

PRELIMINARY NOTES ON THE MEDIEVAL STRUCTURES OF TÂRGȘORU VECHI*

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Abstract: The recent archaeological research at the Voivodal Court area has revealed new data regarding the evolution of masonry structures.

Rezumat: Cercetările arheologice recente efectuate în zona Curții Domnești au adus noi precizări referitoare la evoluția structurilor de zid. A fost identificat un nivel de locuire din secolul al XV-lea și s-au conturat clădiri noi precum cea cu absidă (nr. 2), cea rectangulară (nr. 4) sau gârliciul de acces la beci (nr. 3). De asemenea, au fost identificate elemente care să permită redatarea unor structuri, cum este cea rectangulară (nr. 4) din secolul al XIX-lea în secolul al XVI-lea.

The ongoing project regarding the volumetric reconstruction of the buildings of Turnu monastery (cells and abbot house) on their former location (project carried out by architect C. Hoinărescu) has again drawn archaeological attention to this area of sector “B” of the Archaeological Reservation of Târgșoru Vechi, Prahova County. The interest was particularly higher given the very brief nature of the published results of the archaeological excavations carried out by N. Constantinescu in the 1960’s.¹ It was on the occasion of that research campaign that the foundations of the “Voivodal Houses” and those of the monastery cells were identified.

Hence, resumption of the archaeological research in this particular sector of the Reservation after almost 40 years was intended to complete the excavation of the area affected by the building project and to recover some unpublished information about the constructions identified in the former excavations.

The first research in the Voivodal Court area began in 1959, being carried out by N. Constantinescu. It was continued till 1964 whereas, starting the following year, N. Constantinescu who was in charge focused on the archaeological excavations in Târgoviște that had already been started in 1961.

The outcome of his observations was published in a short article in 1969, where the author, N. Constantinescu, suggested a separation of the evolution of the buildings in the Voivodal Court into five phases, which we will briefly present below.

The first phase was about the foundations of the Voivodal House, seen as a rectangular building, erected in front of the first enclosure wall. The latter was allegedly built in the 16th century, most probably under Neagoe Basarab, a time when data regarding a Voivodal Court in Târgșoru Vechi start to appear.

The second phase, dated back to the 17th century, was marked by the construction of Antonie Voivod’s church. The buildings next to the gate tower are dated back to the same time and the edifice on the west side appeared as well. The Voivodal House was subject to change and was transformed into an abbot house.

The third stage, i.e. the beginning of the 18th century, meant the construction of the second enclosure wall, as well as a structure with a gutter, thought to be a granary or kitchen. Mention is made of a circular structure, belonging to this phase as well, located in the middle of the first enclosure, which is assumed to have been a fountain. Recent excavations showed that this particular building was identified only, yet it was not entirely researched by N. Constantinescu.

The fourth phase, dated back to the second half of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, was characterized by modifications of the abbot house and by a frontal addition of a porch to the construction on the west side of the first enclosure.

* The present contribution is based on the paper *Considerații privind curtea medievală de la Târgșoru Vechi* [*Considerations regarding the medieval court of Târgșoru Vechi*] given at the Symposium ARA/11, 2011.

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¹ Constantinescu 1969.

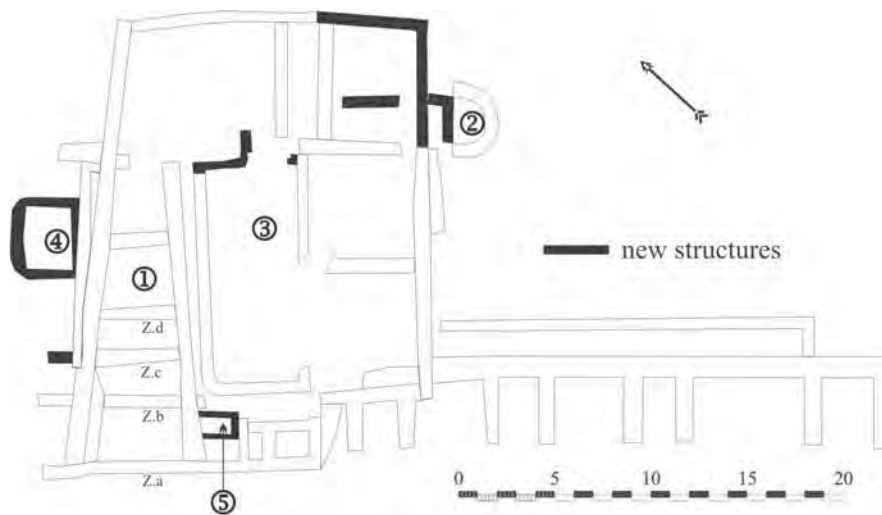


Fig. 1. General map of old and new structures

The last phase, the fifth one, was dated back to the first half of the 19th century when it was only minor changes of the already identified structures that were noticed.

