

EARLY AND LATE ROMAN FORTIFICATION AT INDEPENDENȚA, TULCEA COUNTY

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Although the archaeological site near Independența commune, Tulcea county, was known in archaeological literature * ever since late 19th and early 20th century, it was not until 1981 that it saw systematic investigation, carried out on the initiative and with the financial support of the Center for Studies and Research in Military History and Theory, joined by the Archaeology Institute of Bucharest and the Danube Delta Museum of Tulcea, as collaborating institutions.

The area under investigation lies some 2.5 km east of the Independența commune, in the proximity of the road running from Independența to Dunavățul de Sus. It stretches over a rocky mound which advances into lake Cruhli Mare, its border on the north and east. From the south, the Cetatea Hill overlooks the archaeological site, and the plain surrounding lake Cruhli Mic (drained at present) borders it on the west.

The mound is some 7–8 meters higher than the surrounding area and the archaeological traces on the surface correspond to the structure of the terrain. Before diggings had been started, the area showed traces of walls, pottery, stone blocks, which the archaeological literature linked to the existence of a fortress. Likewise, a number of 15 presumed towers and traces of two earth walls and two ditches (on the western, southern and partially eastern sides) were visible at ground level.

Five campaigns (1981–1983 ; 1985–1986) were carried out according to a previously established protocol, in which two main trenches were dug, the former E–W(S1), 220 × 2 meters, totalling 110 squares of two meters each and the latter, N–S, (S2), 285 × 2 meters, comprising 143 squares of the same dimensions (figs 1 and 7).

The thorough examination of the two sections led to the conclusion that the rock underlying the settlement had a decided slope on the N–S direction, with a two-meters' level difference.

The data that have been obtained after careful investigation point to three great periods in the history of the site at Independența.

The first period (levels A and B), lasting between the 4th and the 2nd centuries B.C., corresponds to the existence of an autochthonous Geto-Dacian settlement in its Latène epoch.

The second period (levels 1–4), between the 1st century and the third quarter of the 3rd century, is an early Roman epoch when the first Roman civilian settlement existed side by side the autochthonous Geto-Dacian one, and was followed by an early Roman fortification with its two stages of development.

The third period (levels 5–13), between the last quarter of the 3rd century and the second or the third decade of the 7th century, is the period of the late Roman fortification.

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The First Period. Levels A and B. The first two levels of inhabitation go as far back as the epoch of the Geto-Dacians. Two levels of inhabitation were identified in both S1 (□ 21–22, 36–37, 46–49, 52–53) and in S2 (□ 24–25, 69, 110–111, 117). *Level A* which consists of clay floors can be dated back due to a fragment of a 4th–3rd century Greek vessel, an ear of a Chersonesus amphora (250–200 B.C.), which was found in □ 46–49 (S1. – 2.50–2.90 m) and a fragment of a Rhodos amphora, which apparently came from the last quarter of the 3rd century B.C. (□ 121, S2). *Level B* is characterized by deeply charred floors, where fragments of autochthonous and Hellenistic pottery were found. Two coins from Callatis (in its autonomy period), found in □ 37 (S1. – 1.60 m) entitle us to establish the 2nd century B.C. as chronological reference for the second Getic level.

The Second Period. Level 1 was identified in S1 □ 7–9 (fig. 4) and S2, □ 83–84 (fig. 2), at c. – 3.10 m. For the time being, no brick-and-mortar building can be attributed to this level. The early Roman pottery (1st century B.C.) and some Hellenistic or autochthonous fragments point to a very early period, probably the second half or the last third of the 1st century, when within the area under research existed a Roman civilian settlement.

* For the history of research see p. 87–96, in the same volume.

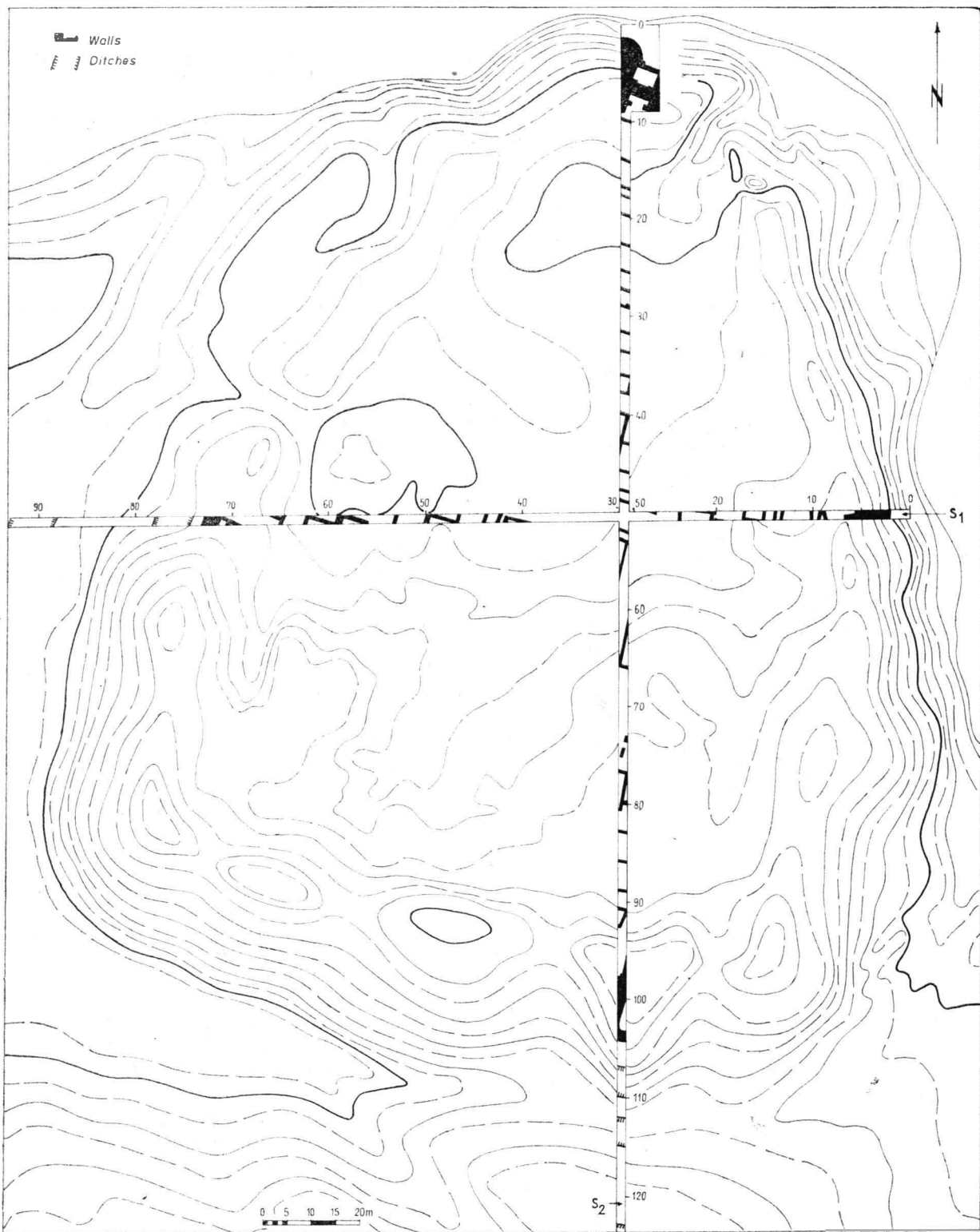


Fig. 1. Independența. The general plan with the two sections.

