

The Roman-Byzantine castellum of Durostorum-Dorostol on the bank of the Danube in Silistra (Abstract)

Georgi Atanasov

The present study presents the Late Antique urban agglomeration of Durostorum-Dorostol and the construction of a new fortification – the castellum on the bank of the Danube. On the grounds of two inscriptions, its beginnings are dated to the very late 3rd c., when an active monetary circulation emerged, attested by ten coins of the Emperor Diocletian (283-305) and pottery from the 4th c. The ground plan of the 4th c. northern wall along the Danube was also complemented, as a new rectangular tower was discovered recently (Fig. 2, 1). Based on the stratigraphy, the narrative sources and the monetary circulation, it was established that about the middle of the 5th c. the fortress was demolished and in the 6th c., under Justinian I (527-565), new fortifications were built *ad fundamentum* (Fig. 2). At some places, mainly to the east, the ruins of the 4th c. walls were used as foundations (Fig. 4), but in most cases (especially to the south) the wall follows a new course.

In result of the archaeological investigations in 1969-1972, 1986-1987, and most of all in 2007-2011, the plan and the elements of the new fortification were specified. It is without parallel in the Late Antique and medieval fortification works. The castellum has a polygonal, trapezoid-like shape, encompassing an area of about 5 ha (Fig. 1, 2). The curtain wall follows an indented course in W-M system, and at

intervals of 12 m, at the apexes of the wall, there were large pentagonal towers with cylindrical interiors for stairs, with small solid triangular towers (Fig. 2, 5, 6) in the recesses. The wall was solid with foundations up to 3 m deep and 3.60 m wide. The first four courses of the superstructure were built of large ashlar (often reused) with emblectum of split stones and pink mortar. Above them, up to the platform, the wall was built in pseudo-brick masonry with identical emblectum. Only the northern wall along the Danube was entirely of stone blocks. It was up to 4.20 m thick and the foundations were 4.50 m deep (Fig. 2, 3).

A postern in the northern wall was discovered (Fig. 2, 2), as well as two gates, respectively in the eastern and the southern wall (Fig. 2, 13, 14). The southern gate was flanked by two towers of almond-shaped ground plan, enclosing large propugnaculum, some 10 by 12 m. The eastern gate probably had a similar ground plan, but it seems that in the 7th c. it was razed to the ground and, in the early 9th c., on top of its ruins a new medieval gate was built, similar to the gates of Pliska.

Stratigraphic observations indicate that the fortress, constructed in the 6th c., was rebuilt in the early 9th c. It was used throughout the Middle Ages and the Ottoman Period, and historical and archaeological evidence date its

destruction to the Russian-Ottoman war in the summer of 1810.

Regarding the plan and the specific features of the fortress (or rather the citadel) of Durostorum-Dorostol-Drastar-Silistra, parallels are adduced of all elements of the fortifications - towers, gates, the curtain wall, configuration, building techniques, etc. It is noted that its constructions followed the directions of the Classical authors Philon, Vitruvius, Vegetius and most of all of the so-called Anonymous Byzantine (Military Compendium of Sirianus Magiste) - a case without parallel in the fortification works. It is established that similar towers with sharp edges have parallels mostly in fortresses from 5th-7th c., but there are no known examples of identical pentagonal towers with constricted base. The gates also reveal specifics that could be seen in Ancyra and Serdica, but there is no identical; parallel. The same could be seen in the indented curtain wall of W-M system. It is attested in some parts of the

walls of Thessaloniki, Aquileia, and Chersonesus, but never in such a regular manner, and *ad fundamentum*. The building technique is unusual, especially the pseudobrick masonry above the plinth to the platform. In general, the plan of the citadel of Durostorum-Dorostol-Drastar resembles the Vauban type fortifications that appeared and became popular only in the 17th c. This is one of the reasons for the citadel to remain in use for 13 centuries, including in 17th-19th c., when the Vauban system was the standard for the European fortifications.

There emerges the legitimate question if the fortress of Dorostol-Drastar-Silistra, completely preserved by that time and described in detail by Evliya Çelebi and other foreign authors, could have been one of the prototypes to inspire Marshal Sébastien de Vauban and his followers, as it was well known in Europe from descriptions of travelers and annalists from 15th to 18th c.