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MARKO POPOVIĆ

SMEDEREVO FORTRESS



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SMEDEREVO FORTRESS

Marko Popović



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Smederevo Fortress is one of the rare mediaeval strongholds in the southeastern parts of Europe whose impressive walls and hidden, still unexplored remains bear witness to a critical period of history. This important fortress was the last and best achievement of the military architecture of mediaeval Serbia. Its building was part of a desperate, but unsuccessful effort to protect the Serbian state from the Turkish invasion. At that time Smederevo Fortress, comprising ten hectares of defended area, was the most extensive Serbian stronghold after Belgrade. The crucial epoch in the development of European fortifications, marked by the introduction of firearms, left its earliest traces in the defence walls and towers of Smederevo Fortress. This stronghold remains an important source of new information on Serbian history in the last decades of the struggle for the survival of the Serbian Despotate and the last vestige of the once prosperous mediaeval state.

The Smederevo fortifications have survived to the present time in the original form they were given at the various stages of construction and enlargement during the fifteenth century, or more precisely in the period 1428-1481. In later times the old fortress, which the development of the art of warfare had rendered obsolete, continued to be garrisoned and maintained in its existing state, but no subsequent additions were made to it. Unlike Belgrade Fortress and some other large European fortifications, which lost their original mediaeval forms in later modernizations, the basic structure of Smederevo Fortress has remained as it was originally laid out by the architects of Despot Đurđe Branković (1427-1456). At the dawn of the new epoch, when Smederevo was finally liberated, it



1. Smederevo Fortress at the beginning of the 21st century

was one of the best-preserved mediaeval buildings in Europe. Its system of fortifications was preserved in its entirety, but the remains of the urban structure of the mediaeval town – its streets, houses and churches – had largely disappeared by that time. Only a few well preserved remains of a building belonging to the complex of the Court could still be seen within the Castle.

Unfortunately, the departure of the Turkish garrison marked the beginning of the decay and disintegration of the fortress. The Serbs – in this case the „Smederevo townsfolk“ - impatient to free themselves as soon as possible from the legacy of the past and pave the



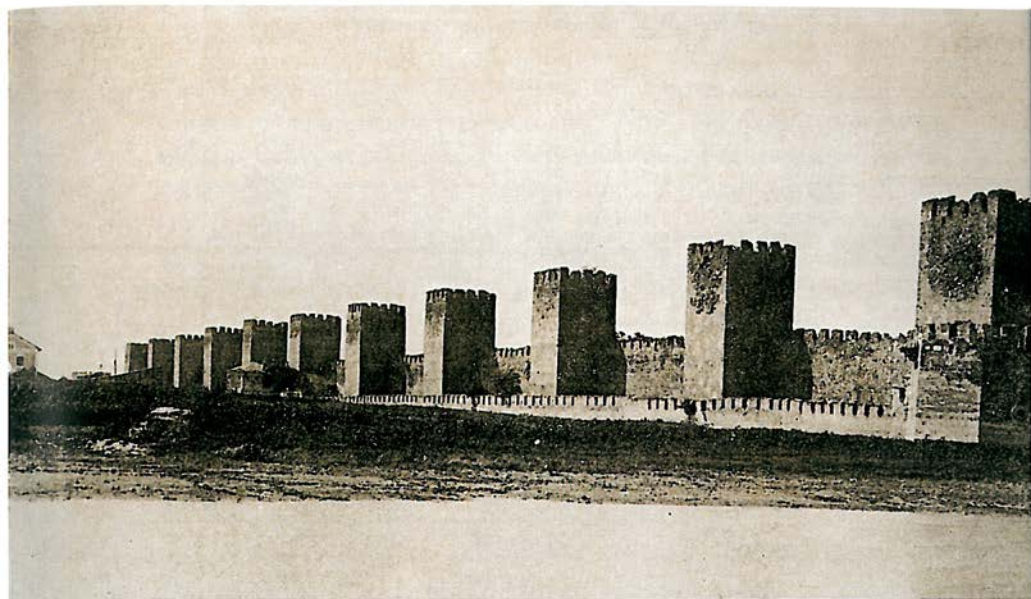
way to a European future, did not show much concern for the preservation of the precious monuments of bygone epochs. Initially, ordinary people regarded the fortress as a burden imposed upon them by „damned Jerina“ and built by their sweat and blood, and later it was viewed as a symbol of foreign oppression, from which their country was only beginning to free itself. In an atmosphere in which such feelings were prevalent, it was difficult to build up any positive attitude of the citizenry, i.e. of the „public opinion“, to objects of cultural heritage, except, of course, to those recognized as the „famous foundations of the Serbian rulers“ .(Fig. 1)

As a result, the fortress began to decay gradually a few decades after the withdrawal of the Turks. The extension of the railway line to the town on the Danube at the end of the nineteenth century entailed

the demolition of the outer defence walls and the filling up of the main ditch of the fortress. The further extension of railway facilities affected also the area towards the Jezava river. A few years later it was proposed by some citizens of Smederevo that the entire fortress should be demolished and the ground cleared up for the construction a quay along the Danube and an enlargement of the port and its storage facilities. That plan was fortunately not implemented, but the idea of the demolition of the fortress was not abandoned. In 1911 the municipal authorities ordered that some parts of the defence walls should be pulled down, and the stone thus obtained used for the cobbling of town streets. The realization of this unreasonable decision was prevented by the timely reaction of enlightened citizens.

The most severe damages, which finally turned the fortress into ruins, date from World Wars I and II. During the German invasion of Serbia in October 1915 the fortress was battered by cannon of great destructive force. The main target seems to have been the old Castle (*Mali grad*), which was consequently the most heavily damaged building. Jerina's Tower and the massive Keep also suffered great destruction, and the greatest part of both main gates – inner and outer – and of the surrounding fortifications was razed. Also ruined were the remaining walls of the mediaeval Court, which abutted on the South Defence Wall of the Castle. The Turkish artillery tower at the mouth of the Jezava river and the fortifications of the Danubian Defence Wall were also badly damaged. In addition to the direct destruction caused by powerful detonations, extensive damage was done by tectonic shifts of the unstable waterlogged ground. They caused a dislocation of the wall with the mullioned windows of the former „Great Hall“, which ran along the river bank, a deformation of the massive Jerina's Tower, as well as fissures on the adjacent towers, marked Towers 2, 3 and 4 in the technical documentation.

World War II caused further ruin of the old fortress. The South Defence Wall of the former fortified town (*Veliki grad* – “The Great Town”) was severely damaged in a great explosion of ammunition on the 5th of June 1941. Two of its towers and one of the town gates were destroyed, and a large part of an adjacent tower was demolished. The tremendous blast also caused heavy damage to the part of the Danubian Defence Wall running along the bank, and reduced to



2. South Defence Wall of Smederevo Fortress c. 1880

ruins almost all the merlons on its battlements. But that was not the end: during the Anglo-American air raids in the spring and summer of 1944, the fortress, already in ruins, suffered further destruction. Tower 3 of the Castle was almost completely demolished, another tower, located along the South Town Wall, was heavily damaged, and the Turkish artillery tower in its vicinity was also hit. In the years after the war the ruins were cleared, the wreckage removed, the craters made by explosions filled up, but serious conservation and restoration work could be initiated only several decades later.

In addition to the devastation caused by human senselessness and the agency of hostile forces, Smederevo was faced with another difficult problem. The old fortification at the mouth of the Jezava river, built on low ground along the river bank, had been exposed to occasional flooding even in the Middle Ages. This situation grew worse in the nineteenth century, after the Austrian authorities raised



3. Interior of Smederevo Fortress at the beginning of the 20th century

a levee along the Banat bank of the Danube, which prevented the overflow of the high waters of the Danube into the former Pannonian retention ponds and diverted their impact to the Serbian bank, and particularly to Smederevo. This necessitated the deposition of a thick layer of earth in the area within the fortress and in the space between the inner and outer Danubian Defence Walls. Intensive work on this type of protection was done in the years preceding World War I. This problem became particularly acute after the construction of the Iron Gate dam and the permanent rise of the Danubian waters to the level, and partly above the level, of the terrain within the old fortress. This new hydrological situation rendered it impossible to preserve and present the original relief of the terrain and also retain the dykes, up to two metres high at places, which protected defence walls and towers.

Exploration and Restoration Works

The remains of Despot Đurđe's town became an object of scholarly interest comparatively late, at a time when the devastation of the old fortifications had already well advanced. The occasion was the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the foundation of Smederevo (1930). Architect Pera Popović prepared for that occasion a well documented monograph based on what could be seen and photographed without undertaking special research. That study, which is still indispensable, was the first to draw the attention of the public to the exceptionally important heritage lying hidden within the old fortress. Two decades later, Prof. Aleksandar Deroko did some research on the Smederevo fortifications, paying special attention to the remains of the Castle. His aim was to point out the complex problems associated with Smederevo Fortress and stress the need for systematic explorations which would enable the restoration and revitalization of this exceptionally important memorial complex.

Exploration works of various intensity, concentrated mainly on the remains of the Castle, were undertaken in 1956 and lasted, with rather long interruptions, until 1980. Archaeological explorations of the former fortified town were of a rather limited scope. Parts of the fortifications, particularly the town gates and the remains of some masonry structures, were explored by sondages. One of the particularly important discoveries was a cemetery with the remains of a church which had been turned into a mosque after the Turkish conquest. A considerable area along the Jezava Defence Wall, in the east corner of the fortified area, was also investigated, but the west part and a large section of the central area remained archaeologically unexplored.

Conservation of the Smederevo fortifications followed the process of exploration and was focused mostly on the area of the Castle. The first works of this kind took place as far back as 1948, when the well-known founder's inscription made of bricks on Tower 4 in the Castle was protected. A decade later the defence wall along the bank was restored. After the archaeological explorations of 1977, restoration of the Castle was resumed and carried on until 1990. It was planned by architect Jovan Nešković and based on the evidence



4. *Smederevo Castle – aerial photo 2006*

available at that time. It involved the reconstruction of the demolished gates, partial restoration of the Keep, of the destroyed Tower 3 and of Jerina's Tower, as well as the re-establishment of the original appearance of the other fortifications. After the completion of this large-scale undertaking the Castle was successfully and completely restored and presented.

Concurrently with these activities work proceeded on a project for the protection of Smederevo from flooding. As a result, the outer Turkish Embankment Wall was reconstructed in its entirety and the main Danubian Defence Wall was restored to the level of the walk-

way. This project was meant to be the beginning of a complete restoration of the heavily damaged fortifications of the town, but that ambitious plan has unfortunately not been realized. It was only recently that large-scale works on the restoration of the Jezava Defence Wall were successfully initiated. In 2012, three decades after the archaeological explorations, the remains of the church in the east corner of the mediaeval town, believed to have been the Court Church of the Serbian despot, were very successfully restored and presented.



THE FORTRESS AND THE TOWN OF SMEDEREVO IN THE CONTEXT OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Written sources on Smederevo dating from the time prior to the construction of the fortress are very scant, but there is nevertheless some evidence that there had been a settlement on that location even before that period. It is believed that it existed already in the early decades of the eleventh century, and that it belonged to the Braničevo Bishopric. The next reference to that settlement dates from the late fourteenth century, when it is mentioned among the estates with which Prince Lazar (1371-1389) endowed his newly built foundation at Ravanica. It is not known what that earlier settlement looked like, but it may be inferred from some Ragusan early fifteenth century documents that it was a trading settlement not only visited in transit, but also resided in by merchants from the Adriatic region.

The known sources are on the whole silent on the building of Smederevo, which began in all probability in the spring of 1428. There is only one brief remark by a Serbian chronicler - „*сзѡдан бустъ градъ Смедерево*“ (*the town of Smederevo was built*). Later documents mention Smederevo in the context of historical developments; they also refer to various events associated with its building, but they contain no detailed evidence on the stronghold itself or on the buildings located within it.

Within the short period of only three decades preceding the fall of the Serbian Despotate, the Turks made several assaults on Smederevo. Their first attack came already in 1439, when the town was still not adequately prepared for defence. They laid a siege to the town and after three months the defenders were forced to surrender as the expected aid from Hungary was not forthcoming and the town had ran out of provisions. During that and the following year Sultan Murad II succeeded in occupying the greater part of the Serbian Despotate. A few years later the fortunes of war changed

and the Turks were forced to restore the occupied territories to the Despot. The peace established by the treaty concluded in 1444 did not, however, last long. In 1454, only a year after the capture of Constantinople, the new Turkish sultan Mehmed II led an expedition against Serbia, one of his goals being the taking of Smederevo. This time the town was well prepared for defence. In spite of the fire from the heavy guns of the besiegers, the strong defence walls of the town withstood the Turkish assaults, and the Sultan had to raise the siege. Smederevo was saved, but that success did not bring a lasting respite. In the years that followed the Turks subjugated one Serbian province after another until only Smederevo remained unoccupied. Its turn came not long after. In the summer of 1459 Sultan Mehmed II moved again against Serbia with a mighty army. The defenders, torn by internal dissensions, had no chance of a successful defence and negotiated a treaty of surrender, following which the Turks took entered the Despot's capital on the 20th of June. The fall of Smederevo also marked the final collapse of the Serbian mediaeval state.

