THE WESTERN FORTRESS WALL OF THE INNER CITY OF VELIKI PRESLAV IN LIGHT OF CONTEMPORARY STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a new attempt to shed more light on the problem posed by the only section of the fortification system of the inner fortress of Veliki Preslav that is still completely unknown. In 2011 a remote survey using aero-LiDAR enabled the team to make digital 3D surface (DSM) and terrain (DTM) models that reliably traced both the route of the unknown sections of the western wall of the inner fortress and revealed the existence of some elements of it, which until now were unknown such as the southwestern corner tower of the fortification and its western gate. The high-contrast images generated show perfectly that the western fortress wall is founded on the periphery of the fourth/underneath the fifth terrace of the Zabui hill. Finally, the absence of any indications of the presence of intermediate towers on the front of the *curtina* – not only on the early wall, but also in its northern extension (expansion) – should be noted.

Keywords: Veliki Preslav, fortification, LiDAR

The fortification system of Veliki Preslav has attracted the attention of several generations of both foreign and Bulgarian scholars. This attention is completely logical, not only due to the fact that it is one of the largest-scale and grandest (in terms of length and construction) fortification structures for its time in Europe, but also because of its topographic specifics – covering a terrain which is extremely diverse in relief and features. At the same time, these circumstances cause a number of serious difficulties, mainly of a practical nature, and have turned out to be a true challenge for researchers.

This paper is a new attempt to shed more light on the problem posed by the only section of the fortification system of the inner fortress of the second Bulgarian capital that is still completely unknown. To date, we have no reliable archaeological data, nor sufficiently satisfactory (nor convincing) answers, to the questions about its main parameters – location, specific route and length, or the presence of potential fortification components relating to it, such as gates, towers, etc. The reasons for this are both the lack of targeted and large-scale field surveys and excavations, and the lack of any accidental uncovering or identifying of its remains during the excavation of sites in the western half of the Inner City. A number of plans and schemes have been published over the years (fig. 1: 1), different assumptions have been made about its location, but to date they are all based on unconfirmed, often free, interpretations which remain hypothetical.

In the first plan of the city, developed by K. Škorpil in the period 1887 – 1905, and officially published in 1914, the relief of the area was represented approximately – the Inner City, the badly visible southern half of the western wall and the whole of the southern one (represented with a

