

STRUCTURE WITH CRYPT AND MASONRY TOMB AT KARATAŠ NEAR KLADOVO

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Roman fortification at the site Karataš is situated about 4 km from Sip towards the village Davidovac in the district of Kladovo (Serbia). At that location already F. Kanitz identified Roman castrum of quadrangular shape.¹ It is nowadays certain that fortification at Karataš could be identified as Roman fortification Diana. The site has been explored to the great extent, the date of construction of the earliest fortification has been determined, building phases are distinguished and period of use established (Fig. 1).²

First sondage excavations at the site Karataš that have been exclusively of rescue character have been conducted in 1964 and 1965.³ Five sondages and two control trenches were investigated. Sondages have been located mostly in the north section of the site towards the Danube bank. In the sondage no. 4 on the northern Danube slope has been completely investigated one interesting structure, which will be the subject of our attention in this work dedicated to dear friend Doina Benea.

Structure is of rectangular shape, external dimensions being 8.20 x 6.70 m and oriented northwest-southeast with the entrance in the southeast. It consists of underground and aboveground section (Fig. 2).

Subterranean part – crypt (Fig. 3, 6) is divided by 0.80 m thick partition wall into two segments (east and west). West segment (1) is of square shape with side length of 2.30 m and has three deep niches (arcosolia); two in the north and south respectively (2.30 x 1.40 m) and one in the west (2.30 x 1.22 m). The east segment (2) of the same size as the west one has two arcosolia in the north and south respectively (2.30 x 1.30 m). Arcosolia have barrel vaults built of bricks. The height of niche vaults is about 2.10 x 2.15 m. Shallow cross vault has been by all appearances constructed above the central areas 1 and 2. The height of this vault equals the height of niche vaults. The perimeter walls of the crypt are of variable thickness, from 0.70 to 1.00 m. The wall had been built of river pebble. At the half height of the underground section at the spot where the vault structure of arcosolia commenced there are three courses of brick (0.34 x 0.24 x 0.05 m). The

¹ F. Kanitz, *Römische Studien in Serbien*, Wien 1892, 49.

² M. Vasić, V. Kondić, *Le limes romain et paléobyzantin des Portes de Fer*, 13. Internationaler Limeskongress Aalen 1983, *Studien zu den Militärgrenzen Roms III*, Stuttgart 1986, 542 – 560; J. Rankov, *The Earliest Fortification of Diana, Roman Limes on the Middle and Lower Danube* (ed. P. Petrović), Beograd 1996, 81 – 91; P. Petrović, M. Vasić, *The Roman Frontier in Upper Moesia: Archaeological investigations in the Iron Gate area – main results*, *ibid*, 15 – 26.

vaults and the walls upon which the vaults are resting had been built exclusively of bricks. Traces of wooden formwork in the mortar are discernible on the vault of northeastern niche indicating that vaults had been built carefully using formwork. The wall foundation finishing vertically without foundational extension has been encountered at the level height (61,61) i.e. 3.10 meters under upper, preserved wall surface. Floor of the crypt is preserved in the room 1. It was made of bricks $0.35 \times 0.28 \times 0.05$ m and laid in some sections directly on the virgin soil and in some sections on the thin mortar layer. The floor in niches is damaged probably as a result of plundering. Large amount of broken bricks and pebbles was found in the damaged zones.

Entrance to the crypt via approaching staircase, internal size being 0.90×1.80 m is in the east. Staircase structure is leaning against east wall of the structure. The walls are of unequal thickness and built of river pebbles and brick laid in lime mortar. South and east walls are 0.50 m thick and the north wall is 0.28 m thick. Only three stairs of unequal height are preserved. Topmost section of stairs the treads are made of brick also of unequal length. The entrance structure is excavated into the virgin soil at the depth of 0.90 m (Fig. 5).

The ground section of the structure is of the same size and shape as the crypt (Fig. 4). It is divided by 0.40 m thick partition wall in two rooms of approximately same size ($3.20 - 3.35 \times 5.00 - 5.20$ m). The thickness of perimeter walls is 0.70 m. The wall had been built of large pebbles with sparse pieces of rough stone and bricks laid in mortar. Their state of preservation is not uniform. The south wall is best preserved, up to the height of 0.60 m. North wall of the structure has been demolished to the ground level. Along the middle of the west wall of room 1 has been preserved an impression of the timber post 0.22 m wide in its entire length. Same impression has been ascertained along the entire length of the south wall and also at the beginning of the partition wall. There is an aperture 1.00 m wide in the partition wall.

