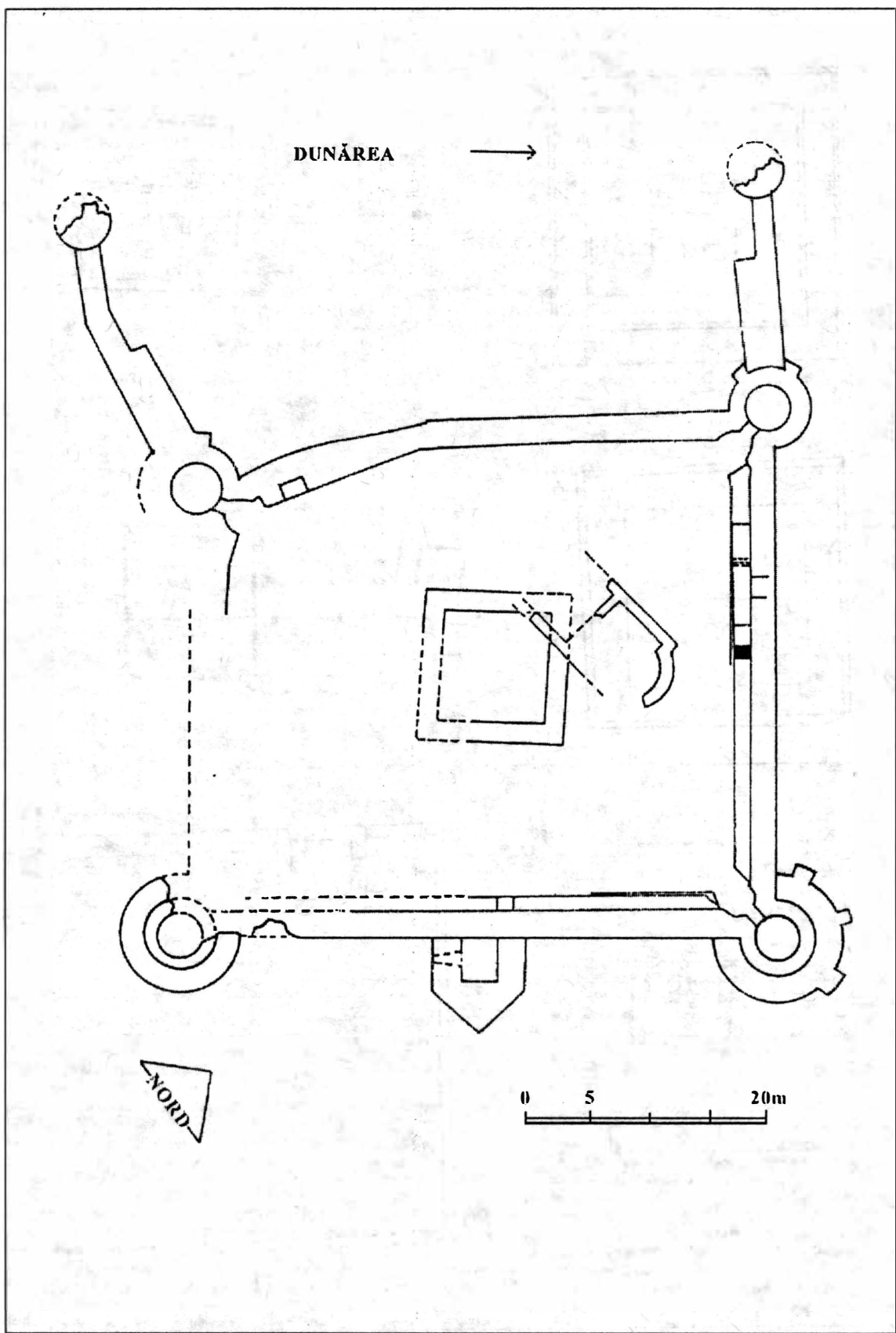


Fig. 3

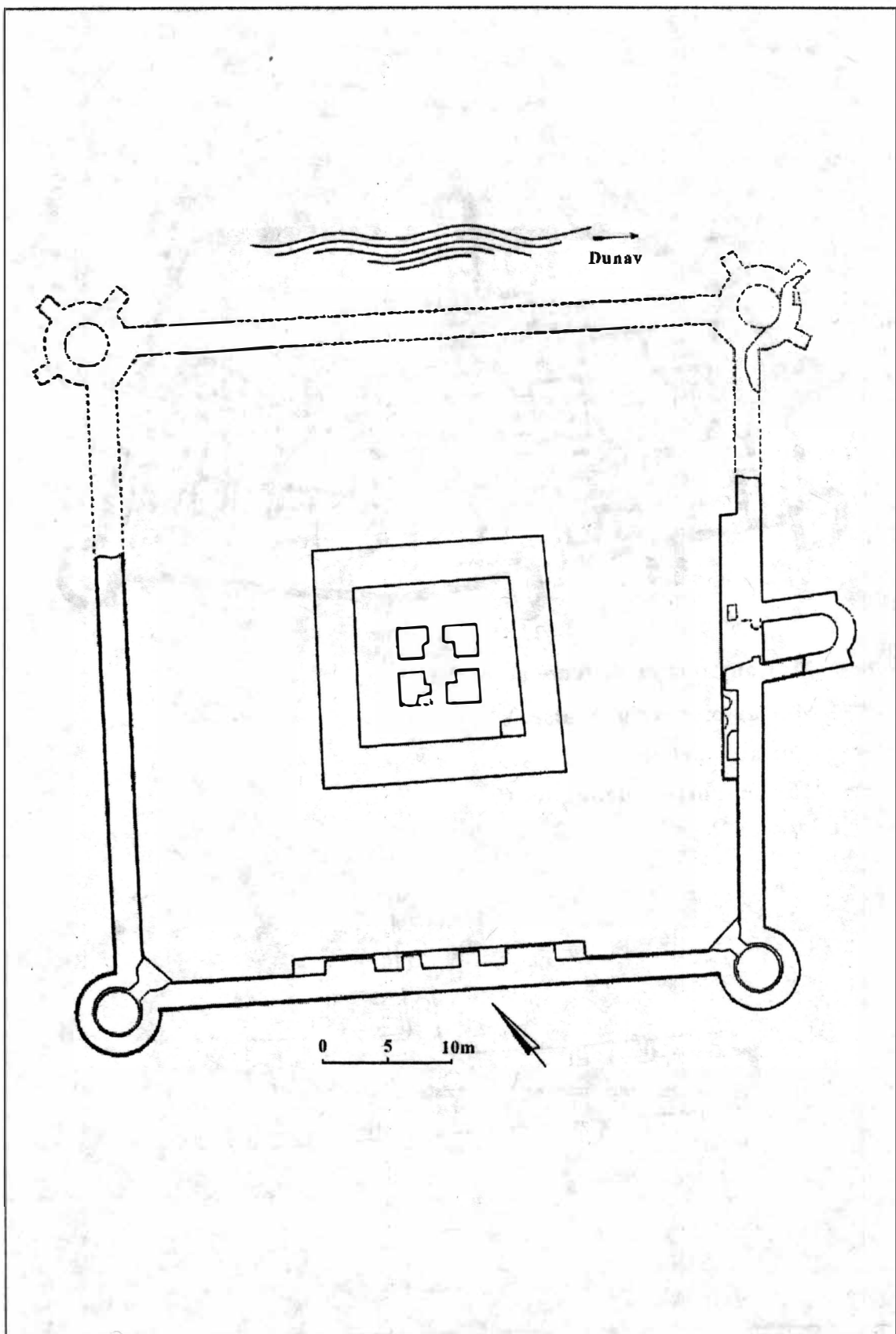
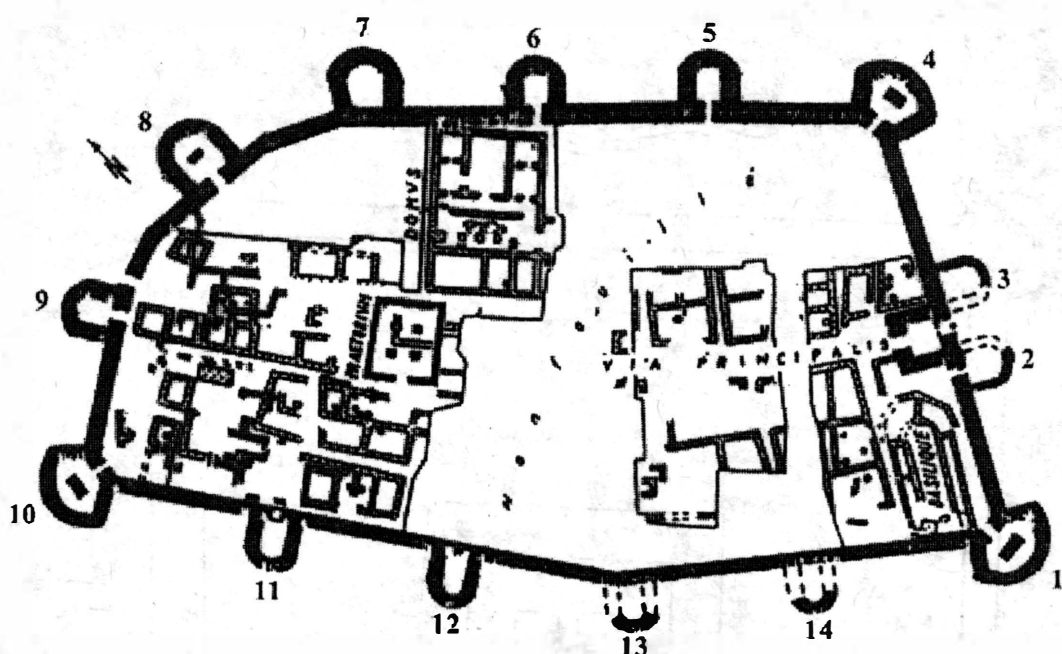


Fig. 4



— Mur au mortier de terre noire. VI<sup>e</sup> s.

— Mur au mortier de glaise. V<sup>e</sup> - VI<sup>e</sup> s.

— Mur au mortier. IV<sup>e</sup> s.

— Mur au mortier, debut du. IV<sup>e</sup> s.

♦ Jarre

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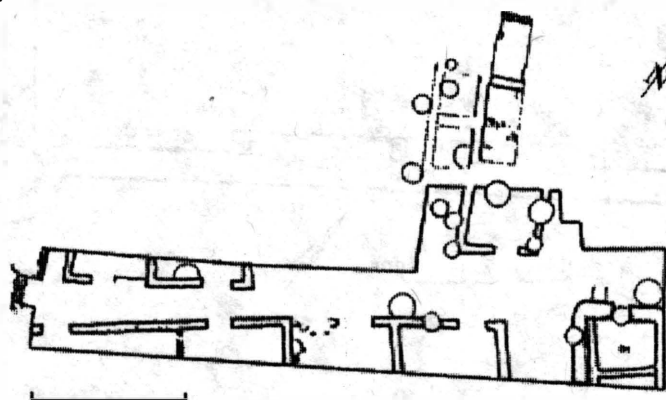


Fig. 5