https://doi.org/10.53250/cba11.63-69

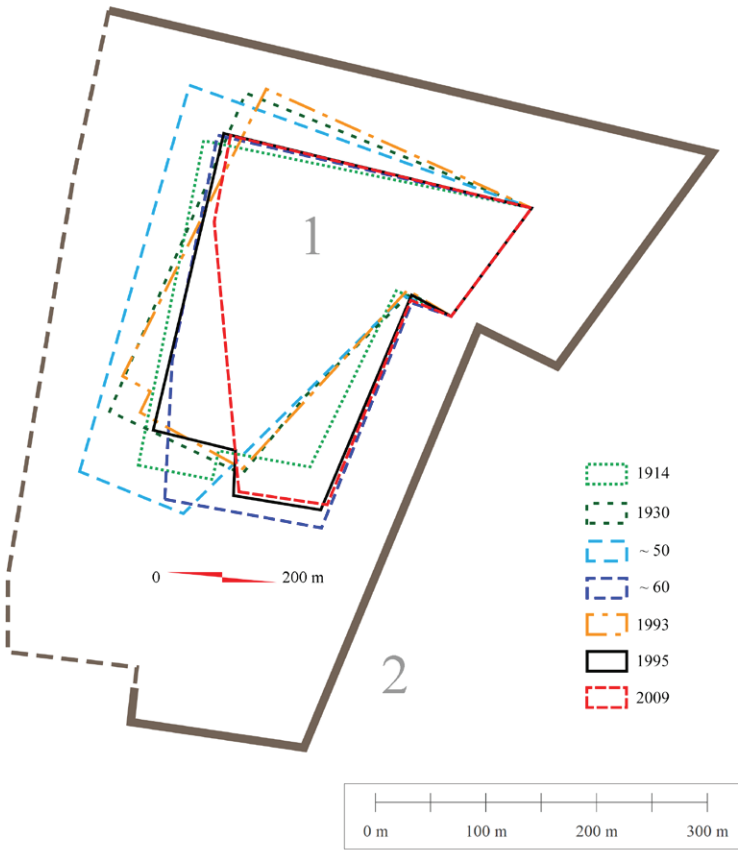


Fig. 1: 1. Comparison of most of the published plans of the Inner City (their scale and orientation are correlated according to the construction of the eastern fortress wall of the extension of the Inner City which is clearly visible on the surface and fully preserved in length; 2. The outlines of the Inner City as a result of the three-dimensional DSM and DTM made

Обр. 1: 1. Съпоставка на повечето от влезлите в научно обращение планове на Вътрешния град (мащабът и ориентацията им са корелирани според добре видимия на повърхността и напълно запазен в дължина градеж на източната крепостна стена на разширението на Вътрешния град); 2. Очертанията на Вътрешния град в резултат на направените триизмерни DSM и DTM

single broken line) are situated at the foot of the first (from east to west) terrace of the Zabui hill and, according to the height lines, seem to be located on a plain terrain (Шкорпил 1914, обр. 93). It is interesting that at the southern *curtina*, a "bend" from the south, has been assumed to be a near "mirror-image" of the one we know about today, and it does not "recede" to the north, but "expands" the fortification to the south. In the significantly revised 1930 version, the location of the inner fortress relative to the landscape was corrected, and the route of the western wall passes (in double broken line) along the fourth (again from east to west) main terrace of the hill (Шкорпил 1930, табл. I). A significant change was also made at the southern wall, whose initial "bend" was "removed" and replaced by an entirely straight line. This "survey" remains valid and has been preserved in publications at the beginning of the 21st c., although quite a large number of other versions appeared after it, more or less schematic (Рашев 1982, табл. LIV/2), and sometimes entirely formal or focusing mainly on the architectural remains uncovered during archaeological excavations (Мавродинов 1959, 136 – 137, обр. 131; Ваклинов 1977, 181).

In 1993, R. Rashev, on reviewing the results of the field surveys he carried out in the reserve, rehabilitated the idea of a "bend" in the southwestern part of the inner fortress. The outlines of the two fortification rings presented then more or less repeat the accurate and precise calculations of K. Škorpil, according to which its southern half (the territory of the former *aul*) has the shape of a trapeze, elongated along the north – south axis. The only difference is that a small, almost symbolic "bend" was added in its southwestern corner, whose position was developed to the most logical (with view of the terrain relief) direction – north (Рашев 1993, 49 – 55, обр. 1). This solution was continued and confirmed in the two main plans of the second capital published in "Materials on the Map of the Medieval Bulgarian State – the Territory of Present-day Northeast Bulgaria" (Бонев 1995, 175 – 189). An especially interesting fact is that in it, the individually presented and relatively detailed drawing of the Inner City (Бонев 1995, 177) is completely different from the same

one presented within the outer fortress (Бонев 1995, 181). The serious discrepancies observed are obviously due to the parallel use of two plans which were close in time, but very different in layout. While the general one is based on the sketch by R. Rashev mentioned above, a new sketch is put forward for the fortification in the detailed plan, with relatively proportionate, almost square proportions, and a significantly longer southern wall divided into two equally long parts by a "bend".

A newer study of the subject (carried out in relation to an attempt for GPS-mapping of the inner fortification) makes the supposition that the wall in question connects the southwestern and northeastern corners of the fortification in a straight line (Аладжов 2009, 159 – 162, обр. 1). Such a direct connection, however, is impossible for two main reasons. The first one is that if its route follows steadily the orientation of the actual construction with a length of 20 m, which has already been uncovered to the north of the southwestern corner tower, then, first, it would appear in a number of plots which have been excavated to present date, where we know for certain it is absent (Балабанов и др. 2010, 461 – 464, обр. 2; Балабанов, Славов 2012, 396 – 398, обр. 2; Бонев, Георгиева 2017, 545 – 548, обр. 1; Ваклинова, Щерева 1995, 81 – 91, обр. 2), and second, without a significant correction in the direction, it would pass a few dozen meters east of the early northwestern corner tower. A serious, but not insurmountable, challenge is also presented by the configuration of the terrain in this section, which does not allow the thus suggested direct route, due to the need for a gradual "transition" between the different levels of the terraces where the western and southern walls are situated. With view of the above, the possibility for the existence

