SLOBODAN ĆURČIĆ
(Princeton University)

VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE ASPECTS OF BUILDING
THE FORTIFIED PALACE OF SMEDEREVO
AND ITS HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The remains of the fifteenth-century fortification of Smederevo, the last capital of the Serbian Medieval state, are among the most impressive remnants of Late Medieval architecture in the Balkans. Despite the attention given to the complex in scholarship, many of its visible and invisible aspects still remain unresolved and deserve further investigation.

Keywords: fortified palace, Smederevo, Constantinople, tower, military strategist, architect, Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos

The remains of the town of Smederevo stand out as one of the most important surviving architectural creations of Late Medieval Serbia. Its fortified enclosure walls are singled out in scholarly literature as the largest late medieval fortress in the Balkans. As such, Smederevo has been published on multiple occasions.¹ The scholarly coverage of architecture of this important monument has produced significant results, but our understanding of its various physical aspects and its origins can hardly be considered ‘complete’. Further studies are likewise in order in relationship to its builders and inhabitants, its urban structure, and even its administrative and military role, about which we know most.² This small contribution regarding Smederevo architecture aims at highlighting some of its overlooked or misunderstood aspects. These fragments constitute the last, yet highly significant chapter of late medieval history not only of Serbia, but in the Balkans as a whole. As such, they are deemed

¹ M. Spremić, Despot Djuradj Branković i njegovo doba, Beograd 1994, with comprehensive bibliography (pp. 134–5, fn. 21)
² Ibid., 122–48 („Zidanje prestonice“).
an apt way to recognize our honoree, whose contribution as a distinguished historian includes highly important insights into the twilight of medieval Balkans.3

The town of Smederevo was constructed as the last capital of Medieval Serbia, following the death of Despot Stefan Lazarević in 1427 and the consequent passing of his capital, Belgrade, in accordance with a previous agreement, into the hands of the Kingdom of Hungary. Despot Stefan’s nephew and successor, Djuradj Branković, thus of necessity undertook the building of a new capital on a flat piece of land east of Belgrade, naturally defined by two rivers – the Danube and its small tributary, Jezava.4

The first construction phase, between 1428 and 1430, saw the completion of the so-called “Mali Grad”, Đurađ Branković’s heavily fortified palace, at the confluence of the two rivers.5 The second phase that followed between ca.1430 and 1439, resulted in the construction of the city fortification walls enclosing a significantly larger triangular space, flanking the two rivers and a stretch of flat land between them. In contrast to the surviving fortifications, nothing of the newly inhabited town of Smederevo, measuring ca.10ha of space within its fortified enclosure, has been preserved. The main, land fortification wall, facing south, with a length of 502m, included eleven massive towers. The 400m-long eastern wall, along the Jezava River, had four massive towers, while the 550m-long wall along the Danube had six, all but one added to the fortification wall as an afterthought. The fortification system involved also secondary, lower exterior walls, fronting the southern and the eastern wall stretches, while a comparable north-western stretch, along the Danube wall was added later. The fortification system involved also a water-filled moat fronting the lower exterior wall on the south side, whereas river Jezava served a comparable function along the east wall.6 Despite the city’s decline in later times, and especially owing to most serious damage inflicted on its fortification system during the two World Wars, the military aspects of the fortified town of Smederevo have retained their substantially visible presence. By contrast, virtually nothing of the urban architectural context of the fortified town has survived. Thus, a sense of the town of Smederevo, as it must have appeared during the second half of the fifteenth century is now totally lost. Save for some of the foundations of


5 Popović, Smededervski grad, 375–80, also, Idem, Zamak u srpskim zemljama, 189–207. The author promotes the use of the term “zamak” (in English: “castle”), possibly following the argumentation developed by D. Ovcharov, Būlgarskijat srednovekoven grad i vuprosüt za feudalnija zamūk, eds. D. Ovcharov and I. Dzhambov, Srednovekovnijat zamuk v Būlgarskite zemi XII–XIV vek, Sopot 1987, 6–9. In contrast to Ovcharov, whose attention was focused on medieval Bulgaria, the issue has been raised by M. Popović in a wider Balkan context; cf. S. Ćurčić, Architecture in the Age of Insecurity. An Introduction to Secular Architecture in the Balkans, 1300–1500, eds. S. Ćurčić and E. Hadjitryfonos, Secular Medieval Architecture 1300–1500, and Its Preservation, Thessaloniki 1997, 37–41, where the term “feudal castle” is questioned as having more western medieval connotations, in contrast to the “fortified palace” that appears to be more precise in the Byzantine and Balkan context. The topic is developed more fully in S. Ćurčić, Late Medieval Fortified Palaces in the Balkans: Security and Survival, Mneméio kai periβalλon 6 (2000) 11–41.