From 1459 to the early decades of the sixteenth century Smederevo was a Turkish fortress on the frontier towards Hungary. The frontier on the Danube remained unchanged for over half a century, and during that period the Turks reinforced their frontier towns with additional defence structures, and also built new fortresses to ensure the preservation of their territorial gains. They also took measures for the defence from sporadic incursions from Hungary, in which a considerable number of Serbian refugees took part. Particularly strong was the attack on Smederevo led by the grandson of the old Despot Đurđe and titular Despot of Serbia Vuk Grgurević, known as Zmaj Ognjeni Vuk. The town was besieged in the summer of 1476, but the Turks succeeded in defending it. During these fights the part of the town outside the defence walls was destroyed by fire. That was a warning which led to the strengthening and extension of the defences of Smederevo a few years later.

In the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the inhabitants of the walled-in parts of Smederevo were the members of a strong garrison and an exclusively Moslem civilian population living in several wards. The Christians were not allowed to dwell within the fortress. We owe the Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi some valu-



5. West corner of Smederevo Fortress with Towers 18–22, aerial photo 2006

able information on the situation in Smederevo in the middle of the seventeenth century. At the time of his visit the Smederevo garrison, including the *disdar* and other officers, numbered about 300 men. A detachment, consisting of about 50 soldiers, was stationed in the citadel or the Castle. The Castle was also the permanent residence of the *disdar*, his adjutant and the imam, while others had no access to it. On the defence wall facing the Danube was a battery of guns which Evliya, who is prone to exaggeration, describes as being „so big that they could hold a man“. In the part of the stronghold without the citadel, i.e. in the area of the mediaeval fortified town, was a considerable number of ground-floor houses without vegetable plots or gardens and mostly built of perishable material. Evliya also makes mention of an elegant building, the Kazlar-Aga Bath, the remains of which are still extant not far from the Danubian Defence Wall. There were three mosques in the town in Evliya's time. One of them, the „Mosque of the Sultan Conqueror of the Town“ is described as being built „in the old style“, which means that it had formerly been a church. Evliya also makes the interesting remark that some enemy weapons were exhibited as



6. East corner of Smederevo Fortress with Towers 10–14, aerial photo 2006

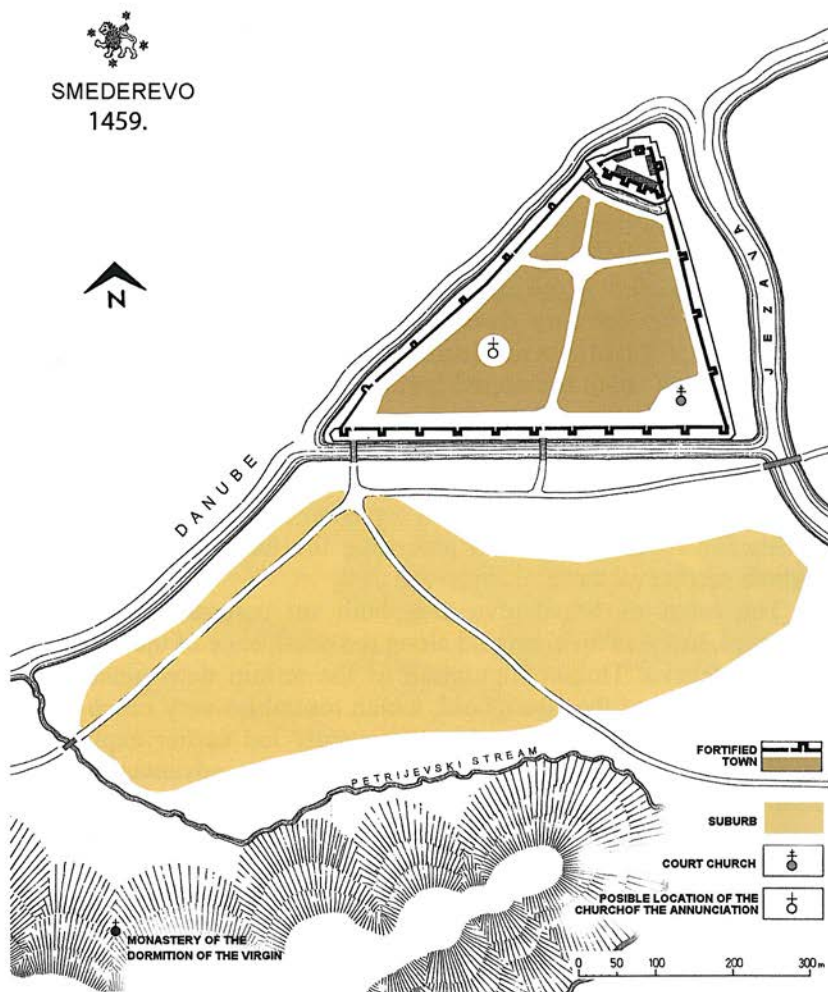
trophies on the town gates. At that time the battlefields on the northern frontiers of the Ottoman Empire were quite distant from Smederevo.

Smederevo lost its military importance soon after the Turks captured Belgrade in 1521 and pushed their frontier deep into Hungary. In the following Austrian-Turkish wars at the end of the seventeenth and in the first half of the eighteenth century the old Smederevo fortress played almost no role. During the Austrian rule (1717-1739), when there was much activity on the strengthening of the defences of Belgrade, no such work was done in Smederevo. An Austrian garrison was stationed in the fortress, but there was no fighting in the vicinity of the town. During the First Serbian Insurrection the town was captured by Karađorđe, but in 1813 it was repossessed by the Turks, who remained in it for another half a century. During that time, a small Turkish garrison was stationed in the fortress, and there was also a small settlement consisting of several dozen houses and a mosque. Finally, on the 12th of April 1867, the Turks handed over the Smederevo stronghold, together with the Belgrade, Kladovo and Šabac fortresses, to Prince Mihailo Obrenović III and the Serbian army.

EVIDENCE OF THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURES IN THE TOWN OF SMEDEREVO

The explorations of the area within the mediaeval walls of Smederevo carried out in the past decades have brought to light much new evidence which makes it possible for us to reconstruct the former appearance of this important mediaeval town and study more thoroughly its historical significance. The results of these explorations also stimulate further research and pose questions of a more general import. The wealth of new information, particularly that obtained by archaeological studies, has been only partly processed, so that the analyses based on it have been focused on particular problems. No systematic study of the entire available material has been attempted so far. Besides, the results of archaeological excavations have been in some cases presented inadequately or incompletely by the explorers, and this has had an adverse effect on the further research. Nevertheless, some problems have been largely resolved, particularly those related to the phases of construction of the Smederevo fortifications and to their significance during the last three decades of the Serbian mediaeval state. (Fig. 7)

When discussing Smederevo Fortress, the starting point should be a definition of its features, both at the time of its origin and in the later periods. So far, this point has not been fully recognized, which has led to the use of different terms for fortified area at the confluence of the Jezava and the Danube. The most common term is *Smederevo Fortress*, while the designation *the fortified town of Smederevo* is much more rarely used. Both terms are essentially correct, but their use should be chronologically differentiated. When speaking of the time of its origin and of the period immediately following, when civilian population, and not only members of the garrison, dwelt within the defence walls, the appropriate term is *the fortified town of Smederevo*. This applies both to the time before



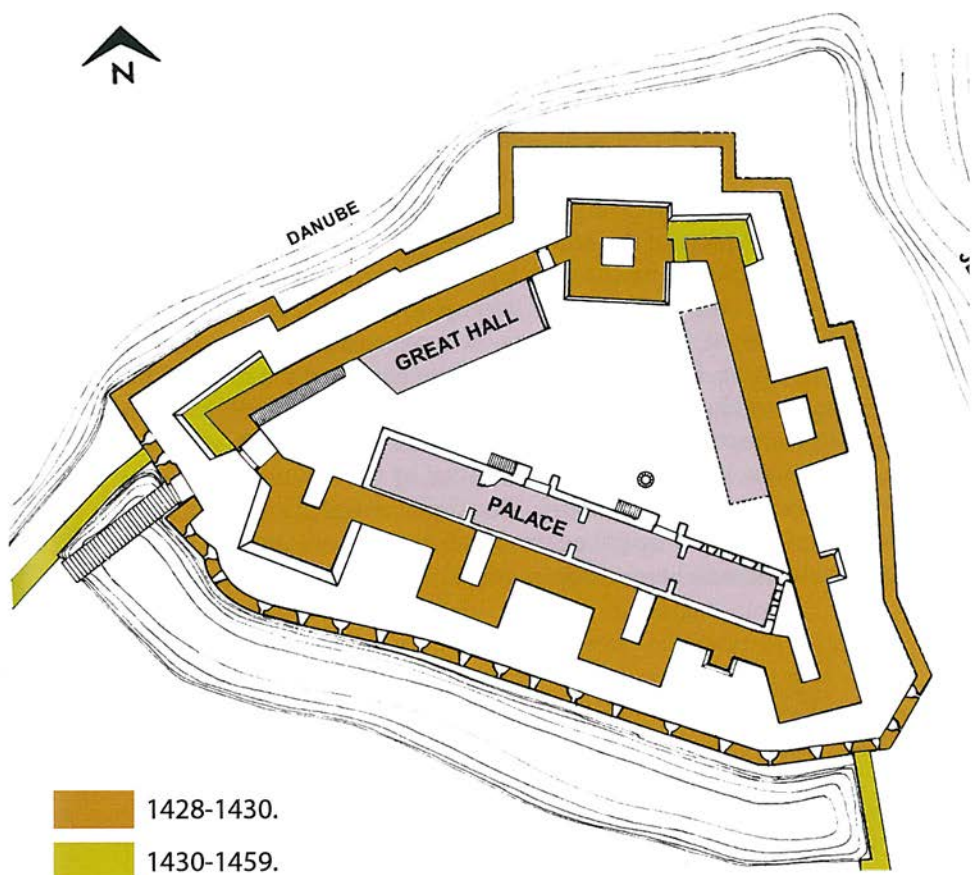
7. Smederevo in the 15th century, reconstruction of the plan of the town

the Turkish occupation of the town and to the earlier period of the Turkish rule, when a considerable part of the urban population

of Smederevo lived within the walled-in area. Later on, from the late seventeenth century onwards, when only the garrison troops dwelt within the defended space, the customary term is *Smederevo Fortress*.

A fairly detailed idea of the fortifications of mediaeval Smederevo, of the technique of their construction and of the system of defence on which they were grounded can now be formed on the basis of the surviving structures and the remains uncovered over the years of archaeological explorations. It is considerably more difficult to speak in detail about the urban structure of the defended area, about the ordinary dwelling houses in it and, particularly, about its more luxurious residential buildings. Also, comparatively little is known about the sacred heritage from the epoch when this town was the centre of the Serbian Despotate. In the following discussion we shall first dwell on the preserved or newly discovered physical structures, and after that we shall examine the evidence concerning the successive stages of construction and the importance of Smederevo in the decades preceding the final collapse of the Serbian mediaeval state.

The town of Smederevo was built on comparatively well protected, low and level ground along the confluence of the Danube and the Jezava. This configuration of the terrain determined the triangular plan of the stronghold, which resembles very much that of Constantinople - a fact which frequently led earlier explorers to mistaken conclusions. This location had its advantages and disadvantages. The rivers and the water-filled ditches hindered assaults on the town ramparts. On the other hand, this area was exposed to frequent flooding and was „very unhealthy“, as a traveller who passed through Smederevo remarked in mid-sixteenth century. Even in modern times the high waters of the Danube occasionally flood the fortress although its ground level is now almost two meters higher than in the Middle Ages as a result of the deposition of a thick layer of topsoil.