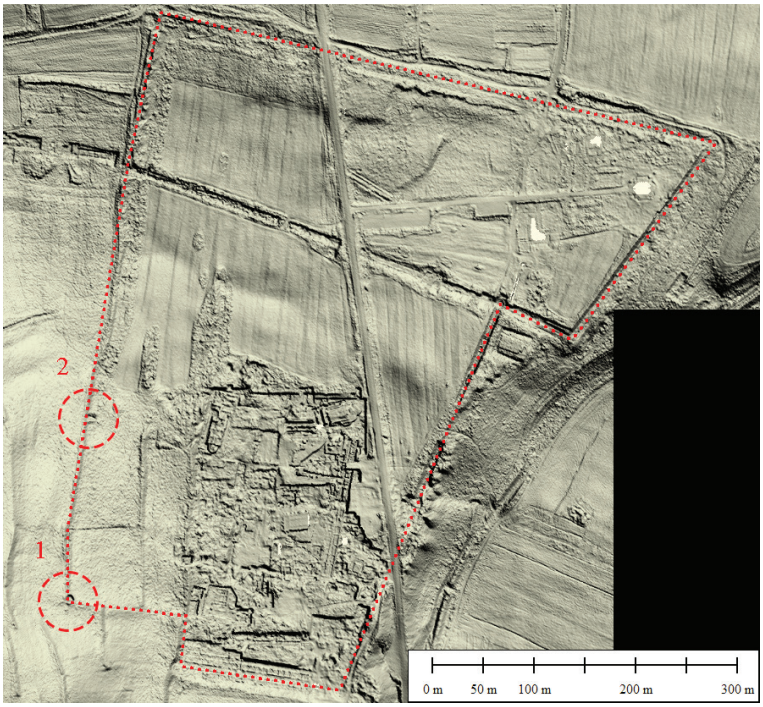


Fig. 2. Topographic situation of the western fortress wall of the Inner City (plan view): 1. Southwestern corner tower; 2. Western Gate

Обр. 2. Топографска ситуация на западната крепостна стена на Вътрешния град (изглед в план): 1. Югозападна ъглова кула; 2. Западна порта

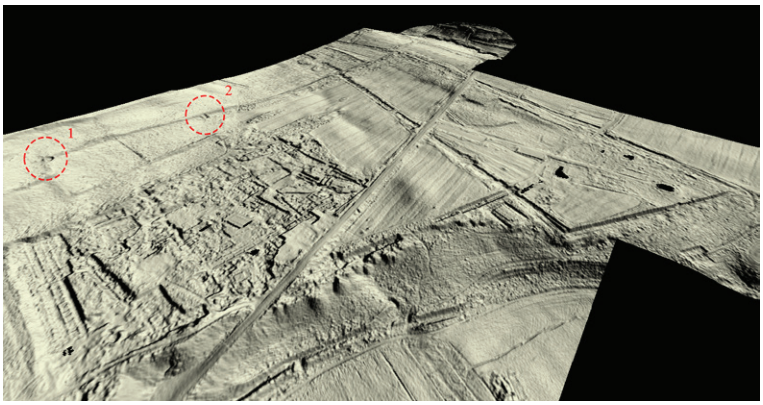


Fig. 3. Topographic situation of the western fortress wall of the Inner City (view to the Northwest): 1. Southwestern corner tower; 2. Western Gate

Обр. 3. Топографска ситуация на западната крепостна стена на Вътрешния град (поглед на северозапад): 1. Югозападна ъглова кула; 2. Западна порта