a few original buildings that have been archaeologically retrieved, the notion of the urban layout and its architecture can be gleaned only from information preserved in a few, generally speaking, quite inadequate written sources.

It is the substantially preserved condition of the fortification system that provides the only tangible aspect of medieval Smederevo. Its physical location, facing the two bodies of water, and the overall form of the fortified town, display similarities with the city of Constantinople and its fortification system, despite their chronological and geographic distance, as well their vastly differing sizes. The city walls of Constantinople, as built under Emperor Theodosius II in the fifth century, encompassed an area 140 times the size of the enclosed town of Smederevo, measuring only ca. 10ha. Though built a thousand years apart, the two systems display similarities in overall physical layout, general design, as well as in dimensions and proportional relations of some of their individual features. Similarities between the two schemes suggest that the solution employed at Smederevo may hardly have been the result of an accident. Resemblances were noted in scholarship early, but were perpetuated without further elaboration of the initially made observations.7 Recently, M. Popović has called to question the validity of the comparison between the fortified walled

enclosures of the town of Smederevo with that of Constantinople, arguing that the relationship of the two has not been subjected to a rigorous method of investigation and that the initial observations of similarity appears to have been too readily taken for granted. Furthermore, M. Popović argues that it was the local topography, rather than the design characteristics of Constantinople’s fortification system that determined the layout of Smederevo fortification walls.

Remarks available in a few historical sources led to the initial scholarly conclusions regarding the perceived links between Constantinople and Smederevo, and as such, even if strictly on a symbolic or associational level, must not be ignored. Other, highly relevant aspects of this mutual relationship do exist. Among them, an essentially untapped visual source must be added as a significant contribution to our understanding of the central question. The overlooked, invaluable piece of evidence, is a drawing of Constantinople contained in an illustrated Latin manuscript at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. The main part of the manuscript in question contains a text along with illustrations by one Paolo Santini, an Italian military engineer and architect, employed in Hungary around the middle of the fifteenth century. Clearly produced with military objectives in mind, the volume is dated on the basis of a map of the Balkan Peninsula contained in the same volume. The plan of Constantinople follows on the next double-page spread in the same volume. Although the map of the Balkan Peninsula has been known in scholarship, the plan of Constantinople remains essentially unknown. The drawing depicts only the circuit of Constantiople’s fortification walls with towers and other features characteristic of the fortification system, while the urban interior of the town is not shown at all, thus revealing the artist’s interest in the strictly military aspects of what was depicted. Probably made by the same individual who produced the map of the Balkan Peninsula, the drawing points to the identical military objectives for which the text and both illustrations were evidently

---

8 “Thus, one still encounters in scholarly literature a stereotypical observation that Smederevo was built after the prototype of Constantinople, and that the entire concept of its fortifications arrived there [in Smederevo] with the Greek builders, a conclusion that, taking into account new knowledge acquired during the second half of the twentieth century, ought to require a more rigorous approach”; cf. M. Popović, Smederevski grad, 373–374, and f. n. 3, with comprehensive bibliography of relevant scholarly literature.

9 Ibid., 378.


11 Tractatus Pauli Santini Ducenis de re militari et machinis bellicis, Codex Latinus Parisinus 7239, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, fol. 111v and 112r.