8. Smederevo Castle in the first half of the 15th century – reconstruction of the plan

Smederevo Castle (*Mali Grad*)

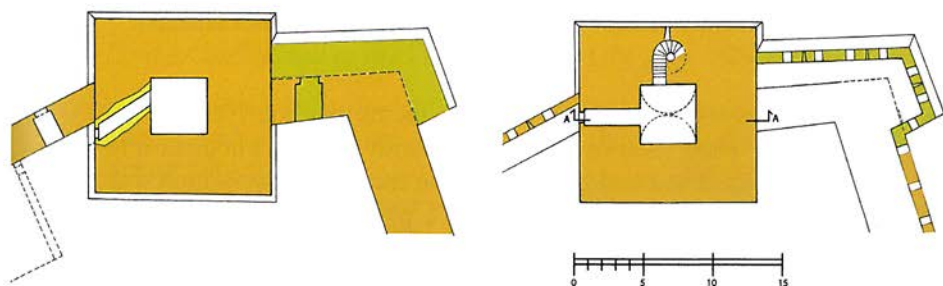
The building of fortified Smederevo began, as mentioned before, in 1428, when the defence wall and the tower of the Castle were erected. At the time of its foundation at the confluence of the Jezava and the Danube the Castle was conceived as an independent stronghold surrounded by double defence walls and separated by a ditch from the other parts of the embankment. The triangular shape of its plan was determined by the existing configuration of the site. (Fig. 8) The main, South Defence Wall, strengthened with four towers and fronted by a moat, faced the accessible landward side. This massive curtain wall was 4.50 metres thick and its height to the level of the walkway was about 13 metres. The Jezava Defence Wall was of a similar construction and originally did not have towers. Shortly after its completion, however, it was reinforced by the addition of a somewhat lower tower with gunports. The defence wall facing the Danube was of the same height as the South and Jezava Defence Walls, but its thickness did not exceed 2.60 m. A masonry stairway ran up



against its inner face, providing the main access to the walkways. The main tower – the Keep – was incorporated into the Danubian Defence Wall. At a later stage both corners of the curtain facing the Danube got masonry reinforcements rising to the walkway level. The resulting broadened platforms on the top of the wall had a function similar to that of towers in the defence system of the Castle.

The Keep differed both in size and structure from the other Smederevo towers. It is now greatly damaged, so that its former appearance can only be surmised. It is square in plan, 13 by 13 m, and it has massive walls about 4.30 thick. On the lowest floor is a chamber measuring about 16 square meters. It is about 9 metres high and has a domical vault made of brick and stone. Access to this unusual room was in all probability from the crown of the vault. Later, presumably during the Turkish rule, a new vaulted entrance was opened in one of the lateral sides. It is not clear what this room was originally used for. Some analogies suggest that it was a storage for grain and other provisions in case of siege. On the second floor was a barrel-vaulted. A spiral masonry stairway, attached to the wall facing the Danube, led from this room to the third storey, which gave access to the machicolations. On the top of the tower was the usual crenellated parapet and a pyramidal roof. Entry to the upper part of the tower, i.e. to the level of the second storey, was from the walkway of the Danubian Defence Wall. (Fig. 9)

The South Defence Wall, facing the landward approach to the Castle, was reinforced with four massive and almost identical towers, square in plan, 12 by 12 m, and about 20 metres tall. Unlike the



9. Keep of the Smederevo Castle – plans, sections and appearance



10. Towers 4 and 5 along the South Wall of the Smederevo Castle, the outer face

Keep, these towers had the entire side facing the courtyard of the Castle open. Their interior was divided with timber structures into several storeys. They had brick vaults on the top, above which was a castellated platform surmounted by a pyramidal roof. (Figs. 10 and 11). One of the towers along this wall, the third in sequence and referred to as the Despot's Tower or Tower 4, bears the well-known inscription commemorating the building of the town. Below a large



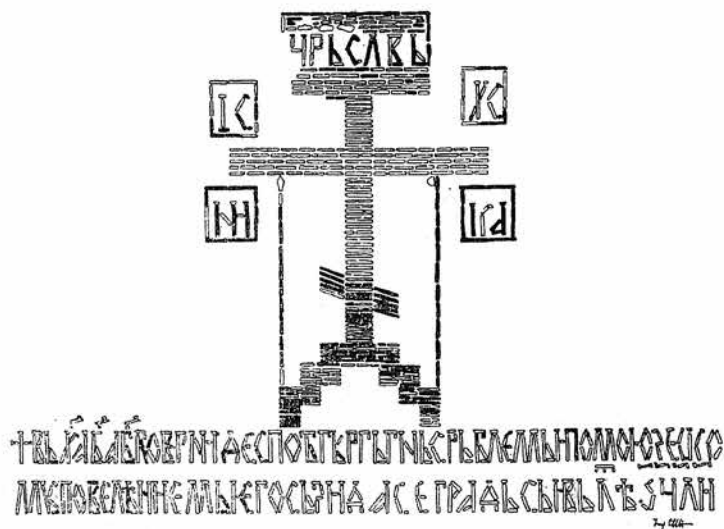
11. Towers 4 and 5 of the Smederevo Castle, the inner face with the remains of the Palace

cross formed of bricks set into the wall runs an inscription in two lines and over 10 m long:

„This town was built on the orders of pious Despot Đurđe, the Lord of Serbia and of the Zeta Littoral, in the year 6938 [1430]“

This brick-built inscription is unique in Serbia and represents one of the rare surviving testimonies of the building of mediaeval towns. (Fig. 12)

A lower outer defence wall, now only partly preserved, ran in front of the main wall of the Castle along all three sides. Its remains on the side facing the Danube, of which only the foundations are preserved at places, have been explored and restored, while the part



12. Smederevo Castle, drawing of the founder's inscription from Tower 4

in front of the Jezava Defence Wall is covered with earth and rubble. The remains of the south outer wall are in a slightly better state of preservation. They have been uncovered in their entirety and fully explored, so that it has been possible to reconstruct their original appearance and former function. The height of this wall, measured from the level of the concealed pathway running between the two walls, was 3.50 m. Its base facing the moat sloped outward in the form of a slanting escarpment and it had a crenellated parapet on the top. The outer south wall had a series of twenty specially made embrasures for cannon. They were of two types: some were simple large openings and the others were semicircular in plan and had a semi-calotte vault. The gunports were faced with a perforated stone slab which had an opening for training the weapon. The ports were also furnished with sliding wooden shutters. These embrasures could be used for comparatively small guns, firing cannonballs with a diameter of 8-10 cm. (Fig. 34)

The main entrance to the Castle, built in the form of a double gate, as necessitated by the system of dual defence walls, was located between the so-called Jerina's Tower and the junction with the

curtain wall facing the Danube. Spanning the moat in front of this gate was a wooden bridge, a part of which could probably be drawn up in case of need. (Fig. 13)

There were two posterns in the Castle apart from the main gate. Both were in the Danubian Defence Wall, on the lateral sides of the Keep. They gave access to the concealed pathway leading to the outer defence wall and on to the river bank. One of these posterns had been out of use for a long time, since it had been walled up when the corner fortifications facing the Jezava Defence Wall were added to.

The buildings of the Court abutted on all three defence walls encircling the castle area. Originally they were timber buildings consisting of several floors and adjoining the wall, into which parts of their floor structures were built. The most important building, a representative edifice, was built against the Danubian Defence Wall.



13. Main gate of the Smederevo Castle

Its remains, which have been archaeologically explored, show that it was rectangular in plan and measured 23 by 6 m. It was built almost entirely of timber, the only exception being a lateral stone wall. It had an upper storey, which was probably fronted by a wooden porch. There were four windows on the upper floor, built into the defence wall in the form of deep vaulted niches with mullioned windows. Three of the windows were carved in the Gothic style, while the fourth, located somewhat apart, was of a simpler design. Stone benches, offering a good view of the Danube, were built on the sides of the niches. The arrangement of these windows seems to indicate that there were two upper-floor rooms: one large, with three double-arched windows and another with a less ornate window. The smaller room may have been a private chamber occasionally used by the despot himself, while the more spacious room was very likely the



14. Danubian Defence Wall of the Castle with the windows of the Great Hall and the Keep



15. Remains of the Palace along the South Defence Wall of the Smederevo Castle



16. Bailey of the Smederevo Castle with the remains of the Great Hall and the Palace

Grand Hall . There is no evidence of the interior and furnishings of these rooms. The only extant detail in the area of the former hall are two small brick-built pentagonal niches for lanterns on the face of the rampart. (Fig. 14)

Another large court building – the Palace abutting on the inner face of the South Defence Wall – was originally built of timber, but was soon replaced by a solid masonry edifice, with the ground plan in the form of an elongated quadrangle measuring 60 by 9 m. The later building had a ground floor, the stone walls of which have been preserved almost in their entirety, and an upper storey. The interior of the ground floor was divided into four rooms. Narrow windows,

resembling arrow slits, have been preserved in one of them. Two doors led from the courtyard into the building and to the upper storey. The semicircular masonry substructure of a fireplace which stood in a corner on the upper storey has been preserved in one of the ground floor rooms. Two masonry stairways on the outer side of the Palace gave direct access to the living quarters on the upper floor. The fairly large two-storey timber building which abutted on the third rampart, the Jezava Defence Wall, was probably used for various household activities. (Fig. 15) The entire yard of the Castle was covered with a thick layer of mortar, which served as the pavement, the only exception being the area towards the main gate, which was cobbled. A deep well carefully lined with brick supplied the Castle with water. (Fig. 16)

The Castle also had an efficient sewage system. A brick-lined canal which ran through the yard and under the main gate conveyed waste into the moat. There was also a number of latrines, sunk as niches into the defence walls and towers, the chutes of which went down into the ditches. One niche with a latrine has been preserved at the level of the upper floor in the Danubian Defence Wall, between the Hall and the room adjoining it. A similar latrine seems to have been located on the third storey of the Keep. The Palace abutting on the South Defence Wall had a latrine in one of the adjacent towers, and there were two similar latrines in the thickness of the Jezava Defence Wall. It is interesting that the openings of two chutes of latrines were discovered on the walkway of this wall during the conservation works. It is possible that there were similar pipes in the other defence walls of the Castle as well.

Relatively few finds from the period before the Turkish conquests were discovered during the archaeological explorations in the Castle. This is not surprising since that period lasted only three decades. By far the most numerous were potsherds. A large number of fragments of pottery, no doubt from the Despot's court, were found in an area used as a rubbish dump. They included, in addition to ordinary kitchenware, parts of costly tableware, some of it glazed and decorated in the sgraffito technique, beakers and candlesticks. (Fig. 17) One of the finds was an exceptionally sumptuous piece of jewelry – a gold earring with a ruby, an emerald and pearls - which



17. Ceramics vessels and candlesticks from the Smederevo Castle

probably belonged to a female member of the Despot's family. (Fig. 18) A particularly interesting group of finds consisted of parts of weapons and military equipment, which had no doubt belonged to the members of the garrison of the Castle. A helmet in a very good state of preservation (Fig. 19) was discovered in the wall built to block one of the posterns mentioned earlier, and eleven bronze harquebuses and a small cannon were found in a pit. They were probably arms which the defenders of Smederevo buried before the surrender of the town to the Turks in 1459. A store of more than seven hundred small cannonballs for the defenders' guns was also discovered in the Castle.

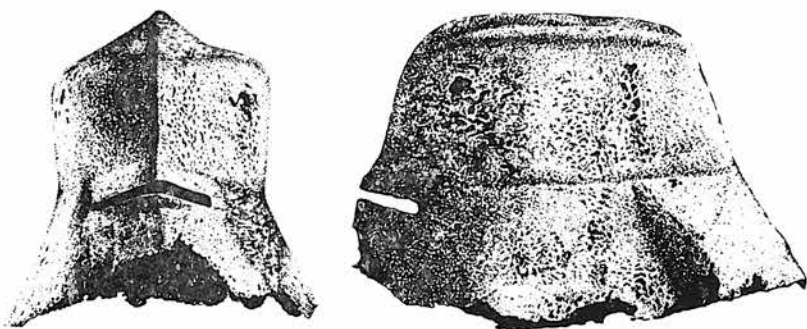
Fortifications of the “Great Town” (*Velki grad*)

Unlike the Castle, which has been explored in its entirety, the cultural and architectural heritage of the former fortified urban settlement has been only partly investigated apart from the fortifications which, in spite of the damage done to them in the past century, still dominate this area. Some evidence of the early structures which were demolished during World War II has been preserved in the reports on researches carried out before the war.