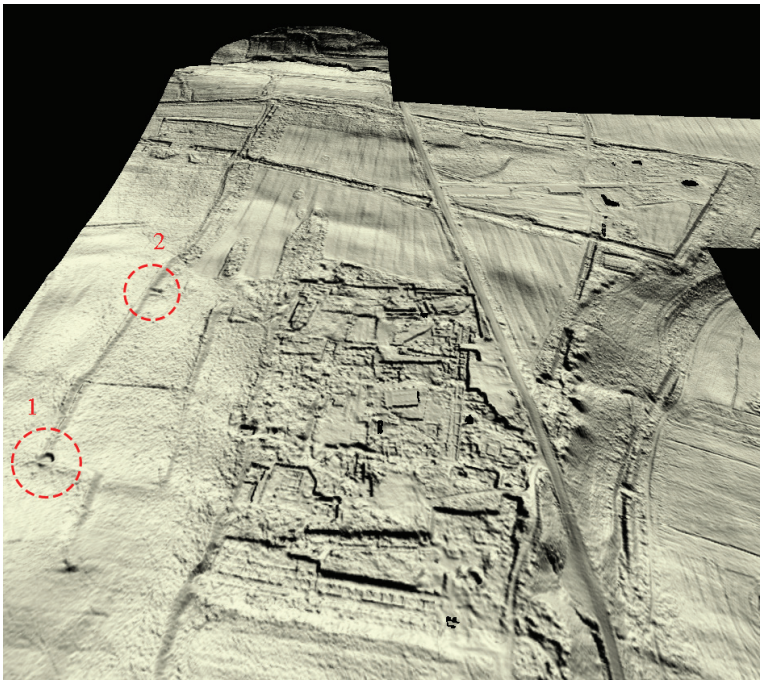


Fig. 4. Topographic situation of the western fortress wall of the Inner City (view to the North): 1. Southwestern corner tower; 2. Western Gate

Обр. 4. Топографска ситуация на западната крепостна стена на Вътрешния град (поглед на север): 1. Югозападна ъглова кула; 2. Западна порта

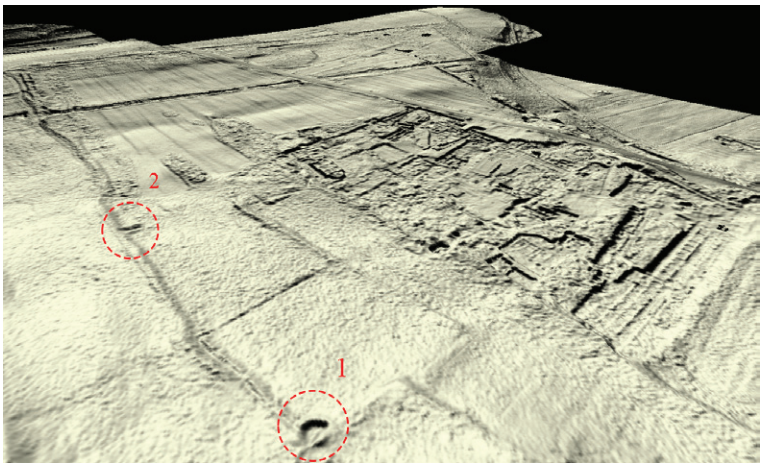


Fig. 5. Topographic situation of the western fortress wall of the Inner City (view to the Northeast): 1. Southwestern corner tower; 2. Western Gate

Обр. 5. Топографска ситуация на западната крепостна стена на Вътрешния град (поглед на североизток): 1. Югозападна ъглова кула; 2. Западна порта

of a "bend" connecting the two routes remains the only acceptable engineering solution, and the most probable interpretation of the development and implementation (Рашев 1990, 71) of this key point of the fortifications in the southwestern end of the *aul*, at least until this is clarified archaeologically.

In the period 2009 – 2011, for the purposes of the project (under OP "Regional Development" 2007 – 2013) of Veliki Preslav Municipality, "The Age of Tsar Simeon Comes to Life", the last (for now) complex geodesic mapping of the terrain and the uncovered and conserved archaeological artefacts was carried out.[1] Quite understandably, it included only the clearly visible and reliably traceable constructions on the surface, and the border strip of low vegetation along the eastern periphery of the terrace along which the wall also passes, is relatively outlined.