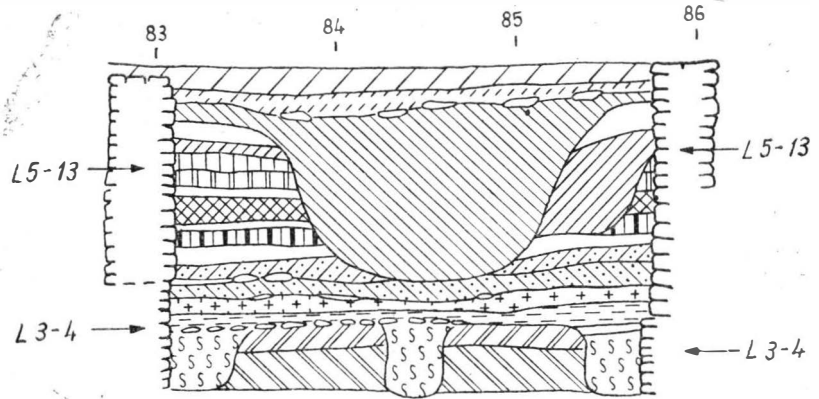
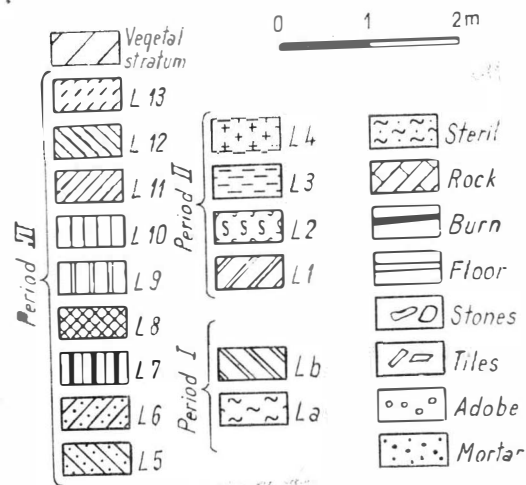


Fig. 2. Independența. S2
The eastern profile in □
84-86.



Level 2 was remarked only at the eastern and the western extremities of S1 (□ 7-9 and 66-67; figs 4 and 5) and S2 (□ 83-86. (fig. 2), at a depth of about 3.00-3.75 m. An important peculiarity is to be noted in S2, □ 83-86, where level 2 consists in three pits filled in with gravel belonging to level 3. If these pits were proved as resulting from wooden pillars, we could presume that an earth fortification (or with wooden buildings inside) had existed on level 2, an ever more plausible hypothesis taking into account the vexillation altar discovered in 1985. The altar as well as the early Roman pottery trace the level back to early 2nd century and its first three quarters.

Level 3, c. - 2.80 m, can be distinguished in certain parts of the fortress only. It is actually the early Roman fortification identified in the southern precinct S2, □ 94-98 (fig. 3) and in C3 (fig. 6). In □ 98 it appears as a substructure of schist stone and white hard mortar, making up a rectangular inner tower (fig. 10). Level 3 is represented in □ 84-85 by a compact layer of blocks, probably a street of the early fortification (fig. 2). In S1 □ 65-67 level 3 displays a possible hydraulic layout (fig. 5) and pavements in □ 7-9 (fig. 4). The date of the level can be established with relative certainty due to a coin from Caracalla found in S2, □ 96 and a colonial coin from the first half of the 3rd century found in S1, □ 60 which would indicate either the period of the colonial piece or the last quarter of the 2nd century towards mid 3rd century. It is to this level that the walls of □ 59-60, and 71 (S1) also belong (fig. 5).

On level 4, c. - 2.65 m, the early stone fortification is still functioning, having walls which also belonged to level 3, S1, □ 59-60, 71, (fig. 5); however, on the eastern side of S1, level 4 is represented only by clay floors (fig. 4). It is worth mentioning that both levels were remarked at the extremities of the two sections, while in the middle area they were not evident. The end of this level seems to have coincided with a new destruction, probably before the reconstruction during the third period.

The Third Period. Level 5 at c. - 2.50 m was identified over the entire area. It is the construction level of the presently visible fortress. It implied the partial replacement of the previous levels by a thick layer of earth brought from somewhere else, still bearing archaeological

