

**STUDIES AND ARTICLES**

**A HYPOTHESIS REGARDING THE SHAPE OF THE SOUTHERN  
ENCLOSURE OF SUCIDAVA FORTRESS**

*Lucian Amon\**

***Abstract***

Southern side of the Roman-Byzantine fortress Sucidava is totally unknown as it was not discovered through archaeological investigations. The author presents several arguments on which he considers that it can be reconstructed based on a vignette of a map of the fourteenth century, made by Paulus Sanctinus preserved in the Codex Latinus Parisinus – 7239. Southern wall had three towers and the main gateway to the borough.

**Key words:** *Sucidava, Codex Latinus Parisinus, Southern Site, Fortress*

Roman-Byzantine fortress from Sucidava (Corabia, Olt County) is located on a small plateau (185 x 115 m), bounded to the south of the Danube terrace forehead, and the rest of a ravine transformed over time by human intervention, into a veritable trench.

In this space, on the site of a fortified Geto-Dacian emplacement, destroyed by the Romans in the first century AD, the latter will build, in the last decades of the third century, a strong fortress of stone. Initially, this had predominantly a strategic role of “bridgehead” kept in a province which was being phased out, but also to protect the Roman settlement which had already been set up in close proximity, to the north. In the early fourth century the fortress was rebuilt by Constantine the Great, its mission will be to protect the Transdanubian Bridge which was made during the reign of the emperor. Later, after a brief hiatus for damage caused by Hun attacks, it will be reused; the most significant additions were made to the building in the early part of the sixth century, under Justinian. But at the end of the same century, the city falls into the Slavic-Avar attacks, suffering, in the opinion of most archaeologists, irreversible destruction. This would explain why, according to those opinions, the Middle Ages, from the end or beginning of the thirteenth century, as at the end of the sixteenth century, during the reign of Michael the Brave (Mihai Viteazul), of the borough will be reused only its southeastern corner<sup>1</sup>. The new perimeter used, much smaller and of triangular shape, used on two sides portions of the old stone enclosures, while the west was defended by a system of ditch and rampart.

Coming back to the Roman-Byzantine fortress, we mention that it had a polygonal shape (figure 1), imposed by the particularities of the plateau on which it was raised. Archaeological research led to the unveiling of its enclosure only on the side facing west, north and east. It is composed of a double wall made of stone, which were placed along 10 towers (A-J). For this study it is useful for us only an overview of known information about the two ends of the enclosure, from the west and east.

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\* Associate Professor, Ph.D., University of Craiova, Faculty of Law and Social Sciences, Department of Social Sciences, no. 13, A.I. Cuza Street, Dolj County, tel. 0040251418515, e-mail: amonlucian@yahoo.com

<sup>1</sup> For the fortified used in the Middle Ages, see Figure 4 below.

At the western end lies the exterior tower of the corner A in the shape of “tear”. It is a massive building, whose walls have a thickness ranging from 2.40 to 3.50 m. It has two straight sides with lengths of 13.50 m and 17.50 m, of which is connected a curve side of 25 m. On the outside, to the southeast, is supported by a counterfort. It is believed that was built in the second phase of the fortress (Constantinian era) suffering a reconstruction in the decades ahead<sup>1</sup>.

At the opposite end, in the east, it is located another external cornered tower, J. As shown in present, it was built in the sixth phase (sixth century), replacing an old tower from the fourth century. The construction is of semi- hexagonal shape, the four sides leaving the front measuring 3.40 m, 5 m, 6 m and 3 m. From this tower, the inner wall of the city turns to the southwest, keeping only the length of 10.40 m<sup>2</sup>.

As mentioned above, if the enclosure of the fortification from the east, north and west is well known, the southern side, towards the Danube, with a length of about 158 m, could not be approached satisfactorily by archeological researches. In the last monographic study dedicated to Sucidava it is stated that from the defense wall from the southern side of the fortress were kept a few traces, as it was demolished (without specifying when – NN). Thus, it is shown that outside of the wall located continuing tower J, its traces were identified just above the “secret” fountain. It had a foundation with a width of up to 2.50 m<sup>3</sup>. The only element, that is just assumed, it would be that along of this side it is logical to have been located also the main gate of the fortress. The deduction takes into account that, in addition to a gate (permitting only a single person movement) existing on the north side and of a gate of a width of 2.50 m (blocked however at a certain moment) on the western side, there weren't other facilities of this kind.