At present, only part of the eastern end of this terrace is marked on the public large-scale topographic maps in the National Cadastral Map of Bulgaria available at the Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Agency (LSTM 1:5000 – https://kais.cadastre.bg) and MRDPW (LSTM 7-18 and LSTM 1:50000 – http://gis.mrrb.government.bg/).

A phased remote survey of the Inner City of Veliki Preslav was performed in 2011, as part of the scientific project at the Bulgarian National Science Fund (BNSF) – "Old Bulgarian Capitals and Their Surroundings", using

[1] I would like to thank eng. A. Kamenov and architect V. Pandzharova for the information.

aero-LiDAR[2] (Blom company). The resulting digital 3D surface (DSM)[3] and terrain (DTM) models[4] reliably traced both the route of the unknown sections of the western wall of the inner fortress and the existence of some elements of it, which until now were only assumed but not confirmed. The southwestern corner tower of the fortification (fig. 2: 1, fig. 3: 1, fig. 4: 1, fig. 5: 1) and its western gate (fig. 2: 2, fig. 3: 2, fig. 4: 2, fig. 5: 2), which were unknown until now, were located. The high-contrast images generated show perfectly that the western fortress wall is founded on the periphery of the fourth/underneath the fifth terrace of the Zabui hill. Thus measured, the length of its initial (southern) section amounts to ~ 430 m, and the sections of the (already) indisputably established southwestern "bend" have the following lengths: 1) North – South ~ 50 m; 2) East – West ~ 115 m. To the west, the latter ends with a massive round corner tower, with a diameter of ~ 8.50 – 9.50 m, completely analogous to the other six discovered so far. Approximately 180 m (along the line of the wall), north of it, there is a large, obviously main (western) gate – at this stage it cannot be said with certainty whether it is of the typical "Pliska – Preslav" type, or a simpler one – e.g., inner "double-winged." Its dimensions of about 12 x 12 m point rather to the first assumption, possibly in a smaller or abbreviated version. Finally, the absence of any indications of the presence of intermediate towers on the front of the *curtina* – not only on the early wall, but also in its northern extension (expansion) – should be noted. The first fact is entirely logical and to be expected, in view of our knowledge about the fortification plan of the *aul*, while the second is somewhat surprising. In conclusion, we can say that the new data obtained undoubtedly shed light on a number of unclear and contradictory issues that have accumulated over the years regarding this extremely important topic. They also demonstrate, once again, not only the need for and advantages of, using modern information technologies and non-destructive geophysical methods, but also their impressive potential for solving certain problems in archaeology and, most of all, for acquiring primary and basic information about large sites and areas. This is especially valid in cases where large-scale and long-term archaeological studies are definitely unrealistic on the one hand, due to their dependence on serious and regular financing and decades of field work, and so not to be recommended, while on the other hand the impossibility of carrying out expedient and high-quality conservation and protection of the entirely uncovered large constructions (like this one) dooms them to certain destruction. Nevertheless, archaeological excavations will remain (at least for the foreseeable future) indispensable as the only reliable means of obtaining, albeit limited, but almost always sufficiently representative samples of the overall picture, providing detailed information on the characteristics of documented structures – their construction, masonry and most of all – their chronology. Therefore, we must emphasize that only additional and targeted sampling surveys could provide detailed and satisfactory answers if not to all, to most of the important questions related to the fortification system of the second Bulgarian capital.

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[2] Light Detection and Ranging.

[3] Digital Surface Model.

[4] Digital Terrain Model.