Mortar floor is preserved in two zones in the west room (1). Fragments of later floor consisting of small pieces of brick and mortar are preserved in the northwest corner. Fragment of primary, earlier floor near the partition wall is made of mortar overlaying substructure of pebbles. The height difference between these two floors is 0.16 m (Fig. 4).

The decorated white marble slab, $1.35 \times 0.93 \times 0.18$ m consisting of two joining pieces was discovered in the debris in the central zone of the ground floor (room 2) next to the partition wall. The slab 0.95×1.45 m and 0.18 cm thick consists of two panels (0.50×0.60 m) is decorated with relief horizontal and vertical bands intersecting diagonally in the center where are also in relief two concentric circles 15 and 7 cm in diameter (Figs. 4, 7). Fragments of another slab have been discovered in the vicinity (Fig. 4). In the same room, in the debris, next to the passage between

³ The works were directed by Ilija Jankovkić, curator of Museum in Bor. Results of archaeological excavations were not published in detail. Except short report by I. Janković, Karataš, Kladovo – antičko utvrđenje, *Arheološki pregled* 6/1964, 53 – 55, we also used Field documentation that is stored in the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade.

rooms 1 and 2 has been found dressed stone, fragment of a column dimensions of which are: diameter 0.40 m, torus circumference 0.63 m and height 0.15 m.

The vault of the crypt has been broken through and interior was filled with debris and earth. In the course of cleaning the structure there were found under the vaults besides the building rubble (stone, brick and tegulae) also large amount of fragmented mostly Late Roman pottery including one beaker fragment and many animal bones. Two fragmented bricks with partially preserved inscription /AILAIO../ have also been found in the course of tomb exploration. Worth mentioning among other finds are one cruciform fibula without pin, bronze bracelet with one flaring end, four fragments of a bracelet of glass paste of bluish color, an iron spur, iron knife and one awl of rectangular section, poorly preserved. In the south section of the structure have been found considerable quantity of black-fired pottery with wavy line and fingernail impressions and in the northeast corner of the west section of the tomb large number of animal bones was discovered in the building rubble at the depth of 1.10 m. In the debris immediately above the crypt floor was found few fragments of the skull, one complete thigh bone, few fragments of the leg bones of human skeleton, two iron nails with traces of wood (probably of coffin) and two fragments of thin cooper sheet. Fragmented human bones have been encountered also in the upper layers of the debris. One bronze coin with obverse representation of Constans and Victory on reverse was also found in the earth excavated next to the north wall.

In the north niche at 1.45 m from the apex of the vault has been discovered a hearth 1.00 x 1.00 m in size with thick layer of ash and scorched animal bones. Large amount of fragments of Late Roman (?) pottery, six fragments of glass bracelets of blue color and one rather massive forged iron nail with circular head were found at the level of the hearth and immediately above it. In the close vicinity of the hearth has also been found large amount of animal and fish bones.

In 1978, in the vicinity of the structure with crypt at about 5.0 m distance has been investigated one barrel vaulted masonry tomb oriented west-east with deviation of eastern end of 30° towards north (Fig.1).⁴ The walls of the tomb, which internal perimeter is 2.10 x 1.20 x 0.85 m were built of pebbles laid in lime mortar and the vault was built of bricks of the format 0.36 x 0.27 x 0.50 m. Floor was paved with bricks. The skeletons of 19 inhumed individuals whose bones were dislocated and poorly preserved were discovered in the tomb. The deceased had been most probably laid in supine position and placed one on top of the other. Closer to the floor have been found grave goods including bronze cruciform fibula dating from 4th century, circular belt buckle, damaged, beads of blue glass paste and one polyhedral bead of carnelian. It is most probable that grave goods should be attributed to the earliest interments in the tomb.⁵ According to the reported

⁴ Data about this find are published in anthropological report. S. Živanović, restes des ossements humains dans la tombe de Karataš près de Kladovo, *Cahiers des Portes de Fer II* (ed. Vč Kondić), Beograd 1984, 19 – 23. Ijudskih kostura iz grobnice u Karatašu kod Kladova, *Đerdapske sveske II*, Beograd 1984,

⁵ Finds are not published, see S. Živanović, *op. cit.* 19.

anthropological analysis 19 individuals of different gender and age had been buried in the tomb. The buried individuals were members of the same family or have been genetically related. It was the native population with the mixture of Mediterranean race.⁶

There were neither other tombs nor structures in the surroundings of the structure with crypt.