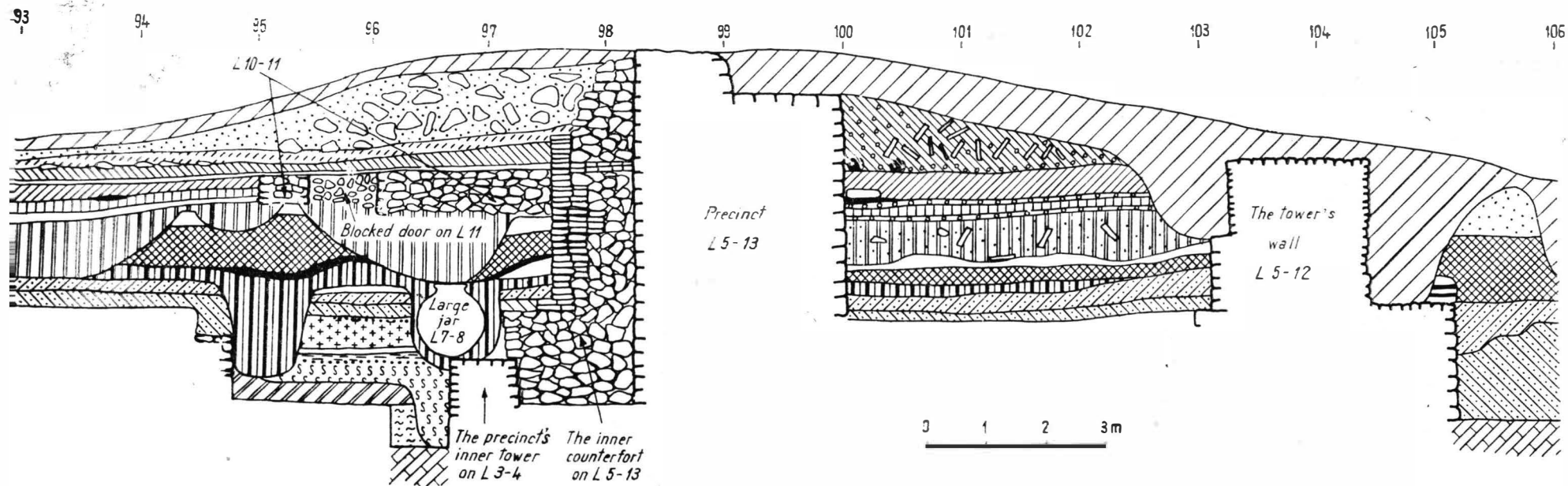


Fig. 3. Independența S2 The eastern profile in □ 94-106

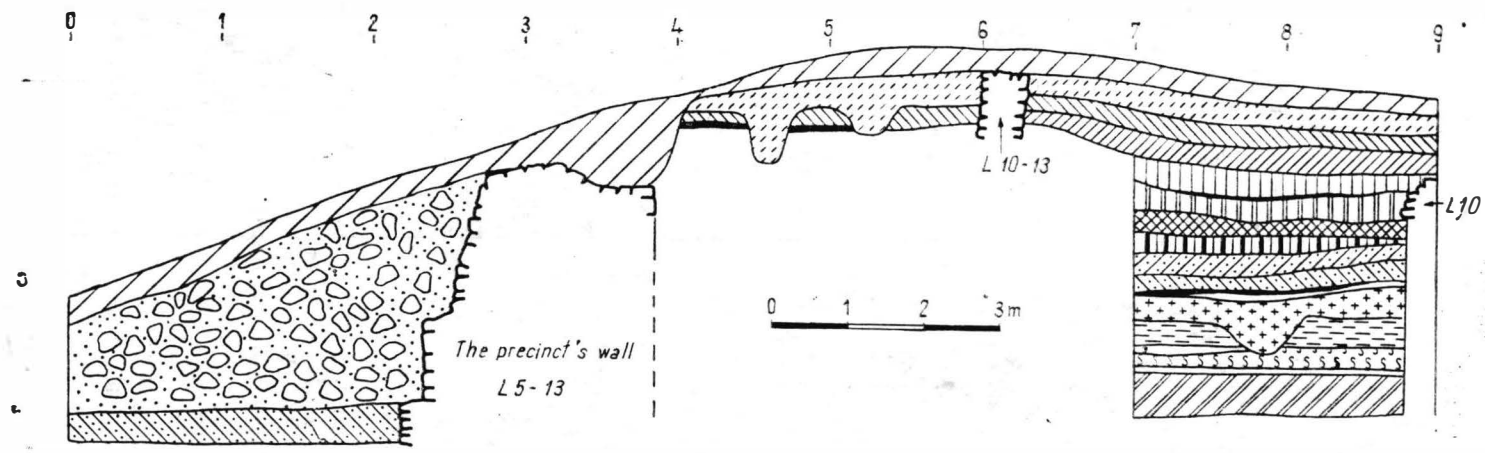


Fig. 4. Independența. S1
The southern profile in □
1-9.

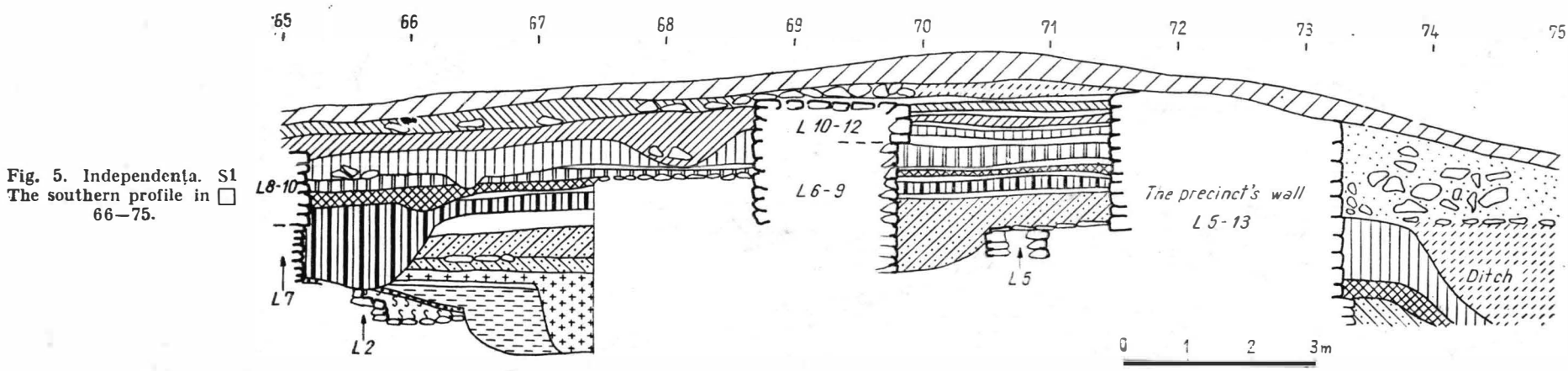


Fig. 5. Independența. S1
The southern profile in □
66-75.

