

THE PROVINCIAL STONE FORTRESSES OF THE FIRST BULGARIAN EMPIRE (9TH – THE BEGINNING OF THE 11TH C. AD)

(Summary)

INTRODUCTION

The provincial stone fortresses play a crucial role in the defensive system and road networks of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, while comprising a distinct category of settlement sites. Numerous questions important for the reconstruction of life in Early Medieval Bulgarian state arise from this. The considerable number of provincial fortresses suggests they were the product of a complex system of diverse relationships and interactions set within the frame of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. The recorded architectural diversity invites questions on planning, construction, function, and origin. Archaeological examination of those fortresses increased immensely data available on them. Thus, a want for a new comprehensive study, dealing with information accumulated since the last such attempt published by Rasho Rashev some 30 years ago, emerged.

The present study does not engage with the stone fortresses of ashlar masonry, identified in the epigraphic monuments and some written sources as “*auls*.” There are several reasons for this. Information from both documents, and archaeological investigations, points undoubtedly to the conclusion that the “*auls*” had permanent or at least short term residential functions and were directly linked to the sovereign’s court. This is also reflected in their specific architectural design, including monumental masonry for the buildings, presence of palace and temple buildings, baths and other water management structures. All those specifics ground the attribution of Pliska, Preslav, Drastar, the fortress on the island of Păcuil lui Soare, and the aul by Khan Krum to a distinct group of monuments, one that has been already the subject of inquiries of a number of authors. The presence of the above listed features has also been the major argument for the exclusion of these monuments from the group of what is here designated as “provincial,” i.e. non-residential, not-capital sites. However, the two groups are brought together in the discussion of the total road and defense systems of the First Bulgarian Kingdom (Map 1,2,4-6). Ohrid, too, is excluded from this study since, after the transfer of the government seat to the southwestern Bulgarian territories, it has been mentioned and regarded as Bulgarian capital by contemporaries such as Emperor Vassilius II. Although the existence of a fortification prior to Ohrid’s transformation into a capital city is quite possible, the absence of any verifiable information on it renders its study impossible. Other fortresses of the southwestern Bulgarian territories, such as Prespa, Skopje, Voden, Koprinishta (Pronishta), Măglen and Setina (cat. nos 135, 145, 151, 157, 163, 169) (map 6) have been mentioned by Byzantine chronicists as linked to the Bulgarian ruling family. The information at hand does not permit to distinguish them from the rest of the fortresses of the southwestern Bulgarian territories of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, by neither architecture, function, nor any other features. Furthermore, they were not attributed special significance – as co-capitals, etc. – by contemporaries, and because

of this are here regarded together with the rest of the stone outlying fortresses. It is possible that the association of those monuments with the ruling dynasty should be seen in connection with the mobility of the court and with the need for strongholds sheltering it under the conditions of a perpetual war with the Byzantine Empire.

Outside the scope of this study fall also the earthen fortifications. They are the elements of an earlier defense system, replaced by the stone forts regarded here (Пашев 1982, 173-174; Rashev 2005, 52-54). Their different construction material and function – as barriers and as military camps – are yet another argument not to engage with those in the present study. The nearly complete abandonment of archaeological excavations on such monuments since the early 1980s prevents renewed involvement with the problems already identified in the literature.

The present study deals with:

✓ *Establishing the reasons for the abandonment of the earthen fortifications and the appearance of the provincial stone fortresses;*

✓ *Outlining the chronological and territorial frames of the phenomenon of the erection of those stone fortresses;*

✓ *Defining the place those fortresses had in the defense, road, and settlement system of the First Bulgarian Kingdom;*

✓ *Clarifying the question of who build, maintained, and defended the fortresses in the different regions of the First Bulgarian Kingdom;*

✓ *Establishing the constructional and architectural traditions which produced those fortresses, and identifying the presence and direction of foreign influences;*

✓ *Outlining the reasons behind the abandonment of some, and for the structural rearrangement and functional change in other fortresses.*

To achieve these goals, the following tasks have been set:

- *presentation, through catalogue and illustrative material, of the basic information available on the studied fortresses, with exhaustive bibliography;*

- *review of the architectural design and constructive specificities of the fortresses by region;*

- *comprehensive presentation of the archaeological information relevant to the date, origin and function of those monuments;*

- *division of a typology for the fortresses, according to their basic characteristic – their defensive adequacy;*

- *presentation of the evidence from the fortresses and their vicinity on the existence of settlements, accounting for the variations in the kinds of settlement sites present, as well as the existence of necropolises, religious sites, crafts production, trade, and for contacts with the government seats;*

- *comparison, in terms of architectural outline, construction and function, of the Bulgarian fortresses and those of the neighboring states and people;*

- *analysis of the known written sources and available data on the architectural outline and the construction of the forts, applied to the study of siegecraft.*

The chronological frame for the study is predetermined by the title – the First Bulgarian Kingdom (7th-11th c. AD). Current data, however, allow the precision of the lower chronological date to the beginning of the 9th c. AD. The upper chronological boundary is conventionally set at 1018 AD, when the Bulgarian state is overtaken by the Byzantine Empire and its territories were incorporated into its administrative, military, economic, and religious systems.

This present study deals only with the fortresses lying within the territories permanently governed by the Bulgarians, and within the territories recognized in peace treaties, for which evidence confirms an extended Bulgarian presence. Those two conditions are assumed to warrant their complete incorporation in the Bulgarian administrative, defensive and settlement systems.

For this reason, the extensive so called “war-time territories” in the southern part of the western Black Sea, in Thrace, Northern Greece, the Adriatic and in Serbia are excluded from this study. It must be stressed too that quite often tracing state boundaries, even tentatively, is problematic. Since this study does not aim at defining the boundaries of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, it operates on the presently dominant opinions, and has included only those territories for which evidence withstands scrutiny.

The most important source of information are archaeological excavations. The data secured in them is in direct correlation with the methodology and the scale of the investigations. Comparatively few fortresses have been subjected to large-scale archaeological excavations, for most data are derived from test excavations or field surveys and from observations on looter’s trenches. This not only presents an obstacle to the comprehensive review of the monuments, but also poses a specific problem. At the beginning of the 10th c. AD many abandoned Late Antiquity fortresses across the entire First Bulgarian Kingdom’s territory are re-populated. Since the majority of those have been studied by field surveys or through very limited in size test trenches, they are often postulated to be functioning Bulgarian fortresses. This study operates under the presumption that the presence of earlier fortifications in combination with archaeological materials indicating early medieval habitation is not sufficient to attribute such a site to the group of early medieval forts. The application of such strict criteria reduces the number of the functioning fortresses, compared to the number circulated in the literature. Future archaeological investigations may introduce new data and thus redeem some of those sites to the status of true functioning fortresses. Until such data is secured, however, analyzing them on the basis of uncertain indications together with the other sites is unacceptable. As a result of the criteria employed here, only 107 of the 195 sites included in the *Catalogue* have been pronounced possibly functioning during the First Bulgarian Kingdom. (Table 1).

The information within the *Catalogue* is presented in accordance with the principle applied in *Tabula Imperii Byzantini*. This was done in order to avoid extraneous details, while simultaneously provision comprehensive bibliography for each individual monument. The sites in the *Catalogue* are arranged by regional groups – I through V, and within each regional group – by subgroups, in accordance with the described in the *Chapter I* plan. The fortresses within each subgroup are introduced alphabetically, to circumvent controversies which might stem from the application of other criteria – such as the extent to which it has been studied through excavations – might introduce. The identification number assigned to the sites presented on the maps is identical to the number assigned to the fortresses in the *Catalogue*.

