

## AN EARLY-BYZANTINE FORTRESS ON THE TELL OF DYADOVO\*

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### *Discovery*

During the summer of 1976, an excavation was started near the village of Dyadovo (district Burgas), People's Republic of Bulgaria.

The object of this excavation was a tell (several layers of settlements) of about 220m (E-W) by 140m (N-S) and 140.4m above sea-level (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup>

The excavation took place as a joint Bulgarian-Dutch project, named "The Ethnogenesis of the Thracians", conducted by the Bulgarian Institute of Thracology and the Dutch Henri Frankfort Foundation.

The tell contains settlements from the Middle Ages down to the Chalcolithic period.

The tell was for the first time described in 1898 by the brothers Hermann and Karel Skorpil as "the Dedekyoiska Mound". On this mound were the remains of a rectangular building with a gate and a tower on its south-eastern wall.<sup>2</sup> During the making of a probe, in 1977, the wall of this building was rediscovered.

In the following years, till 1984, foundations of walls, towers and a gate were excavated.

### *Description of the fortress*

Foundations were found of a rectangular building with four corner towers and a gate in the eastern wall (Fig. 2). The distance from tower to tower of the southern and northern walls is 52.5m, while the east and west distance is 68.5m. The gateway is almost in the centre of the eastern wall and above this gateway probably was a fifth tower (Fig. 3).

\* This article was written with kind permission of the Henry Frankfort Foundation.

<sup>1</sup> *Expeditio Thracia 1*, Sofia, 1980, 45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, 46.

The tower bastions were pentangular with triangles pointing to the north-west and south-east, while a part of them slightly projected beyond the western and eastern wall. The tower bastions were possibly rectangular in origin and later made pentangular (Fig. 4).

The rectangular parts of the tower bastions were 6.75m by 7.40m, the triangles were 2.50m by 5.20m. The tower bastions probably had flat roofs.<sup>3</sup>

The gateway bastion also was slightly projected beyond the wall and was about 10 by 8m with two entrances beyond each other. In between the entrances was a small court. Inside the walls were the remains of two smaller walls discovered, while at the centre of the westwall probably a staircase existed. Further stone foundations of buildings, inside the wall, were not discovered.

The walls, about 2m thick and probably 6m high, consisted of bricks and large rough ashlar blocks put together by white-gray mortar with a great amount of sand and gravel (Fig 5).

One of the walls of the inner structure contained pink mortar with pulverized bricks.

Some of the ashlar blocks of the walls were later reused for the building of houses of an 11th century village, situated at the same place as the fortress. Roman tiles were found inside the furnace of one of the houses.

### *Dating of the fortress*

Although an exact dating of a Roman building is not possible without an *in situ* inscription,<sup>4</sup> the fortress on the Dyadovo tell can be roughly dated on the basis of the material found inside the layer of the building or in the surroundings of Dyadovo.<sup>5</sup>

This material consisted of a) coins, b) ceramics, c) votive plates of the Thracian horseman, d) fibulae, e) an inscription about building activities in the surroundings of Nova Zagora (not found in the layer of the fortress), f) the ground-plan of the fortress.

Coins found in the layer of the fortress were mixed up with those probably belonging to inhabitants of the 11th century settlement. They

<sup>3</sup> S. Johnson, *Late Roman fortifications*, London, 1983, 43.

<sup>4</sup> M. Biernacka-Lubanski, *The Roman and Early-Byzantine fortifications of Lower Moesia and Northern Thrace*, Warszawa, 1982, 129.

<sup>5</sup> Biernacka (1982), 29.

range from Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) till the 11th century.

However, there is a gap between the coins of Tiberius II (578-582 AD) and those of the 10th century AD. This makes it likely that the coins before 582 AD belong to the fortress, while the later coins belong to the medieval settlement.

Of these coins before 582 AD, 50% belong to the period 527-582 AD.<sup>6</sup>

This date is supported by the finds of early-Byzantine ceramics of several kinds. Among these are sherds of early-Byzantine amphoras, belonging to the 6th century AD. Early-Byzantine amphoras are clearly distinguished from the late-Roman ones.<sup>7</sup>

Three fragmented votive plates of the Thracian horseman were found in 1898 in the remains of the fortress, indicating an occupation by Roman troops of Thracian origin.<sup>8</sup> Only during the late-Roman times, Thracian troops were employed on the territory of Thrace itself.

A bronze, so-called "Zwiebelknopffibel" was found in the layer of the fortress (Fig. 6).