12 Ibid., fol. 111v and 114r; for the illustration cf. The map has been published on a number of occasions: cf. F. Banfi, Two Italian maps of the Balkan Peninsula, Imago mundi XI (1954) 17–33; also: M. Nikolić, Karta Balkanskog polostra iz prve polovine XV veka, Istorijski časopis XXIX–XXX (1983) 63–75, who dates the map to the fifth decade of the fifteenth century. The main dating indicators are two city vignettes appearing on the map – that of the fortified palace of Smederevo, completed between 1428 and 1430, as the terminus post quem, and the vignette of Constantinople with a Christian standard atop one of its towers, providing the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 as the terminus ante quem. The most recent account of Smederevo on 15th-century maps is G. Tomović, Smederevo na kartama XV veka, ed. M. Spremić, Pad Srpske despotovine, 1459. godine, Beograd 2011, 351–363, esp. pp. 354–59.
produced. It should be born in mind that the map of the Balkan Peninsula appearing in the same volume, does depict Smederevo (Smedrico) as a small fortification on the Danube between Belgrade (Belgrado) and Golubac (Cholonbazo). Smederevo, the smallest of the three, was clearly depicted after the completion of the construction the fortified palace of Đurđ Branković (so-called “Mali Grad”) in 1430. The illustrated group of three fortified complexes on the Danube, thus reflects the last period of intensive military construction in the Balkans, shortly before the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and of Serbia in 1459 to the Ottomans.

The drawing of the fortifications walls of Constantinople by Paolo Santini, brings into question the possibility of this, or a comparable drawing having been brought from Constantinople to Smederevo at the time when the beginning of the construction of its fortified enclosure may have been contemplated. An individual who may have been involved in bringing such a drawing with him could have been the eventual master builder of the fortified palace, and probably the key figure in the eventual construction of the main fortification system of Smederevo, Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos (b. ca. 1390), a brother of Eirene Kantakouzene, and the brother-in-law of Serbia’s ruler, Đurđ Branković. Georgios and Irene were two of the six children of one Theodoros Palaiologos Kantakouzenos, whose early career, though murky, was linked to Thessalonike, where he built a sumptuous private residence, mentioned in the writings of Ioannis Chortasmenos, Georgios’ teacher and tutor. Georgios himself became renown as a military technician and architect, whose role in the building of Smederevo was mentioned in the sources. Most important in this regard are comments of one Th. Spandugnino, who refers to Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos as a man “…gifted with many values, enjoying great respect among the Greeks, both because of his origins, as well as on account of his virtues.” Furthermore, Spandugnino claims that he (Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos) “…laid the foundations, and built from the ground, the highly fortified town of Smederevo.” The time of his arrival in Smederevo, however, is not mentioned, and remains a subject of debate. In contrast to the opinion of B. Ferjančić that Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos must have arrived in Smederevo only after 1437, we hope to demonstrate that he must have been in Smederevo long before then, and that after 1437 he came there for the second time.
His father, Theodore Palaiologos Kantakouzenos, on the other hand, may have left Thessaloniki and established his residence in Constantinople several years before his death in 1410–11. Theodore’s presence in Constantinople is associated with a private residence, known as Mermerkule, possibly constructed under the supervision of his son, Georgios. Mermerkule, probably one of, if not the very last Byzantine construction of significance in Constantinople, was built between ca. 1402 and 1410. Situated at the south-western end of the city Land Walls, at their junction with the Sea of Marmara, the fortified palace belonged to a series of such private residences constructed along the city walls, starting in the late twelfth century at the city’s northeastern corner. The phenomenon of fortified residences appears to have become widespread, not only on the territories of the Byzantine Empire, but also in the neighboring states of Bulgaria and Serbia during the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Mermerkule was conceived as a small heavily walled-in enclosure, measuring ca. 33 × 18 m in plan. Its western side, once sitting in the waters of the Sea of Marmara, is now land bound. The eastern side of its enclosure was dismantled during the construction of a six-lane highway in the 1960s providing the main traffic access to the city from the south. Only traces of the massive southern walls have survived facilitating the sense of a fortified enclosure, whose western and southern parts are preserved essentially to their full height. The main part of the complex is a four-story massive tower, measuring ca. 10 × 10.8 m in plan and ca. 25 m high. Originally strategically located on the seafront, the tower rose from a massive, multi-stepped platform made from huge re-used marble blocks. (Fig. 1) The