Written sources are considered here a secondary source of information. This is to a great extent due to their brevity; to the time lapse between the moment of the creation of the written document and the date of the recorded events, which throws a shadow of doubt over their reliability; and to their character. Straightforward record of erection of fortresses by the Bulgarians is almost non-existent. The single exceptions are the Bitola inscription by Tsar Ivan-Vladislav, and the too-brief and not always reliable data in the “*Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle*” from the 11th c. AD. Useful descriptions of exact locations, types and constructions of the fortresses are also lacking. The only information of relevance provided in written sources is that certain fortresses existed during particular military campaigns. This kind of information, however, must too be used with great caution because of the ever present possibility of “transportation” of certain fortresses to earlier periods. As a rule, whenever we deal with written sources, they must always be evaluated against data from archaeological investigations.

Chapter I

REGIONAL GROUPS OF FORTRESSES – ARCHITECTURAL OUTLINE AND CONSTRUCTIONAL SPECIFICS

The distinction between the core region and the periphery within the wide territory of the First Bulgarian Kingdom is obvious. It is also reflected in the defensive architecture. Therefore, fortresses are here regarded by regional groups.

The territory of the First Bulgarian Kingdom is divided into five regions. The fortresses of each of these five large regions make up the respective regional groups, within which sub-groups are distinguished. The specific conditions in the regions produce certain variations in the review of the regional groups. Fundamental factors, affecting the formation of the distinct sub-groups and respectively assigning the fortresses to them are 1) if the fortress was built during the time period of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, or if it is a re-used Late-Antiquity fortress; 2) if it serves certain specific functions; 3) if information raising doubt about the re-use of a certain Late Antiquity fortress during the time period of the First Bulgarian Kingdom is available; 4) if a certain military/ or political situations allow for a certain sub-group of fortresses to be set apart; 5) if there are written sources, mentioning fortresses of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. Of utmost importance is to take under consideration the extent to which the different regions have been studied archaeologically, and the presence, or respectively the total absence, of written evidence on them, as well as the place they had in the military-administrative system of the First Bulgarian Kingdom.

In accordance with those conditions, factors, and criteria, the following system of regional groups and functionally-architectural subgroups is suggested. In this system the groups are identified by Roman numerals I through V, and the subgroups – by Arabic numerals.

I. Fortresses East of Yantra River, enclosed between the Danube River and the Balkan Mountains

1. Newly erected fortresses;
2. The Stone Dike in Dobrudja and the fortresses associated with it;
3. Fortresses mentioned in the written sources and re-used Late Antiquity fortresses;
 - a) late Antiquity fortresses, re-used during the First Bulgarian Kingdom;
 - b) fortresses for which re-use is proven beyond doubt;
 - c) fortresses for which there is no conclusive data for re-use;
 - d) fortresses for which re-use as fortresses is doubtful.

II. Fortresses west of Yantra River

1. Newly erected fortresses;
2. Re-used Late Antiquity fortresses;
3. Fortresses mentioned in the written sources;
4. Fortresses with no conclusive data for re-use during the First Bulgarian Kingdom.

III. Fortresses north of Danube River

1. Newly erected fortresses;
2. Fortresses mentioned in the written sources.

IV. Fortresses south of the Balkan Mountains

1. Byzantine fortresses, incorporated within the Bulgarian territories;
2. Newly erected fortresses, the construction of which is commissioned by the Bulgarian state;
3. Re-used Late Antiquity fortresses, the re-use of which is linked to the Bulgarian state;
4. Re-used Late Antiquity fortresses, for which no conclusive data exist to assign re-use to the First Bulgarian Kingdom, and possible Byzantine fortresses.

V. Fortresses of the southwestern Bulgarian Territories

1. Newly erected fortresses;
2. Re-used Late Antiquity fortresses;
3. Fortresses mentioned in the written sources;
4. Re-used Late Antiquity fortresses, for which no conclusive data exist to date re-use to the First Bulgarian Kingdom.

Despite variability in the amount of information available for the different regions, it is possible to draw conclusions about the specifics in terms of architectural outline and construction and about the existence of similarities, differences, and connections between the regional groups. Two large regions emerge, distinguished by substantial dissimilarities in construction and architectural outline, and separated geographically by the line of the Balkan Mountains.

In the lands north of the Danube River, as well as in the western Bulgarian territories (Map 4), the influence from the core region of the First Bulgarian Kingdom is clearly distinguishable. Primary sign of it is the domination of newly erected fortresses and the rare incidents of re-use of Late Antiquity strongholds. As an exception in this regard presents the western Bulgarian territories – the right banks of the Danube River west of the Yantra River. Two characteristic trends emerge. The first one is the monumentality employed in the fortress construction – the use of ashlar blocks bound in mortar. This kind of construction is rarer and is more often influenced by the second trend – which betrays inferior technical skills and limited economic capacity. In the second trend foundations most often than not are missing, and it makes use of unworked stone set in mud. An example of the combination of the two trends presents the fortress by Tsar Asen (Catalogue No 22) (plates 34-36). The interstices of its ashlar face are filled with mortar, but the blocks are set in mud. Those walls were built on sturdy foundations, and worked stone caps finished the merlons. The towers, however, had no ground floor and were of insignificant size, akin to the rest of the newly erected fortresses in northeastern Bulgaria (Map 2). Similar are the fortresses and the barrier wall of the Stone Dike in Dobrudja (Catalogue nos 23-54) (plates 37-72).

A shared trait is the comparatively limited number and inefficient positioning of the towers. The monuments north of the Danube River and in the western Bulgarian territories (Map 4) are indistinguishable. The fortress by Slon (Catalogue no 107) (plate 91) reflects both the first trait - monumentality, and the early stages of the progression of the second trait, while the monuments in the western Bulgarian territories for which conclusive archaeological data exists (Catalogue nono 98, 99), (plates 87-90) demonstrate the use of the cheep technique with set in mud quarried stone. Over a large territory the influences of the state core's traditions of fortress building were closely reflected.

Characteristic for the territory south of the Balkan Mountains (Maps 1, 5, 6) is the extensive re-use of the local Late Antiquity fortifications. New strongholds were rarely erected *ad fundamentum*.

Common traits are the use of unworked stone, bound by mortar, and strict adherence to the outline of the re-used earlier monuments, which warrants a well-planned and effective defensive system for the early medieval fortifications.

As it is readily expected, the two large regions – to the south and to the north of the Balkan Mountains, do not develop in isolation, but undergo the effects of mutual influences. The Pernik fort (Catalogue No 134), (Plates 105-107) and Tserovo (Catalogue No 147) exemplify the southbound influences. Another example of a possible influence from the south centers on the strongholds north of the Balkan Mountains is the Veliki Gradats fortress by Donyi Milanovats (Catalogue no 97) (plates 85, 86). In this particular instance, the Late Antiquity fort was re-used, its walls mended with quarried stones set in white mortar.

Chapter II

THE PROVINCIAL STONE FORTRESSES AS DEFENSE SYSTEMS AND HABITATION SITES

1. Typology of the fortresses

Fortresses as archaeological monuments present a challenge to those attempting to develop a typology. The characteristic features, which may be used in the division of a typology, depend on a large number of variable factors, such as relief, locally available building material, building traditions, investment in labor and materials, orders of the sponsor, the architect's design and skills, the skills of the builders, sometimes even trends in architectural fashion. If a typology were to take into account all those factors, and to encompass all characteristic features of the given fortifications, the product would be a very complex and confusing system with numerous types, sub-types, variants, which is more likely to obscure than to clarify the development of the defensive features it attempts to study.

To escape producing an empty in its effects typology, secondary characteristics, such as construction peculiarities are neglected here, since they are found to be in strong correlation to a large number of highly variable factors and to obscure the main criteria – building tradition. The goal, instead, is to present the main characteristic of the fortresses – their aptitude to defend, which to a major degree is defined by the use of a basic fortification element – the tower.

Included in the typology are only those strongholds, for which use during the period of interest is confirmed, and for which information is available on the character of their defensive features.