After the completion of the Castle, work began on the construction of defence walls and towers which were to protect the main part of the Smederevo urban settlement. In this case, too, the configuration of the terrain along the banks of the Danube and the Jezava determined the layout of the fortifications and indirectly delimited the defended area. New defence walls were erected on the side facing the rivers as well as on the southern landward side, from which the town was approached. (Fig. 20) Since the southern side was easily accessible, special care had to be devoted to the fortifications defending it. The area between the Jezava and the Danube was spanned by the main curtain wall – the South Defence

18. Golden earring,
mid-15th century
– a find from the bailey





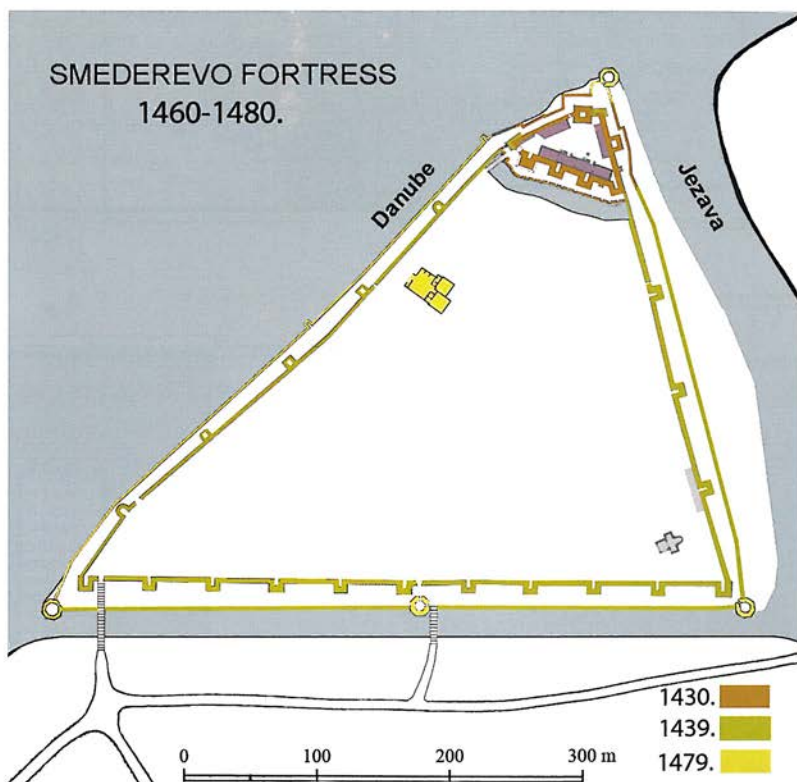
19. Helmet of a garrison member of the Smederevo Castle, first half of the 15th century

Wall – which was 502 metres (c. 1700 ft) long. The key principle of fortification was based again on the system of double defence walls with a moat, which had been applied in the construction of the defences of the Castle. The main, inner curtain was 3.50-3.70 m (about 12 ft) thick and 9 m (about 30 ft) high to the level of the walkway, or over 11 m measured to the top the castellated parapet. This defence wall was reinforced with eleven massive towers (Towers 10-20), spaced at even intervals of 39 m or 130 ft. All the towers along this defence wall were square in plan, 12 by 12 m (40 by 40 ft). They belonged to the same type as the towers in the Castle. They were open on the side facing the interior of the town and their height was about 19.50 m (65 ft) measured to the platform on their top, and almost 22 m measured to the top of the battlement. The interior was divided, as usual, into several storeys by timber floor structures. The top floor was surmounted by a brick-built vault, above which was a platform with a crenellated parapet and, probably, a pyramidal roof. (Fig. 21)

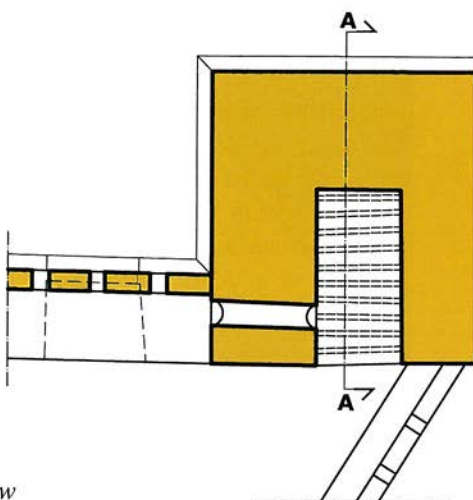
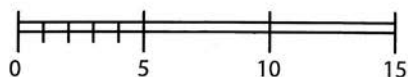
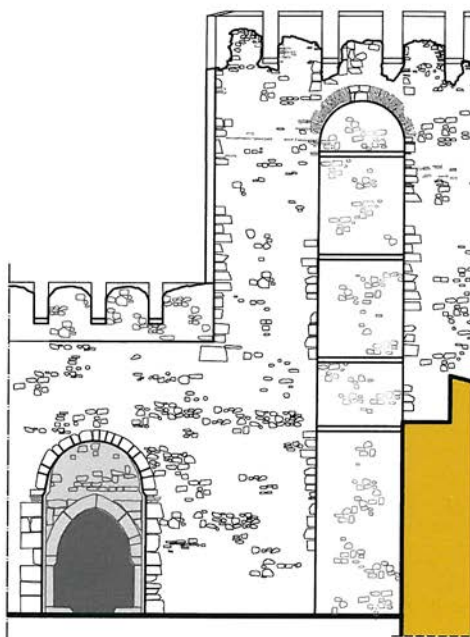
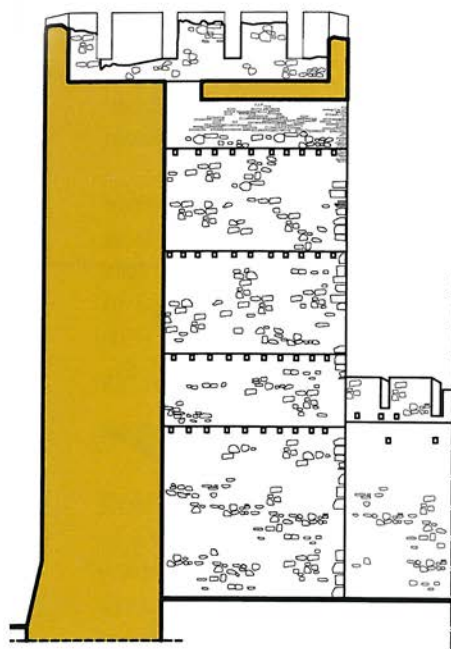
In front of the main defence wall was a concealed pathway and a considerably lower outer wall, which was identical in all respects to the corresponding defence wall of the Castle. It, too, had a series of embrasures for canons, but their precise number is difficult to establish because it has not been thoroughly explored. It can be only surmised that at least 60 cannon were deployed in the outer south

wall. A moat, about 20 m wide and connected with the Jezava and the Danube, ran in front of the double defence walls of the town. On the opposite side of the moat was a stone-built escarpment, and beyond that lay a tract of open land which separated the fortified town from the suburb.

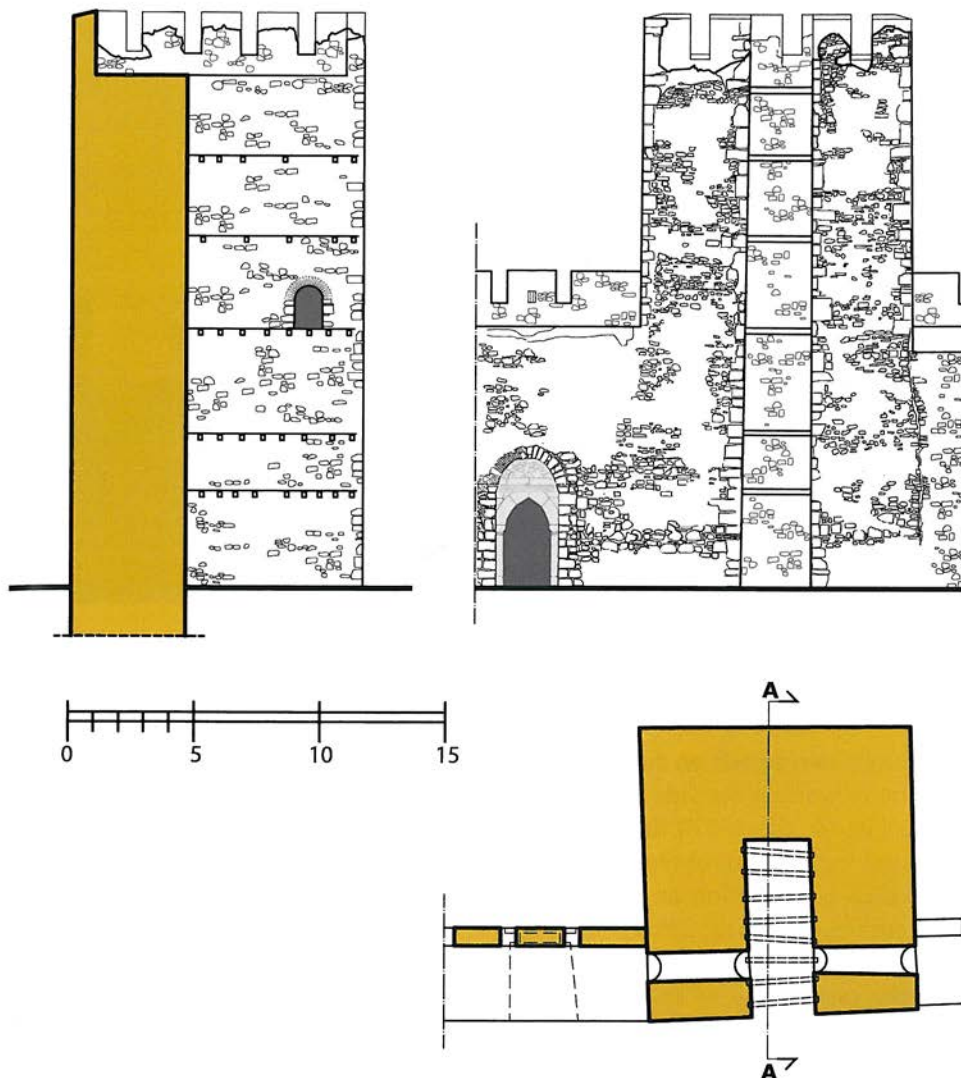
The side facing the Jezava was also fortified with double defence walls. The main wall was of approximately the same dimensions as the South Defence Wall – it was up to 3.50 m thick and a little less than 11 m tall. It was strengthened with three towers, identical in type with the towers along the South Defence Wall (Towers 7-9). Only one of them was vaulted, while the upper platforms of the



20. Smederevo – the Castle and the fortified urban settlement at the end of the 15th century



21. Tower 20 with the gate in the South Town Wall – ground plan, view of the interior and section (1:300)



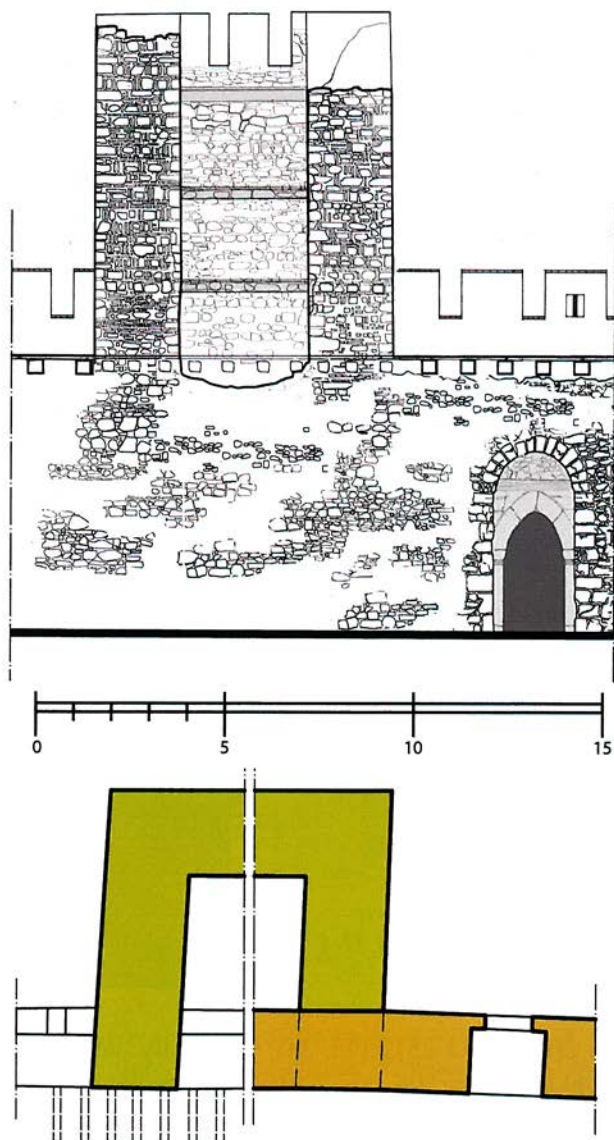
22. Tower 7 with the gate in the Jezava Defence Wall - ground plan, view of the interior and section (1:300)