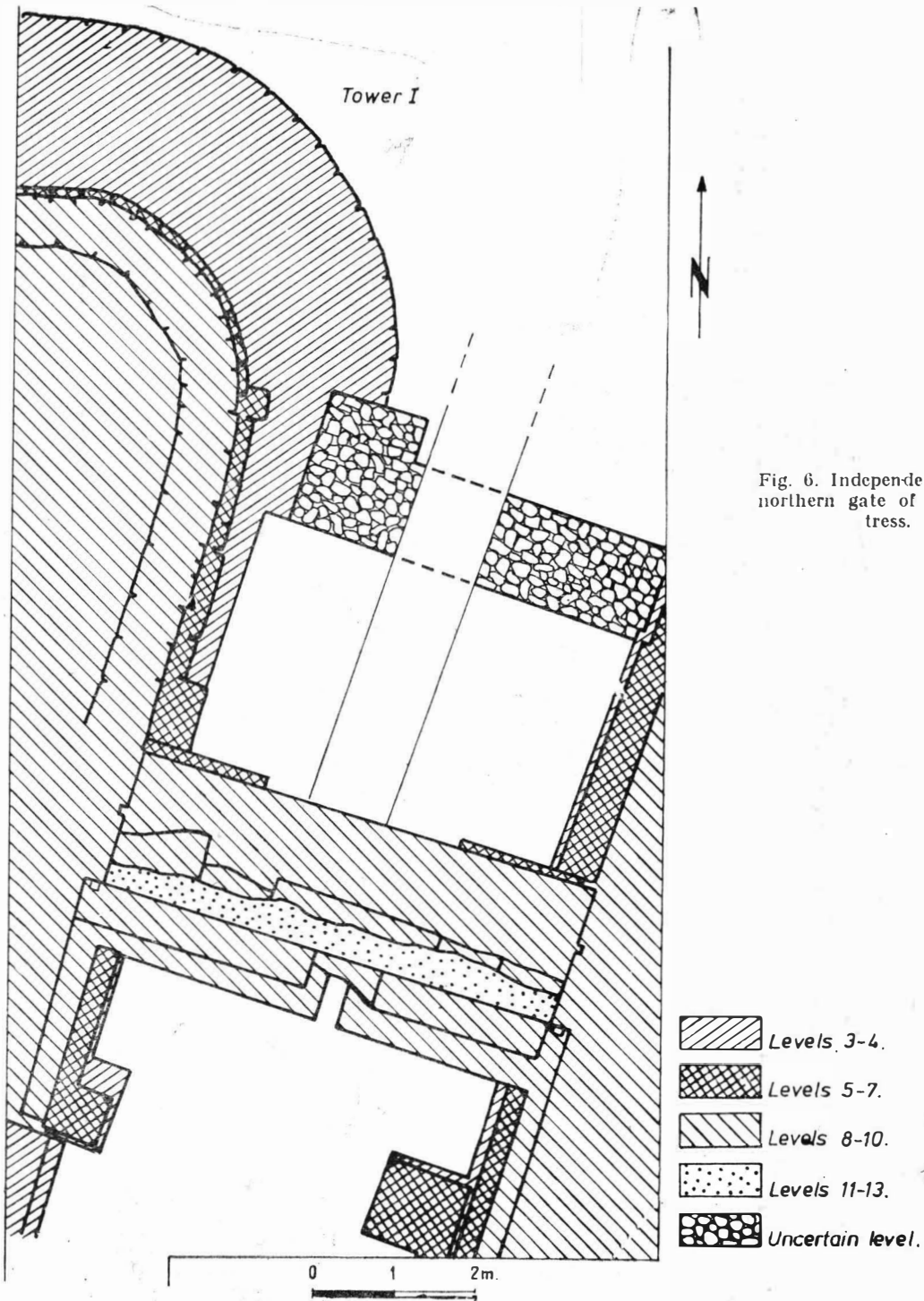


Fig. 6. Independența. The northern gate of the fortress.

traces of the preceding epochs. It was during this period that the 3.20 meters wide enclosure wall, the towers, the gates and the main buildings inside the fortress were erected, therefore it can be inferred that the distribution of the urbanistic network, probably changed, in comparison with its earlier configuration, and the construction of most of the buildings were to take place on level 6. We do not altogether rule out the possibility of incipient building which were to be finished on level 6. Actually, in S2 □ 39, in the sector of a great edifice which from now on we shall call *domus*, there is a wall in its initial stage of construction. The arterial lines of the fortress N—S and E—W are clearly drawn now, and while in □ 35—37 (S1) they appeared as mere levelling of the preceding ground, in □ 60—61 (S2) they are already accurately marked by a layer of blocks. The sequence of reconstruction is evident on the southern side of the enclosure

(figs 3, 9 and 10). An amorphous mass of schist stone and mortar covered quite early the brick-and mortar structure belonging to levels 3 and 4, presumed to be the tower of the early fortification, functioning as the bed plate of the foundation for the inner spur of the late-tower, with brick corners, which was built on that occasion. The late horseshoe-shaped tower is 11.50 m long (measured from the outer face of the northern enclosure wall) and has a 0.30–0.50 m wide plinth (figs 3 and 8). Only its inner face was preserved intact. It appears that no attempts to reconstruct the tower were made, and the partial investigation of its inner side pointed out eight levels of use, corresponding to the levels in the fortress. Extensive reconstruction works were noted in the northern precincts (see below). Level 5 can be dated on the basis of two coins, one from Probus time (S1 □ 11 – 2.45), and the other from Aurelianus'epoch (S2, □ 95 – 2.80 m) roughly indicating the second half of the 3rd century.

Level 6, at c. – 2.30 m, attests to a period of still massive construction of the fortress, a continuation of the preceding level. This holds true for the walls of buildings in □ 15, 17–18, 19, 20, 32, 36, 76–78 (S2); the first level of the reconstruction of the main lines, E–W and N–S, crossing the fortress (□ 52–61, S2) also belong to this level. In □ 98 (S2), level 6 extends over the plinth of the spur of the inner tower, which was identified in that place (fig. 3), thereby signalling that this level, with which the construction of the fortress comes to an end, takes over previous edilitary activities. In the sector of the *domus*, there are traces pointing to the fact that the walls of the rooms were built in this period (S2 □ 40, 43–44, 45, 47). Likewise, the building of the thermal installation from S1 □ 18–19 – of which the apsis with its red plastered walls and its hypocaust were preserved – belong to the same level. Level 6 also includes a big building made of stone bound with mortar, its inside plated with big flagstones, and leaning against the western precincts wall, with a function that is still to be ascertained. The continuous constructive line running from level 5 to level 6 could also suggest a longer lasting level with two distinct phases. Level 6 can be dated due to two lamps and a set of coins ranging from Licinius I to Constantius II, therefore the first half of the 4th century.

Level 7, at about – 1.80 m, seems to be made up of two different phases, **a** and **b**. Level 7 **a** is represented by relatively high quality floors or pavements, as well as by the fact that the *domus*, the mortar edifice on the western side, the thermal installations and the two arterial lines were still in function, in addition to some other buildings. The distinctive elements of level 7 **b** are a circular building made of stone and bound with clay, identified in S1 □ 63, which intersected the pavement of level 7 but also overlapped the pavement of level 8 and the wall without foundation from S1 □ 70. However, we should point out the fact that the phases, albeit distinctive, could not be identified over the entire area of the two trenches. Consequently, many walls can be attributed to level 7 in general, without chronological distinctions. Level 7 includes walls of buildings in S1 □ 17–18, 19, 20, 32, 36, 44–45, 54, 59–60, 61, 70 (fig. 5); the walls in S1 □ 30 and S2 □ 45, 63, 65 were newly built. The arterial line N–S was remade as attested to by the layer of schist blocks from S2 □ 58–60. On the northern edge of the fortress, the precincts wall suffered serious damage, a sign maybe that the precinct was in a critical situation, the damage being mended during the following level. It can be estimated that the general period of this level is mid 4th century (a coin issued by Valentinian, 364–367) and the end of the 4th century (a treasury of 47 coins of which the late ones come from 395–408).