The decisive criterion in this typology is the presence and the effectiveness of the position of the towers along the walls. The following factors are considered fundamental in defining the degree to which the system of towers offers an effective defensive system to a particular fortress: 1) provision of efficient flanking fire along the curtain walls, i.e. spacing the towers at circa 60 meters – the precision range of a bowshot; 2) protection of most vulnerable to attack areas along the wall perimeter – corners, changes in the course of the wall, as well as relief-defined points prone to assault by siege engines or vulnerable to the work of siege engines.

In accordance with these criteria three types of fortresses are distinguished:

Type I – Fortresses without towers;

Type II– Fortresses in which towers are of limited or inadequate use;

Type III – Fortresses with an efficient system of towers;

The major reason behind the exclusion of the relief as primary criterion for type designation, is the observation that, for the fortresses reviewed, although the natural potential of the location seemed to have been a factor in the selection of the location, it appears that it was never assigned such a fundamental role, that the manmade fortifications would appear secondary to the givens of the relief.

The fortress types are presented in Table 2 and on Map 7

In the regions of the First Bulgarian Kingdom situated north of the Balkan Mountains, the forts of type I and II dominate, which reflects an early developmental stage of a fortification system, that still lacks established defensive design and architectural layouts, which leads to the utilization of dysfunctional defensive systems in the known forts. On the representatives of the complex type III data is either incomplete, or the construction of the towers limits the potential of the otherwise well planned outline and relates them to type II. Their number however remains low – about ten per cent of all recorded forts. The single exemption is Veliki Gradats (plate 85), which is an instance of re-used Late Antiquity fortress.

Precisely re-used earlier fortifications are also all fortresses from the Bulgarian territories south of the Balkan Mountains, which all fall within the third type. They reflect a developed fortification tradition with perfected methods and means of defense. Of particular importance is the observation that this tradition was obviously fully adopted and practiced by the early medieval builders, which in the sometimes quite extensive repairs and restorations demonstrate understanding and appreciation of the defensive qualities of the earlier monuments.

Despite the limited availability of data, at least for the moment the southwestern Bulgarian territories seem to be a kind of a contact zone between the above-described two fortification traditions.

2. Organization of the defense and siege on fortresses according to written sources and archaeological data

The competition between the methods and the tools of assault, and the development in the plans, make up, and construction of the defensive structures dictate the development of military architecture. The stone provincial fortifications of the First Bulgarian Kingdom are no exception to this. In this regard the Bulgarians are members of a large community, members of which are also the Byzantine and the Carolingian Empires, and the Islamic nations. Within this community military technologies and experience spread rapidly and were applied according to the available resources and skills. Therefore, here I discuss the siege warfare as it was practiced within the community, as well as the available information pertaining to the First Bulgarian Kingdom in particular.

Current information links the act of foundation of the Bulgarian siege train to the reign of Khan Krum (802-814). It is, however possible that the description of his preparations for march on Constantinople, especially the inventory list of oxen and carts (5000) is an exaggeration, an index of the alarm in the wake of a threat, prevented by “God’s hand.” Still, it is beyond doubt that the Bulgarian sovereign adopts and utilizes an advanced for its time siege technology. The description of how this came to be, however, is also suspicious. The script reads as a rehearsal of anecdotal stories on the introduction of the illiterate “barbarians” into the art of poliorcetics. It is much more probable that Khan Krum attracted highly qualified Byzantine or Arab engineers (Рабовянов 2005).

Data on the development of siege technology in the First Bulgarian Kingdom after the death of Khan Krum is very limited. More evidence is available for the reign of the Kings Simeon and

Samuel. It may be conjured that the siege equipment was neglected after the death of Khan Krum. The information at hand, however, is too scant to allow for definite conclusions.

We have somewhat clearer view of the organization of the defense of fortresses by the Bulgarians. Written sources on this are quite scarce, too, but information is supplemented by data collected at the defense structures themselves, preserving evidence on the kind of enemy they were constructed against, and on the kind of siege inventory and skill.

It may be concluded, that along with their other functions, up to 971 the fortresses of the central region of the First Bulgarian Kingdom have been constructed to fend off a limited in headcount, and unskilled in fortress assault enemy (such as Magyars, Pechenegs). An attempt to change this model seems to have been made after the transfer of the government seat to the southwestern Bulgarian territories. An effort to transform the fortresses into key points of the defense system is distinguishable, which led to focus on defense and to the accumulation of materials and expertise in this area. A proof of this is the number and duration of siege operations the Byzantine army had to employ against the Bulgarian strongholds.

3. The provincial stone fortresses in the defense and road network of the First Bulgarian Kingdom

The brevity of the written sources and the still limited volume of archaeological excavations on the stone outlying fortresses prevent reconstruction of their place in the defense and road networks of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. This holds true especially for all attempts to trace the communication lines, which are of chief importance for the movement of military personnel and resources.

The resemblance between the defensive systems employed in early medieval Bulgaria and in England, despite the geographic distance, is telling. They demonstrate similar response to threat. For a brief period of time (the beginning of the 10th c. AD), in the central region of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, a network of fortresses was put in place, designed to counter an unskilled in the art of poliorcetics enemy. Spaced at one day march distance (Map 2), they hold promise for back-up forces in case of assault, and for secure land communications. The fact that until present day excavations have produced evidence of only lower social status population, undistinguishable by its material culture from the inhabitants of the non-fortified settlements, suggests that guard and maintenance of the fortresses was enlisted amongst members of those social groups. Whether those were of status similar to the free English peasants, charged with military duties; the frontiers of the Frankish Empire in Central Europe; and in Byzantium is open to debate.

The defense system of the core state region is complemented by the Stone Dike in Dobrudja and the associated fortresses (Map 3). The defense system employed here differs from the one known from the Early Byzantine linear fortification structures. The barrier function is no longer dominant and the principle feature is not the curtain wall with its towers. Primary role is assigned to the numerous fortresses, forming a belt of autonomously operating defensible points. In this way, after overcoming the Dike (provided they lack experience in putting fortified sites to siege, the case of the nomadic tribes of the North-Pontic), the enemy faces several difficult choices. Assault on one or more of the fortresses will cost them the momentum of their attack, allowing the rest of the fortresses along the Stone Dike and the government to lounge a counter-attack. Bypassing the fortresses and focusing on the assault on the central region, they leave in their back a significant number of troops on alert, ready to organize a hit on the returning with spoils and captives disorganized bands. In the meantime, as indicated by their surface area, the fortresses offer protection to the nearby residents. The area encompassed within the defensive walls of the forts of the Stone Dike is comparable to surface area of the newly-erected and the re-used Late Antiquity fortresses from the territory of

the contemporary Northeastern Bulgaria. The fortresses and the defense strategy of the Byzantine Empire, of Great Moravia, and of the Frankish territories in Central Europe are also organized in a similar fashion.

By their plan and construction specifics, the fortresses of the II regional group, i.e. those of the territories west of the Yantra River, resemble the above discussed fortresses of group I. It must be noted, though, that their count is significantly lower, and they are more dispersed (Map 4). This renders cooperation quite difficult, even impossible. One explanation for this scatter might be the insufficient level of research in the region. It is reasonable to accept the possibility that future archaeological investigations might uncover traces of other fortified sites, dated to the First Bulgarian Kingdom. It is also possible to look for other explanations: lower population density of those border territories, lower level of perceived threat, and above all – a precaution of the central government against influential figures or families, whose separatist aspirations would have been well served by a closed network of fortifications. It is also possible that the observed situation is a reflection of the priority the government assigned to the core region and the southern border.

The Western Bulgarian territories seem to have not been directly under threat after the mid 9th c. AD. This is reflected in the development of the defense sites, and leads to the absence of a comprehensive defense system. It seems more probable that fortifications were built to meet local needs.

These factors, steering the development of the defense system, were probably even more expressive in the territories north of the Danube River (Map 4). Hardly any new observations may be offered to complement present understanding of the single site in this region – the fortress by Slon – as an important border point, guarding the roads crossing the Carpathian Mountains.