18 Ibid., 179, f. n. 32.
20 Ćurčić, Late Medieval Fortified Palaces, esp. pp. 11–19. The article provides prolegomena to the subject of fortified palaces during the Late Middle Ages in the Balkans, demonstrating close links between Byzantine examples and those in the related neighboring countries, between ca. 1250 and ca. 1450.
Most of the natural light, therefore, came into its interior spaces through large openings facing the central interior court. Especially telling are the two-storied interior arcades consisting of large arches supported on massive piers. The system of interior arcading is characterized by high-quality construction, especially distinguished by banded arches revealing a method of arch construction that became quite common in Constantinople from the last decades of the thirteenth century on. (Fig. 2) Practically nothing of the interior decoration of the palace itself survives, making the understanding of the building’s interior spaces and their intended functions almost impossible. This, of course, is a general case with most secular Byzantine buildings of which very few survive anywhere, including in Constantinople itself. Of all parts of the surviving interior spaces in the Mermerkule palace, the interiors of the main tower are of particular interest, especially its two central, superimposed rooms on the ground, and on the second floor. The ground-floor room was vaulted by a pendentive brick dome, 4m in diameter, while its side walls forming a square, 4 × 4 m in plan, expanded laterally into deep barrel-vaulted niches. A similar scheme was repeated on the second floor, though the condition of its dome and side vaulting is not as well preserved. Only the east and north exterior walls of the top two floors survive. The exact function of either of the two lower rooms is not known, but they must have been spaces of special importance on account of their central position, their size, and the fact that they were both domed. Ceremonial functions, undoubtedly, must have taken place in this part of the palace. Use of domical vaulting, and especially of domes in towers of this size and type were fairly rare in Byzantine architecture, and appear mostly in buildings of special significance in secular contexts.21

The time of the construction of the Mermerkule complex, as well as its location and architectural characteristics, are of considerable importance for our better understanding of the fortified palace (“Mali Grad”) of Đurđe Branković at Smederevo. With its ‘prow’ position at the southwestern point of the city fortification walls of Constantinople, Mermerkule, its main tower occupying the forefront position, seems to have served as a model for the fortified palace at Smederevo constructed in 1428–1430, lagging the construction of Mermerkule by 18 years. This brings us to the key question of what may have been the role of Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos in the construction at Smederevo. Considering that as a young man, he may have played an active role in the construction of Mermerkule on behalf of his father Theodore, sometime before the latter’s death in 1410–11, the subsequent activities of George Palaiologos Kantakouzenos, whose virtues are praised by Spandugnino, remain strangely opaque. On account of the fact that, according to the opinions of Hunger and Nichol, and also accepted by Ferjančić, Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos

---

21 An outstanding example of the use of domes in fortified palace architecture is the private residence of Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos (1347–54) at Pythion. The residence incorporates two towers, the larger one measuring 14.80 × 14.70 m in plan, while its three surviving stories reach a height of ca. 17 m. The smaller of the two towers, measuring ca. 7.4 × 7.3 m in plan is ca. 20 m in high, with its four surviving stories. Both towers are characterized by brick saucer-dome vaulting, a characteristic that the Pythion towers share with the mentioned main tower of Marmerkule; M. Korres and C. Bakirtzis, Fortress of Pythion, Greece, Secular Medieval Architecture, 158–61; also, more recently: K. Tsouris and A. Brikas, To frourio tou Pythiou kai to ergo tis apokataataseos tou, Kavala 2002.
could not have arrived in Smederevo before 1437, we would have to conclude that his only known professional activity before this time is that in the service of Constantine Palaiologos for whom he led a diplomatic mission to Dubrovnik in February 1431. Since no specific date when he may have actually entered the service of Constantine Palaiologos is known, the question has to be raised regarding his activities between 1410 and 1430.