On the basis of examined material a few questions could be raised concerning construction and purpose of this structure. In the first place we must discuss the location of the structure. Entrance to the ground level of the structure was on the axis of the road running from south and north gate towards the Danube where the harbor was located. This was the main and by all appearances the only approaching road from the harbor to the fortification gate. As we have already mentioned there was no other structures in this area and in the vicinity and it could be assumed that the intention was for this building to dominate by its appearance and position this section of the Danube slope under fortification walls and north gate.⁷

Architectural construction and general structure of the building with crypt suggest its cult character as it had been already indicated by Ivanka Nikolajević.⁸ The ground section of the building consists of two rooms of approximately same size. The east room was used as vestibule while west room was intended for the cult and between them was a partition wall. The interior of the ground floor was probably plastered but there are no data that it was decorated with fresco paintings. The entire decoration of the building was concentrated on the partition wall. Discovery of marble parapet panels and of column fragment near the wall suggests its possible appearance. The span between north and south wall of the ground floor was 5.20 m and that makes possible disposition of panels and columns in the following way. Composition of the partition wall was symmetrical. In the middle of the partition wall, on longitudinal axis of the building was a passage about 1.00 m wide. Next to the entrance, in the north and south, was one parapet panel each and at the joint of partition wall and perimeter walls of the building was one column each. What was the upper section of this monumental partition structure looking like is not quite clear. There are two possibilities. First solution includes architrave resting on massive columns and also probably supported by balusters (up to 0.15 m in diameter) arranged on the top of the panels. Second solution supposes arched structure resting on columns similar to the reconstructed altar partition at the site Manastirine in Salona (Fig. 8).⁹ The absence of architectural decoration but also general characteristics of the building structure with predominant use of bricks suggests that the latter

⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷ Downstream from these finds, outside fortified area at the Danube slope was discovered a few pagan shrines. Material from archaeological excavations has not been published.

⁸ I. Nikolajević, *Sahranjivanje u ranohrišćanskim crkvama na području Srbije*, *Arheološki vestnik* XXIX, Ljubljana 1978, 685.

⁹ N. Duval. E. Marin, *Salona I*, CEFR 194, Rome-Split 1994, 236 – 237, pl. LXXII, X.a.1.

solution is more probable (Fig. 9). The roof cover made of tegulae and imbrices was arranged over pitched roof construction placed over the barrel vault or the wooden ceiling. Panels with identical motif of intertwined molded bands and of similar dimensions have been found in Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica) but the exact finding place is unknown. Nowadays two of these panels are built into the wall of a modern building (Fig. 10)¹⁰ while fragment of similar panel is in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb (Fig. 11).¹¹ They are associated with some of the Early Christian basilicas in the town. Same motif of decoration was encountered at 4th century parapet panels from Salona.¹² Diagonally crossed molded bands have been recorded on the representation of a barrier on the Constantine's triumphal arch in Rome as well as on the marble base of the obelisk of Theodosius I in Constantinople.¹³ Similar type of barrier was depicted on the wall of early Christian tomb in Niš, dating from the end of 4th century.¹⁴ The use of such type of barrier is confirmed in the catacombs of St. Callixte and St Cyriac in Rome.¹⁵ In the end of 5th and during the 6th century panels with intersecting molded bands have been combined with cross and circle i.e. wreath (sites Kolovrat near Prijepolje in Serbia, Salona and Založje in Dalmatia in Croatia and in Duklja in Montenegro).¹⁶ All quoted examples of panels have been used as decoration of Early Christian basilicas or tombs although identical or similar motif could be also encountered on the pagan monuments of that time. We would like to mention just one, which is an integral part of the bronze railing discovered at Mediana near Niš. This barrier had been neatly packed and hidden 100 m to the northeast from villa with peristyle. By all appearances it was the part of shrine created in the time of Julian (361-363) in the triclinium of villa together with sculptures of Asclepius, Mercury, Hygieia, Satyr, Dea Dardanica etc. This railing is dated into the second half of the 4th century.¹⁷

Parapet panels from Diana could be with more certainty determined as Christian and ground floor of the building as Christian chapel. Panels from Karataš and from Sirmium according to I. Nikolajević had been produced in the same stonecutting atelier.¹⁸

The crypt according to the size and shape of plan resembles the crypt of martyrrium in Niš from the second half of the 4th century (Fig. 12).¹⁹ Martyrium in Naissus, oriented west-east with

¹⁰ A. Móczy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia*, London and Boston, 1974, Pl. 41.

¹¹ Fragment of stone barrier from Sirmium was presented to ban Jelačić by Ignjat Jung teacher from Sremska Mitrovica in 1905, J. Brunšmid, *Kameni spomenici hrvatskog Narodnog muzeja u Zagrebu*, *Vjesnik hrvatskog arheološkog društva* 11 (1910 – 1911), Zagreb 1911, Cat. 668.