It is possible that those less densely settled territories served as a kind of a buffer zone, protecting the core area from attacks originating in the northeast. Those increased the distance between the centers of the First Bulgarian Kingdom and the immediate threat, and could be used to introduce “burnt land” in-between. Keeping in mind that the construction of the stone provincial fortresses in the central region starts with the onset of the 10th c. AD, the lack of fortresses north of the Danube River is not surprising. Traces of burnt horizons in the settlements north of the Danube delta, dated to the beginning of the 10th c. AD, are evidence to the fact that those territories were already possibly lost to the Bulgarian state.

In contrast to the core area, the fortresses south of the Balkan Mountains do not make up a dense network (Map 5). It is possible that this is due to a strict regulation regarding fort construction in bilateral treaties between Bulgaria and the Byzantine Empire, and to the two governments’ heightened sensitivity in the event of an erection of new fortifications along their common border.

Since the population density was quite low in this buffer territory, the local fortresses served chiefly military function. The stone fortifications controlled also the major transportation routes. Following the pattern established for the Second and the Third regional group, there are no indications that the forts of the Fourth regional group were part of a complex defense system.

Insufficient research on the forts in the southwestern Bulgarian territories (Map 6) presents difficulties to their further study. It is impossible to make any conclusions for the defense system prior to the 970-ies on the basis of the available evidence.

The transfer of the Bulgarian state center after 971 here, and the extended war for independence against the approaches of the Byzantine Empire, brought about radical changes. Written sources provide data on the process of saturation of the local map with fortifications (Map 6). The strongholds have key role in the war on the Byzantine Empire. They serve as origin points of surprise attacks, storage base for the troops of the Bulgarian kings, strongholds slowing down enemy offense

and shielding the population. They provide also for the protection of the life force of the Bulgarian troops, in the face of the outnumbering resources of the Empire. Possibly, the prolonged resistance against the determined campaign of the currently undergoing its biggest political and military climax Empire, was possible only because of the existence of those fortifications.

Up to date we lack data confirming the institution of a complex defense system in the southwestern Bulgarian territories after the transfer of the government center here, comparable to the one devised for the modern northeastern Bulgaria and Romanian Dobrudja lands. The descriptions of the military operations between the Byzantine and the Bulgarians in the new state center do not support cooperative action of the fortresses. On the contrary, information suggests an emerging trend towards separatism among Bulgarian aristocracy, based precisely on the fortifications.

The issue of the development of the road network of the First Bulgarian Kingdom is still in its infancy. Along with re-use of the old Late Antiquity roads, it is reasonable to expect the appearance of new ones, securing communication between the newly established centers of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. Those are hard to trace, however, possibly because they were not paved.

Therefore presently trace of those new roads relies entirely on the locations of the fortified sites. Those, however, suggest numerous difficult to decide on alternatives. The idea that the stone provincial fortifications doubled as a kind of way stations, guarding the safety of the roads and providing accommodations for the travelers, is not unfounded.

4. The provincial stone fortresses in comparative plan. Architectural and construction tradition of the stone provincial fortresses

The newly-founded fortifications of the end of the 9th – 10th c. AD in Bulgaria do not emerge in isolation. It is impossible to make an informed decision which architectural and construction traditions produced them, unless they are regarded in the context of the fortification traditions of the neighboring countries. Here they are considered against the forts of the Khazar Khaganat, the fortifications of the Eastern Slavs, and Kievan Rus, against those tied to the Eastern Frankish border marks and Great Moravia in Central Europe; against some enterprises from Italy and the central regions of the Frankish state, against the fortifications of the Byzantine Empire, including those on Crimea, and against a digest of the Islamic Early Medieval fortification traditions.

First, we need to stress the absence of any common traits between the Bulgarian fortresses and the fortifications of the eastern Slavs and those of Kievan Rus. The latter utilize earth-and-wood construction, which finds no analogue among the Bulgarian stone forts. Similar lack of familiarity is noted with the fortifications from Central Europe and with the politically and culturally connected to them people of Western Europe – such as Northern Italian and the Eastern German territories. Here, too, one of the principal characteristics – the construction technique – is utterly distinct. Some of the Italian sites seem to be closer to the Early Medieval Bulgarian monumental architecture, such as the brick citadel in Pliska. This is due to the shared Byzantine-Mediterranean influence, as well as on the attempt to imitate models from Antiquity. The Early Medieval Martinichko Gradishte in Duklia (plate 138) demonstrates resemblance to the constructive and architectural scheme of some Bulgarian forts, such as Pernik (plates 105-107). This is likely a reflection of the common to both sites Byzantine influence.

Certain similarities are noted between the fortresses of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd regional groups, and some Khazar forts. Comparanda for the built with baked and unbaked bricks Semikarakorsko gradishte (plates 128, 129) and Sarkel is lacking in Early Medieval Bulgarian territories. Certain familiarity in terms of construction and layout is established between the newly erected fortresses in what is today Northeastern Bulgaria and some Khazar forts, which make use of quarried stone bound with mud – in sites such as Suhaya Gomolsha, Mayaki, Stari Saltov, Kordon-Oba, and Baksanskoe.

Along with the material employed in the construction, another shared trait is the absence of foundations. Certain essential divergences must be stressed, though. Most Khazar fortified sites utilize the so-called “two faced” technique. A similar distinction between the face and the fill is not recorded in the Bulgarian territories, despite the noted local preference for larger better finished stones organized in more-orderly fashion in the faces. Respectively, the curtain walls in the Khazar forts are often thicker. Another important difference is established in the architectural plans. The Khazar fortifications lack towers – an element of the defense system (though in a primitive form) which is persistently present in the Bulgarian forts. They are usually also smaller in surface area.

Common traits are also established between, on the one hand, some of the forts along the Stone Dike, the Stone Dike itself (catalogue Nos 23-54) (plates 37-40), the forts by Tsar Asen (Catalogue No 22)(plate 35) and Slon (catalogue No 107), and, on the other hand, the monumental Khazar forts such as Pravoberezhnoe Tsimlyanskoe gradishte (plate 132), Humarinsko gradishte (plate 133), the large forts on the Crimean peninsula – Syujren (plate 134), the early medieval Mangup, etc. In both groups worked stone blocks were used in the faces of the walls, while the fill was predominantly of quarried stone – unbound, or set in mud. Shared feature is also the lack of foundations. Another common trait is the lining of the interstices in the face with mortar. It must be noted that the walls of the Khazar forts are thicker, with better finished and often larger ashlar than the ones utilized in the Bulgarian sites. In addition, the majority of the Khazar fortifications wall up a greater surface area than their Bulgarian counterparts.

Information at hand renders unlikely the possibility that Khazar fortification traditions exerted any influence on the design of the Bulgarian forts. The differences listed above seem to indicate that the two concurrent traditions developed independently of each other. The building techniques, and the architectural layouts reflect not only lack of experience in construction, but also very primitive knowledge of the poliorcetics. While the monumental fortifications of the Khazar Khaganate betray an effort towards portliness and towards emulation of certain Byzantine and Sassanid models, the Bulgarian strongholds made in a similar technique are the outcome of an effort to replicate Bulgaria's own state centers and, possibly, of the government intervention into their construction. Executed in local material, by local workers, they are marked by numerous imperfections absent in the *auls* which developed under the influence of the Mediterranean Byzantine architectural tradition. This peculiar development, characterized by reliance on local resource base, construction skills, and knowledge of fortification, is especially explicit in the newly erected forts of the First regional group (over the territory of modern Northeastern Bulgaria). Support for this argument provides the obvious influence from the earlier earthen fortifications.

It should be pointed out, that the negligible defense value of the Bulgarian fortresses in regional groups I, II, and III, is due to a great extent to poor planning, identified through the absence, or the limited use, of towers and the poor defensive capacity of those. This trait is shared by most of the early medieval sites with defensive architecture across Europe, and is a reflection of the early developmental stage to which they belong. Therefore, it is not useful as a criterion in judging the origin of influence upon the Bulgarian stone outlying fortresses in the territories north of the Balkan Mountain.