Spandugnino’s reference to Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos as a man who “…laid the foundations, and built from the ground, the highly fortified town of Smederevo” should be linked with his earlier building activity in Constantinople. As a builder of distinction in the court circles of Constantinople, he would have been a logical choice, to be invited to Serbia by his sister Eirene. The occasion could have been the need for the construction of the new residence for his brother-in-law, Đurad Branković, who became a ruler of Serbia, following the death of his uncle, Despot Stefan Lazarević, in 1427. Because the circumstances at the time required the construction of a new official residence for the Serbian ruler, an architect, equipped with sound knowledge of fortified palace architecture, as Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos at the time was, would have been an ideal choice. Characteristics of the fortified palace, built for Đurad Branković, dated precisely between 1428 and 1430, according to an inscription on one of its towers, in most respects followed the concept of Mermerkule, and therefore, would clarify the role of Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos, as a man who was involved in “laying the foundations and building [the palace] from the ground up” at Smederevo. His postulated arrival in Smederevo ‘after 1437’, according to Ferjančič, Hunger and Nichol, therefore, can only be accepted as his return to Smederevo, after his actual years in the service of Constantine Palaiologos had ended.

Examining more closely characteristics of the fortified palace (“Mali Grad”) at Smederevo will provide us with further indications that first-hand knowledge of fortified palaces in Constantinople, played a role in Smederevo, and must have been linked by the agency of Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos in these matters. The most obvious aspect of the relationship between the fortified palace at Smederevo and Mermerkule is in the presence of a dominant main tower. Situated at the prow of both land formations, the main tower in Smederevo, as in the case of Mermerkule, is massive and physically dominant within its palatine complex. As such, in both cases the main tower relays symbolically, as well as functionally, the sense of power. The interiors of both main towers are dominated on the ground and second levels by central, vaulted square rooms. The dimension of these rooms in both structures are identical – 4m x 4m in plan. In both structures, a pendentive dome covers the ground-floor square room. During the 1949–50 excavations and exploration of the badly damaged remains of the fortified palace, A. Deroko raised the fundamental question of access to the main tower and its possible functional intent.22 (Fig. 3) Examining the extensively collapsed southern side of the main tower, Deroko ventured a hypothetical reconstruction of its interior. A square room on its first level was ca 9m high, and was covered by a brick-and-stone pendentive dome, only northern half of which had survived. (Fig.

---

4) The room above this one, also ca. 4m square in plan, was also vaulted, in this case by a barrel vault. The tower rose above this level to an unknown height, and may have featured one, or possibly two additional stories. In the remaining thickness of the northern exterior wall of the second floor room, Deroko noted a cavity measuring ca. 2m x ca. 4m in plan, with a visible part of a niche, facing east. He correctly postulated that this could have been a palatine chapel linked to the ceremonial wing of the palace – *magna sala audientiae* -- whose identity has been ascertained beyond any doubt. A comparable example of a palatine chapel, next to a palace hall was noted by Deroko at Golubac, where a comparable square blind domed chapel, measuring 4 × 4 m in plan, is situated above a basement story within a tower. Deroko’s hypothetical

---

23 The similarity of interiors of the main towers of the Mermerkule and Smederevo fortified palaces is notable also because the use of domes and vaulting of tower interiors is relatively common in large Late Byzantine towers related to palaces and significant monastic complexes. In the Serbian context, by contrast, interior vaulting of towers was exceptional.

Constantinople, Mermerkule, Fortified Palace (perspective reconstruction drawing: M. Dimanić)
suggestion of the palatine chapel having been located within the main tower of the fortified palace in Smederevo, was rejected for various reasons by Nenadović, and subsequently followed by others. The later restoration of the main tower in the fortified palace in Smederevo ultimately led to the removal of aspects of physical evidence that may have supported Deroko’s ideas, causing his hypothesis to be suppressed and entirely forgotten. Most recently, the presence of a palace chapel, referred to by the term cerkov polatna, in the sources, has been categorically rejected.

Doubts that Deroko’s critics may have harbored, however, can be challenged most effectively by referring to a miniature domed chapel, within “Tekfur Saray”, a late thirteenth-century fortified palace in Constantinople. The relevance of “Tekfur

---


26 G. Simić, Donžon kule u fortički srednjovekovnih gradova, Beograd 2010, 105–107, ultimately, rejected Deroko’s ideas, without taking into account details of his reasoning. In discussing the “donjon” at the “Citadel” of Smederevo, she offers her reconstruction of the building (fig. 57) in which the evidence recorded by Deroko was ignored and replaced with a hypothetical reconstruction of a spiral staircase.