Level 8, c. – 1.50–1.70 m is characterized by a 0.25–0.30 m thick clay floor, covering the entire investigated area. The inner side of the inhabitation level underwent perfect levelling as proved by some well preserved stone pavements (S2 □ 70–73). The previously identified and partially examined great edifices – the *domus*, the building with mortar in the western precincts, the two main lines, E–W and N–S, the thermal facilities – continue to exist and the fact that they were repaired is clearly visible. The repairs at the two arterial lines can be seen in S1 □ 35–39 and S2 □ 56–60. The collecting well endowed with a ditch from S1 □ 22–23 belongs to this level too. The constructive activity in the intramural area is proved by the walls of the buildings from S2 □ 72–74, 82–84, 88–90 and in S1 □ 47, 51; previous buildings continue to be in use (S2 □ 15, 16–18, 19, 20, 28, 30, 32 and S1 □ 45, 54, 61, 63, 68–70). The extensive repair of the *domus* can be seen in S2 □ 46–48, 49. The western and southern precincts also underwent massive repair: the western side was mended with schist stone and white hard mortar, as seen in S1 □ 72–74 (fig. 5), when a big breach in the southern side which had occurred on level 7 was filled in on that occasion. The reconstruction of the precincts walls, which so far had been noticed on three sides, seems to have been extended now over the entire perimeter, a fact minutely verified on the northern side of the enclosure of the fortress and which we shall resume later. As indicated by the pottery and particularly by a coin from Arcadius' time, (□ 71, – 1.80 m, S1) level 8 belongs to the first six decades of the 5th century.

Level 9, qualitatively inferior to the preceding one, was found at about 1.30–1.40 m deep and consists in a clay floor bearing traces of violent fire, which points to a difficult moment in the life of the fortress. The constructions of the previous level are nevertheless in use: the edifice with mortar on the southern side, the two main arterial lines, the *domus* and the buildings in S1, □ 47, 51 and S2, □ 11, 20, 28, 30, 32. Although level 9 is quite modest as compared with its antecedent, the constructive activity is nevertheless evident. It is to this level that the walls in S1, □ 18, 45, 54, 59, 61, 63, 70, or S2, □ 32, 34 can be attributed. However the walls with mortar from S1 □ 15, 17–18, 19 and the thermal building from □ 18–20 go definitely out of use, as indicated by a wall built over the absis. Chronologically, the pottery and two lamps point to the second half of the 5th century. Likewise, the two unidentifiable coins, 5th century in aspect, found in □ 66 suggest the same period as the ceramics.

Level 10, generally at – 1.10–1.20 m, consists of a heavy yellow earth floor, charred all over its surface. It is the last period of urban organization and massive reconstruction in the intramural area. The *domus* and the mortar edifice on the western side, having undergone repair, are still in use (S1 □ 65–72, fig. 5), as well as the main lines E–W and N–S. The repair works at the *domus* can be seen in □ 41, 46–47; previous walls and compartments were further used. Actually, many of the former walls were further made use of, as in S1 □ 46–47, 50–51, and S2 □ 10–11, 27–36, 43. In S1 □ 7, 9, 20–21, 39, 42, 44–47, 52, 54–60, 62–63, 65–66, 69–70 and S2 □ 14–15, 17–18 new walls and in S1 □ 21 a ditch were built. The western side (S1 □ 72–74) of the enclosure wall was rebuilt and as it will be further seen, its northern side was also rebuilt at far greater dimensions. Fine ceramics and coins from Iustinus I and Iustinianus I date level 10 to strictly the first half of the 6th century. Particular indications which require further verification do not exclude the extension into the third quarter of the same century.

Level 11 was identified at c. – 0.80–0.90 m and consists in a well-worn yellow earth floor. The entire area under research was covered by a thick layer of adobe, which shows traces of intense fire, an evidence that many of the buildings belonging to level 10 which were still in use had walls with an adobe superstructure. As convincingly attested in S1 □ 4–6 (fig. 4) buildings belonging to the previous level were actually still in use (S1 □ 5, 9, 14, 16–21, 23, 45–47, 54, 59, 63, 66). New walls were erected in S1 □ 66. The great edifices of the fortress, the *domus*, where reconstructive attempts are testified to in S2 □ 38–42, the mortar edifice in the western precincts whose window was filled in with bricks, and the two arterial lines running E–W and N–S were still preserved. The level is also characterized by the building of ovens and hearths (S1 □ 19–21, S2 □ 28–29, 75–76). The adobe levelling identified in both trenches and the charred layer indicate the fact that the fortress underwent serious destruction, part of the precincts being demolished. In S2 □ 91–97 (fig. 3), level 12 covers the remnants of the demolished enclosure wall of the previous level. The pottery – both of fine quality and for common use – and a coin dated back to 584–585, that is to Mauricius Tiberius' time, found in S2 □ 26, might indicate that the level prolonged its existence to late 6th century.

Level 12, identified all over the area of the fortress at – 0.50–0.70 m, is actually a clay floor with no traces of fire. The *domus*, the mortar edifice on the western side and the E–W arterial line remain in use while the N–S arterial line is almost out of use, and level 12 seems to be the last one to preserve its traces. Constructive efforts were also made and they were materialized in the erection of some buildings made of stone and bound with clay, found in S1 □ 10 and S2 □ 52, a street paved with flagstones (S2 □ 26–27) and hearths (S2 □ 28–29). Previous walls bound with mortar or clay were still made use of in S1 □ 6, 16–18, 21, 24, 39, 42, 44–47, 54, 59–60, 63 and in S2 □ 10, 14, 16, 19–23, 26, 28–29. The pottery, a coin from Mauricius Tiberius' time (582–602), as well as the already mentioned coin on level 11, as a *terminus post quem*, date level 12 back to late 6th century and also probably the first decade of the 7th century. We should also mention the three allogeneous vessels found in S1 □ 61–62, alongside local Roman pottery.

