

NADEŽDA M. GAVRILOVIĆ VITAS, Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade

GORDANA D. MILOŠEVIĆ JEVTIĆ, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture

BUILDING WITH OCTAGON FROM THE LOCALITY OF „GRADSKO POLJE” IN NIŠ (*NAISSUS*). NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

e-mail: nadia011@yahoo.com

Abstract – After three decades of exploring and excavating the so-called building with octagon at the locality of „Gradsko polje” in Niš, new archaeological research has been conducted. The main goal of the new excavations was, based on a previously led geophysical survey, to determine the dimensions of the western part of the building and to continue the exploration of the approach in front of the room with octagon. Despite modest finances and the short duration of the excavations, this year’s archaeological research has allowed us to conclude that the building with octagon had at least three building phases, starting with the beginning of the 4th century and was in use until the 6th century. Also, a clear stratum of Middle Age houses, dating to the 11th–12th century, was also confirmed in this year’s excavations, along with many fragments of ceramics belonging to the same period. This paper discusses in detail the archaeological and architectural results obtained from the new excavations led in 2018.

Key words – Building with octagon, Gradsko polje Niš, Late Antiquity, mosaics, Constantine the Great

Archaeological excavations in different localities in Niš started in an official capacity in the 1930’s, on the territory of the locality of Mediana (a suburb of contemporary Niš) and on the area of the necropolis in Jagodin-Mala, in the very centre of the city. The first large archaeological research in the area of the antique city in the Niš Fortress and around it began after World War II at the localities of Glasija, Gradsko polje and again Jagodin-Mala, when the area of the Fortress came to the focus of the city management, because of their intention to explore and present the cultural heritage of the centre of Niš city.¹ The first archaeological excavations in Niš fortress were carried out during 1962–1963, in the area of Belgrade and Jagodin gate and around the mosque, and were continued a decade later in the area of the Turkish

niches, arsenal, south-western area of the fortress and in the locality of „Glasija”, on the area of the contemporary bus station.² With all the mentioned excavations,

¹ As archaeological excavations confirmed, the city of Niš (antique Naissus) was formed during the 1st century, from which time it spread on the right bank of the river Nišava, coinciding with the area of the later Turkish fortress and was bordered on the northern and eastern side by necropolises, Петровић 1993, 63. It can be presumed that the city became a municipium at the end of the 1st or the beginning of the 2nd century (during the reigns of the emperors Traianus or Hadrian), being an important city in the Central Balkans, particularly during the 4th century, when its size was approximately 20 ha, Петровић 1976, 34–35; Петровић 1993, 63.

² Archaeological excavations conducted in 1962–1963 by R. Ljubinković were first focused on the area of Belgrade gate and around the mosque (from 5. 6. 1962 – 3. 7. 1962 and continued on