27 M. Popović, Ka problemu srednjovekovnih crkvi Smederevskog grada, Starinar n. s. L, 2000 (2001) 201–19, is a detailed survey of older literature pertaining to the problem of church buildings known to have existed in Smederevo, as well as the question of their locations. Basing his conclusions regarding the problem of the palatine chapel on Nenadović, Razmišljanja, cf. f. n. 24, while completely ignoring Deroko’s ideas, Popović denies that the chapel ever existed within the palace complex. In our opinion, the problem of the location of the palatine chapel remains unresolved.
Saray” lies not solely in the physical dimensions and the form of its palatine chapel, but in the fact that Georgios Kantakouzenos would certainly have known the residence in question, with its architectural characteristics, including the small palatine chapel, which thus, as an idea, could have reached Smederevo. The “Tekfur Saray” chapel of very small dimensions (ca. 2 × 3 m in plan) is easily identified by its distinctive characteristics of a miniature church with a blind dome on pendentives, and a projecting small apse on its east side.28 (Fig. 5) The idea of a small interior chapel brought from Constantinople, therefore, would have been entirely feasible in Smederevo. This, in turn, renders the judgment that the space within the fortified palace enclosure for accommodating a palatine chapel would have been too small, entirely unconvincing.29

From the technical and decorative points of view, various other architectural aspects of the fortified palace of Đurđ Branković are also noteworthy, as they reveal links with Late Byzantine architecture and, as such, further reinforce our perception of the key role of Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos in its construction. Important here are the large windows of the palace audience hall, whose round arches feature banded-vousoirs in which triple bricks alternate with single stone voussoir blocks. (Fig. 6) Banded-vousoirs, although known in earlier Byzantine architecture, became much more common in Late Byzantine times. Their use was especially frequent in Constantinople after 1261.30 “Tekfur Saray” is the earliest known instance of their extensive Late Byzantine application in the capital. The trend continued through the fourteenth and into the fifteenth century. Their use in the arches of the Mermerkule palace is of particular relevance in comparison with the arches of the palace of Đurđ Branković with which they share the same system of voussoir alteration, using triple-brick and single-stone voussoirs. (Fig. 2) Use of alternating layers of brick courses with bands made up of rough stone, characterizes also some of the vaulting features, as is especially notable in the blind dome of the interior of the main tower, pointing to another construction technique notable in Late Byzantine Constantinople. (Fig. 4)

The exterior walls of the fortified palace (“Mali Grad”) at Smederevo were marked by visibly displayed pieces of Roman sculpture, reflecting another characteristic of Late Byzantine architecture that must have reached Serbia from territories where the practice began in Middle Byzantine times and became widespread.31 Especially notable at Smederevo is that spoils used in construction here, were not chance-finds from the terrain used for its construction. Instead, they were specially brought from elsewhere, most notably from the Roman town of Vimincacium (modern Kostolac), ca. 30 km downstream from Smederevo on the Danube.32 Especially notable in the context of selected and ‘displayed’ ancient works of art was the figure of the Roman goddess Vesta (Greek Hestia), protectress of the home. Almost certainly not by chance, the 2m-high, fully preserved statue of the goddess at Smederevo was displayed in a niche next to the

29 Popović, Smederevski grad – etape, 379.
SLOBODAN ĆURČIĆ: Visible and invisible aspects of building the fortified palace …

main inner gate of the fortified palace. The concept and the installation of the statue was informed by an individual versed in ancient religious beliefs, reflecting an educational level that would have been accessible to the members of the court in Byzantium, as well as those in Serbia at this time. Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos, the most likely architect of the palace complex, would not only have understood the symbolic implication of the statue, but would have been the most likely designer of the niche for its appropriate display in the vicinity of the palace gate.

Among various decorative façade features on fortifications at Smederevo, outstanding is the monumental founder’s inscription on the façade of one of the four southern towers of the fortified palace of Đurađ Branković. (Fig. 7) Measuring 10.65 × c. 7.5 m, occupying upper half of the total tower height of approximately 22 m, this is probably the largest surviving wall inscription in the fifteenth-century Balkans. Written in Old Church Slavonic, its two-line long main text reads as follows:

In Christ God Faithful, Despot Gurg, the Lord of Serbia and the Zeta Litoral. By his order this fort was built in the year 6938 [1430]

Executed in brick, the lines of the inscription are 46 cm high. The text is executed with great precision, revealing outstanding craftsmanship. A huge double cross, ca. 6.3 m high, rises axially in relationship to the inscription that appears as a ground line below the three-stepped base of the cross. Comparable to Byzantine monumental inscriptions on building exteriors of the Late Byzantine period, the Smederevo cross has no preserved comparisons in either size or quality. Despite the fact that the text is in Old Church Slavonic, the concept of the inscription and its execution in brick almost certainly reveal Byzantine origins.