¹² N. Duval. E. Marin, *op. cit.*, 264, pl. LXXXVII, X.c.44.

¹³ I. Nikolajević, *op. cit.*, 685.

¹⁴ L. Mirković, *Starohrišćanska grobnica u Nišu*, *Starinar* 5 – 6 (1954 – 1955, izd 1956), 53 – 72; Idem, *Ograda na slikama raja u katakombama Rima i ranohrišćanskim grobnicama u Pečuju i Nišu*, *Starinar* 9 – 10 (1958 – 1959), 215 – 216.

¹⁵ Cabrol-Leclercq, *DACHL*, II-2, 1921, 1723, fig. 1937.

¹⁶ I. Nikolajević, *op. cit.*, 685.

¹⁷ M. Vasić, *Bronze Railing from Mediana*, *Starinar* 43 (2003), in print.

¹⁸ I. Nikolajević, *op. cit.*, 685.

entrance in the east and aboveground structure used for practicing of the cult is dated in the second half of the 4th century, in the time of Constantius (337-361).²⁰ The find of coin with representation of Constans (337-350) indicates that structure with crypt at Karataš could have been built not before the fourth decade of the 4th century and that it could be related with construction of martyrium in Naissus. In that context the questions could be raised concerning the use and purpose of the underground section of the structure i.e. the crypt. The entrance to the crypt was under the approaching road and must have been closed and inaccessible to the visitors. According to the available archaeological documentation it could be concluded that there were no burials under the crypt floor. Found human bones have been dislocated and in the same layer with building rubble and fragmented archaeological material and it is difficult to decide whether they date from the time of construction or they have been buried there in the later periods of tomb use. Furthermore, the number of the buried individuals is not determined but it is certain, according to the nails found that the deceased had been buried in wooden coffins.

In the report at the end of daily log of excavations that unfortunately has not been published I. Janković identifies structure with crypt as 'martyrium'. In the hagiographic material the name of the martyr who could be associated with this structure is not mentioned.²¹ The find of cruciform fibula in the layer of debris indicates that crypt has been in use in the 4th century but also suggests that high ranking military official could have been buried there. According to the mentioned finds it could be assumed that it had been Christian chapel with crypt where relics or fragments of relics of some of the martyrs persecuted somewhere else have been deposited. Persecution of martyrs and throwing of their bodies in the river had not been isolated incident in the end of 3rd and in the beginning of the 4th century.²² We should not exclude the possibility that structure with crypt had been a memoria of some Christian saint as protector of navigation on the Danube while the find of cruciform fibula is perhaps an indirect evidence that some officer of the Roman army or even representative of the river fleet took advantage of his rank and position and was buried in the crypt. The privilege of burial in the immediate vicinity of a martyr, in the memoria, is historically and archaeologically confirmed in Salona and to some extent in Naissus.²³ The reconstruction of the floor in the west room confirms that this structure had been in use for rather long period of time but the date of destruction of the tomb could not be established precisely.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 686.

²⁰ G. Milošević, Late Roman Martyrium and Basilica at the Necropolis in Niš (Naissus), Conference *The cult of martyrs and the relics, its architecture in East and West (3 – 7 c.)*, Regional Museum of History, Varna, in print

²¹ Cf. H. Delehaye, Saints de Thrace et de Mésie, *Analecta Bolondiana* 31 (1912); Idem, *Les Origines du culte des Martyrs*, Bruxelles 1933; J. Zeiler, *Les origines chrétiennes dans les Provinces Danubiennes de l'empire Roman*, Paris 1967.

²² Prisoner Hermylus and his converted guard Stratonicus were persecuted about the middle of second decade of the 4th century, in the time of Licinius' conflicts with Constantine. J. Zeiller, *Les origines chrétiennes dans les Provinces Danubiennes de l'empire Roman*, Paris 1967, 106 – 107. On character of conflicts and persecution of martyrs see M. Mirković, Licinije i progoni hrišćana u Singidunumu, *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta* XIV-1, Beograd, 21 – 26.