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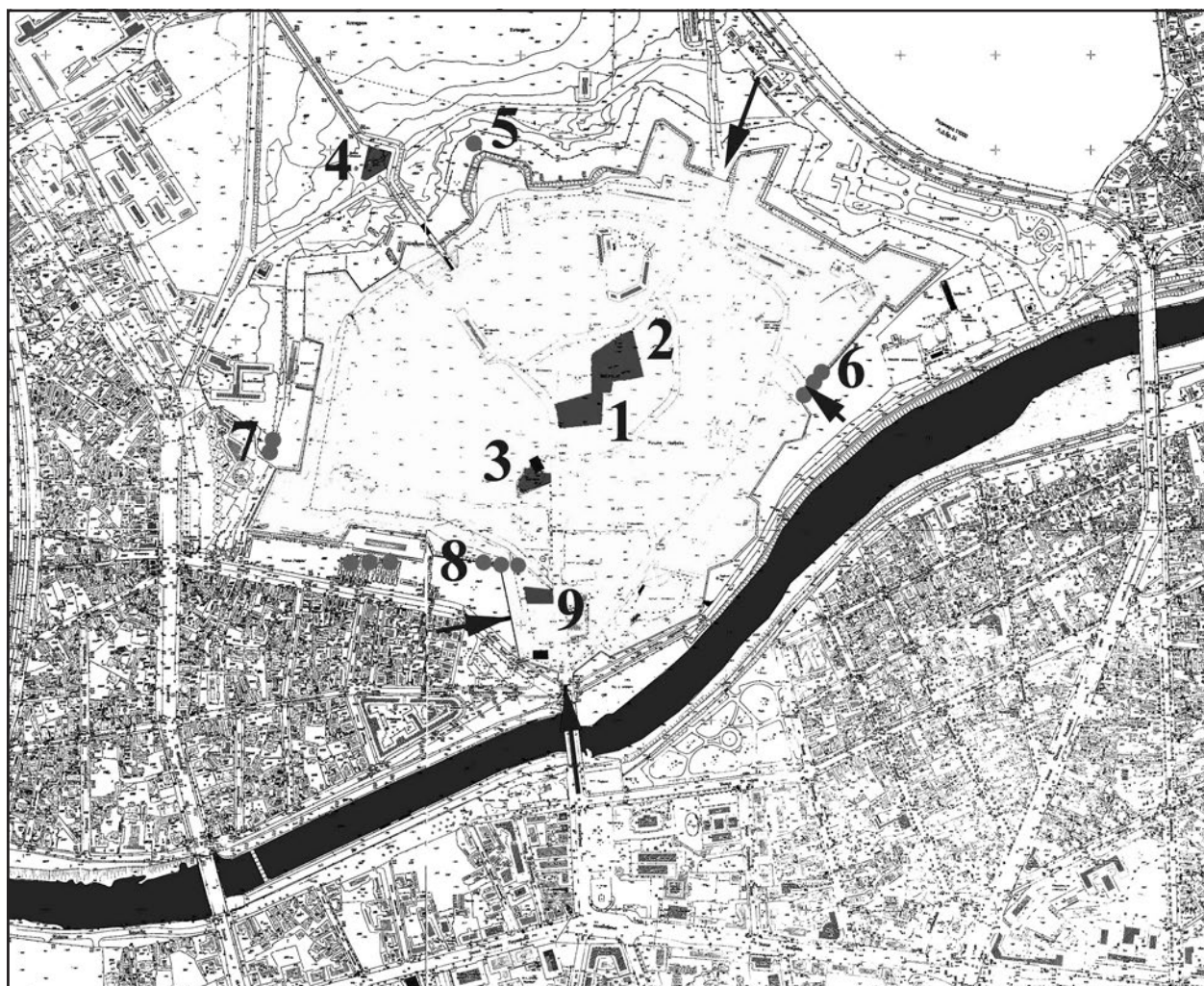


Fig. 1. Niš, situation plan of antique objects in the area of the Turkish fortress and in its vicinity: 1) Building under arches; 2) Antique street and basilica (?); 3) Byzantine street (Bali Beg mosque); 4) Building with Octagon; 5) Thermae; 6) Remains of the antique eastern rampart; 7) Byzantine rampart; 8) Remains of the antique and middle age rampart; 9) Public city thermae; 10) Islan Agin mosque (G. Milošević Jevtić)

Сл. 1. Ниш, ситуациони план античких грађевина на простору турске Тврђаве и њене околине: 1) Грађевина под сводовима; 2) Античка улица и базилика (?); 3) Византијска улица (Бали-бејова џамија); 4) Грађевина са октогоном; 5) Терме – античко куќашило; 6) Остаци источне античког бедема; 7) Византијски бедем; 8) Остаци античког и средњовековног бедема; 9) Јавне градске терме – куќашила; 10) Ислам-аина џамија (Г. Милошевић Јевтић)

the shape of the antique and middle age Niš started to appear more clearly, to which research carried out during the 1980's and 90's in the centre of the Niš fortress greatly contributed, which was carefully planned with the goal of discovering the narrow antique city centre with its accompanying buildings (Fig. 1).³ The discovered parts of the antique city central area with a monumental building with two *cellae* (temple of Capitoline triad?), part of the street, the city basilica and city

15. 7. 1962 – 31. 7. 1962; excavations in 1963 were conducted from 17. 6. – 19. 7. 1963), official documentation (diary of excavations and report from 1962) of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade.