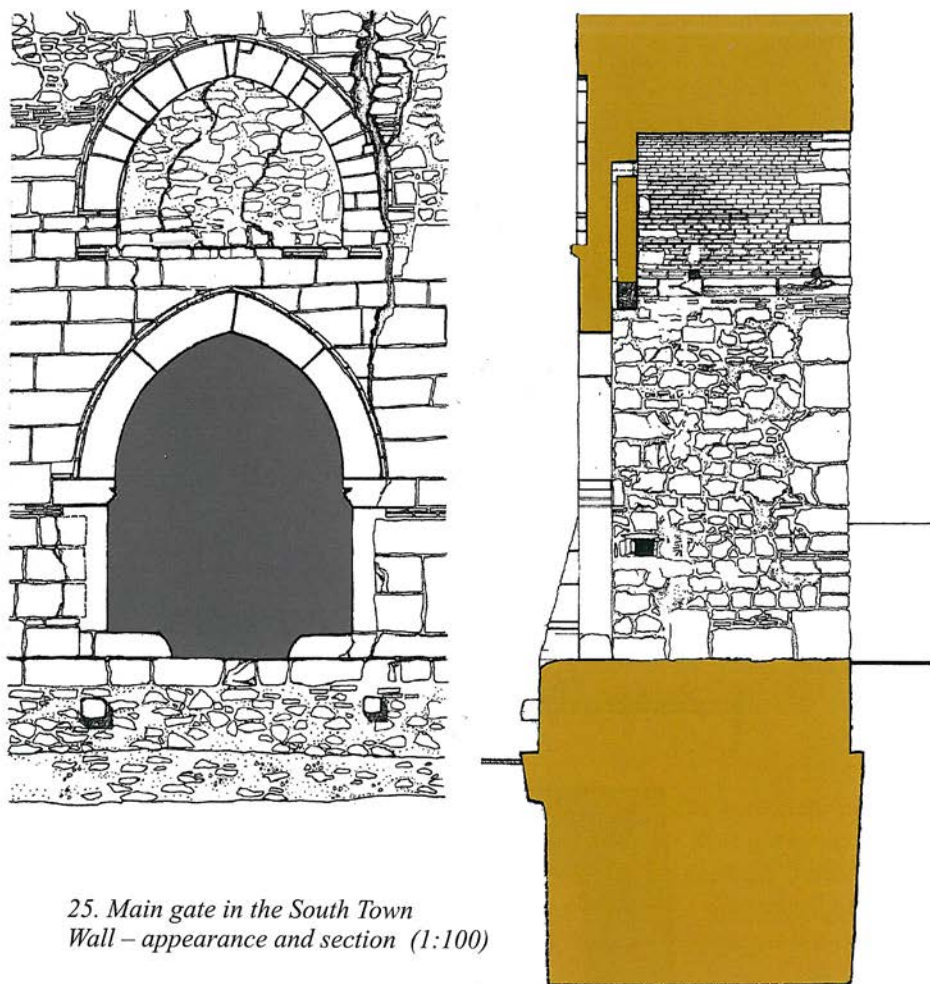
23. Jezava Defence Wall with Towers 7 and 8 – after the 2010-2012 restoration

other two rested on timber structures. (Fig. 22) There was also an outer wall on the side facing the Jezava. It had been well preserved as late as the end of the nineteenth century. Its ruins are now buried under earth and rubble, so that we have no evidence of the technique of its construction or of the possible existence and arrangement of embrasures. (Fig. 23)

The defence wall facing the Danube was the least fortified since the probability of an attack from that side was the least likely. It was 1.90-2.10 m thick and 7 m (21 ft) high to the level of the walkway, above which ran a crenellated parapet. The narrow walkway was widened by a timber platform resting on brackets. The wall was originally strengthened by a single tower semicircular in plan. Some time later four more towers were added along the defence wall; they were smaller than the others, but they were considerably more care-



24. Tower 24 with the gate in the Danubian Defence Wall – ground plan and view of the interior (1:200)

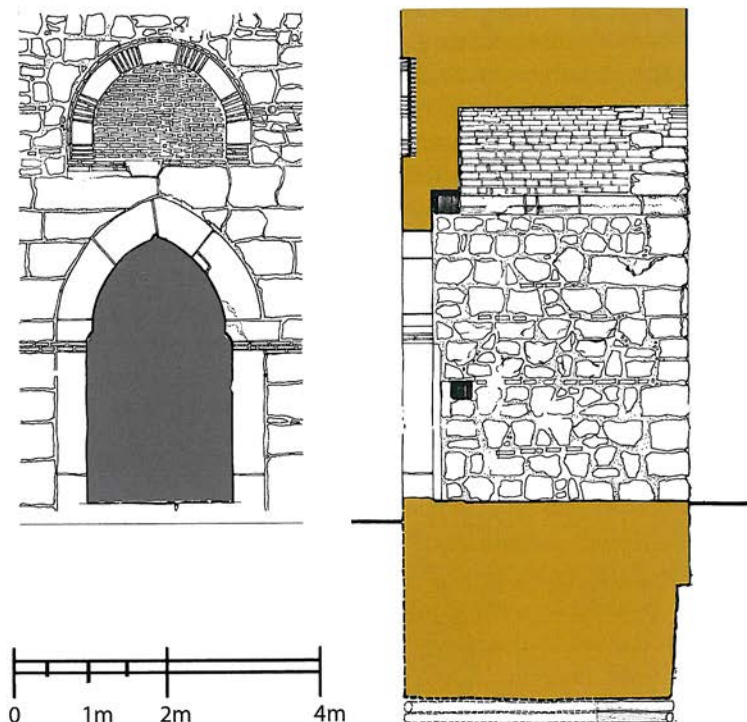


25. Main gate in the South Town Wall – appearance and section (1:100)

fully built (Towers 22-25). (Fig. 24). Originally there was no outer wall in front of this curtain, which ran along the bank for a stretch of about 450 m. It was only after the Turkish capture of the town that an outer wall with emplacements for several large guns was built. Concurrently with this the outer town wall was reinforced with four polygonal artillery towers – the one built first was located at the

mouth of the Jezava and the other three were at the ends and in the middle of the South lower outer wall.

The fortified settlement encircled with the new defence walls could be entered through four gates. The two larger ones were in



26. Jezava Town Gate – appearance and section (1:100)

the South Town Wall. Both of them, like the castle gate, were incorporated into the system of double defence walls. One of them, the one next to the corner Tower 20, was particularly carefully constructed and is undoubtedly the best example of its kind in Serbian mediaeval military architecture. (Fig. 25) The other large gate was located between Towers 14 and 15 in the middle section of the South Defence Wall. There is not sufficient evidence of its original

appearance because it was reconstructed during the Turkish rule and then razed to the ground in the explosion of ammunition in 1941. Two more gates were located in each of the lateral town defence walls facing the Jezava and the Danube. The Jezava gate, which has a decorative and finely carved portal, is in a particularly good state of preservation. (Fig. 26) The gate in the derfence wall facing the Danube, which has been recently restored to its former appearance, was designed in a similar way. Next to Tower 21 and facing the Danube was a gate of a very specific form. Its width was 7.20 m and it was not vaulted, but had only a timber architrave. On its outer side, above the door posts made of neatly carved ashlars, was a massive stone arch surmounted by a crenellated parapet. The gate seems to have been used for towing the river boats into the defended space of the „Great Town“ (*Veliki grad*). At a later period, perhaps after the Turkish occupation of the town, this gate was first made narrower, and then walled up.



The Building Technique and Stylistic Features of the Smederevo Fortifications

The building of Smederevo was an ambitious undertaking at that time, which necessitated the engagement of a large number of workers. The memory of the difficult conditions in which the town was built and of the exceptionally burdensome labour it involved has been preserved in Serbian popular ballads. Large quantities of stone had to be provided for the new fortifications of the Despot's town. This was a great problem, for there are no quarries in the vicinity of Smederevo. At the beginning stone was brought from the ruins of Roman towns, as is evidenced by the large number of classical spolia, which are most numerous precisely in the defence walls and towers of the Castle. Since that source was not sufficient, stone was transported from various other, often quite distant places. The builders used various kinds of stone, or rather all kinds they could come by.

A particular problem was the waterlogged and unstable terrain, which made it necessary to sink the foundations of the new defence walls very deep and to strengthen them with massive wooden piles. As the explorations carried out so far have shown, the foundations of the Jezava Defence Wall were three metres deep, while those of the South Defence Wall were even deeper (over 4 metres). All the defence walls and most of the towers were built of broken, roughly hewn stone bonded with very strong and compact lime mortar. Some defence walls and towers had a base course, or rather a sloped extension built of more carefully dressed stone. The walls of the ramparts and towers contained a large quantity of fragments of both classical and mediaeval bricks. Horizontal timber elements were embedded at certain intervals in the thickness of the walls. The external surfaces of the walls were coated with a thin layer of plaster and probably also whitewashed. Crenellated parapets ran on top of the walls and towers. They were largely brick-built, and their height above the level of the walkway was generally 2.30 m, or about 7.5 ft.. Almost each other merlon had an embrasure. The floor structures of the towers and the stairways giving access to the defence walls were made of timber. The towers had pyramidal timber roofs probably



27. Postern in the lateral wall of Tower 3 at the level of the walkway

covered with lead. All the towers dating from the earliest phase had arched posterns on the lateral sides giving access to the walkways. (Fig. 27)

The towers built along the Danubian Defence Wall later, probably at some time after 1444, were of a considerably more careful workmanship, the aim being that, in addition to serving their primary military function, they should also contribute to the better ap-

pearance of the town. A technique used to that effect was a combination of ashlars and bricks set in decorative patterns. This is shown to the best advantage on the face of the semicircular Tower 25, which is one of the most beautiful examples of decorative masonry not only in Serbian military architecture but also in the entire Byzantine sphere. (Fig. 28)

Special attention was also devoted to the design of the town gates. All of them were built of carefully dressed blocks of stone used in combination with thin bricks. Above the main gate was a shallow niche prepared for a fresco showing the saintly patron of the town. A similar niche with a fresco probably decorated the entrance to the Castle. The broken arches of the extant portals of the town gates reflect the influence of the Gothic architecture. The same applies to the arched windows on the Danubian Defence Wall of the Castle, which are carved in the Gothic style. This stylistic orientation should be perhaps associated with the activity of Ragusan masons, whom Despot Đurđe had engaged to work in Smederevo, as is evidenced by a document.

A specific feature of the Smederevo walls and towers is the use of fragments of classical marble carvings brought from various places as building material. These fragments were often built into the face of the walls without any particular plan, but in some cases a decorative effect was clearly intended. The most obvious example is a well preserved marble statue, for which a special shallow niche with a broken arch was made in the wall of Jerina's Tower. The conspicuous position of this statue, meant to embellish the entrance to the Castle, gave rise to the popular belief that it represented Despina Jerina. A relief with a representation of Hercules and Alcestis, which had formed the upper part of a fairly large classical stele, was also built into a place of honour on the front wall of a tower. Similar examples are also found on the defence walls of the „Great Town“.

Particularly remarkable are the finds of three classical half-capitals, the lower, semicircular sides of which bear subsequently carved reliefs showing similar figures with long hair, moustaches and a beard. Judging by the best preserved example, which was discovered near the Keep, they may have served as decoration for a court building within the Castle. The striking similarity of one of



28. Bricks set in decorative patterns on the towers added along the Danubian Defence Wall

these heads to the head of Despot Đurđe as shown on one of his silver coins shows that these carved figures may represent portraits of historical personages. (Fig. 29)

The subsequently built Smederevo fortifications, dating from the second quarter of the fifteenth century, belong, as their technique

of building and defence structures show, to the broader Byzantine cultural sphere. They are based on the traditional principles of warfare with cold weapons and duplicate forms established as long back as the late classical times. Some details, however, have certain specific features characteristic of Serbian military architecture which can be traced throughout the second half of the fourteenth century in various fortifications - at Ravanica, Kruševac, Stalać, Belgrade and Resava. All of them were designed for cold weapon warfare, since artillery still played a minor role in the defence of towns when the first guns appeared. It was only in the early decades of the fifteenth century that the builders of European fortifications began to plan emplacements for defensive artillery. This novelty was adopted very soon in Serbian military engineering and became fully implemented in the construction of the walls of the Castle.



29. Classical capital with a subsequently carved relief figure found near the main gate of the Smederevo Castle



30. Towers added along the Danubian Defence Wall

THE URBAN SETTLEMENT OF MEDIAEVAL SMEDEREVO

Our knowledge of the development of Despot Đurđe's urban capital is based largely on the evidence concerning the building of the Castle and the construction of new urban fortifications, while our knowledge of the mediaeval settlement is still very limited. The urban structures which had existed in Smederevo earlier seem to have been located on the slopes of the nearby hills, where they were not threatened by flooding, and not on the low embankment at the confluence of the Jezava and the Danube. Settlement in the area enclosed by the new walls could begin only after the construction of the Castle and the urban fortifications. There is no reliable evidence of that process because the archaeological explorations carried out so far have been of a rather limited scope. It may be assumed, however, that the period of less than thirty years was not sufficient for the complete urbanization of the fortified part of the town. Most of the early structures in this area were probably built of timber. It may be supposed that they were mostly ground-floor houses. The only monumental edifices that stood out among the comparatively modest buildings were the churches, particularly the Despot's foundation – the Church of the Annunciation.

The position of the town gates can give us an idea of the former network of communications. One line of communication certainly ran along the Danubian Defence Wall connecting the main town gate with the entrance to the Castle. Another route linked the town gate in the middle part of the South Defence Wall with the area in front of the moat of the Castle. A transverse communication crossed it connecting the Danubian Gate and the Jezava Gate. At the intersection of these two streets was presumably an open space which may have served as the town square. The churches probably stood in fairly

large free areas. According to the evidence available at present, that was especially true of the corner next to the Court Church, where only one building – a large timber house abutting on the defence wall – seems to have been located.