Level 13, the last one to be identified in the fortress, does not have a unitary aspect in the two trenches. Generally, it was found some 0.30–0.50 meter deep as a layer of yellow earth and ashes with no traces of fire. The specific buildings of the level are the dwelling places made of stone and bound with mortar, half-buried or built on the surface, and of a rectangular or circular shape, which turned the hearths (S1 □ 5, fig. 4) and the walls of the preceding levels into integral components (S1, □ 7, 11, 16, 21, 24, 39, 42, 44, 59, 63, and S2 □, 11, 21, 27). There are also a circular building in S2 □ 10–12, the half-buried rectangular dwelling places from S2, □ 24–26, 37–38, 47–48, and the surface dwelling places with foundationless walls in S1 □ 16.23 and S2 □ 92–93. Some of the dwelling places on level 13 are made by altering

Fig. 7. Independența. General view of S2.

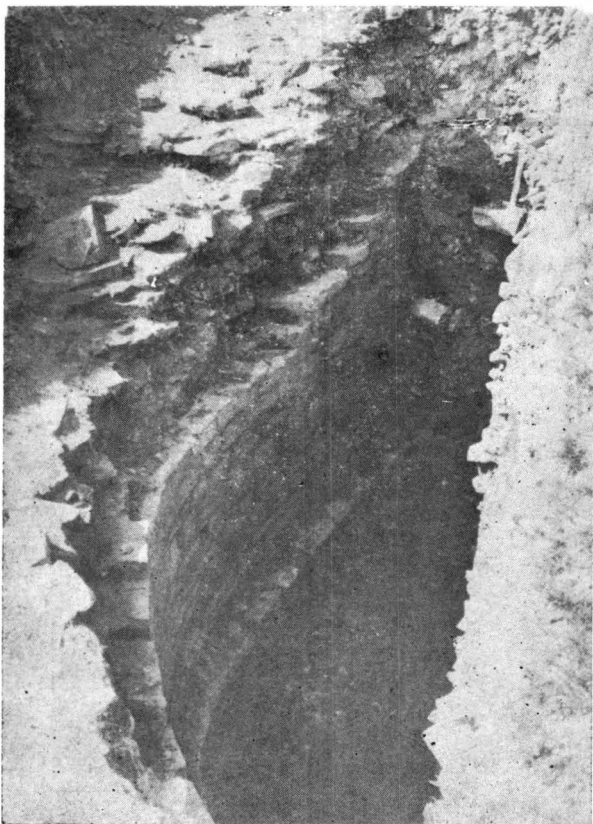
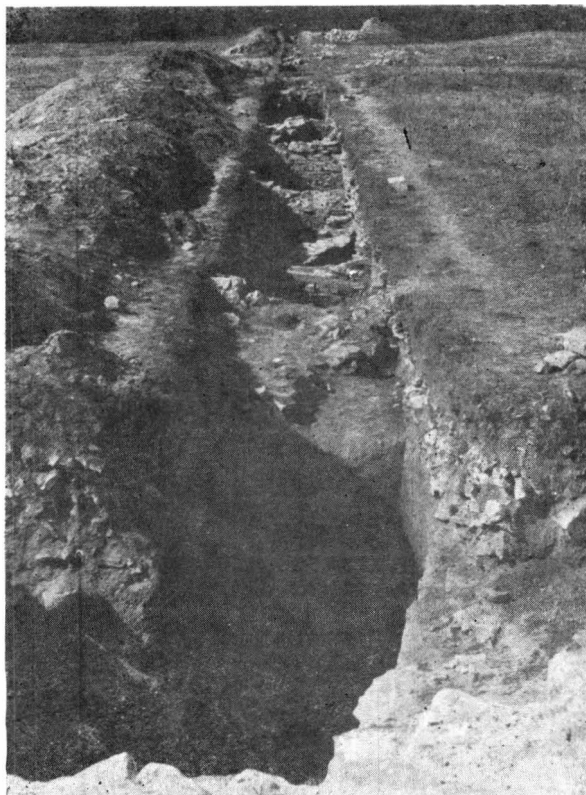


Fig. 8. Independența. The tower on the southern side of the fortification.

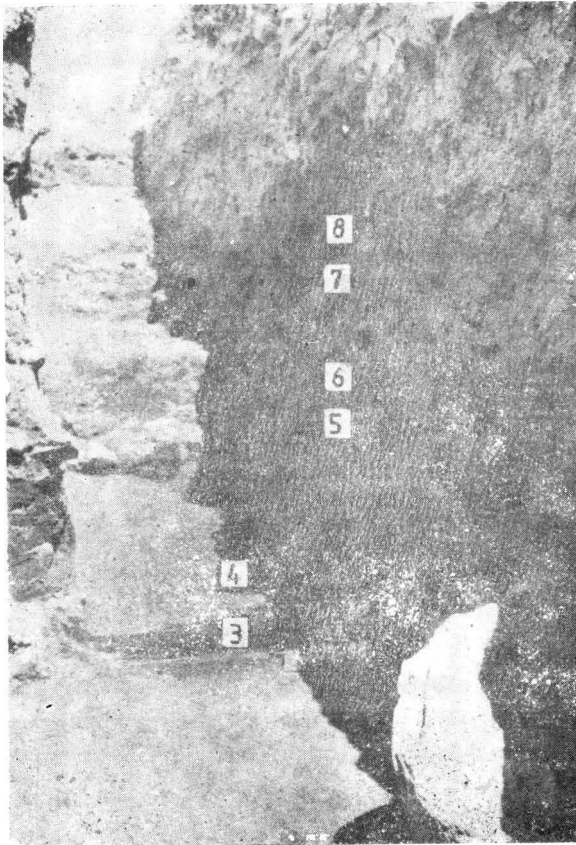


Fig. 9. Independența. The eastern profile in S2 □ 94–96.

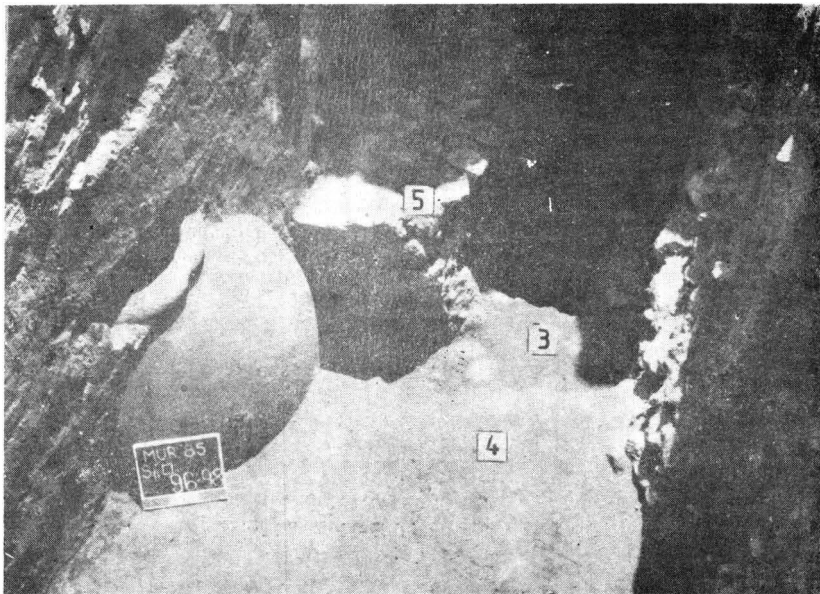


Fig. 10. Independența. S2 □ 97–98 : the overlap of the early Roman fortification by the later one.