³ As P. Petrović confirms, with thus far conducted archaeological research and discoveries, the debate concerning the exact location of the centre of the antique city, the *forum* in the area of Niš fortress, would be disputable, but the position and the quality of discovered buildings in it imply the presumption about the central urban area, Петровић 1993, 66.



Fig. 2. Locality of “Gradsko polje”,
Building with Octagon, excavations 1987–1988
(Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

Сл. 2. Локалитет „Градско поље”,
грађевина са октагоном, истраживања 1987–1988.
(Документација: Археолошки институт Београд)

baths *thermae* (*extra muros*),⁴ confirmed the opinion of ancient writers about the importance of Naissus as a significant strategic, military and economical centre (the third city of the province of Dardania by Ptolomeus, III, 9.4).⁵ Although the discovered parts of the mentioned buildings are too small to allow their certain identification, it is clear that they belong to the beginning of the 4th century, the period of the reign of the emperor Constantine the Great, when large amounts of building and reconstruction was undertaken in the birth city of the monarch.⁶ However, archaeologists have been able to debate with more certainty the history of antique building activity in the north-western area of Niš fortress since 1987, when, during the works on the new footpath, a building from Late Antiquity was discovered.⁷

Previous excavations

During the rescue excavations conducted in 1987 and 1988, the northern part of the building was excavated and six rooms were discovered: a central room of octagonal ground-plan and four square shaped rooms grouped around the central room (two rooms on the

western side and two rooms on the eastern side of the central octagonal room) (Fig. 2).⁸

The building was elongated and of rectangular shape, oriented north-south. The discovered size of the building is approximately 350 m² (length 31 m, width 11.26 m).⁹ The diagonal of the octagonal room was 7.7 m, while the dimensions of four square rooms were approx. 4.1 x 4.1 m. The building had two entrances on

⁴ The part of the antique and early Byzantine street with porches was discovered around the mosque, oriented N–S, almost parallel with the contemporary footpath in the fortress. Also, in the central plateau of the fortress, a part of the street with a partial canal system was found (oriented E–W). The monumental building with two *cellae* was also discovered in the central area of the fortress, while the sanctuary of the god Asclepius was discovered next to the south-western rampart wall of the fortress.

⁵ The antique city of Niš was situated at a very important cross-road, which connected Ratiaria, Singidunum, and Viminacium with Serdica and, further on, Constantinopolis. Its strategic position owed much to the existence of the River Nišava, which was partly navigable and, at the end of the 1st century, the city had its military camp, where the *cohors I Cretum* was stationed, Васић 2013, 91.

⁶ The close connection between emperor Constantine and his hometown is confirmed not only by large building activity and monumental impressive sacral and profane buildings erected in Naissus in the period of his reign, but also by his several visits and stays in the town in 315, 319, 324, 334 etc., Петровић 1976, 39; Vasić 2008, 9–23.

⁷ The excavations from 1987 and 1988, are not the first excavations conducted in the area of the locality of Gradsko polje. In 1982, archaeological excavations were conducted with the goal of locating the remains of the antique building with hypocaust and the antique necropolis, whose existence was known, but not the exact location of the objects. The only fact that was known about them was that they were situated north of the central area of the fortress. Therefore, sondage excavations were undertaken (one sector was just next to the so-called Turkish trench at the fortress and another sector was on the small hill towards the area where the building with octagon was discovered after five years). Unfortunately, neither the object with hypocaust nor antique necropolis were discovered during the sondage excavations at the site of Gradsko polje in 1982. However, besides numerous fragments of antique and Turkish ceramics, fragments of glass vessels, window glass and animal bones, seven graves belonging to the period of Late Antiquity were found. Around the skeletal remains of the deceased, many fragments of late antique ceramics were discovered; documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, official report of the archaeologist S. Drča, custos in National museum of Niš.