The 1430 completion date of the fortified palace of Đurđe Branković coincides with the probable departure of Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos from Smederevo and his joining of Constantine Palaeologos as his aid. His first recorded function in the service of Constantine Palaeologos was a mission journey to Dubrovnik, recorded in 1431. The end of Georgios Kantakouzenos’ work in the service of Constantine Palaiologos came in the fall of 1437. They may have departed together for Constantinople at the time when Constantine was called to temporarily assume regency on behalf of his older brother Emperor John VIII, during the latter’s long journey to Italy. At the same time, Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos journeyed on to Trebizond, visiting his sister Helene, wife of Emperor John IV Komnenos. It is known that after that visit he went to Smederevo, to join his sister Eirene. Generally, in contrast to what is presented here, scholarship has accepted his visit after 1437, as his first and only visit in Smederevo. In our opinion, as this article has attempted to demonstrate, this was Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos’ second, longer visit there. His architectural input during this time was more limited in significance and

---

33 Preserved in situ until WWI, the statue was removed by the Austrian-Hungarian troops following a major bombardment of Smederevo in 1916. Subsequently removed with other artifacts, this statue was shipped by German troops to an unknown destination; cf. L. Pavlović, Smederevo i Evropa, 1381–1918, Smederevo 1988, 14–15 and Fig. 4.

34 Đerok, Smederevski grad, 91–6; G. Tomović, Morfologija čiriličkih natpisa na Balkanu, Beograd 1974, 110.

35 Ferjančić, Vizantinci u Srbiji, 197.
output. In all likelihood, it involved interventions on the outer fortification walls of Smederevo, specifically the addition of four large towers facing the Danube in 1444. The addition of the four towers occurred after the end of the short Turkish conquest of Smederevo (1439–44), when such an addition must have been deemed essential. Their construction most certainly was the work of Byzantine builders, probably from the area of Byzantine Macedonia, judging by the building technique employed in the construction of the towers. It was undoubtedly Georgios Palaiologos Kantakouzenos who supervised the last construction and thus, the completion of the Smederevo fortification enclosure walls, as we know them. In addition, during a surprise Hungarian attack on Smederevo in 1453, he also found himself in charge of its military defense. His outstanding skills, both as an architect and as a military strategist, as noted in historical accounts, warrant further, more detailed study.

The thirty-year long history of Smederevo framed the most dramatic period of medieval history in the Balkans. From the initiation of the construction of the fortified palace of Đurad Branković in 1428, to its ultimate fall to the Ottomans in 1459 Smederevo became the final stage of Christian resistance to the massive Ottoman incursion into the Balkans. Sharing the image, the knowledge, and ultimately the destiny of Constantinople through family ties it became a grand final testimony of this crucial historical epoch.
ЛИСТА РЕФЕРЕНЦИИ — LIST OF REFERENCES

Извори – Primary Sources

Sathas C., Documents inédits relatifs à l’histoire de la Grèce au Moyen-âge, IX, Paris 1890, 135–261.

Литература – Secondary Works

Banfi F., Two Italian maps of the Balkan Peninsula, Imago mundi XI (1954) 17–33

References:

Banfi F., Two Italian maps of the Balkan Peninsula, Imago mundi XI (1954) 17–33

References:

Banfi F., Two Italian maps of the Balkan Peninsula, Imago mundi XI (1954) 17–33

References:

Banfi F., Two Italian maps of the Balkan Peninsula, Imago mundi XI (1954) 17–33

References:

Banfi F., Two Italian maps of the Balkan Peninsula, Imago mundi XI (1954) 17–33
Слободан Ћурчић
(Универзитет Принстон)