In the absence of archaeological information, the only source that could provide a complete picture of the layout of the fortress, and especially on its southern side seems to be, paradoxically, a medieval cartographic source. It is found in the known document, generically, by the name of *Codex Latinus Parisinus* – 7239, from the collection of the National Library in Paris. In fact, the latter unites, by binding in leather at the early nineteenth century, six operas, of which the first is *Tractatus Pauli Sanctini Ducensis “De re militari et machinis bellicis”*<sup>4</sup>. The manuscript of military art, assigned to the Italian Paulus Sanctinus contains at its end, a map of north-Balkan area (Figure 2). Cartographical representation in question was made, probably at the request of the Hungarian king Sigismund of Luxembourg, on the eve the crusade against the Ottomans at Nicopolis in 1396 and used during the military campaign Treaty of Sanctinus will get into possession of the Turks, however, it was only rediscovered in 1687 by the French ambassador in Istanbul, in the archive of the Ottoman empire.

As shown, the map renders a number of orographic, hydrographic, vegetation details, information on travel routes, bridges and, most importantly, locates through vignettes (individualized, not identical) the existing fortress, in most cases specifying also their

<sup>1</sup> Octavian Toropu, Corneliu Tătulea, *Sucidava Celei*, București, 1987, pp. 75-76, 84.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 80, 84-85.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>4</sup> For translation into Romanian, bibliography and a detailed analysis of the document, see Ion Dumitriu-Snagov, *Tările Române în secolul al XIV-lea. Codex Latinus Parisinus*, București, Cartea Românească, 1979.

name<sup>1</sup>. Also, the author distinguishes between the fortifications that came into possession of the Turks that have above the Ottoman flag and the Christian ones bearing the sign of the cross. We note the fact, negligible at all, that of entire area represented, that of Wallachia is the most detailed and rich in detail.

For this study one of the fortresses is of special interest (Figure 3). It seems to be large, does not bear any name and is located on the northern bank of the Danube, between its confluence us to river Žicho (Jiu) and Holta (Olt) being flanked to the west and east by two other fortifications: Schierino (Turnu Severin) and Zorio (Giurgiu). As in this area has not been documented another fortress, the only explanation leads us to the thought of the old fortification Sucidava. The idea was embraced also by Florio Banfi, one of the interpreters of the document in question<sup>2</sup>. A possible relationship between the fortress map and Sucidava is mentioned also by last authors of the monograph of Sucidava, but without a more detailed discussion<sup>3</sup>.

Accepting therefore the identity between the two fortresses, the question arises to what extent the drawing of Paulus Sanctinus restored the appearance that Sucidava still had in the XIV century, or it was a mere convenience. The following arguments plead for first possibility:

- None of the dozens of fortresses shown on the map does not resemble the others, individualization and attention to detail was absolutely necessary to Crusaders to identify them on the ground;

- I. Dumitriu-Snagov accepts that the rendered forms are not imaginary without yet asserting with certainty that there is a perfect similarity between the vignettes and actual construction<sup>4</sup>;

- Based on many details about the space provided by the map, the Romanian Country, a number of researchers believe that Paulus Sanctinus knew very well the north of the Danube area, and the map would have been made even in these places<sup>5</sup>, so it is very plausible that he might have boned to this subject directly;

- Confining us to extrapolate the comparative analysis only on the two neighboring fortresses, on the Vlach shores, Turnu Severin and Giurgiu, it appears obvious similarities between Sanctinus' drawings and their appearance in the fourteenth century (Figure 5)<sup>6</sup>. The one in Severin is shown with a roughly rectangular shape and a single enclosure, with

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<sup>1</sup> Toponyms and hydronyms mentioned in the map were influenced by the peculiarities of the Italian language.

<sup>2</sup> Florio Banfi, *Two Italian map of the Balkan Peninsula: The map of the Balkans contained in Codex Latinus 7239 of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris*, in "Imago Mundi", Stockholm, XI, 1954, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Octavian Toropu, Corneliu Tătulea, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>4</sup> Ion Dumitriu-Snagov, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>5</sup> Florio Banfi, *op. cit.*, p. 23; idem, *Carta parziale della Regione Balcanica (1443)*, in *I paesi Romeni nei monumenti cartografici italiani nel Rinascimento*, extracted from *Bulletin of the Romanian Library*, Freiburg, 1954, 1, p. 11; Veselin Beševliev, *Eine Militärkarte der Balkanhalbinsel aus den Letzten Jahren des 14 Jahrhunderts*, in "Linguistique Balcanique", VII, 2, 1963, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> In our illustration, Severin, fortress plan of the fourteenth century was adapted from the general plan, published by Mișu Davidescu, *Cetatea Severinului*, in *Buletinul Monumentelor Istorice*, 3, 1970, p. 10, fig. 2; idem, *Monumente medievale din Turnu Severin*, Editura Meridiane, 1969, p. 11, fig. 1. For the fortress of Giurgiu, see <http://www.giurgiu.djc.ro/ObiectiveDetalii.aspx?ID=263>