The situation in the Bulgarian territories south of the Balkan Mountains is different. The new projects step upon solid foundations, in most cases – upon earlier fortification walls. They also rehearse the layout of the preceding late antiquity forts. Here mortar is used as a rule. The building material is quarried stone, often recycled, with larger and better aligned stones in the faces, and smaller less carefully aligned ones in the emblecton. Sometimes the interstices between the stones were filled with brick fragments or stone chips, as is the case at Constantia (plates 95, 96), and in the fortress by Sliven an abnormally high number of bricks was employed.

These features provide an almost perfect correspondence to the specifics of the layout and the building technique of some Byzantine fortresses. It must be remembered also that despite the considerable number of Late Antiquity fortresses in modern northeastern Bulgaria, no First Bulgarian Kingdom date forts overlap with them. The only exceptions are Capidava (Catalogue No 56) (Plate 73), where so far only topographic continuity, and Abritus – Razgrad (Catalogue No 58) and Martianopolis-Devina (Catalogue No 57) (plate 74) where topographic and also constructional continuity is recorded.

The conclusion drawn from the above observations is that the early medieval fortresses of the First Bulgarian Kingdom's territories south of the Balkan Mountains are subject to a manifest and obviously direct Byzantine influence. It may be reasoned that at least part of them were in fact constructed by Byzantine personnel. Some of those functioned prior to their incorporation into the Bulgarian state and were taken over with minor repairs as "living" forts, but others – such as Markeli (Catalogue No 115) (plate 97) and Sliven (Catalogue No 117) (plate 100), were restored precisely by the Bulgarian government.

Byzantine influence in the area of defense architecture arrived via multiple paths. Byzantine forts in the vicinity of the border were models for imitation. This was further intensified by the collisions during Bulgarian wars with the Empire, as well as by the resultant inclusion of some Byzantine fortresses within Bulgarian territories. Simultaneously, skilled in the art of poliorcetics people, whose craft was needed for the restoration of the fortresses, seeped within the boundaries of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. Many anecdotes report the use by the Bulgarians of prisoners of war, renegades, or of attracted with good offers subjects of the Byzantine Empire.

The strong Byzantine influence on Bulgarian fortresses, especially in Thrace, poses the question to what degree some of them, i.e. Haskovo, Lyubenovo, and Mineralni bani (Catalogue nos 119-121) (Map 5), should be attributed to the fortification initiative of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. That they might be product of this program is suggested by archaeological material indicative of "Bulgarian" population. However, certain circumstances render doubtful the Bulgarian origin of those constructions. The building technique employed, and specificities in the layout find parallels in Byzantine forts of the 9th-10th c AD, like Philippi, Saon, Sahan Kaya, Akrokus, Saruhanlar and Dereagzi. In addition, they are all situated south of Erkesia Dike, the plausibly accepted border line between the two states. The materials found in those three sites may be interpreted as marking the presence of Bulgarian population, admittedly hardly unusual for a border region. Examples for this are the fortifications near Sredets and Izvorovo, the Byzantine attribution of which is beyond doubt.

Though most expressive in the Bulgarian territories in Thrace, Byzantine influence on defense architecture is also distinguishable in the southwestern Bulgarian lands (Map 6). From this region come examples of sites, where Byzantine influence affects Bulgarian traditional constructions, without completely replacing it. The Pernik (Catalogue No 134) and Tserovo (Catalogue No 147) fortresses are built of quarried stones set in mortar, but their foundations are very shallow, and the layout, with the ineffectively positioned towers replicate the stone outlying fortresses north of the Balkan Mountains. It is beyond doubt that future research in the southwestern Bulgarian territories will contribute to the better understanding of this transitional in terms of traditions in military construction zone.

Another monument, reflecting Byzantine influence, is the Veliki Gradats fortress by Donji Milanovac, on the right banks of the Danube River (Map 4) (plates 85, 86) Its appearance that far northwest, in the most remote from the border with the Empire territory, awaits explanation.

Although some stone provincial fortresses clearly attest to the Byzantine influence, Bulgarian role in those constructions shouldn't be played down. After all, those constructions served the needs of the Bulgarian state, were erected and maintained at the expense of its resources, and were defended by Bulgarian soldiers. These forts are a demonstration of the flexibility and the desire of the

Bulgarian government to adopt more sophisticated and effective means of defense, and from their immediate adversary, carrier of a more advanced culture. This quality is clearly articulated in the sites with monumental architecture and is yet one more example of the inclusion of the Bulgarians to the early medieval architectural community, developing in the Eastern Mediterranean.

5. The provincial stone fortresses in the settlement system of the First Bulgarian Kingdom

The provincial stone fortresses fulfilled a very important role in the military and communication system of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. Simultaneously, by their appearance, the majority of them are in fact fortified settlements.

The information at hand is inadequate to clarify their exact place in the settlement system of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. The fortresses north of the Balkan Mountains, encompassed in the First and Second regional groups, should be designated type-settlement sites for the period under consideration. What distinguishes them from the rest of the habitation sites is the presence of fortifications and of Christian churches, which effectively promoted them into natural local foci. The established dearth of higher social status inhabitants, with the possible exception of Durankulak (Catalogue no 5), and the still limited data supporting regular communication with the government centers present numerous questions about the structure of management of the fortified settlements and their place in the country's administrative system. The predominantly agrarian subsistence and the lack of traces from craft production or trade contribute to the picture.

A comprehensive review of the types of settlements on the fortified locations in the Fourth and Fifth regional groups, comparable to the one offered for the fortresses of the First and Second regional groups, is unfortunately prevented by the insufficient archaeological research in the area enclosed within the walls. Alongside the many common traits, obvious differences are present too. The residences of high-ranking individuals unearthed in Pernik (plate 107) and in Serdica-Sredets, which might have belonged to the stewards of those respective strongholds, and the buildings interpreted as barracks and housing compartments for military personnel (plate 105), mark those sites as ones of greater import to the state administrative system. It is possible that in the core state region the large *aul*-cities, like Pliska, Preslav, and Drustar, were the hubs of administrative life, and that the administrative functions of the stone outlying fortresses/fortified settlements of the First and Second regional groups studied here were limited to the rank of local centers for the surrounding villages. Data confirming the presence of managing authorities has not been found, though. Even the apparent superiority of certain fortresses – such as Tsar Asen (Catalogue No 22) and fortresses nos XX and XXVII (Catalogue Nos 43, 51) and of those associated with the Stone Dike in Dobrudja – superiority expressed in the utilization of a more expensive and sophisticated construction technique, could only be thought of as indirect, circumstantial evidence. Possibly, the need to administer the newly conquered territories south of the Balkan mountains (Map 5, 6) forced the Bulgarian authorities to adopt the inherited Byzantine centers such as Serdica-Sredets (plate 120) and Philippopolis (plate 101), and to institute new ones – such as Pernik. Those raised to the position of administrative, religious, and economic centers of the respective regions. Still, undeniable evidence of a developed craft production or intensive trade is lacking. It seems probable that other sites – such as Constantia, Markeli, and Sliven (plates 94, 97, 100) – sheltered settlements, but their role as military posts had precedence, and hence their exact position within the settlement system is yet to be clarified.

Another important feature of the fortresses south of the Balkan Mountains that distinguishes them from the forts in the other regional groups are the discernible Byzantine influences in the architectural planning of their built environment – the make up of the dwellings, the reuse of Late

Antiquity church and representative buildings, the establishment of street network, aqueducts and water storage facilities. To-date it is hard to determine what effect those amenities had on the economic, social and administrative stand of the respective settlements.

Certain the provincial stone fortresses have been discussed by researchers in relation to the issue of the early medieval Bulgarian town. An examination of the Bulgarian fortresses against those of the neighboring countries highlights noticeable resemblance to the fortified Byzantine settlements in Crimea, and to a lesser degree – to the ones attributed to the Saltovo-Mayatskaya culture of the northern Pontic steppes.