ВИДЉИВИ И НЕВИДЉИВИ АСПЕКТИ ИЗГРАДЊЕ УТВРЂЕНЕ ПАЛАТЕ („МАЛОГ ГРАДА“) У СМЕДЕРЕВУ И ЊЕΝ ИСТОРИЈСКИ ЗНАЧАЈ

Изградња утврђене палате („Малог града“) деспота Ђурђа Бранковића и смедервске тврђаве („Великог града“) спада у последње значајне изданке српског градитељства касног средњег века. Утврђена палата Ђурђа Бранковића подигнута је као последња престоница средњовековне Србије, између 1428 и 1430 године, у равници на самом ушћу речице Језаве у Дунав, док је изградња тврђаве („Великог града“) настављена између 1430 и 1439, а са додацима и не-посредно после привременог заузимања Смедерева од стране Османлија, 1439–44. године.

План смедервске тврђаве својим троугаоним обликом у основи, са системом високих кула унутрашњег бедема, са спољашњим нижим зидом, као и са воденим ровом испред целог система утврђења, навео је већ најранји истраживаче смедервске тврђаве да запазе сличност одбранбеног система са системом цариградских бедема, подигнутим у петом веку. Временска раздаљина измађу...
два система, као и њихове разлике у величини, у новије време довели су до одбацувања могућности да је цариградски систем градског утврђивања имао било какве везе са српским. Међутим, везе између два система, напротив, наговештавају не само апстрактну сличност, већ су директно релевантне, захваљујући цртежу сачуваном у рукопису Tractatus Pauli Santini Ducenis de re militari et machinis bellicis, Codex Latinus Parisinus 7239, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, fol 111v and 112r, делу италијанског војног инжењера и архитекте, Paolo Santini-ja, активног око средине петнаестог века.

Други значајан индикатор веза између Смедерева и Цариграда јесте улога Георгија Палеолога Кантакузина, војног стратега и архитекте-градитеља, у изградњи приватне резиденције свог оца, Теодора Палеолога Кантакузина (умро око 1410–11. године), у Цариграду (тзв. „Мермеркула”), која је недавно потврђена. Као најстарији брат сестре Ирине, он је у 1414. године највероватније присуставао вечану своје сестре и Ђурђа Бранковића у Србији. Наследивши српски престо после смрти деспота Стевана Лазаревића, 1427. године, Ђурђа Бранковић је приступио изградњи нове српске престонице у Смедереву, 1428. године. Први објекат нове престонице, била је утврђена палата („Мали град”), чија изградња је највероватније била поверена Георгију Палеологу Кантакузину и трајала је до 1430. године.

Значајне сличности „Мермеркуле“ у Цариграду и утврђене палате Ђурђа Бранковића у Смедереву распознају се у више аспекта, који откривају допринос њиховог творца, Георгија Палеолога Кантакузина. Символично најважнији од свих је постава вишесратне куле у оквиру зидинама опасаног резиденцијалног склопа. Кула, у оба случаја, је после највиши део комплекса, најближе постављен води и, као таква, символично обележава значај комплекса, посебно у прилазу са водене стране. Куле имају сличне димензије, квадратне су основе, а њиховим ентеријерима доминира простор пречника 4 m надвишен каменом изведеном од опеке и камена у обострано карактеристично византијској техници која се врло ретко среће у ентеријерима кула српских средњовековних утврђења. Појава лукова изведенх алтернативним употребом опеке и клесаног камена, такође открива карактеристике конструкције коришћене у комплексу "Мермеркуле".

Огromни крст на спољашњем платну једне од кула смедеревске утврђене палате носи монументални натпис са именом книтора, деспота Ђурђа, владара Србије и зетског поморја, са годином подизања – 1430. Огromних размера – 10.65 × 7.5 m, израђен у језици, натпис је јединствено уметничко остварење, иза кога се крије његов творач-архитекта. Слични натписи нису сачувани ни у српској, а ни у византијској архитектури.

Утврђена палата деспота Ђурђа Бранковића један је од последњих и најзначајнијих архитектонских остварења пред сам пад Византијског царства и Србије под Османсу власт, уједињен у напорима породичних, духовних и политичких веза непосредно пред заједничку коначну пропаст.