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ЗАПАДНАТА КРЕПОСТНА СТЕНА НА ВЪТРЕШНИЯ ГРАД НА ВЕЛИКИ ПРЕСЛАВ В СВЕТЛИНАТА НА СЪВРЕМЕННИТЕ ПРОУЧВАНИЯ

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РЕЗЮМЕ

Укрепителната система на Велики Преслав привлича вниманието на няколко поколения чужди и български учени. Интерес, който е напълно закономерен и се дължи не само на факта, че тя се явява едно от най-мащабните и грандиозни (като дължина и градеж) фортификационни съоръжения за времето си в Европа, а и не само там, но и топографските ѝ специфики – обхваща изключително разнообразен като релеф и особености терен. Същевременно тези обстоятелства предпоставят редица сериозни трудности, най-вече от практическо естество, и се оказват истинско предизвикателство за изследователите ѝ.

Настоящата статия е нов опит да се хвърли допълнителна яснота върху проблема за единствения останал все още напълно неизвестен участък от укрепителната система на вътрешната крепост

на втората българска столица. До момента не разполагаме със сигурни археологически данни и съответно достатъчно задоволителни (и убедителни) отговори на въпросите относно нейните основни параметри – местоположение, конкретно трасе и протежение, а също така и за наличието на възможни фортификационни елементи към нея, като порти, кули и др. Причини за това са както отсъствието на целенасочени и мащабни теренни издирвания и проучвания в тази посока, така и липсата на каквито и да е случайни регистрации на останките ѝ при разкопките на обекти в западната половина на Вътрешния град. През годините са обнародвани множество планове и схеми (обр. 1: 1), изказвани са различни предположения за локализацията ѝ, но и до днес всички те са плод на непотвърдени, често свободни тълкувания и остават силно хипотетични.

През 2011 г., в рамките на научния проект към ФНИ „Старите български столици и техните околности“, бе извършено поетапно дистанционно сканиране на Вътрешния град на Велики Преслав посредством аеро-LiDAR (фирма “Blom”). Създадените в резултат цифрови 3D модели на повърхността (DSM) и на терена (DTM) достоверно очертаха както трасето на неизвестните до момента участъци от западната стена на вътрешната крепост, така и съществуването на някои досега само предполагаеми и непотвърдени елементи от нея. С висока степен на сигурност бяха локализирани неизвестните до момента крайна югозападна ъглова кула на укреплението (обр. 2: 1, обр. 3: 1, обр. 4: 1, обр. 5: 1) и западната му порта (обр. 2: 2, обр. 3: 2, обр. 4: 2, обр. 5: 2). Генерираните висококонтрастни изображения отлично показват, че западният крепостен зид е фундиран в периферията на четвъртата/„подножието“ на петата тераса на „Зъбуите“. Така измерено протежението на първоначалния му (южен) участък възлиза на ~ 430 м, а отсечките на (вече) безспорно установената югозападна „чупка“ имат следните дължини: 1) север – юг ~ 50 м; 2) изток – запад ~ 115 м. На запад последната завършва с масивна кръгла ъглова кула, с диаметър ~ 8,50 – 9,50 м, напълно аналогична на разкритите до момента шест такива. На приблизително 180 м (по линията на зида) северно от нея се очертава и една голяма, очевидно главна (западна) порта, за която на този етап не може със сигурност да се каже дали е от характерния „плисковско-преславски“ тип или от по-опростен такъв – напр. вътрешна двукрила. Размерите ѝ от около 12 х 12 м насочват по-скоро към първото предположение, възможно в по-малък или съкратен вариант. Накрая трябва да се отбележи и липсата на каквито и да било индикации за наличието на междинни кули по фронта на куртината – не само на ранната стена, но и при северното ѝ продължение/разширение.

Независимо от големите възможности и предимства на ГИС технологиите, археологическите разкопки остават (поне в обозримо бъдеще) незаменими като единственото надеждно средство за добиване на макар и ограничена, но почти винаги достатъчно представителна извадка за общата картина, предоставяща детайлна информация за характеристиките на регистрираните структури – тяхната конструкция, градеж и най-вече хронология. Затова трябва да подчертаем, че само допълнителни и целенасочени сондажни проучвания биха могли да дадат подробни и задоволителни отговори ако не на всички, то на повечето от най-важните въпроси, свързани с укрепителната система на втората българска столица.

Ключови думи: Велики Преслав, укрепителна система, ЛИДАР