Now, we would like to return to the problem of construction of barrel vaulted tomb where remains of 19 inhumed individuals have been found. One of few grave goods, bronze cast, cruciform fibula dated into the 4th century suggests contemporaneity or short time interval between construction of these two structures and also their interrelation. According to the anthropological analysis the deceased were the members of one family or of few genetically close families that have been buried at the same place during rather long time. The find of fibula in this tomb also indicates high army rank and could be associated with the privilege of interment ad sanctos that was permitted also to the descendants of the family. The absence of necropolis could be explained by the fact that structure with crypt had been destroyed in the Hunnish invasion in the middle of the 4th century and was not restored in the end of 5th or in the beginning of the 6th century as it was archaeologically confirmed in the martyrium in Naissus.²⁴ The hearth established above the crypt floor certainly dates from the period when structure did not serve its original sacred purpose and without detailed analysis of pottery and other material it is difficult to draw any conclusions.

Finally to conclude that discovery of the structure with crypt raises many questions concerning Christian religion in the Danube basin and that it is one of few Early Christian monuments that almost with certainty could be dated in the 4th century. It was the period of reign of Constantine's heirs Constans and Constantius when more intensive construction of early Christian churches, tombs and martyria in the central Balkans has started.

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²³ G. Milošević, *op. cit.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Fig. 11 Fragment of stone panel from Sirmium, today in Archaeological Museum in Zagreb (J. Brunšmid, *Kameni spomenici hrvatskog Narodnog muzeja u Zagrebu*, *Vjesnik hrvatskog arheološkog društva* 11 (1910 – 1911), Zagreb 1911, cat. 668).

Fig. 12 Naissus, East necropolis, martyrion and basilica (after G. Milošević, *Late Roman martyrion and Basilica at the Necropolis in Niš (Naissus)*, "The cult of martyrs and the relics, its architecture in East and West (3 – 7 c.)", Regional Museum of History, Varna, in print).

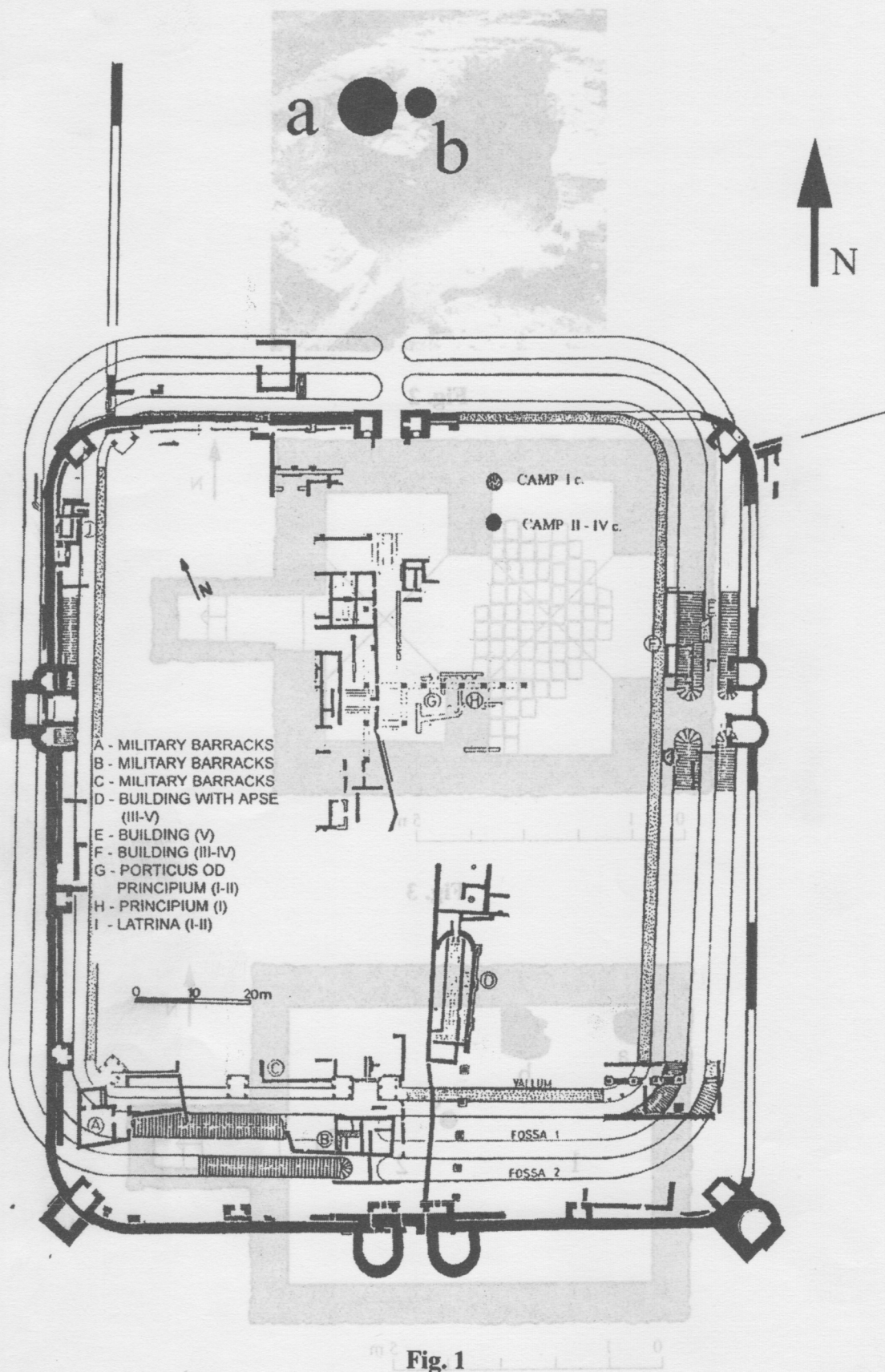
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²⁴ G. Milošević, op. cit.
²⁵ Ibid.