In terms of size, make up, and type of construction, the Bulgarian fortresses find close comparanda in the Crimean region Byzantine fortresses of the 10th c. AD. The Byzantine “*kastra*”, however, are distinguished by their more developed architectural form. The houses are constructed with stone, the cult sites were of more substantial built, and the Late Antiquity’s heritage is much more effectively incorporated in the town layout. It is telling that the fortified settlements of the First Bulgarian Kingdom which most closely resemble their Byzantine counterparts, are precisely the former Byzantine fortified sites – such as Serdica-Sredets and Philippopolis, or the ones built in the exposed to direct cultural influence territories to the south of the Balkan Mountains – Pernik, Tserovo. It must be emphasized, though, that despite the fact that agrarian production persists to be the dominant occupation in the Byzantine “*kastra*” and “*poleis*”, craft production and trade also flourish – industries, for which data is still missing from the sites of the Bulgarian fortresses.

Certain affinity is also noticed to the fortified settlements of the Khazar Khaganate in Crimea, the lands by the River Don, and other regions of the northern Pontic. Resemblances however, are mostly based on construction techniques and on the architectural specifics of the houses and the other buildings. Still, Khazar dwellings are typically quite sparsely distributed over a walled area of significantly larger than the one enclosed by the Bulgarian forts size.

This author has reservations accepting D. Dimitrov’s opinion that the majority of the Bulgarian fortresses filled up the role of “towns”, or St. Mihajlov’s assertion that they were in a “pre-town” state of development, despite a shared with them consensus that the term “*town*” in the early medieval period designated a different from the Late Antiquity, or post-eleventh century era phenomenon. The only feature that makes them akin to a town is the presence of fortifications. Their settlement design – plan, distribution and density of the houses, is indistinguishable from the contemporary unfortified settlements. With the exception of some small tabernacles and average residential compartments and complexes, representative, or in the least, distinctive architectural monuments, such as the ones characteristic of the centers – Pliska, Preslav and Draŝtar, are missing. The function of the latter – as military, religious, and cultural centers – provides ground to consider precisely those *auls* the true original Bulgarian towns.

Furthermore, no visible hint of commercial activities or craft production is preserved at the provincial stone fortifications. There is no evidence that the majority of those ever served as administrative centers. With the exception of some fortresses south of the Balkan Mountains – such as Serdica-Sredets – nothing implies they were more than local religious foci. Their temples could only have accommodated the fort’s own inhabitants.

The conclusion from the above discussion is that the provincial stone fortresses possessed no features substantiating their interpretation as town centers (with the exception of some cases south of the Balkan Mountains – Serdica-Sredets, Philippopolis, Mesemvria, and Pernik). Undoubtedly the presence of protective walls and church buildings sets them apart from the surrounding unfortified settlements and promotes them into the position of natural local centers. Interruption of life on the majority of those forts precluded further development, which may have possibly transformed them into medieval towns.

Chapter III

EMERGENCE, LIFE, AND ABANDONMENT OF THE PROVINCIAL STONE FORTRESSES

1. Fortification of the early period of the First Bulgarian Kingdom: earthen fortifications

This study engages with a summary presentation of the earthen fortifications, in deference to their place as original fortification structures of the Bulgarian state. The expansion of the state territory and the changes occurring in the First Bulgarian Kingdom brought about the abandonment of the system of earthen fortifications – camps and dikes – and to their replacement by the stone forts. The location of some of those stone forts leaves no doubt that they inherited some of the functions of the nearby earlier earthen fortifications, which by this time have become unfortified settlements. A significant number of other forts – such as Durankulak, Izvorovo, Pet Mogili, etc., reflect the administrative, military and communication system of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, current in the end of the 9th – the beginning of the 10th c. AD.

As a result, the core area of the Bulgarian state (Map 2) acquired a much more dense network of fortified sites, demonstrating much improved defense capacity than the one offered by the earthen fortifications. This prevalence of stone fortifications since the beginning of the 10th c. AD is also attested in the other territories of the First Bulgarian Kingdom (Map 1).

2. Chronological frame of the stone fortresses by region and by architectural-functional groups: the archaeological evidence

The monuments for which operation as forts during the period under consideration could not be proven beyond doubt, are excluded from the presentation of the archaeological data on the stone provincial fortifications of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. Similarly, data from some forts south of the Balkan Mountains was not used, since, most likely, they were not the product of the defensive efforts of the Bulgarian state – Haskovo, Lyubenovo, Mineralni Bani. It must be pointed, that evidence for the date of their construction and restoration, 9th – the beginning of 10th c. AD, is not in discord with the observations made on this regional group.

Obviously, the erection of the forts of the First regional group occurred in the end of the 9th, or more likely in the beginning of the 10th c. AD.

The limited information presently available on the monuments of the Second and Third regional groups – west of Yantra and north of the Danube Rivers, precludes categorical conclusions. Nonetheless, research at Veliki Gradats by Donji Milanovats, and to a lesser degree at Rash by Novi Pazar show that possibly here too most forts were constructed in the end of the 9th – the beginning of the 10th c. AD. An earlier date, however, is an option for some. Perhaps the foundation of the fort by Slon should also be assigned to the 9th c. AD, because in the early 10th c. AD the Bulgarian kingdom had already lost control over the Transdanubian territories.

The forts south of the Balkan mountains present a distinct case in terms of the date of their use, repair, or restoration by the First Bulgarian Kingdom. For the majority – Constantia, Mesemvria, and possibly Goloe, those processes took place in the early 9th c. This is related to the expansion

of the Bulgarian state south of the Balkan Mountains, when attention focused instantly on the operating or restoration-prone forts. The restored, likely in the second half of the 9th c. AD walls of the fortress by Sliven, and in the 10th c. AD walls of Markeli are not just a reflection of the attempt to strengthen the border with the Byzantine Empire, but are possibly also a response to the phenomenon which triggered the concurrent mass construction of forts north of the Balkan mountains.

Irrespective of whether or not the forts of the southwestern Bulgarian territories, which collectively make up the fifth regional group, were the product of the desire of the Bulgarian government to solidify its presence, or if they were an element of the war strategy against the Emperor Vassilius II, assigning a date to those sites is still problematic. The dates offered by their excavators are too broad, or are derivative of historical conjectures supported with archaeological materials of wide date, usually pottery – i.e. Pernik (second half of the 9th c. AD), Serdica-Sredets (the beginning of 9th c. AD). Presently the only reasonably securely and narrowly dated site is the barrier wall east of the St Nicolas church in Melnik – the end of the 10th or the very beginning of the 11th c. AD. Its excavated area, however, is very small, and more evidence is required.

3. Motives for the abandonment of the earthen fortifications and the emergence of the provincial stone fortresses

The abandonment of the earthen fortifications and the emergence of the provincial stone fortresses of the First Bulgarian Kingdom is conditioned upon many factors – demographic, political, military. Often those acted as a complex and are interconnected. Certainly many were common to the entire territory of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. There are, nonetheless, a number of local variations. In the lands north of the Balkan mountains, the appearance of the stone fortifications was probably conditioned upon the threat from the north (of Magyars and Pechenegs) and reflects an attempt of the central authorities to protect its subjects and the communication lines in the capital region. With the exception of the Stone Dike, and possibly of several forts such as Tsar Asen and Rujno-Kartal Kale, most stone fortifications were likely the product of neighborhood initiative of the communities or the free peasants, but licensed and assisted by the state government.

The erection of stone forts south of the Balkan Mountains is conditioned upon military and political reasoning of a different order. The forts here fulfill administrative functions and are military outposts aimed at the Byzantine Empire. Of import here is the presence of functioning Byzantine centers, integrated with no remarkable alteration in the organization of the First Bulgarian Kingdom.