five towers. The only difference is that archaeologists date in general – even if problems of the phases of construction was not fully clarified – at that time only four towers, to which would have been added, at a later stage, two others, placed in the middle of the long sides. Regarding the fortification of Giurgiu, it appears to be surrounded by an approximately triangular enclosure and provided with two towers, one massive, exactly as in the reconstructions proposed by specialists for the stage of the fortress from the time of Mircea the Elder (Mircea cel Bătrân);

- Referring strictly to the Sanctinus' vignette Sanctinus that shows Sucidava, we will focus initially on three elements (Figure 6). The first is the massive round tower located on the far left (west) of the drawing. Through the position, shape and size it finds a perfect correspondence with the tower A of the fortress, identified by archaeological research. At the opposite end (east) Sanctinus renders a more modest-sized tower, all-round, which probably corresponds to the small tower J, in the reality semihexagonal. For the latter, in the vignette starts westward a wall, apparently shorter, which finds correspondence in the preserved wall segment on the length of 10.40 m, and which is, as we have seen above, the only preserved on the south side of the fortress. It is hard to believe that all these obvious similarities between the vignette and archaeological reality would be simple coincidence.

Therefore, based on the arguments presented, we can accept the idea that cartographic information provided by Paulus Sanctinus seem to be quite truthful, the result of careful documentation.

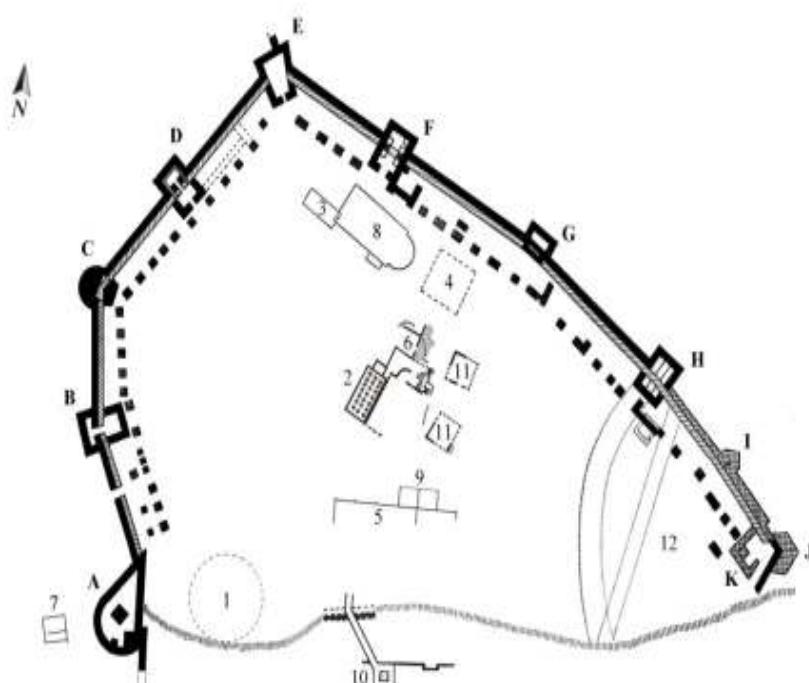
The vignette of the Italian specialist that represents the fortress of Sucidava respects, of course, in a manner more schematic, reality. The author renders the fortress in perspective, bordering the only suggest its polygonal shape. Fortunately, the only side to which he provides details is that towards the Danube, that is precisely the southern enclosure, currently nonexistent.

In conclusion, the hypothetical reconstruction of the southern side (Figure 7), based on drawings by Sanctinus, reveals the following aspects, but it also raises a number of questions:

- A slightly sinuous route (as the other sides), imposed by the peculiarities of the field;
- The existence of three towers, two round (L, M) and one quadrilateral (N). The distances between them are within the archaeological certified in cases of other towers;
- The presence of the main gate on the south side of the fortress, between the towers M and N.
- It is possible that the position of the tower L to have been slightly to the west, where it came across the south ends of medieval defensive ditches;
- Why were not discovered by archaeological research the foundations of the tower M and, also the foundations of the wall between the tower M-A towers?
- If the south side of the fortress existed in the fourteenth century, why and when was it destroyed? One possible answer is that the demolition was imposed by the Ottomans in the centuries immediately following, so that at the end of the sixteenth century this side no longer existed. Therefore, in the time of Michael the Brave there was only used the southeast corner of the former Roman-Byzantine fortress.

