

Drastar (Silistra) and the Danube residence of the Bulgarian khans during the first half of the 9th c. (Abstract)

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Durostorum is the only major Roman city in the borders of pagan Bulgaria, whose fortifications were rebuilt and used throughout the Middle Ages. The possibility that the fortress was restored as early as the late 7th c. during the reign of Khan Asparuch (665-700/701), as stated in the Anonymous Bulgarian Chronicle and accepted by many scholars, should be rejected. It is specified that the text of the Chronicle is not from the 11th c., but it is rather a 13th c. compilation. Archaeological investigations in Silistra have not brought to light 8th c. finds. Actually, around the southern gate and at sites near the Danube, small amount of Slavonic pottery and Penkovka type of pottery are found, but they date from the last decades of the 6th and the 7th c. (Fig. 2). They should be related to the end of the life in Roman and Byzantium Durostorum – Dorostol in the second half of the 7th c. The earliest authentic artifacts, attesting the presence of the Bulgarians in Drastar, date from the end of the 8th – the beginning of the 9th c. First of all, pottery fragments are found under the foundations of the cathedral basilica on the banks of the Danube and to the west of it (Fig. 3). These fragments belong to low spheroidal jars made of well purified clay of black and gray colour, with traces of burnishing on the surface (Figs. 3-3), and high jars made of clay with brown admixtures, with surface that is densely covered with incised parallel and wavy lines. Much more secure evidence for life in Drastar in early 9th c. is offered by several inscriptions, related to the reign of Khan Omurtag (814-831), and especially a column with inscription ΚΑΝΑΚΥΒΙΓΓΙ ΟΜΟΡΤΑΓ (KHAN SUVIGI OMURTAG) on the first row and ΣΤΡΑΤΗΓΟΣ (THE STRATEGUS) on the second (Figs. 4, 5). It is known that in 809, during the reign of Khan Krum (803-814),

some Byzantine *strategoi* were involved in the Bulgarian army. They were removed from the army in the time of Khan Omurtag, around 816. In my opinion, one of them was active in Drastar between 809 and 816. Considering the lack of evidence for inhabitation of the fortress from the late 7th to the late 8th c., it is possible that he was engaged with the reconstruction of the early Byzantine structures of Durostorum and its transformation into a major military and administrative centre of early medieval Bulgaria. Special attention is paid to the early Byzantium fortifications of the city, reconstructed after the beginning of the 9th c., which have no analog in the Bulgarian lands. The fortress was built in the time of emperor Justinian I (527-565). It has a polygonal shape, or rather a trapezoidal one, according to the latest research (Fig. 1). It covers an area of 5 ha. From the northwestern corner on the Danube, a system begins that has no analog in the Late Antique and medieval fortifications. It consists of large pentagonal towers and small triangular bastions, alternating at intervals of 12 m in a configuration that is reminiscent of the system W-M (Figs. 1, 6). The vertical stratigraphy in front of the southern fortress wall and the characters incised into it, including the combination IYI (Figs. 9, 10), suggests that the fortress was used without any drastic changes during the Middle Ages. Very significant repairs are detected in the eastern fortress wall, where the early Byzantine gate was destroyed. In the beginning of 9th c., a new gate was constructed to east of the earlier one (Figs. 1 1, 7, 8). Its closest analogs are the gates of Pliska before their reconstruction, i.e. from the beginning of the 9th c., when the additional outer (second) double door was still not used.

The article discusses new evidence that the reconstructed fortress of Drastar

was the Danube residence of the Bulgarian rulers in 9-10th c. (the so-called “Preslaven dom” in the Omurtag’s inscription from Tarnovo). Four other inscriptions from the time of Khan Omurtag, found in Silistra, are adduced as additional arguments. It is suggested that the palace of Omurtag in Drastar was a massive tripartite building situated near the northern fortress wall (Fig. 1 4, 13,14). The unearthed tripartite bath (Fig. 1 5, 15, 16) in the same area of the fortress was probably connected with the palace. It has 9th c. parallels from Pliska, Preslav and the Aul of Khan Omurtag at the village of Khan Krum near Shumen. The unearthed pagan temple (*kapishte*) at the centre of the fortress, which was destroyed after the middle of the 9th c., is among the indisputable pagan monuments in Drastar (Fig. 1 8, 17, 18, 19). Unlike the temples in Pliska and Preslav, the *kapishte* in Drastar was not transformed into church, because there was already a sanctified place on the bank of the Danube, where in 362 St. Emilian from Durostorum was burnt. For that reason, the stone blocks from the *kapishte* in the centre of Drastar were dismantled and transported

to the Danube, where a cathedral church was built after the middle of the 9th c. (Fig. 10). On the grounds of earlier excavations, my conclusion is that in the first half of the 9th c. only three monumental buildings were constructed in the citadel of Drastar: the Danube palace of the Bulgarian rulers, the ruler’s bathhouse and the pagan temple (Fig. 1). Perhaps there were other secondary buildings, such as barracks for a small garrison and storehouses, but that does not change the general picture. Obviously Drastar was a “closed city” with exclusive access, designed for the ruler and his entourage and used as refuge during enemy attacks, providing shelter to the neighbouring population and military contingents. Attention is paid to the small amount of archaeological materials from the 9th c. in Silistra. That is explained with the leveling of the terrain in late 9th – early 10th c., when the patriarchal cathedral and the patriarchal residence were built. Archaeological arguments are adduced to reject the localizations of the so-called “*Preslaven dom na Dunav*” in Pacuiul lui Soare and near the village of Malak Preslavec, Silistra District.