⁸ The results of the excavations from 1987 and 1988 have never been published, yet the building is known as the building with octagon (some authors refer to it as a *villa*, *domus* or *palace*) and was briefly described by different authors such as Петровић 1993, 68–69; Гушић 1993; Петровић 1995a; Милошевић 2005: 153 etc; Јеремић 2007: 88 etc; Васић 2013, 93; Ћершков et al. 2016, 105. The building with octagon is situated approximately 300 m north-west of the central area of the Niš fortress where different buildings from the Late Antiquity period were discovered (see ft. 5).

⁹ Гушић 1993, 168.

the southern wall of the building, one larger and one smaller, with the larger having three steps. The central room of the building was of octagonal form and had four semicircular niches made of bricks (openings of the niches were 1.5 m). The interior of the niches was painted red. Identical niches were found on the building's outer wall, on the main southern entrance to the octagonal room which was 1.9 m wide and up to which led two stone steps (1.93 m long, 0.3 m wide the height between the two steps was 0.3 m). Although no statues or fragments of statues were found in the thus far excavated parts of the building with octagon, it can be presumed that statues stood in the niches (most probably mythological), which presumably also adorned the other rooms of the building with octagon.

Next to the interior northern wall (wall no. 4) of the octagonal room, 0.95 m from the interior corner of wall nos. 3 and 4, in the layer of rubble (at an approx. depth from the floor of the room of 0.85 m), a skeletal grave (Grave 1) was found (oriented W–E). Just beside the elbow of the right hand of the skeletal remains from Grave 1, the remains of a second skeletal grave were found, unfortunately completely destroyed by the conduit for the electricity. In the layer of the rubble, an iron belt clasp was discovered, in the shape of the letter „S”, with stylised snake heads at the ends and a square loop. In the north-eastern corner of room III, a third skeletal grave was discovered (depth from the floor of the room was 0.9 m), oriented E–W. It is presumed that the graves belong to the Middle Ages.

The building was mainly built using the *opus incertum* technique (a mixture of broken stone and mortar), while the openings and niches were built in the *opus latericium* technique (bricks).¹⁰ The walls of the building with octagon were built in the *opus mixtum* technique and are approx. 0.9 m thick, while the walls of the octagonal room are not of the same width, but were saved, *in situ* (as the other walls of the building), over 2 m in height. The floors of the rooms were made from thick mortar and in the octagonal room a mosaic floor (approx. size 42.6 m²), damaged in some parts, was discovered.¹¹ The other rooms also had mosaic floors, badly damaged due to the building's demolition and use in later periods.¹² The thus far discovered mosaics (composed of motives like octagons, hexagons, squares, rhomboids, a Solomon's knot and composition schemes) in the building with octagon bear a strong resemblance to the mosaics from the peristyle of Constatine's villa at Mediana.¹³ Every room had a floor heating system (*hypocaust*), the north-western room even had wall

heating and a ceramic tube which served for water drainage from the building's roofs (it entered the canalisation system). Traces of fresco-painting and fragmented marble architectural plastic implied that the building represented a luxury and monumental object, tastefully decorated with marble plastic, mosaics and fresco-painting. Although no statues or fragments of statues have been found in the thus far excavated parts of the building with octagon, it can be presumed that in the niches stood statues (analogous to similar objects, most probably mythological statues), which presumably also adorned the other rooms of the building with octagon. The finding of a Maximinus Daia coin from 309–310 in the plaster of the building's wall confirms

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The mosaic floor in octagonal room was made from stone tiles (*tesserae*) of white, black, red and green colour and the composition scheme consisted of octagons with squares that connect them, octagons and crosses that form elongated hexagons, squares and rhombuses that are connected and floral motives such as a Solomon's knot, propellers, circles, and motives in the shape of the tip of a spear, Јерemiћ 2007, 91–92.

¹² Heavier damage to the building with octagon occurred from trenches dug for military exercises held on the site of Gradsko polje up to the 1950's.

¹³ Vasić et al. 2016, 21–25.