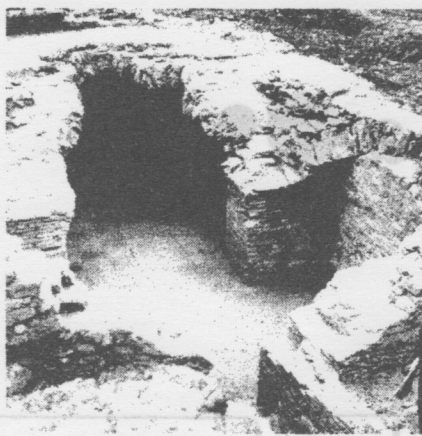


Fig. 2

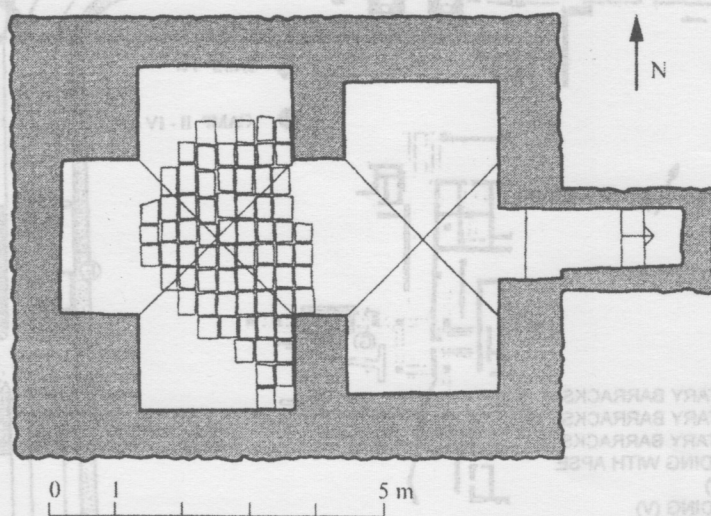


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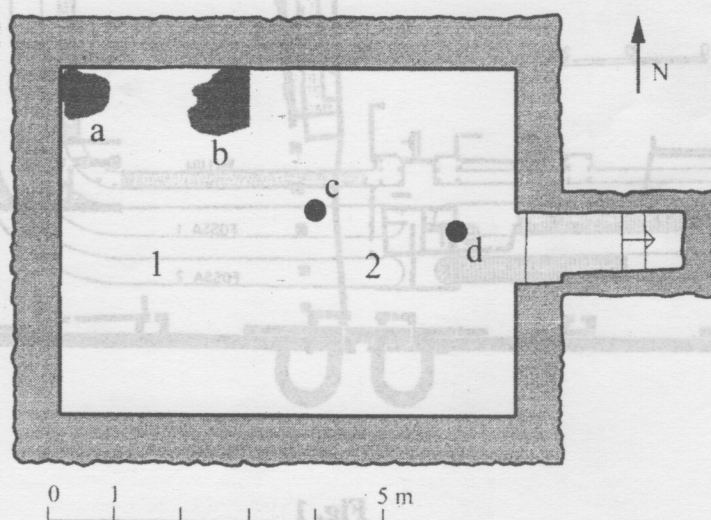