These communication lines, which might be termed main streets, reflected the basic urban pattern and marked the boundaries of town wards. There is a record – though of a considerably later date – that they were paved with logs, which was a common practice in the towns of the time. There is no reliable information on the arrangement or density of houses within wards. Some records, dating from the time of the Turkish rule, testify that the houses in the fortified part of the town had no gardens or large yards, which indicates that they were built close to one another. They were mostly dwelling houses, but they must have included some public buildings, of which, however, we have no evidence. One important institution – the Smederevo mint – was almost certainly located within the fortified part of the town.

The question who resided in the defended part of the town, i.e. what the composition of the population of that part of the town was like, must remain an open issue. We shall not err in supposing that a part of the garrison was stationed in it and that persons associated with the Despot's Court resided in this area. These inhabitants certainly included the wealthy Ragusan merchants, for whom the protection provided by the town walls was very important. One of them was Pasko Sorkočević, a patrician and the court treasurer, who owned a house in the fortified part of Smederevo and whose services were so highly esteemed that his family crest was placed on one of the town towers.

After the fall of Smederevo, the population of the fortified part of the town consisted of the members of the large Turkish garrison and of Moslem civilians, while Christians were not allowed to dwell there. The original urban structure was probably not much altered. It continued to be a settlement with predominantly timber-made houses and a few public buildings. Outstanding among them was the Kazlar-Aga's Bath, built near the Danubian Defence Wall around 1480.

The suburb lay before the town walls, in the area between the Jezava and the Danube. It included the territory of the former settlement, but it also extended further, towards the river banks. A

large part of it was encircled by the outer fortifications, which served as the first line of defence of the town. They proved their value in times of siege, particularly in 1458 and 1476. The defences consisted of an embankment with wooden palisades and a ditch partly filled with water from a nearby stream. The precise position of this line of defence is not known, which makes it difficult to establish the boundaries of the settlement.

A bridge spanned the Jezava on the eastern approaches to the settlement, not far from the Turkish artillery tower. One line of communication ran along the bank of the Danube, and the main gate of the settlement was, it is supposed, on the southern side. The majority of Smederevo townsfolk and the merchants from the maritime region dwelt in the suburb. There was at least one church in that urbanized area in the period before the Turkish conquest. The Turkish censuses taken in Smederevo in the course of the sixteenth century list a comparatively large number of priests - between ten and fourteen - which indicates that there was a considerable number of churches, of which we have no more specific evidence.

The only extant church dating from the time of the building of the Smederevo town is the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in the present cemetery, which stood in the immediate vicinity of the old suburb. It survived undamaged the Turkish rule and probably served as the Cathedral Church of the Smederevo metropolitans for a time.

Churches in the Town of Smederevo

Our knowledge of the churches which had stood in the town itself and which disappeared long ago was for a long time very scant, based on rare references in historical sources and on meagre material evidence, i.e. on their remains used secondarily in the construction of the Turkish tower at the mouth of the Jezava. It was only during the archaeological explorations carried out three decades ago that the first evidence of a mediaeval church within the Smederevo defence walls came to light. (Fig. 31)

Remains of an aisleless church with a semicircular altar apse in the east, a spacious narthex, square in plan, in the west, and rectangular



31. Court Church – view after the partial restoration of 2012

choirs have been discovered in the east corner of the fortified town. The specific features of its ground plan are immediately apparent. Since there were no east and west bays, the nave was virtually reduced to the space under the dome. The sanctuary was also rather small, confined to the apse, which contained a large masonry altar. Traces of the foundations of two paraeccleseions built against the lateral sides of the narthex were discovered during the recent additional explorations. They had unusual trefoil ground plans. A bell tower seems to have stood in front of the west facade of the church.

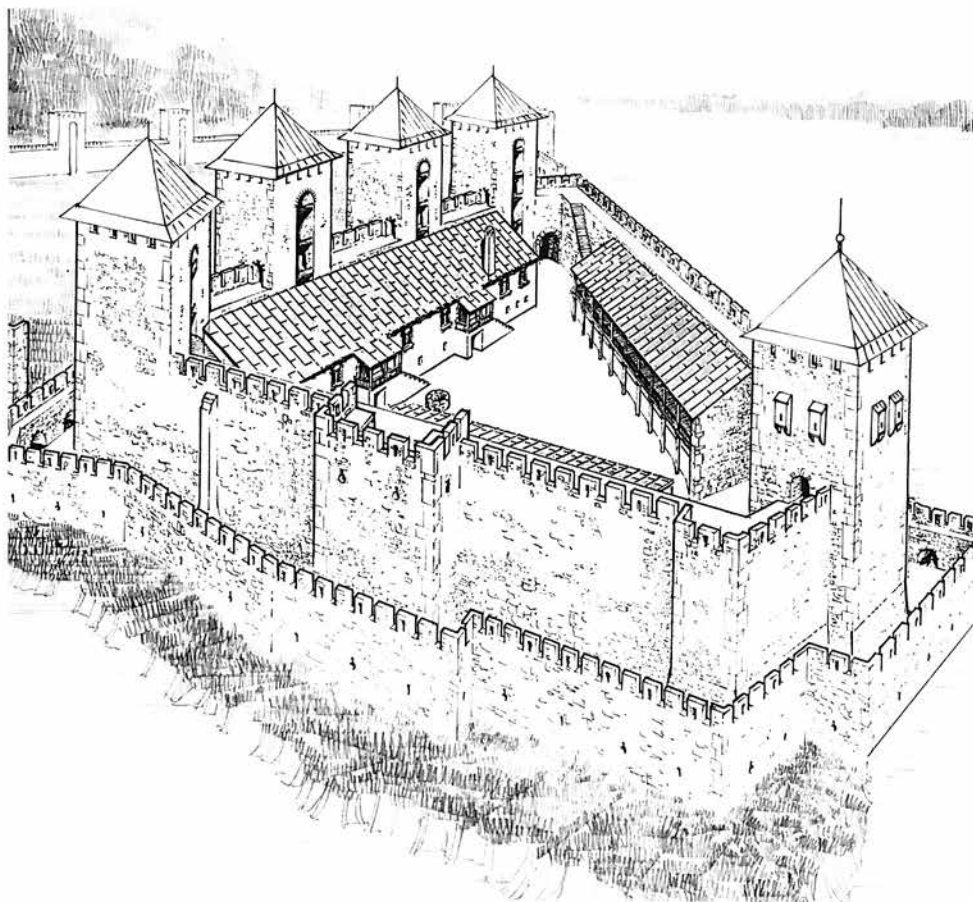
The size, ground plan and method of construction of this church, which is only about 20 m long, are such that it cannot be identified as the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin founded by the Despot. The results of the explorations carried out so far indicate that these

remains belonged to a court church. It seems to date from the time of the building of the Castle and the court complex (1428-1430) and it stood in a free area about 250 m distant from the new defence walls. Its unusual ground plan and rather small dimensions show that it was probably intended for a comparatively limited congregation consisting of people belonging to the Court. The area on which it stood was included into the newly formed fortified urban core in the fourth decade of the fifteenth century. At the time of the first fall of Smederevo in 1439 it was undoubtedly the only church in the defended part of the town, and as such it was immediately converted into a mosque. After the re-establishment of the Serbian rule in 1444 it was restored to its original use. The building of the Church of the Annunciation, which is known to have been completed by the early 1450s, seems to have begun also in that period.

In spite of the fact that the location of the Church of the Annunciation is yet to be ascertained, we can form an idea of the main features of its architecture on the basis of its spolia that have been preserved. Despot Đurđe modelled the new Smederevo cathedral on Resava – the foundation and sepulchral church of his predecessor Despot Stefan. The Church of the Annunciation was not inferior in size to its model. It had polygonal lateral apses with semi-colonnettes at the corners and massive, moulded piers supporting the cupola. Its facade was faced with dressed blocks of sandstone and it had a row of arcades below the roof cornice. The window openings and portals were decorated with carved plaitwork, and other carved ornaments included rosettes, which were a common feature of the Morava style decoration. The church was also decorated with frescoes, as is evidenced by the preserved fragments on some uncovered stone blocks. It is not known whether the Church of the Annunciation, as the cathedral of the Metropolitan of Smederevo, was also the sepulchral church of its founder, but it is to be hoped that future explorations will give an answer to that question.

After the final fall of Smederevo in 1459, the smaller Court Church, which had already been converted once into a mosque, was turned again into an Islamic place of worship in accordance with the principle „once a mosque – always a mosque“. In the succeeding periods it was reconstructed and enlarged several times, but it

nevertheless retained recognizable features of a former Christian church. First it got a small annexe with a mihrab; later a large space for prayer was added and a minaret was erected next to it. During the Austrian rule, 1717-1739, this old building was converted into a Catholic church to be again turned into a mosque when the Turks returned to Smederevo. Its further fate is not known. It was probably demolished towards the end of the eighteenth century or in the early nineteenth century.



32. Smederevo Castle in mid-15th century –*axonometric reconstruction*

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TOWN OF SMEDEREVO AND THE PHASES OF ITS BUILDING

The decision to build of a new capital was made in response to the dramatic developments triggered by the sudden death of Despot Stefan in July 1427. The new Serbian ruler Đurđe Branković was obliged, according to a previously concluded agreement, to cede to the King of Hungary the town of Belgrade, which had begun to develop as the main seat of the ruler and as the military, economic and cultural centre of Serbia more than two decades previously. It was a very difficult obligation, which the successor of Despot Stefan had to comply with already in the early autumn of 1427. Serbia, threatened with Turkish onslaughts, remained without its chief stronghold. The only solution in these difficult circumstances was to build another fortified seat of the ruler, a new capital. The same reasons that had led to the building of Belgrade made it necessary, three decades later, to find another place and start building, in considerably more adverse geopolitical circumstances, a new centre of the state. These circumstances necessitated prompt decisions and the establishment of a new capital, adjusted to the actual conditions. Accordingly, it was decided to build Smederevo, and the implementation of that plan began immediately with great exertions of the entire country.

In the earliest stage a castle with the ruler's court was built at the very mouth of the Jezava. It was a comparatively small autonomous stronghold encircled with double defence walls. Its construction may have begun in the spring of 1428 at the earliest, and it was probably completed by the late autumn of 1430. (Fig. 32) The triangular plan of the fortification was determined, as mentioned earlier, by the configuration of the terrain. The main curtain wall facing the landward side was best fortified and strengthened with four towers. In front of it was built another, lower defence wall,

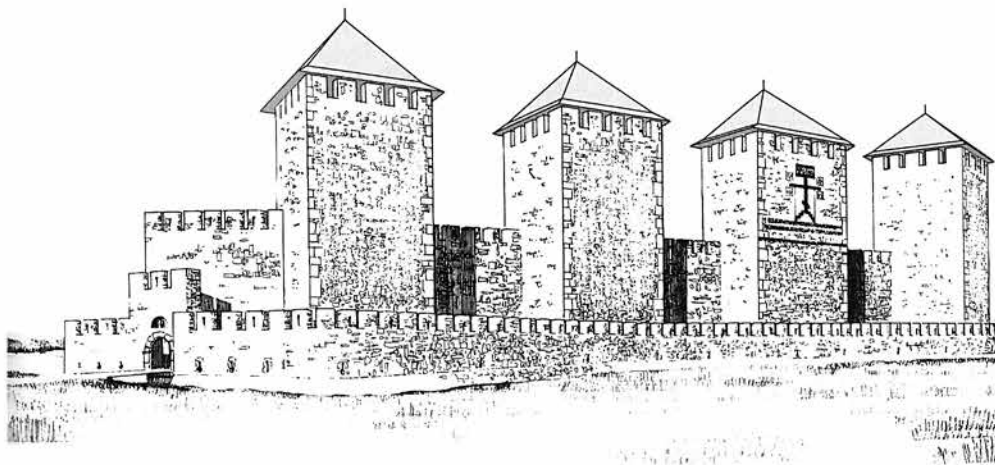
with an escarpment towards the moat, which was connected with the adjacent rivers, so that the Castle was surrounded by water from all sides. (Fig. 33) This outer defence wall had special gunports, which are among the earliest examples of this type not only in the Serbian territory, but also in the larger context of European fortification systems. The artillery fire from these positions could successfully defend the landward side of the stronghold. (Fig. 34) The curtain walls facing the Danube and the Jezava were originally not reinforced with towers. At their junction was the Keep, which was of a more solid structure and a little taller than the other towers. In front of the defence walls facing the embankment was also an outer, lower curtain wall, similar to that facing the landward side, but, it seems, without gunports. The main entrance to the Castle was in the southwest corner, near the bank of the Danube. Two posterns, on either side of the Keep, also gave access to the river bank. This ensured that in case of a Turkish siege the Serbian Despot could cross the river, which was still fully controlled by the Christians, and take refuge in the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom.