¹⁴ The analysis of ceramics showed that numerous fragments belong to the period from the 4th to the 6th century, and finds of various discs and pieces made of red deer antler cortex, one bronze ring and tools for the processing of wool and leather (which could indicate the existence of a workshop), date from the last phase of the building with octagon (the 6th century), documentation of the Institute of Archaeology (official report of the archaeologist Toni Čeršković).

¹⁵ The sondage excavations in 2016 were conducted by the Institute of Archaeology in cooperation with the Institute of Balkan Studies and colleagues from the Institute Ausonius, Bordeaux, Јерemiћ, Петровић 2016, 85–87. The sondage excavations (6.5 x 5 m) were carried out in the area south of the south-eastern room (room VI in the nomenclature of the 1987 and 1988 excavations), documentation of the Institute of Archaeology from 2017.

¹⁶ We would like to express our gratitude to the director of the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade, Dr Miomir Korać, for his support and help and to our colleagues Jelena and Vladimir Miletić, for their assistance and interpretation of the results.

¹⁷ Archaeological excavations at the site of „Gradsko polje” in Niš were led by: leader of the team Dr Nadežda Gavrilović Vitas, Institute of Archaeology Belgrade; Dr Gordana Milošević Jevtić, architect, Architectural Faculty Belgrade; Ljiljana Mandić, archaeologist, National Museum Užice; Slobodan Mitić archaeologist National Museum Niš; Aleksandar Aleksić, archaeologist, Institute for the Protection of Monuments of Cultural Heritage Niš; Dr Igor Bjelić, architect, Institute of Archaeology Belgrade; Milan Zeković, MA student; and two PhD students from the Institute of Ausonius, Bordeaux – Laura Barataud and Alice Ognier.

that the building with octagon was probably erected in that period, but the archaeological material along with the find of a Justinianus coin from 529, imply the use of the building from the 4th to the 6th century.¹⁴ After the excavations were finished, the researched area of the building was conserved and mosaics were covered and protected with a wooden construction. In 2012, because of the celebration of 1700 years of Milan edict in Niš, The Institute for the Protection of Monuments of Cultural Heritage in Niš, undertook conservation works on the discovered parts of the building with octagon (walls, mosaics) and denivelation works.

Small sondage excavations were conducted in 2016, in the area south-east of the main entrance to the octagonal room.¹⁵ In 2017, due to the planning of new archaeological excavations in the area of the building with octagon, the Institute of Archaeology conducted geophysical research on the area to the south and west of the building with octagon (south in the direction of

the contemporary market and west in the direction of the Boulevard Nikola Tesla), with the goal of defining the dimensions of the building.¹⁶ The research showed in both areas certain deviations which implied the existence of the walls of either the same building (building with octagon) or a different one (Fig. 3). Guided by the results of the geophysical research, the team from the Institute of Archaeology planned the excavations in 2018, with the goal to define the outer western wall of the building and to continue with excavations in the area south of the main entrance of the octagonal room.¹⁷

Archaeological excavations in 2018.

The archaeological excavations conducted in the area of the building with octagon in the locality of „City field” in 2018 lasted three weeks and, considering certain facts (like the very thick layer of the contemporary horizon which took much time with limited finances), it was decided that the excavations would be



Fig. 3. Locality of “Gradsko polje”, Building with Octagon, geophysics 2017
(Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

Сл. 3. Локалитет „Градско поље“, Грађевина са октојоном, геофизика 2017. године
(документација: Археолошки институт Београд)