It is possible, that the newly emerged and the re-used Late Antiquity fortresses enclosed between the Danube River and the Balkan mountains east of the Yantra River, were built, maintained, and defended by organized peasant communities, which saw in them a promise for protection. The selection of certain settlements for fortification possibly betrays encouragement, or even administrative intervention by the central government, who had vested interest in the establishment of a network of forts, guarding the roads and its subjects. This solution seems to have presented itself as a logical outcome of the proven failure of the troops and the large fortified centers to prevent enemy incursions into the core state territories. This hypothesis finds some support in the distribution of the forts at 25-30 km intervals (one day march) along the major road Draštar – Plika – Preslav – Rishki pass, and along the presumed secondary communication lines, as well as in the marked superiority, in terms of construction, of certain forts such as Tsar Asen and Rujno-Kartal kale. This last one indicates the involvement of skilled labor, most likely provided by the central authorities, which was charged with the design of the layout, and the supervision and administration of the construction work.

Key, though circumstantial, evidence in support of the suggested model of emergence of the stone forts in modern day northeastern Bulgaria is provided by excavations on many re-populated in the late 9th-10th c. AD Late Antiquity local fortifications. Although traces of repairs and re-use of the defensive structures are currently in deficit, it is entirely plausible that the preserved enclosing walls offered a certain degree of protection to the settlement's inhabitants. Various opinions have been offered in an attempt to explain the rapid re-population of those vacant till the end of the 9th c. sites. V. Yotov accepts that the Magyar invasions of the 894(5)-896 instigate a new appreciation for the advantages the Late Antiquity forts amongst the inhabitants of the unfortified settlements – even if this is simply due to their naturally protected location – and drove them to relocate there. Similar view is expressed by T. Balabanov. G. Atanasov links the phenomenon to population increase – a theory supported also by R. Rashev, who concludes that in the 10th c. AD settlements spread to previously uninhabited territories– such as the mountainous regions and the ruins of the Late Antiquity forts. It is entirely possible that the emergence of Bulgarian settlements atop the Late Antiquity forts in the 10th c. AD is a product of the combined action of both factors, which in turn can be seen as evidence in support of the above presented triggers for the emergence of the stone forts in the region.

The date, layout, and make up of the Stone Dike are an obvious expression of the factors which set off the construction of the barrier wall and its affiliated forts. Its function – to hinder access to the core state region, or in case of breach – to establish the associated forts as a fetter of independently fighting sites – indicates it was designed to meet enemy attacks from the north. The fundamental factors for the construction of the Stone Dike complex are obviously of military and political nature. The political deterioration of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, which at the beginning of the 10th c. AD probably had already lost control over the Transdanubian territories, rendered impossible the protection through diplomatic or military means of the core state territories from invaders of north Pontic origin. Pecheneg assaults of the 940s are indicative of the reality of the danger the Stone Dike was designed to fend off.

Construction specifics and the plan of the Stone Dike and its affiliated forts demonstrate the involvement of the state in the administration construction, as well as the considerable size of the employed local labor and expertise. It is beyond doubt that this grand endeavor was planned, and its construction – organized and supervised by state clerks. Presently the stationing of military garrisons in the forts remains unconfirmed, and similarly no data exist to support the maintenance of direct line of communication to the state center. However, this might be due to the poor state of research. At the same time, numerous traces of settlements, occupied during the 9th and 10th c. AD, are found in the vicinity of the Stone Dike and on some of its forts. This offers grounds to suggest that the forts were maintained and guarded by the local population. The possibility that those peasants was charged with military duties should not be excluded, especially in view of the abundant contemporary comparanda from the lands of the Carolingian Ostmark and the Byzantine Empire. It is plausible to assume that state clerks and military garrisons operated some of the forts (nos XX, XXVII, near Rasova), where construction specifics and plans imply a greater affinity to the state centers. The grander scale of expenditure, in terms of resources, and architectural and construction skill allotted to their conception is readily observable.

The differences between the factors contributing to the emergence of the stone forts south and north of the Balkan Mountains are stressed by the chronological position of the respective sites. While in the newly conquered territories south of the Balkan mountains, and to some extent in the western Bulgarian territories, the onset of fortress building coincides with the act of their capture and persists over the entire period of their participation in the First Bulgarian Kingdom, for the core territory the phenomenon of fortress building is restricted to the end of the 9th – the beginning

of the 10th c. AD. At the same time the abandonment of the earthen dikes is already a fact, and the Magyar attacks make pointed statement about the vulnerability of the country's core territories.

The specific conditions operating in the southwestern Bulgarian territories after the transfer of the state center do not exclude the possibility for gradual appropriation of some of the functions of the state government related to the erection and defense of forts by the Bulgarian aristocracy. This hypothesis, however, is yet to be tested.

4. Factors contributing to the abandonment of the provincial stone fortresses.

The faith of the provincial stone fortresses during the period of the Byzantine dominion and the Second Bulgarian Kingdom

The faith of the early medieval Bulgarian forts is predetermined by the loss of territories and the final termination of the sovereign Bulgarian state in 1018. Within the frame of the Byzantine Empire they undergo different historical development, conditioned upon their location and changes in Byzantine political, military, administrative and economic system. Important role played also changes in the ethnic and demographic map of the Balkan peninsula, produced by the late nomads' invasions – Pechenegs, Uzi, Cumans, affecting especially the territories north of the Balkan mountains. A portion of the forts were preserved throughout the entire period of the Byzantine dominion, and were included in the resurrected Bulgarian state at the end of the 12th – beginning of the 13th c. AD, though with changed function, and sometimes design.

The heavy damage inflicted by the Pechenegs' invasions brought about the dissolution of the fortress network in modern day northeastern Bulgaria and Romanian Dobruja. The large scale military conflicts of the Byzantine Empire with Magyars, Serbs, Normans, and from the end of the 12th c. AD – with the restored Bulgarian Kingdom, as well as with the participants in the Third and Fourth Crusade have equivalent impact on the lands south of the Balkan Mountains and the southwestern Bulgarian territories. However, many of the provincial forts – Anhialo, Beroe, Mesemvria, Philippopolis, Serdica-Sredets, Skopije, Bitola, etc, survive or are restored to become important military-administrative, economic and church centers. The abandonment of forts, and the neglect to restore others is due to a large degree to the emergence of new regional centers, often found atop the ruins of Late Antiquity fortresses, and some newly established ones, which appropriate all those functions. Of utmost importance is the advance in warfare, especially in siege technology, which leads to sophistication of military architecture in the period of the 12th to the 14th c. AD. Those developments configure the interest of medieval monarchs and builders in well-planned, advantageously located on inaccessible terrain Late Antiquity forts. Simultaneously, many early medieval Bulgarian forts turn out to be unfit to answer to the new requirements and are abandoned or replaced by others, the construction of which obliterated the original features.

As a result of all those changes in the life on the Bulgarian lands during the 11th-12th c. AD, the defense system of the First Bulgarian Kingdom became almost irrelevant to the system employed by the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. This holds even more true for the core region of the pre-971 Bulgarian state. The preserved Bulgarian forts either continue to make use, with minor repairs, of the inherited Late Antiquity walls or built new ones. In both instances, however, the early medieval forts play no part in the development of the fortification of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom.

CONCLUSIONS

Data acquired in archaeological excavations demonstrates that the origin of the provincial stone fortresses must be linked to the expansion politics of the Bulgarian kingdom. In the ongoing conquest of new territories south of the Balkan Mountains, functioning Byzantine

forts such as Anhialo, Goloe, Mesemvria, Serdica, and Filippopolis were incorporated within the state borders. The necessity to control and protect the newly acquired lands prompted the emergence of other – Constantia, Markeli, and the fortress by Sliven.