The archaeological excavations carried out in 2005, 2007 and especially in 2009 by a team made up of archaeologists Andrei Măgureanu of the Institute of Archaeology of Bucharest and Bogdan Ciupercă of Prahova County Museum of History and Archaeology, together with Dorin Sârbu and Eugen Paveleț who worked on the project in 2005 only,² succeeded in identifying and investigating a number of new structures, unknown from the previous excavations, and in collecting data that allowed a reconsideration of the development stages of the Voivodal Houses and, later, of the Abbot Houses (Fig. 1). The task proved to be very difficult when new structures were identified (Figs. 2-4). An attempt to identify the various stratigraphic

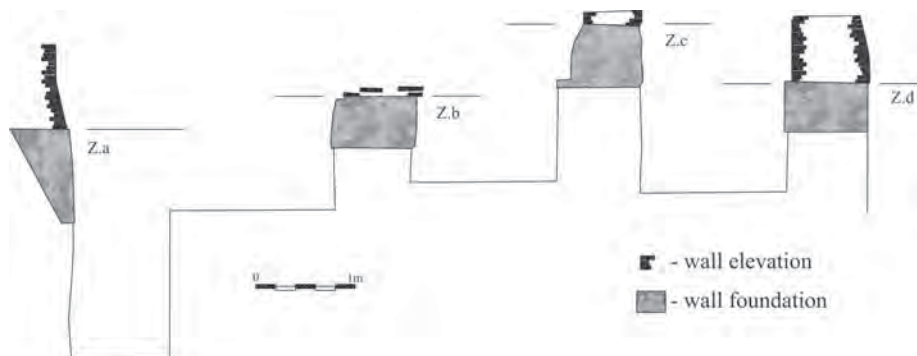


Fig. 2. Sequence with differences between 4 ground levels of close structures

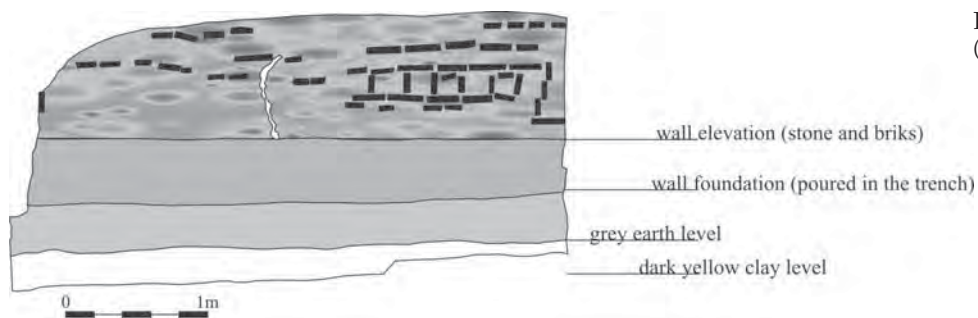


Fig. 3. Stratigraphic sequence (Z.d)

² Niculescu *et al.* 2006.



Fig. 4. General view over the north part of the excavated area

relations was almost impossible due to the destruction of the archaeological layers either because of previous research, or because of modern levelling of the area.

The following lines will briefly show the outcome of the new excavations in the Voivodal Houses area.

1. First of all, from a chronological point of view, a new level of habitation was identified, i.e. wooden constructions that were observed in particular owing to the burnt clay remains that cover the area of the former building.



Fig. 5. Burned remains of a 15th-century structure and stove tiles



A first structure is a surface building, marked by a 20-centimeter burnt clay layer imprecisely shaped because of subsequent stone buildings that cover it (Fig. 5). The chronology of this construction is enabled by some fragments of stove-tiles dating from the 15th century, according to Mrs. Venera Rădulescu.³

A second wooden structure is a basement of which the slope entrance and partially the main chamber were identified. This building was destroyed by fire too. Unfortunately, dating this cellar can only be presumed from its stratigraphic overlapping by the aforementioned 15th century wooden building. Hence, we think it acceptable to date the cellar back to the 15th century as well.