In the interior of the Castle were the court buildings, which were originally built of timber and which abutted on one the three defence walls. Against the wall facing the Danube was the building with the Great Hall, which had four arched windows facing the river. (Fig. 35) This was the most important building in the Castle, i.e. the *magna sala audientiae*, in which Despot Đurđe received a Venetian embassy in 1435. The living quarters were in a spacious edifice – the Palace – abutting on the South Wall. The court buildings included, as mentioned before, sanitary facilities, which were built in the form of separate niches in the adjoining defence walls and towers. Refuse water was conveyed to the rivers through specially constructed chutes, which were built into the thickness of the defence walls or dug into the ground. A well, always well supplied with water, was located in the central part of the yard of the Castle.

The various court buildings within the Castle walls left not sufficient space for a court chapel or church, which means that such a place of worship was probably located outside that area. This supposition was confirmed by the discovery of the remains of a church, already referred to as the hypothetical „Court Church”, in the

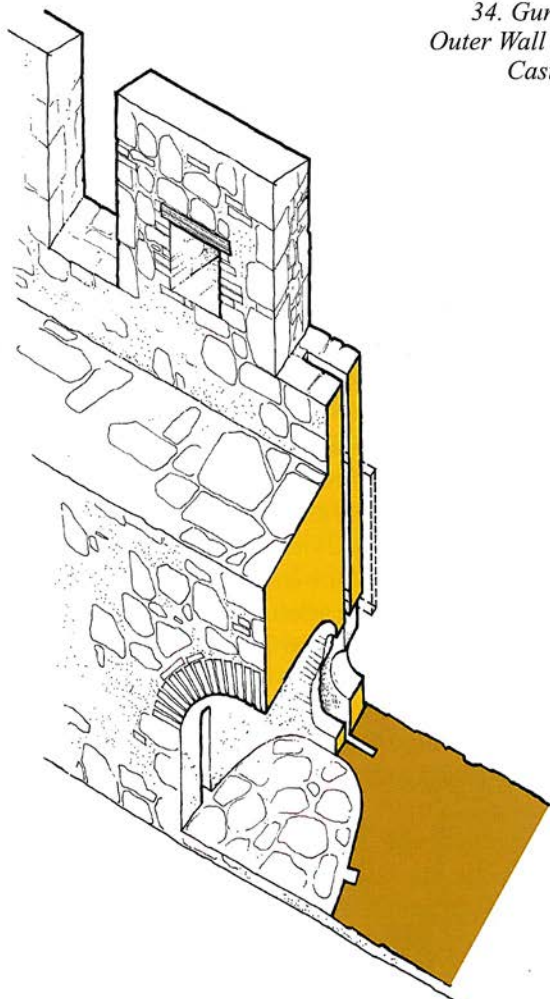
eastern corner of the “Great Town” (*Veliki grad*). This church stood on the edge of the open space in front of the Castle. The peculiar ground plan of this building seems to support this hypothesis. The sanctuary of modest dimensions and the small nave indicate that the church was not designed to be used as an ecclesiastical centre or intended for a large congregation. It may be supposed that its nave was used by the members of the ruling family, while the somewhat larger narthex was reserved for the nobility or the courtiers. (Fig. 36)

The second phase of building began after the completion of the Castle and was probably finished before the first Turkish occupation of Smederevo in 1439. Throughout that period, lasting almost a decade, work went on the fortification of an area measuring around ten hectares, which was planned for the building of a defended settlement, now commonly called “Great Town” (*Veliki grad*). Its triangular plan was determined, like that of the Castle, by the courses of the Danube and the Jezava, which are of exceptional importance in its defence system. Consequently, the approach that had to be fortified most was the one from the landward, south side. There the same system of fortification was implemented as in the Castle – the system of double defence walls with a ditch connected



33. South Defence Wall of the Smederevo Castle in 1430 – axonometric reconstruction

*34. Gunport in the South
Outer Wall of the Smederevo
Castle – axonometric
reconstruction*



with the Danube and the Jezava. (Fig. 37) The main south curtain wall was reinforced by a series of evenly spaced rectangular towers. In front of the curtain wall was a lower outer wall with gunports identical with those in the defence wall in front of the Castle. The guns positioned there could defend the approach to the stronghold very efficiently.

The east side facing the Jezava was also fortified with double defence walls, but it had considerably fewer towers and, apparently, no empostments for guns along the outer line of defence. Unlike the earlier two walls, which had been built concurrently and incorporated the same principles of defence, the curtain facing the Danube was considerably less fortified and originally reinforced with a single semicircular tower. It was built separately, with no structural link with the adjoining South Wall, and it merely abuts on the corner tower of that wall. It appears that the defence wall facing the landward, south side and the wall running along the Jezava were built first, while the least exposed side facing the Danube was fortified only after the completion of the other two defence walls.

The main town gates were in the South Defence Wall, at the landward approach to the town. One of them was located, as it has already been said, in the middle of that wall curtain, and the other was in the southwest corner. The latter, which appears to have been more important and monumental, was on the communication line running along the Danubian Defence Wall towards the gate of the Castle. There were two other gates in the town: one facing the Jezava, and another giving access to the bank of the Danube. An additional wide gate was in the Danubian Defence Wall, which was used for towing vessels from the Danube into the town.

After the completion of the new fortifications, the church that was probably Despot Đurđe's Court Church became a part of the defended area of the town. The crosses, formed of built-in bricks in the curtain of the Jezava Defence Wall, testify that this church had already been in existence at the time of the construction of the new defence walls. They clearly mark the sacred area of the Court Church, and possibly also of some other structure in its vicinity. (Fig. 36)

It is not clear whether some other buildings were constructed in the defended urban core of the new Serbian capital during this second stage. It is difficult to suppose that any extensive activity was going on there in view of the enormous labour involved in the building of the new defence walls and towers.

By the time of the first Turkish occupation of Smederevo at the end of August 1439, the area of the "Great Town" had been

fortified in its entirety, but it is an open question whether and to what extent the new urban structure within the walled-in area had been constituted. Since the town surrendered, it may be supposed that there was no large scale destruction. The Court Church seems to have been immediately converted into a mosque since *juma namaz*, the principal Moslem weekly prayer, was held in the occupied town immediately after its surrender.

After the temporary Turkish occupation and the re-establishment of the Serbian rule in 1444, work on the building of Smederevo was resumed and was carried on during the following fifteen years. In this period, which may be termed the third stage, the existing fortifications were added to and reinforced, and the urban structure of the capital was further developed. During the fifth decade of the fifteenth century a lower tower was built along the Jezava Defence Wall of the Castle, and the north and west corners of this stronghold were reinforced. Extensive work was done in the complex of court buildings. On the site of the earlier Palace abutting on the South Defence Wall a completely new and spacious court building was constructed. It had stone walls and an upper floor with living quarters. It may be supposed that the earlier building with the Great Hall was also thoroughly renovated in this period. As regards the town fortifications, the main attention was devoted to the Danubian Defence Wall, which had not been well fortified in the preceding period. Four new towers, very carefully built and decorated with bricks set in ornamental patterns, were built along the curtain on the very bank of the Danube. (Fig. 30)

Our knowledge of the buildings erected in the last period of the prosperity of the town before the final Turkish conquest is very scant. Immediately after his return to Smederevo, or in the late 1440s, Despot Đurđe Branković initiated the building of the monumental Church of the Annunciation – his principal foundation and the cathedral church of the Smederevo Metropolitanate. At the beginning of the next decade the church was completed and decorated with frescoes, and in January 1453 the relics of St Luke Evangelist were translated to it.

The precise location of the Church of the Annunciation is not known – it is only certain that its remains should be looked for



35. *Bifore windows of the Great Hall in the Danubian Defence Wall of the Smederevo Castle*

in the defended area of the town. In spite of the fact that we do not know the location of the church, its spolia built into the later Turkish fortifications can give us some idea of its basic architectural features. They show that Despot Đurđe modelled the new Smederevo cathedral church on the church of Monastery Resava – a foundation of his predecessor Despot Stefan Lazarević and also his sepulchral church.

The archaeological explorations carried out so far have not produced reliable evidence of the urban structure within the defence walls and of the buildings constructed there in the final period of the prosperity of the town. It has been noticed that the earliest layers, i.e. those dating from the time of the Despotate and of the early Turkish period, contained very small quantities of waste building material, which seems to indicate that there were few solid, stone- or brick-

built structures. The buildings from that time were to all appearances made predominantly of timber and other non-durable materials. This conclusion is borne out by the observations of travellers who passed through Smederevo in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

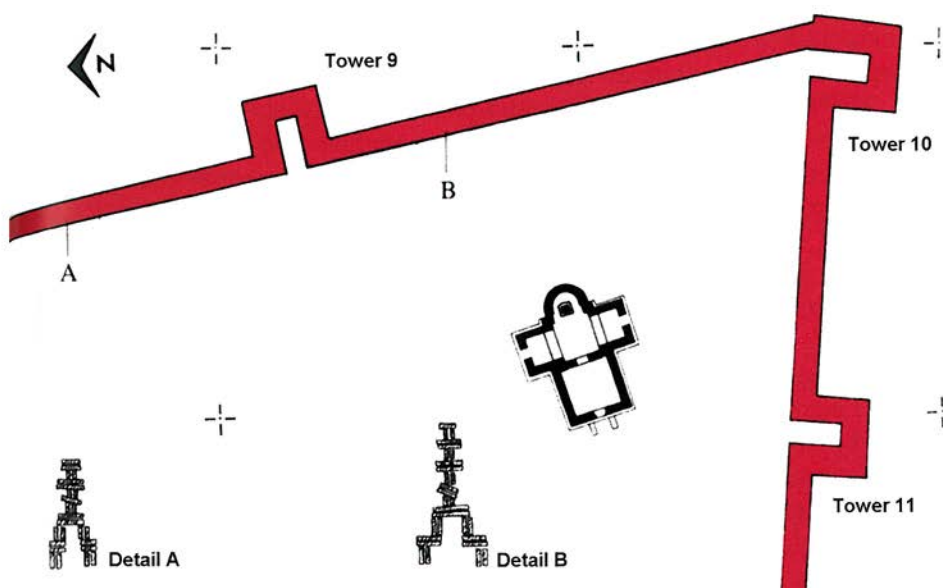
Work on the fortifications of the town was resumed after the Turkish taking of Smederevo in June 1459. Soon after the occupation of the town, probably during the 1460s, steps were taken to strengthen the least fortified Danubian Defence Wall. A lower outer wall with gunports was erected in front of the main curtain, and a new artillery tower was built in front of the north corner of the Castle, at the very mouth of the Jezava. A part of the new fortifications was built with the stone from the demolished Church of the Annunciation. (Fig. 38)

Some time later, in 1479 as is testified by an inscribed tablet, the southern, landward approach to the town was reinforced with artillery towers. Two were built at the corners of the outer wall facing the Danube and the Jezava, and a third was located at the middle of that wall, in front of one of the town gates. These were the last defences built in Smederevo. (Fig. 39)

After this brief survey of the building stages of the Smederevo town, it is possible to reach some conclusions based on the analyses of its extant structures. The choice of the location for the new fortified centre of Serbia was determined by the political circumstances following the sudden death of Despot Stefan. It was necessary to build a new stronghold on the northern frontiers of Serbia, in the immediate vicinity of Christian Hungary and far enough from the routes of possible Turkish irruptions from the south. Accordingly, the area at the confluence of the Jezava and the Danube, in close proximity to the existing settlement of Smederevo, was chosen as the most suitable defensive location. The place offered no other advantages: the terrain was marshy, miry and frequently flooded – in a word, unhealthy and unsuitable for urban settlement. This is corroborated by the remarks of several travellers who visited Smederevo in later times.