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|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Tell-ul preistoric                 | 5. Horreum (sec. IV)         | 9. Construcție (sec. VI)         |
| 2. Construcție cu hipocaust (sec. IV) | 6. Terme (sec. IV)           | 10. Fântâna "secretă" (sec. VI)  |
| 3. Construcție (sec. IV)              | 7. Turn - pasarelă (sec. IV) | 11. Barăci-ateliere (sec. VI)    |
| 4. Zonă cu hipocaust (sec. IV)        | 8. Basilica (sec. VI)        | 12. Zona fortificației medievale |

Fig. 1 Plan of Sucidava Roman-Byzantine fortress

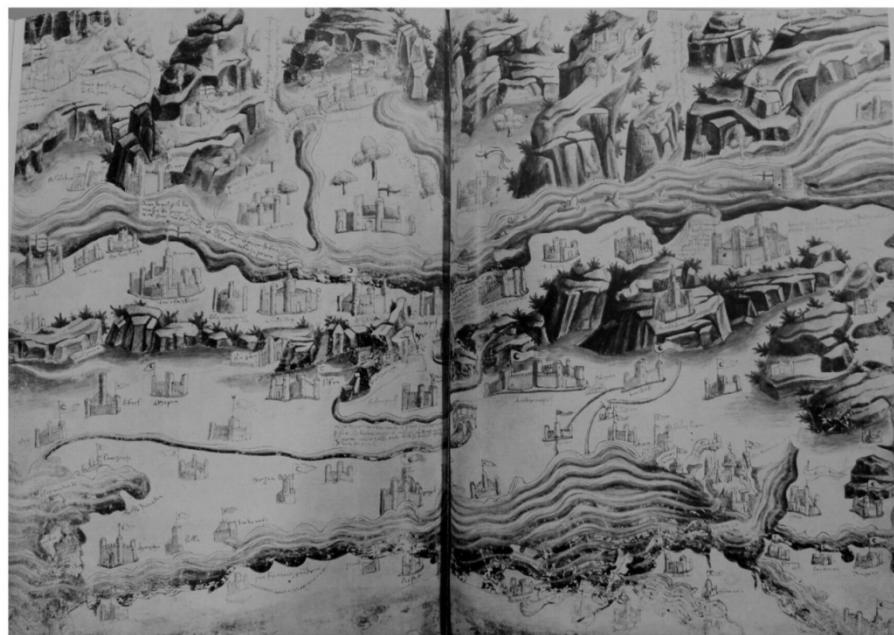


Fig. 2 Map of Codex Latinus Parisinus



Fig. 3 Sucidava in *Codex Latinus Parisinus*

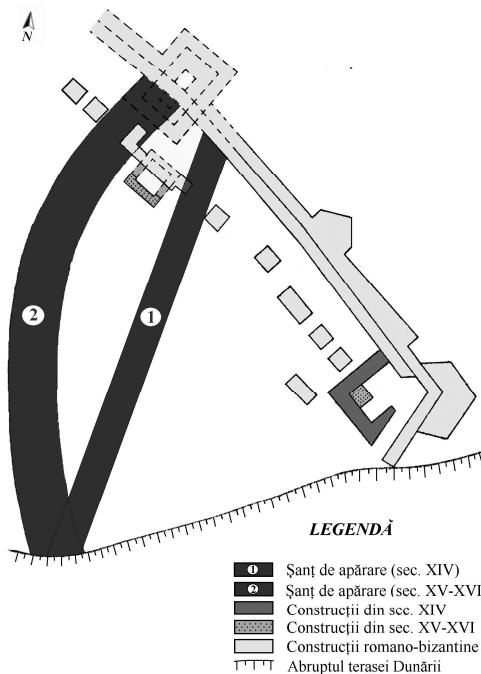


Fig. 4 Southeast corner of the fortress Sucidava, with elements of medieval fortification