Fig. 4

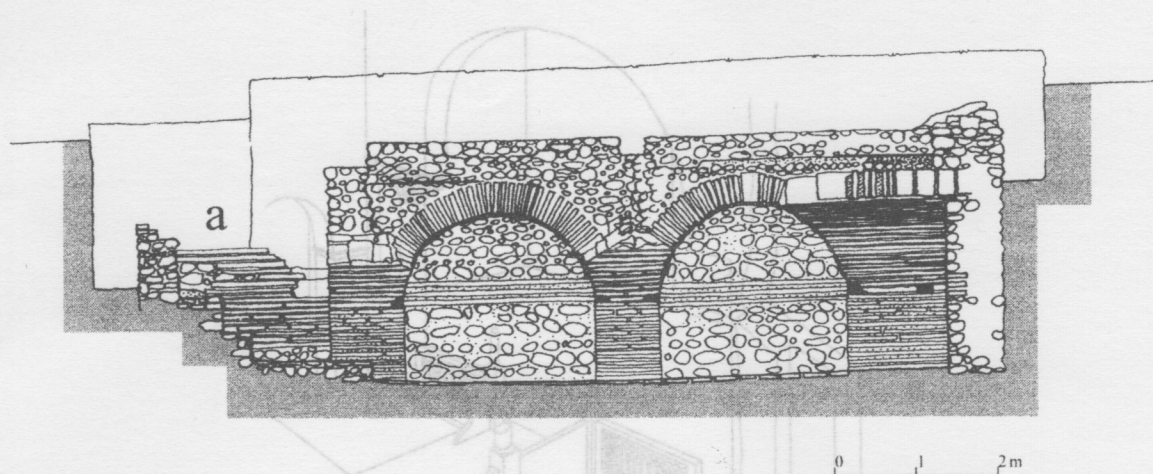


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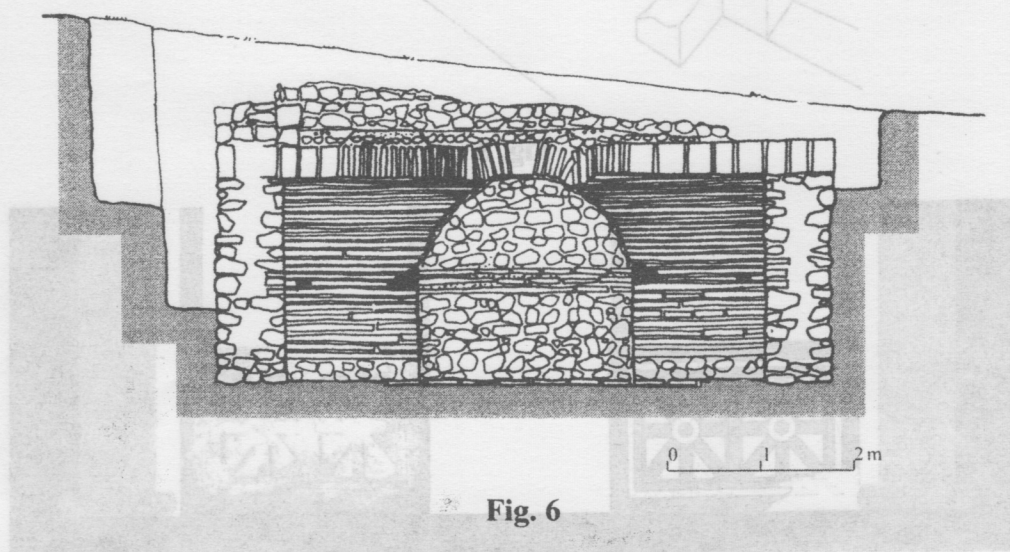