It is very important to identify this 15th-century habitation level, on the one hand, because it starts to outline the area in the times when the church built by Vlad Țepeș was used, and, on the other hand, because of the positioning of these wooden constructions on the same location where the stone and brick houses will later be built.

2. A semicircular structure, identified by N. Constantinescu and assumed to be a fountain, is, in fact, a fragment of a building that had an apse looking to the south-east (Fig. 6). The archaeological excavations found fragile foundations made of cobblestone bound with lime mortar. The aspect of the foundations suggests a wooden structure on top of it.



Fig. 6. Structure with apse



Fig. 7. Rectangular structure

From a stratigraphic point of view, the semicircular apse building overlaps a 14th-15th-century inhumation grave, unfortunately with no inventory pieces in it, and its north-western part is destroyed by a wall dated by N. Constantinescu back to the 18th century, which we believe can be related to a 16th-century stage based on its relation to other masonry structures.

Therefore, our view is that the apse building, that we believe to be most probably a small chapel, functioned some time in the 15th to 16th century, and not in the 18th century.

3. As far as the cellar of the Voivodal House is concerned, we managed to find the entrance corridor in the 2005 campaign, as well as in the 2009 one. Its position does not follow the main axis of the cellar, being built in the southern part of the east side. We found the places where the wooden doors were fixed in the walls and the wooden fragment of the threshold.

4. On the north-western side of the first enclosure of the Voivodal Court, N. Constantinescu marked the inception of a building that he dated back to the final phase of the architectural ensemble of Târșoru Vechi, i.e. the 19th century.

In 2009 we managed to uncover the entire building (Fig. 7). It is rectangular in shape, with outer

³ We would like to express, again, our gratitude for her kind observations.

rounded corners, built of bricks bound with lime mortar, going over 2.00 m deep below today's walking level. In the upper part of the walls, there are still some fragments of mixed masonry preserved that allow us to believe that there were some brick and cobblestone boxes at this masonry level.

If, as far as the functionality of this structure is concerned, we still have to clear things out, we can however make some observations regarding its chronology. Thus, one can notice that the south-eastern corner of the building is overlapped by a stone wall that, in its turn, is damaged by the wall of first enclosure. Taking into consideration that, based on the observations made in the 60's, the enclosure wall can be dated back to the 16th century, the structure that was completely excavated in 2009 cannot be dated to the 19th century, as it had been suggested, but to the 16th century, if not even earlier than that.

5. The last construction presented here is yet another surprise, as it was not identified in the excavations in the 60's.

It is a rectangular structure, sunken deep in the ground, built entirely of cobblestone bound with lime mortar. The floor of this structure is made in the same manner as the walls. Dimensions, depth (1.80 m), presence of a floor, low temperature inside even in summertime were all arguments in favour of interpreting it as a "storage place". As far as chronology is concerned, we can rely only on indirect suggestions. Because it is overlapped by an 18th-century wall, we can presume it must have been built before this century. Also, the "storage place" is located outside a 16th-century wall which seems to have been taken into account at the time of construction. Thus, we suggest a most likely dating back to the 17th century, a premise which is also supported by the dating suggested for the cellar of the Voivodal House, and the similarities of the two constructions (materials, technique and thickness of walls).

We have tried here to briefly present some new data gathered during the recent excavations of 2005, and particularly those of 2009, and we think these data managed to add to the image of this area in the medieval ensemble in Târgșoru Vechi. These new structures have suggested clarifications, and new questions as well as concerns the chronology, dynamics, evolution of the mediaeval landscape, and the impact of architectural transformations connected to its 17th-century change from Voivodal House to Abbot House.

The answers are, as usual, hard to find and the analysis of our field research is not finished yet. However, we can already state that the evolution of the mediaeval Târgșoru Vechi is completely different from that in the 60's.

Bibliographical abbreviations:

- Constantinescu 1969 – N. Constantinescu, *Note arheologice și istorice asupra curții feudale de la Târgșor*, SCIV 20, 1969, 1, pp. 83-100.
- Niculescu *et al.* 2006 – Gh. Al. Niculescu, A. Măgureanu, D. Sârbu, D. Lichiardopol, B. Ciupercă, E. Paveleț, A. Frânculeasa, *Târgșoru Vechi, jud. Prahova, Punct: La Mănăstire*, CCA (Campania 2005), 2006, pp. 362-365.