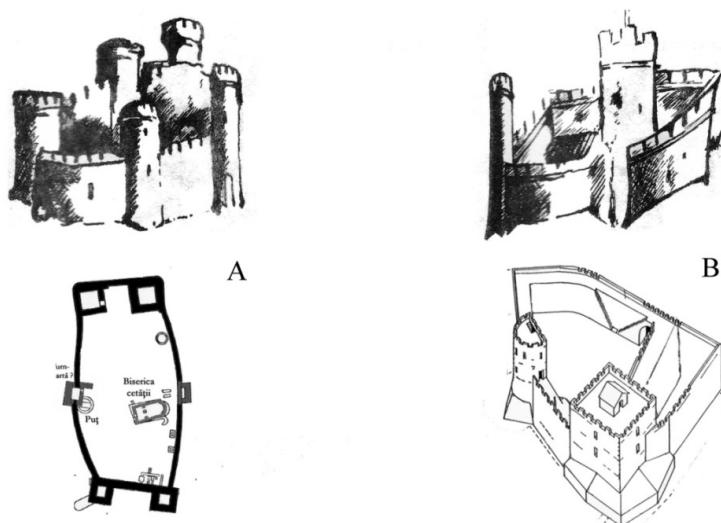


Fig. 5 Fortresses Severin (A) and Giurgiu (B) represented in the Codex Latinus Parisinus (top) and their appearance in the XIV<sup>th</sup> century (below)

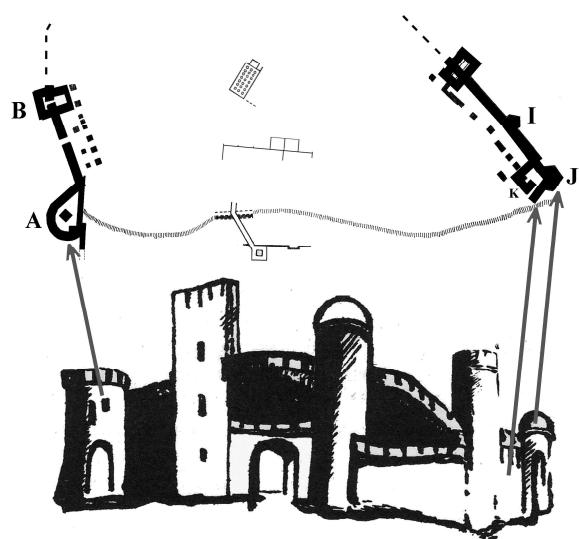


Fig. 6 Elements of correlation between certified archaeological constructions and those figured in Codex

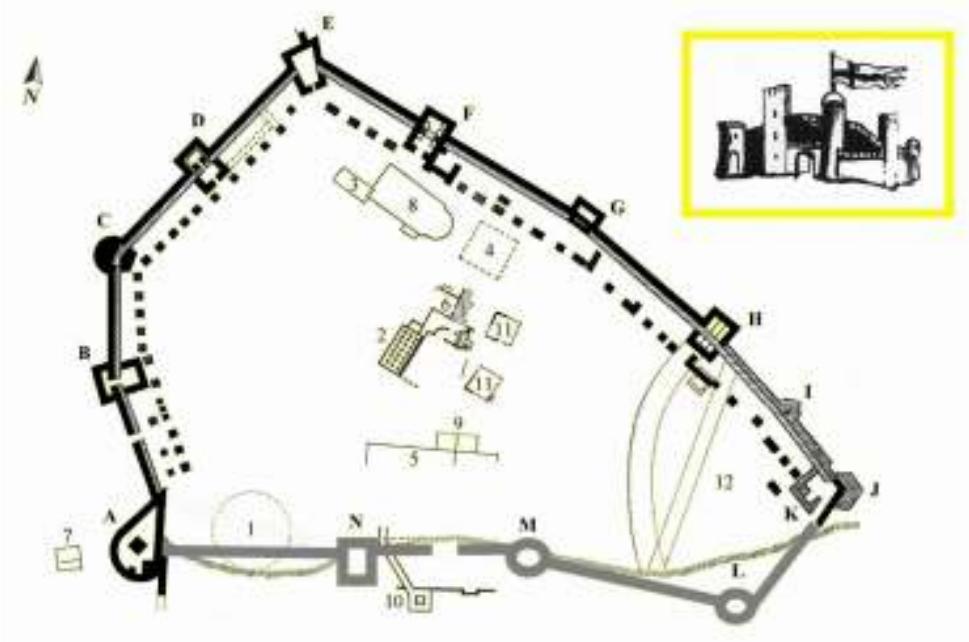


Fig. 7 Hypothetical reconstruction of southern side route