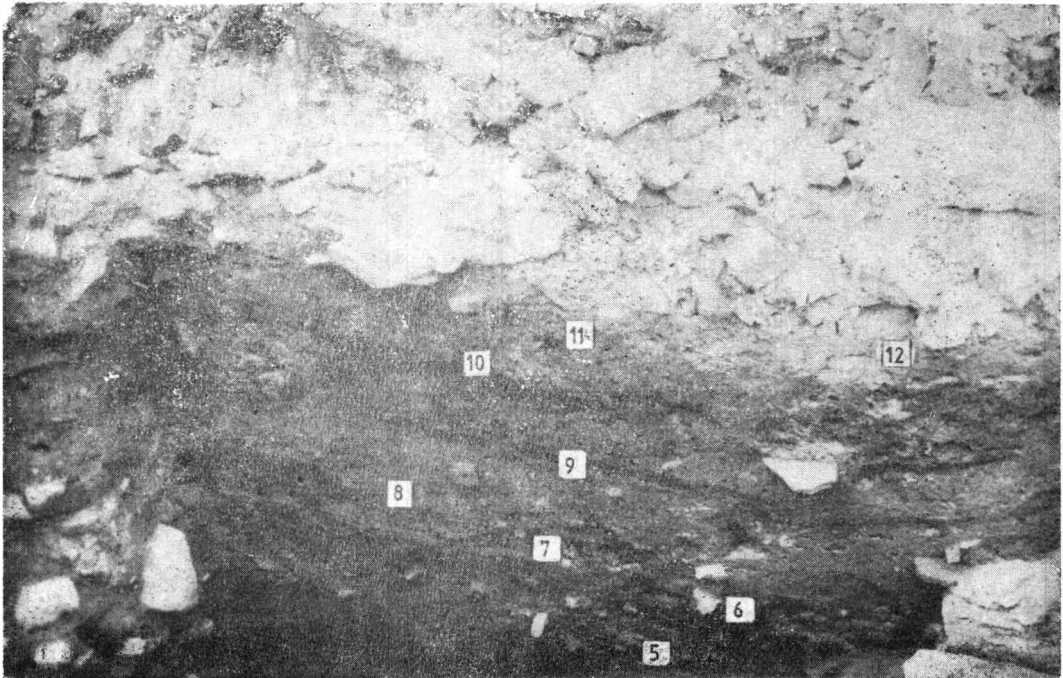


Fig. 11. Independența. S2 □ 7-9. Stratigraphy of the northern gate.

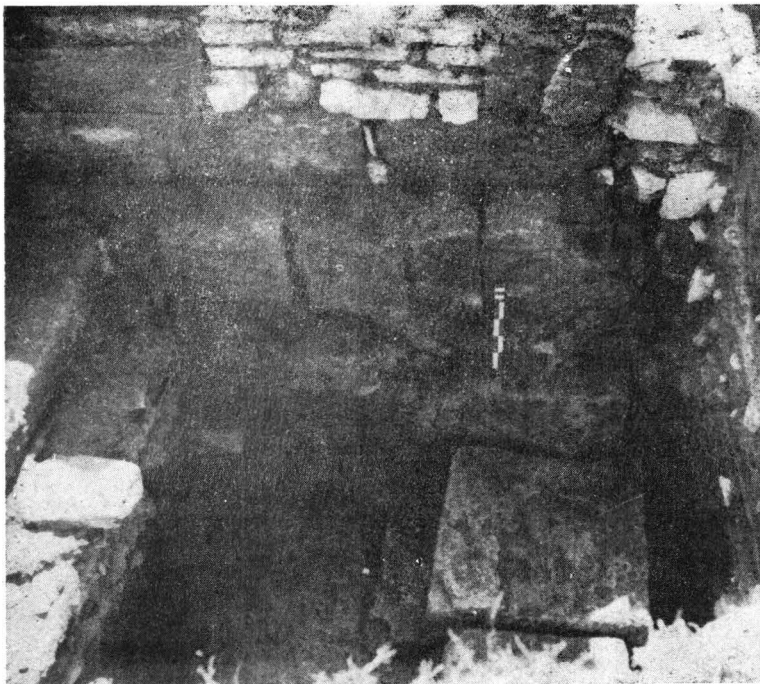


Fig. 12. Independența. S2 □ 7-9. The phases of the northern gate.

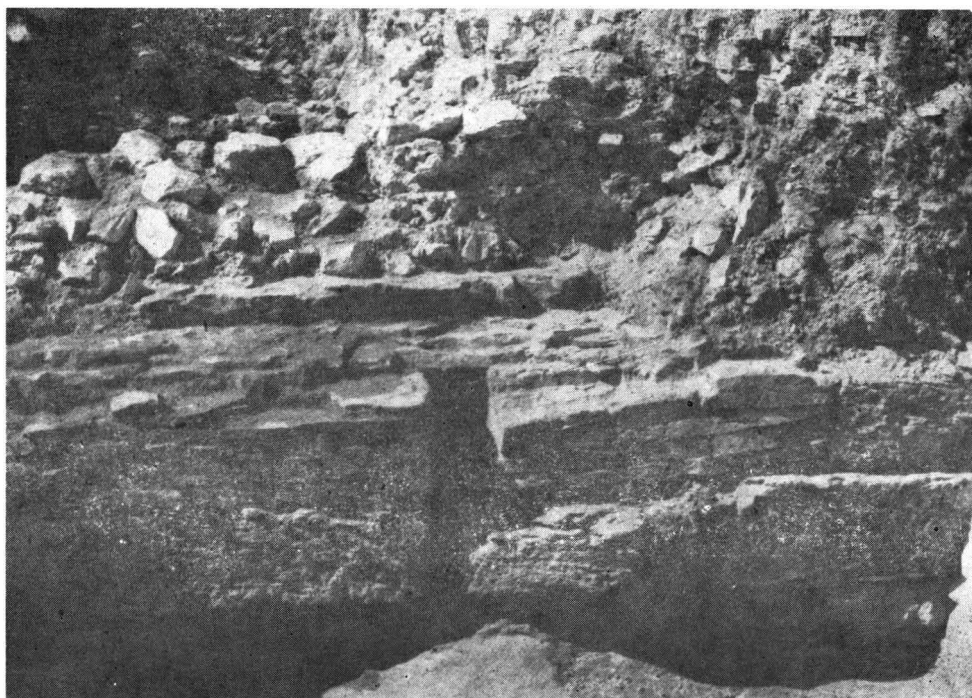


Fig. 13. Independența. S2 □ 5–7. The northern gate. View from the south.