The original plan envisaging the building of a strongly defended castle with the ruler's court was realized, at the cost of enormous labour, in two years only. The new stronghold was a self-contained

whole and designed for defence with firearms, which was a very modern concept at that time. No larger stronghold could be planned under the circumstances. The small Smederevo castle could provide refuge to the ruler, his court and a small garrison, but it could not ensure the survival of the imperiled state. It is difficult to say today what the actual plans of the Serbian ruler were when the building of Smederevo began, but it is quite certain that the prevailing political circumstances were not conducive to ambitious plans for the building of a prosperous urban capital modelled on Constantinople. Therefore the first works had to be limited to the most necessary structures. However, Despot Đurđe, taking advantage of the complex circumstances at the Turkish court and, apparently, without the knowledge of Sultan Murad II, began to build, immediately after the completion of the Castle, new fortifications designed to protect an urban settlement covering more than ten hectares. There is no



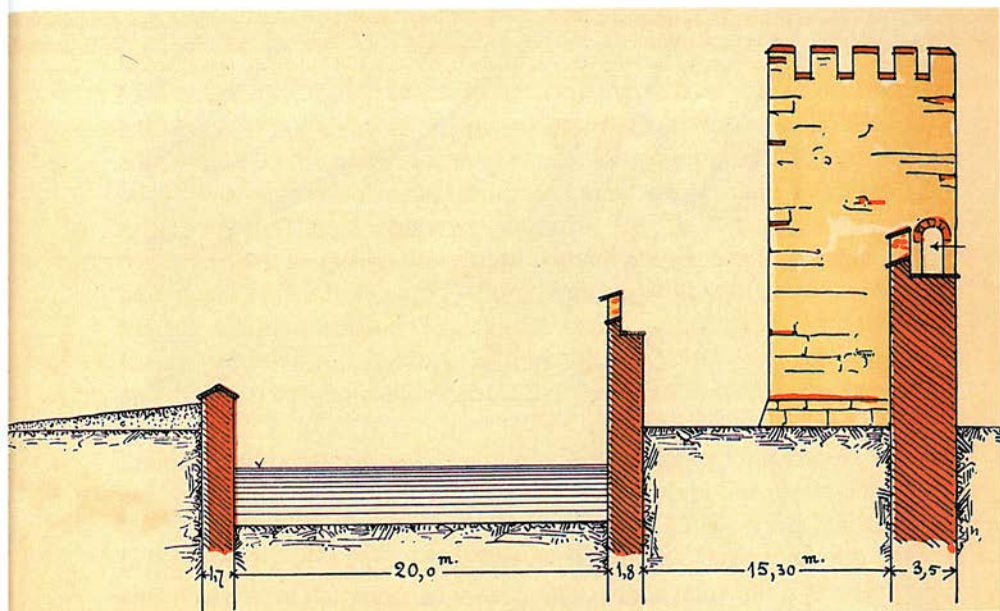
36. Position of the Court Church in the east corner of the fortified town - plan

reliable evidence showing how long the building of these defences lasted. A passage in the work of Uruj, a Turkish chronicler and a contemporary of these events, seems to imply that the works on the fortifications of Smederevo were completed by the beginning of 1435. If they were still in progress at that time, they must have been completed before the first Turkish capture of the town in 1439.

A separate question, the answer to which requires more extensive research, is how the Serbian ruler managed to implement his plan and to stall, at least while the construction was in progress, the negative reaction of the Turkish Sultan. This difficult problem was probably dealt with by diplomatic means. In any case, the Sultan was never willing to accede to the establishment of a new and large Christian stronghold. It is also a moot question why the Turkish reaction came only after the new Smederevo defence walls had been nearly completed. A possible answer is that the Sultan thought it wise to wait patiently for the fortifications to be finished and then take possession of the ready-made stronghold and use it as a base for the further Turkish advance into central Europe, as it actually did happen after the capture of Smederevo in 1439.

The building of the town walls provided defended space for the quartering of a strong garrison, for accommodation of persons connected with the Court, and for the development of an urban core of the capital in spite of the disadvantages of the terrain. These works, however, rendered considerably less useful the fortifications of the recently finished Castle, and particularly their greatest advantage – the battery of more than twenty guns on the outer defence wall facing the landward side. This incongruity indicates that these two fortification systems were not originally conceived as parts of a single plan.

The triangular plans of both the Castle and the Smederevo town fortifications were determined, as mentioned before, by the banks of the Danube and the Jezava. They certainly do not represent a deliberate replica of the layout of Constantinople, although this is not to deny that the similarity of these plans may have given rise to such associations in the minds of contemporaries. Viewed as a whole, the new Smederevo fortifications belong to the general sphere of Byzantine culture. A number of their elements follow, however, the



37. South Town Wall – section through the system of fortifications

specific line of development of the Serbian military architecture of the time and make use of the experience gained in the construction of a number of Serbian strongholds, including Belgrade and the defences of monastery Resava. In this sense, Smederevo was the last and best achievement of military engineering of mediaeval Serbia. Masters from the Greek regions and from the Serbian maritime region took part, together with native craftsmen, in its building. An important role in the organization of works on the new fortifications was played by Georgios Kantakuzen, brother of Despina Jerina, often called „the builder of Smederevo“ by his contemporaries.

The evidence of the urban structures and significance of the town in the early period of its development is much scantier than that related to the building of new defence walls and towers. One of the factors which contribute to the better understanding of that process

was the emergence of Smederevo as a centre of the Serbian Church. There was a strong tendency, which had become apparent several decades earlier in Belgrade, to establish the seat of „the exarch of all Serbian lands“ in the place in which the ruler's resided. In the earlier centuries the settlement at Smederevo had belonged to the Braničevo Eparchy. In the new circumstances it became its seat. The last reference to Metropolitan Savatije's residence at Braničevo dates from 1434. It is believed that the Metropolitan moved to Smederevo some time before 1439, probably in 1437, when the Turks occupied his former seat. Metropolitan Atanasije, who was with the Despot during the first Turkish occupation, was styled „the Metropolitan of Smederevo“. After his return to Smederevo he continued to officiate in it until his death in 1456.

The transfer of the Metropolitan's residence to the new capital, which was still under construction, rises the question where his seat had been in the period before the building of the Church of the Annunciation. Direct evidence on the churches of mediaeval Smederevo is very scant and does not help us to answer this question. A church had probably existed in the settlement known as Smederevo even before the building of the fortified capital. It may have been located in the area of the former suburb or on one of the foothills facing the Jezava. It is possible that such a church became a temporary seat of the Metropolitan. Another - and in our opinion more likely - possibility is that it was the Court Church in the "Great Town" (*Veliki grad*). A part of the Jezava Defence Wall in the immediate vicinity of that church bears traces of a fairly large timber building which abutted on its inner face. It may well be that this vanished building was the earliest residence of the Metropolitan.

During the last period of the history of Smederevo as the centre of the state, which lasted from the restoration of the Serbian rule in 1444 to the final subjugation by the Turks, its fortifications were little added to or reinforced. The main activity seems to have been concentrated on the formation of urban structures within the newly constructed defence walls and on the enlargement of the suburb as an essential element of the urban capital. The most important undertaking was the building of the Church of the Annunciation - Despot Đurđe's foundation and the cathedral church of the



38. Material from the Church of the Annunciation built into the walls of the Turkish artillery tower at the mouth of the Jezava

Metropolitanate of Smederevo. The establishment of the sacral topography of the town can be associated with this stage only. This was achieved by time-honoured methods, such as the foundation of shrines with relics and careful choice of locations for churches, the aim being to impart to Smederevo the image of a legitimate Christian capital under the patronage of the celestial powers.

The most important event in this respect was the translation of the relics of St Luke Evangelist from Rogos in Epirus to Smederevo only a few months after the Turkish capture of Constantinople and the final collapse of the Byzantine Empire. The greatly revered relics were solemnly received and taken first to the Court Church and then to the Court itself, where an all-night vigil was celebrated. At dawn the casket with the relics was taken to the centre of the town. After

that it was carried in procession round the town walls „*to make them strong and impregnable*“. The procession ended in the „*newly built and decorated*“ Church of the Annunciation, where the relics were deposited in the place of honour – in front of the sanctuary and to the right of the royal door.

We do not know whether the Church of the Annunciation was, in addition to being the cathedral of the Metropolitan of Smederevo, the sepulchral church of its founder. There is no direct evidence of Despot Đurđe's place of burial. It is reasonable to suppose that he was buried in Smederevo. However, no traces of such a burial have been discovered either during the explorations of the remains of the Court Church or during similar works carried out in the mediaeval Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in the present cemetery. Until some reliable evidence concerning the sepulchral church of the Branković family comes to light, our attempts to solve this problem must be based on sheer guesswork. According to the present knowledge, one should not exclude the possibility that the last Serbian Despots Đurđe (+1456) and Lazar (+1458) were laid to rest in the foundation of their family, beside the venerated relics of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke.

The collapse of the mediaeval Serbian state, marked by the Turkish capture of the Despot's capital on the 20th of June 1459, was of decisive importance for the further fate of Smederevo. The development of the mediaeval town and the urban centre of the state was abruptly discontinued. Under the new circumstances Smederevo became a strong Ottoman base for the further northward expansion and for the defence of the conquered territories. The town became the administrative centre of the newly-established Sanjak of Smederevo and its former mediaeval urban structure gradually assumed an Oriental aspect.

The first victims were the Christian places of worship. An eyewitness of these events, the Turkish chronicler Ashik-Pasha Zade, recorded: „The church bells in Smederevo were wrecked. Its churches were spoiled and turned into mosques“. Immediately after the establishment of the Turkish rule a church in Smederevo was converted into a mosque named after the conqueror of the town – Sultan Mehmed II. Some Serbian historians formerly thought, as



39. Portal of the Turkish artillery tower added in 1479

mentioned earlier, that the church thus converted was the cathedral Church of the Annunciation. Recent research has, however, definitely disproved this view. The archaeological and other evidence clearly shows that the church in the east part of the fortified town which was converted into a mosque was the former Court Church of the Serbian Despot, which was extant, in a reconstructed form, as late as the eighteenth century. Why the larger and more monumental Church of the Annunciation was not adapted for the use of Moslems after the Turkish conquest, as has been erroneously held hitherto and as would have been more in conformity with the usual Ottoman practice, must remain an open question. We believe that we shall not err in supposing that of decisive importance in making this decision was the fact that the older Court Church had already been converted into a mosque after the first Turkish occupation. After the return of the Serbs to Smederevo this church continued to be regarded, in accordance with the Islamic views, as a mosque temporarily usurped by „infidels“. Accordingly, when the Turks occupied the town again, this place of worship was, in their opinion, merely restored to the followers of Mohammed.

There is no evidence of the fate of the Smederevo cathedral church after the imposition of the Turkish rule. Since the town surrendered without resistance, it may have remained in the Christian hands for some time, but it was deprived of its main spiritual treasure – the reliquary with the relics of St Luke, which was taken away, with the consent of the Turks, by the daughter of Despot Lazar and the later queen of Bosnia when she left the town.

We can only speculate on the attitude of the Turks to the Serbs in the occupied town. Even if the relations were fairly tolerant immediately after the conquest, they must have deteriorated in the 1460s and, particularly, 1470s, at the time of the intensification of the Hungarian-Turkish conflicts, in which the Serbs took an active part as subjects of the King of Hungary. The Turks were compelled to defend their gains south of the Danube and to strengthen the defences of Smederevo. As a result of these developments, their relations with the Christian population undoubtedly worsened. A consequence, and possibly a special act of reprisal, may have been the demolition of the Church of the Annunciation, the material of which was incorporated



40. Despot Đurđe Branković with his family – miniature from the charter granted to monastery Esphigomenou

into the earliest Turkish fortifications of Smederevo. If this church had been converted into a mosque in 1459, as was long held, it would not have been demolished only a few years later, for that would have been contrary to the fundamental principles of Islam, as is testified by numerous examples from Constantinople, Salonica, Belgrade and other towns in Christendom which have been under Islamic rule in some period of their long history. Apart from the church converted into Sultan Mehmed II's Mosque, there were two other Islamic places of worship in the fortified part of the town around the middle of the seventeenth century, but it is not known when they were built and what their appearance was like. The urban structure within the town walls, which assumed an increasingly Oriental aspect as time went on, still consisted chiefly of timber houses. Outstanding among the more solidly constructed public buildings dating from the period after the Turkish conquest is the Kazlar-Aga's Bath, built around 1480, partly with the material from the demolished Church of the Annunciation.

Smederevo was a town of great strategic importance for the Ottoman Empire throughout the second half of the fifteenth century, and therefore the Turks took pains to extend and strengthen its former fortifications. The earlier system, designed for defence from assaults from the south, had now to be strengthened on the side facing the Danube as the frontier river, the northern bank of which was still held by the Hungarian Kingdom. Therefore a new, polygonal three-storey tower with platforms for more than ten guns was built, as mentioned earlier, at the very mouth of the Jezava soon after the capture of the town. It belonged to the of transitional type from high to somewhat lower cannon towers. At the same time, empostments were made for a series of guns in the new, outer Danubian Defence Wall, which controlled the navigation on the Danube and ensured effective defence in case of an attack from the river.

The value of the Smederevo fortifications, both of the ones built before the imposition of the Turkish rule and of those added later, was proven in the time of the Hungarian-Turkish war, in which the Serbian troops of Despot Vuk Grgurević also took part, and also during the abortive siege of the town in 1478. The experience of this siege showed that it was necessary to improve the fortifications

facing the south, landward approach to the town, and particularly to ensure a more efficient use of defensive gunfire. This was achieved by the addition of three polygonal artillery towers along the outer South Defence Wall. They represent lower and improved versions of the somewhat earlier artillery tower built at the mouth of the Jezava. The construction of these towers, which may have begun soon after the unsuccessful Hungarian siege, was completed by the end of 1479. They were also the last additions to the fortifications of Smederevo.

After the Turkish capture of Belgrade in 1521 the town of Smederevo lost its previous importance. The newly occupied town at the confluence of the Sava and the Danube, the former centre of Serbia which had become a Hungarian stronghold in 1427, became again a regional centre, to which the Turks transferred the seat of the Sanjak of Smederevo. That was an event of decisive importance for the further destiny of Smederevo. In the later periods this town was to exist in the shadow of neighbouring Belgrade.



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