This type of fibula was used by Roman and auxiliary troops from the 4th century AD onward.<sup>9</sup>

An inscription found near Nova Zagora indicates substantial building activity in this region during the reign of Justin I (527-565).<sup>10</sup>

The gateway of the fortress is in the eastern wall, which conforms to the regular form of a Roman fortress (Vegetius Epit. R. milit. I 21-25).<sup>11</sup>

Although the architecture of a Roman fortress cannot be reconstructed from the foundations, as several styles are possible on one type of foundation, there are several late-Roman fortresses which can be compared with the fortress on the Dyadovo tell.

Near the village of Bistritsa (Southern Bulgaria) a Roman fortress

<sup>6</sup> Р. Катинчаров, Р. Георгиева, Б. Борисов, Разкопки на селищната могила до с. Дядово, Сливенски окръг-Археологически открития и разкопки през 1984, Сливен, 1985, 67.

<sup>7</sup> Б. Борисов, Ранновизантийски амфори / IV-VI в. / от Сливенски окръг, Археология 1, 1985, 38 — Б. Борисов, Исследование ранневизантийской керамики из Сливенского округа, Тракия 8, София, 1988, 92.

<sup>8</sup> *Expeditio Thracia* 1, 46.

<sup>9</sup> G. Gomolka, Zur Herstellung von Schmuck und Trachten-Bestandteilen im spätrömischen Thracien unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Funde aus dem Kastell Iatrus, *Thracia* 3, Sofia, 1980, 432-434.

<sup>10</sup> V. Besevliev, Spätgriechische und spätlateinische Inschriften aus Bulgarien, *Berliner Byzantinische Arbeiten*, Band 30, Berlin, 1964, Nr. 198.

<sup>11</sup> H. Buchwald, The first Byzantine architectural style, evolution or revolution?, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32/5, 1982, 33-45.

of the same size and a comparable ground-plan was excavated.<sup>12</sup> The fortress, probably used as a villa, is dated to the 5th century AD.

Another comparison can be made with a fortress in Palestine, dating from the 3rd century AD but modified during the 6th and 7th century AD. This fortress was sometimes used by refugees during a foreign invasion.<sup>13</sup>

Concluding on this evidence, the fortress can be roughly dated in a period between the 4th and the 6th century AD, and considering the finds of coins and ceramics probably in the 6th century AD.

### *Historical situation in Thrace and Moesia between the 3rd and the 6th century AD*

Thrace and Moesia were, between the 3rd and the 6th centuries AD, devastated by barbarian tribes, forcing their way into the east-Roman empire.

Successively Goths (3rd century), Ostrogoths, Visigoths and Huns (4th and 5th century) and Isaurians, Longobards, Huns, Slavs and Protobulgars (6th century) invaded the east-Roman empire, causing social and economic destruction.<sup>14</sup>

The installation of Constantinople as the new capital of the Roman empire (4th century) had made Thrace much more militarily and politically important. A large percentage of the east-Roman military industry was situated here.<sup>15</sup>

The threat of the barbarian invasions led to an enormous increase of defence building activities, especially under the reign of Justin I (527-565 AD).<sup>16</sup>

This was the only period in Thrace when fortifications were built in agricultural areas.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Н.С. Додов, Развалина в местността "Коосикия" нед с. Бистрися, ИАИ 55, 1926, 300.

<sup>13</sup> M. Gichon, Excavations at Mezar-Tamar 1973-1974, The Israel Exploration Journal, Volume 26, 1976, 191, Fig. 3.

<sup>14</sup> V. Velkov, Cities in Thrace and Dacia in Late Antiquity, Amsterdam, 1977, 46-58.

<sup>15</sup> V. Velkov, Thrakien und die Thraker in der Spätantike, Actes du IIe Congrès International de Thracologie II, Bucharest, 1980, 445-450.

<sup>16</sup> V. Velkov (1977), 47-52, V. Velkov, Thrakien in der Spätantike (IV.-VI. Jhdt.), Thracia I, Sofia, 1972, 213-221; M. Stancheva, Certains problèmes de la culture thrace à l'époque de la basse antiquité, Dritter Internationaler Thrakologischer Kongress I, Sofia, 1984, 283.

<sup>17</sup> D. Nikolov, Particularités des villes antiques en Thrace romaine, Actes du IIe Congrès de Thracologie II, Bucharest, 1980, 371-377.