A complex set of factors, amongst which changes within state military-political system, reflected in the abandonment of the system of earthen fortifications and the inability of the government to secure effective protection of the core area, set off the emergence of a large number of fortresses in modern day northeastern Bulgaria at the end of the 9th and the beginning of the 10th c. AD. A manifestation of this is the construction of the Stone Dike and the associated forts in northern Dobruja at the beginning of the 10th c. AD, possibly during the reign of King Simeon, or in the early years of the rule of his son, Peter. An identical trend can also be tracked in the lands west of the River Yantra, although some of the local forts, such as Bdin and Belgrade, were possibly military-administrative centers, exerting control and securing the defense of the territories annexed at the beginning of the 9th c. AD. Comparable functions probably had Pernik, Tserovo, and other forts from the southwestern Bulgarian territories. It is perceivable, however, that the construction of a significant number of the western forts was sponsored by the members of the Bulgarian ruling elite, result of a wave of construction projects realized in the context of the war with the Byzantine empire, spanning over a long period from the end of the 10th to the beginning of the 11th c. AD (the case of Bitolja and Melnik).

It is hard to reconstruct the picture for the lands north of the Danube River, where so far only one Bulgarian fortress is confirmed – the one by Slon. Since the region was much less densely settled, and probably served as a buffer zone, it is unreasonable to expect a large number of forts here.

Inquiry into the architectural layouts and the constructive specificities of the studied fortresses securely assigned to the period of the First Bulgarian Kingdom betrays the operation of two trends in the defensive architecture across the Bulgarian territories.

The first one is representative of the indigenous development, and is characterized by the typical for this early stage lack of construction expertise and knowledge of poliorketics. It is recognized by the unrefined and ineffective technique, making use of quarried stone set in mud, the compact size of the solid towers, which likely didn't exceed in height of the up to four-meter tall curtain walls. This is precisely the tradition in which most of the newly erected and re-used Late Antiquity forts in the core area, some of the forts of the Stone Dike, and some of those in the western Bulgarian territories were executed.

Certain sites – the one by Tsar Asen, a portion of the forts of the Stone Dike, and the one by Slon – are indicative of the influence from the monumental architecture of the *auls* of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. This simulation of monumentality, however, should not be taken as an indicator of foreign influence, since the resemblance is only in the appearance. The effect is imitated through the employment of stone blocks in the faces of the walls. The specifics of the construction and of the architectural planning, such as the lack of foundations and the use of solid towers, relates those to the forts executed in quarried stone set in mud. It seems most likely, that the noted distinctions reflect immediate involvement of the state in the design of forts like those at Tsar Asen and Slon.

The second trend reflected in the construction of the provincial stone fortresses, is most widely attested among the forts of the territories to the south of the Balkan mountains, in Thrace and in the southwestern Bulgarian lands. Characteristic here is the employment of a much more effective building technique – quarried stone bound in mortar, and the application of architectural plans, reviving the achievements of Late Antiquity poliorketics. The direct

influence of Byzantine traditions in fortification construction is beyond doubt. Triggers for its adoption seem to be the use of operating Byzantine installations by the Bulgarians, as well as the wartime collisions with others, which offered persuasive proof of the efficiency of the Byzantine forts. Possibly weight for the adoption of this building tradition into Bulgarian territories had the presence of skilled in the art of poliorketics personnel within the First Bulgarian Kingdom – Byzantine captives, refugees, and volunteer employees of the Bulgarian government.

Exchange and interactions between the two trends of defensive architecture can be traced in sites such as the fortresses by Pernik and Tserovo. Intriguing examples of monuments executed in one of the traditions, located amidst territories dominated by the other also exist. The barrier wall by the St. Nicolas church in Melnik reflects the influence of the native Bulgarian tradition in the territories south of the Balkan Mountains, while Veliki Gradats on Danube shows the characteristics of the Byzantine tradition.

The different defensive capacity of the forts constructed in the two distinct traditions is a result of their attunement to the peculiarities of the enemy force they were designed to deal with. In the lands north of the Balkan Mountains, forts were envisioned as protectors against unskilled in the art of siegecraft nomads from the northern Pontic steppes, while the forts to the south of the Balkan Mountains had to withstand the Byzantine Empire, with its centuries old tradition in poliorketics.

Data available on Bulgarian aptitude in fortification assault and defense is very limited. It may be suggested, however that after its swift materialization during the reign of Khan Krum, the Bulgarian siege park went on stand-by, or was even desolated. In contrast, skills in the defense of fortified sites were at their peak precisely in the final stages of the existence of the First Bulgarian Kingdom.

Data accumulated as a result of archaeological excavations allows asserting with greater confidence the existence of a comparatively developed defense system in the core area of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. It relied on the newly erected and on some re-used Late Antiquity forts, spaced at a one-day march from each other. This organization of the strongholds warranted the protection of the surrounding population and allowed them to exchange support troops, while simultaneously securing the communication lines.

An important part of this defensive system was the Dobruja Stone Dike. Despite its imperfections as a barrier, and its possible inability to effectively stop assaults, it offered a line of independently working fortresses, fulfilling tasks quite similar to the ones set in front of the forts of the core area.

Although the mass emergence of Bulgarian settlements atop the ruins of Late Antiquity forts at the beginning of the 10th c. AD is likely directly linked to the demographic growth, it may also be taken as an indicator of the imperfections of the core area's defense system. The failure of the new forts to offer protection to the entire population against the ongoing nomad invasions might have generated the search for naturally protected sites for settlement. It must be stressed, however, that on the hitherto studied reclaiming naturally defensible positions sites – Odartsi, Debrene, Stana kale – there is no evidence for repair of the Late Antiquity defensive walls.

The system of the country's core territories, envisaged with the attacks of the northern Pontic steppes nomads in mind, proved incapable of fending off the well organized military campaigns, which brought about the end of the Bulgarian statehood north of the Balkan Mountains after 971.

In contrast to the modern day northeastern Bulgaria and Romanian Dobruja, there are no indications that the forts of the other Bulgarian territories were organized in a similar

defensive network. They were a response to local interests and were of local significance, erected in order to resolve region-specific problems. This in no way diminishes their importance in the defense of the state, function which came to the forth after the transfer of the state center to the southwestern Bulgarian lands and during the extended independence war against the Byzantine Empire.

The connection of the stone outlying fortresses to the road network of the First Bulgarian Kingdom is obvious, and they are convincingly regarded as a kind of way stations promising safe travel. The exact design of the state road system is however still unknown, and with few exceptions, the communication routes, beyond the main road Drastar – Pliska – Preslav – Rishki pass, are still to be clarified, as well as the specifics role the forts had in it.

Alongside their function as fortified places, offering protection to the people and the land, most forts are in fact fortified settlements. For some newly erected and re-used Late Antiquity sites north of the Balkan Mountains this in fact is the dominant qualification. The layout, architecture, and specifics of the artefacts found there are in accord with the material registered at unfortified sites, with the obvious exception of the fortification features and the presence of churches. Often they appear to be the focal point for the settlements in the immediate vicinity. This likely made them into natural regional centers, but there is no reason to interpret them as “towns”.

Immediately related to the character of the forts and the architectural plans and constructive specifics of their fortifications is the issue of who built, maintained and defended them. While the newly erected and re-used Late Antiquity sites of the lands north of the Balkan Mountains (with the exception of the Stone Dike, Slon, and possibly of Tsar Asen, Bdin and Belgrade) should be associated with the initiative of the local peasant communities, most of the forts south of the Balkan Mountains betray government involvement. It is telling that precisely the latter ones preserve traces of higher status inhabitants and ongoing communications with the state center, an example of which are the discoveries at the forts by Serdica, Pernik, Sliven. While for the strongholds of the core area evidence of soldiers or administrators is lacking, outside the central territories the function of military-administrative centers was obviously designated precisely to the stone forts discussed in the present text.

The dissolution of the First Bulgarian Kingdom and the heavy blows the Pechenegs inflicted on the lands north of the Balkan Mountains contribute to the disappearance of many of the Bulgarian stone provincial forts. The inclusion of some in the military-administrative system of the Byzantine Empire predetermines the changes in function and architecture, introduced to them. The implementation of Byzantine experience and traditions is reflected by the fortification practices of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. All those factors brought an end to the development of the native Bulgarian tradition in military architecture.