Fig. 14. Independența. S2 □ 4–6. The northern gate. The wall of the western tower.

previous constructions such as those in S2 □ 37–38 and 42 where older walls were demolished for accommodation. It is highly probable, although we cannot assert it with absolute certainty, that the differences in the building technique of the dwelling places should point to two distinct stages of inhabitation within one and the same level. Most of the great buildings, as well as the street network go definitely out of use, being completely ignored by the inhabitants of the level. The precincts wall on the southern side of the fortress is far higher than its general height of level 13, a fact suggesting that it was turned into a mere shelter and did not represent a firm defensive element. Moreover, the situation from S1 □ 69–72 (fig. 5) where the floor of the level covers the debris of the precincts wall proves that the latter was in a state of advanced ruin.

The pottery in Roman style which can be found side by side with fragments of alien nature, a coin issued during Focas' time 602–610 and overstricken during Heraclius' time 612–613 (S1, □ 65, – 0.30 m) date the level back to at least the second decade of the 7th century, although the coin could also indicate only a moment in the life of the level which could have been longer, extending into the following decades of the same century.

During the campaigns of 1985–1986, we examined the northern gate of the fortress (fig. 6) in three squares C1–C3, and to a smaller degree its eastern tower (tower 15). Several constructive stages were distinguished.

Stage I represents the gate of the stone fortress in the early Roman epoch (levels 3–4); the walls flanking the entrance were built of schist stone bound with hard white-greyish mortar (fig. 12). During that stage the gate was 3.40 meters wide. The U letter shaped tower which exceeds by 8.25 meters the threshold of the gate belongs to this stage. The threshold of the gate of the early fortification corresponds to the level outside it, where massive ruin was ascertained as early as 1985.

Stage II corresponds chronologically to levels 5–7; the superstructure of stage I of the gate is now demolished. (fig. 14). Black earth with many archaeological remnants (Geto-Dacian Hallstattian and Latène pottery, Hellenistic and early Roman pottery) was laid over the foundation, completely covering the brick-and-mortar layer of the previous stage. In stage II large blocks of yellowish calcar were used both at the gate and the towers. In profile, the level of construction is seen as a layer of calcar crumbs, which resulted from the cutting and fitting in of the blocks into the new structure (fig. 11). We should point out the fact that stage II follows the same line as stage I, leaving a small plinth at its base. In stage II, the gate is 3.60 meters wide and the towers, of the same U letter shape, show a marked retreat of their front as compared to stage I, a fact which is evident at tower I and partially in tower 15. The threshold of the gate is made of large blocks of yellowish calcar placed on the previous threshold which was slightly heightened by means of gravel and mortar. It is possible that the layer of calcars outside the gate was levelled up to the threshold, as it has a slight slope.

Stage III corresponds chronologically to levels 8–10. The layer of calcars from stage II was covered by a 0.30 m thick layer of earth mixed with stones. The area of stage II of the gate was overlaid with irregular blocks of schist stone bound with mortar, making up a 0.30 meter wide ditch to collect the dirty or rain water (fig. 13). Inside the gate the layout for the ditch served as support for the threshold proper of the gate, which was obviously higher and consisted of three large calcar blocks, bearing inscriptions, and still lying on their face *in situ*. The superstructure of the gate was made in the same manner as in stage II, that is from huge blocks of yellowish calcar. The blocks of stage III were laid over the substructure of stage II in order to build up a solid groundwork for the superstructure proper of the gate, which was built in identical manner. The constructions of stage III turned to better use blocks belonging to stage II. The towers were rebuilt in the same manner, with the peculiarity that at tower I the previous exfoliated blocks were replaced with new ones, some of them taken directly from the superstructure of the inner gate, as proved by a block which had served as fold at the stage II of the gate. The entrance of the gate reached the greatest dimensions – 5.77 and 6.35 m in the area of the folding. The inner side of the tower was filled in with gravel and schist stone, thereby the interior platform being raised. An extremely hard yellow clay floor covered the inner pavement, serving as a first layer of calcars for the new tower.

The layer of calcars outside stage II of the gate was levelled from stage III almost to the layer of calcars belonging to the stage I of the gate, leaving room for the connecting ditch which remained unchanged till the end of the fortress. On that level, which also included the ruins resulted from the two towers, three funeral inscriptions were found. On the eastern area outside the gate, on level 6–7 a large vessel was buried which is to go out of use on level 8, but the remaining half is still preserved on levels 8–10, as proved by the ceramical remnants.

Stage IV, which chronologically corresponds to levels 11–13, is characterized by extensive repair work at the northern gate which was mended by means of schist blocks of small and medium size bound with white breakable mortar, fit in the superstructure of stage III of the gate, replacing the exfoliated or destroyed blocks. Tower 1 also underwent repair. Consequently, the entire width of the entrance of the gate was blocked with schist and calcar stones bound with mortar mixed with pound brick.

A wall of schist stone bound with earth 1.30 meter thick was built at a later stage either to strengthen the terrain or to support the wooden bridge of a probable harbour facility.

The diggings carried out over 1981–1985 revealed the outer defence system of the fortress. On the west, a berme with three phases (corresponding to levels 5, 8 and 10), a ditch (in use on the same levels), then a first wall in which two levels could be ascertained (5 and 8), a new ditch, and finally a second wall identical in structure with the first were found.

Research carried out on the southern side, from the tower towards the exterior, discovered a 5-level berme, a ditch, a wall (levels 5 and 8), a moment when a new ditch was dug from level 10. Walls 2, 3 and 5 separated by the respective ditches seem to have been initiated on level 5, and built later on, on level 8. Although we are not in a position yet to make a correlation between the two situations (the number of walls in the southern area is greater than in the western one), we should remark that in both cases, after the second wall, an extramural settlement was ascertained, corresponding to levels 9–10.