In 550 AD, the Slavs conquered the town of Topiros which was well fortified. This means that they probably had some experience with siege machines.<sup>18</sup>

Defence buildings were therefore made with pentangular tower bastions.<sup>19</sup>

The invading barbarian tribes were mostly in urgent need of food supplies, which made the construction necessary of small hill-top defences. These fortifications could be used for assembling livestock, local inhabitants and troops in case of emergence and could withstand a short siege.<sup>20</sup> The protection of food supplies was essential for the east-Roman and Byzantine armies, operating in this area. These hill-top defences were mostly built on places of iron age settlements and hills near a well.<sup>21</sup>

In central Bulgaria, this meant that most of these fortifications were built on the many settlement tells like Junatsite, Gulubovo or Dyadovo, with layers from the Neolithic till the Hallstatt period.

The hill-top defences were normally built on a distance of 50 km. from each other (like the distance Dyadovo—Gulubovo), deep inside the agricultural areas.<sup>22</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The combined historical and archaeological information about the fortress on the tell near Dyadovo indicates that it was probably a 6th century AD hill-top defence, built during the reign of Justin I or one of his successors as a part of the defence against the barbarian invasions.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Velkov (1977), 49.

<sup>19</sup> Biernacka (1982), 218.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson (1983), 77.

<sup>21</sup> T. Ivanov, Über die Kontinuität der thrakischen Kultur in den thrakischen Gebieten während der Römerherrschaft, *Thracia I*, Sofia, 1972, 163; Biernacka (1982), 84; Johnson (1983), 226.

<sup>22</sup> J.C. Poutiers, À propos des forteresses antiques et médiévales de la plaine Danubienne, *Études Balkaniques*, 1975, 2, Sofia, 60-75.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson (1983), 227.



Fig. 1.

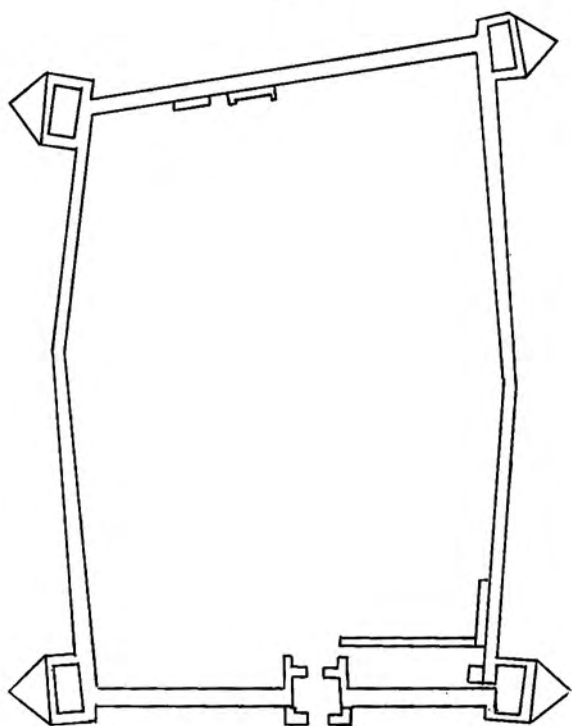


Fig. 2a. Groundplan of the fortress.

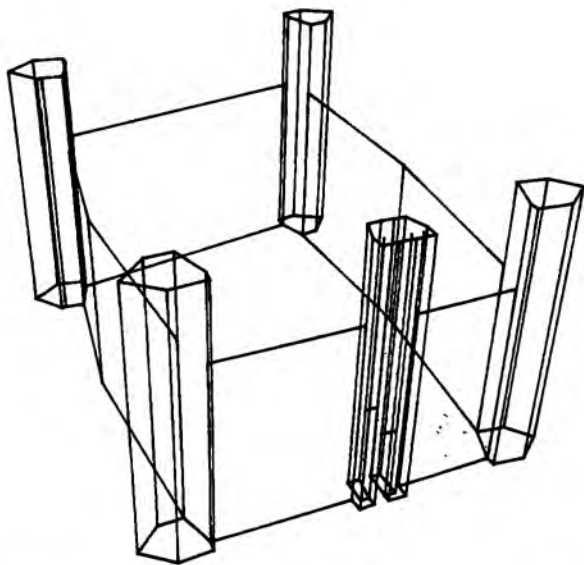


Fig. 2b. Reconstruction of the fortress on the tell of Dyadovo.  
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Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.



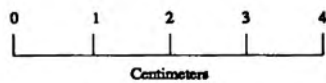


Fig. 6. Roman "Zwiebelknopffibel".