Fig. 6

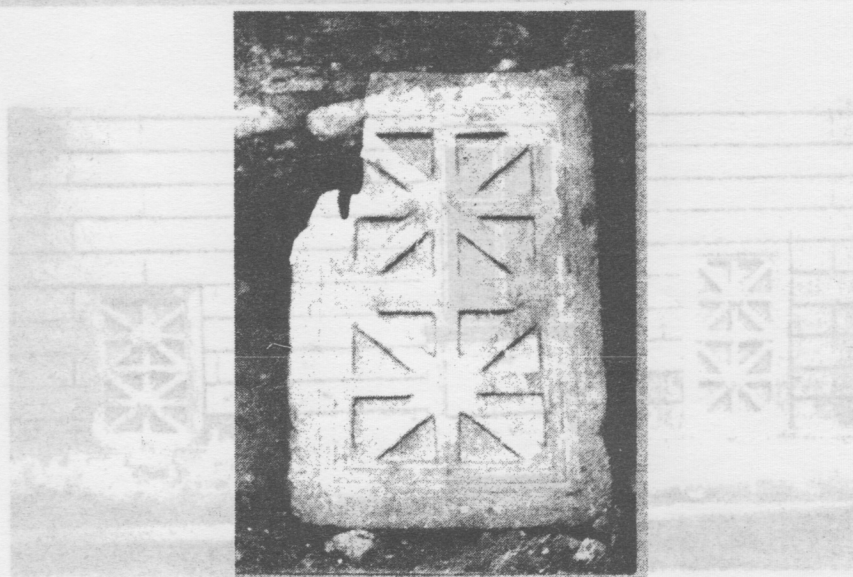


Fig. 7

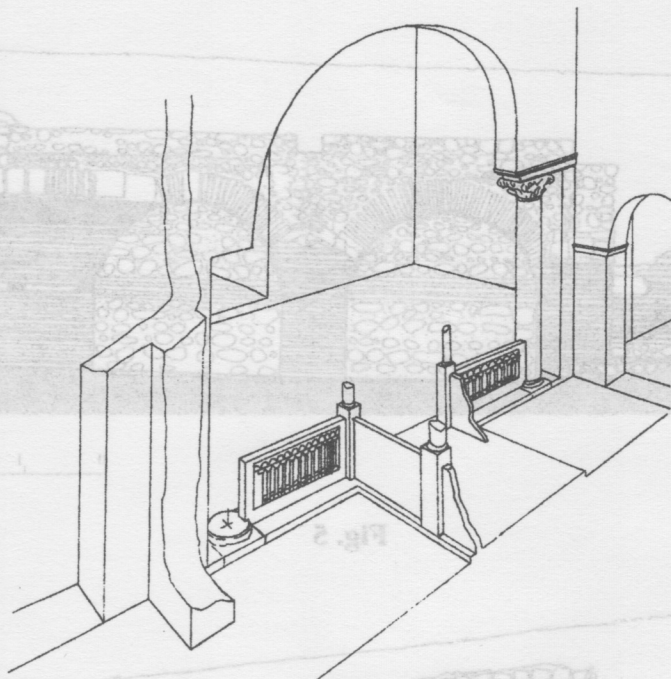


Fig. 8

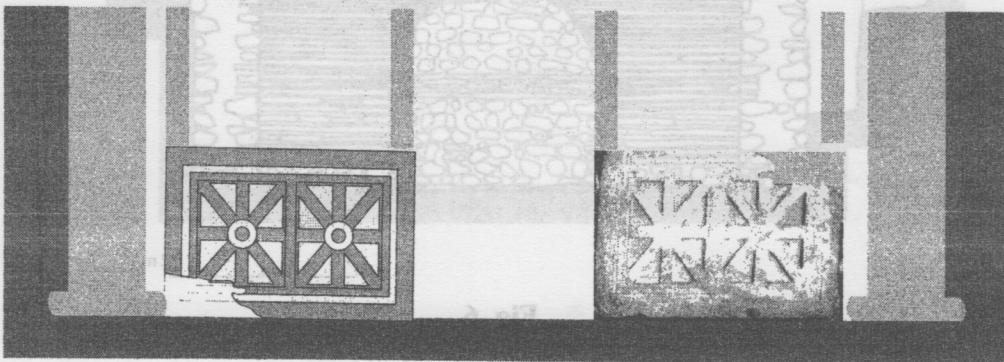


Fig. 9

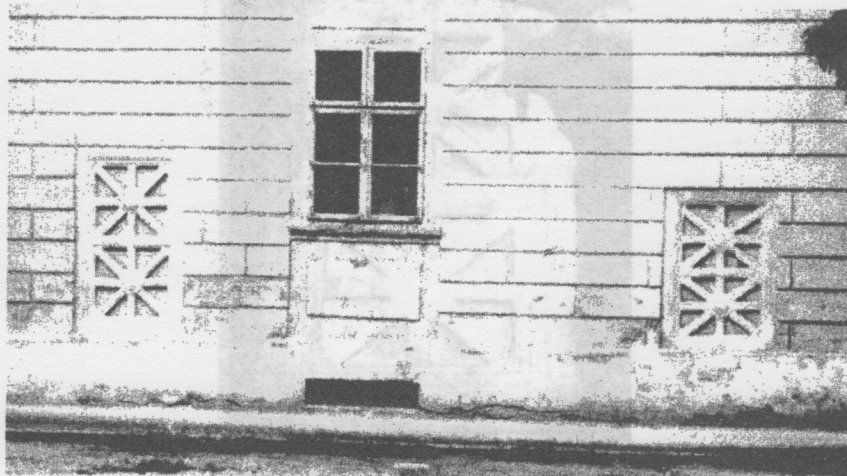


Fig. 10

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