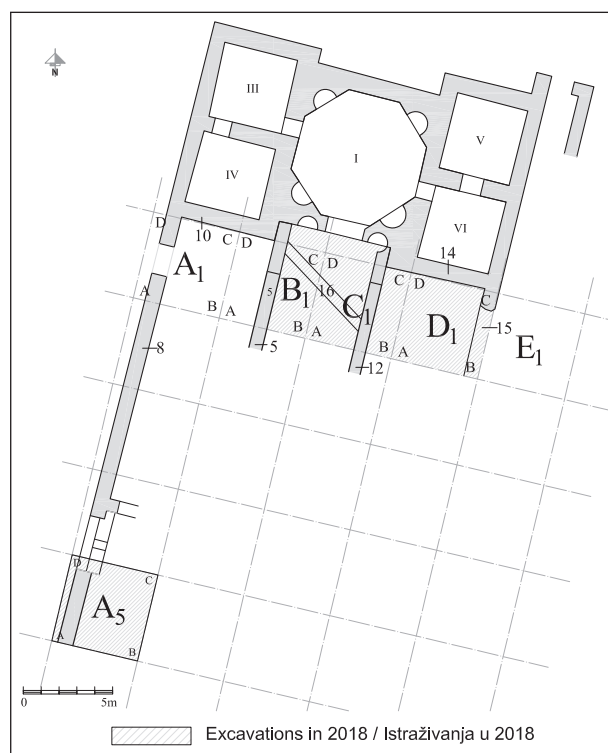


Fig. 4. Locality “Gradsko polje”, Building with Octagon, plan of the building in grid system, excavations 2018 (Igor Bijelić)

Сл. 4. Локалитет „Градско поље”, Грађевина са октојоном, план са квадрантним мрежом, истраживања 2018. године (Игор Бјелић)

carried out in two sectors of the locality. **Sector 1** which represented the area where the end of the outer western wall of the building could have been expected (implied by the results of geophysics from 2017) and **Sector 2** which presented the area south of the entrance of the octagonal room (south to east and west of the entrance). Before the beginning of the archaeological works, it was decided to conduct the excavations in a grid system (squares 5 x 5 m) and the grid system was positioned in accordance with the discovered northern part of the building with octagon, given of the precise connection between the discovered antique architecture and the new archaeological finds in the space (Fig. 4).¹⁸

Stratigraphy

The excavations in sector 1 were carried out in square A5 and, by the end of the excavations, five cultural layers could be differentiated in the northern and

eastern profile of the square, and six cultural layers in the western and southern profile of the square (Fig. 5–8). The most recent layer (layer A) is of dark loose soil, with fragments of stone and contemporary material.¹⁹ The upper border of the layer was between an elevation of 200.74 and 200.40, while the lower border of the layer A was between an elevation of 200.50 and 200.04. The second layer (layer B) is composed of dark-grey loose soil, with a minor concentration of stone and a small number of bricks. The upper border of the layer is between an elevation of 200.60 and 200.04, while the lower border of the layer B is between an elevation of 200.39 and 199.79. There is a very thin, visible layer of mortar (0.10 m), probably from the floor of a contemporary building.²⁰ The third layer (layer C) is composed of grey loose soil, with an intensive concentration of stones and bricks. The relative thickness of the layer in the southern profile varies by around 0.40 m (in northern profile it varies by up to 0.60 m, while in western profile of the square A5 it varies by up to 0.80 m). The base of this layer varies between an elevation of 199.44 and 199.04. The fourth layer (layer D) is composed of intensive rubble of yellowish-whitish colour, with large fragments of stone, bricks and lumps of mortar. In the eastern half of the southern profile, it is interrupted with digging 1, while in the western half of the same profile of square A5, a wall with surrounding bricks was discovered. In the western profile, layer D can be followed along half of the profile. The base of layer D varies between an elevation of 199.26 and 199. The fifth layer (layer E) is of compact reddish-yellow soil, which is visible only around the wall and bricks that were discovered in the

¹⁸ The grid units were squares of dimensions 5 x 5 m, and were marked alphabetically (starting from A) going from the left to right side and Arabic numerals (from 1 to 5) going from north to south, starting from the south-western corner of the building with octagon (first square is A1).

¹⁹ During the sondage excavations in 1987, a layer of rubble made of filling of broken stones and of a thickness of approximately 1.9 m, was covering the object – the layer was clearly visible in the profiles of the discovered part of the building with octagon. That layer was formed from the broken stones with which military trenches (dug in the past century for the purposes of the military exercises) were backfilled. The presence of the army was frequent up to the 1950’s at the site of Gradsko polje and this year’s excavations confirmed again a very high layer of rubble with contemporary finds.

²⁰ In one part of the southern profile of square A5, the thin layer of mortar is interrupted by an iron pipe (probably a pipe from the canalization).

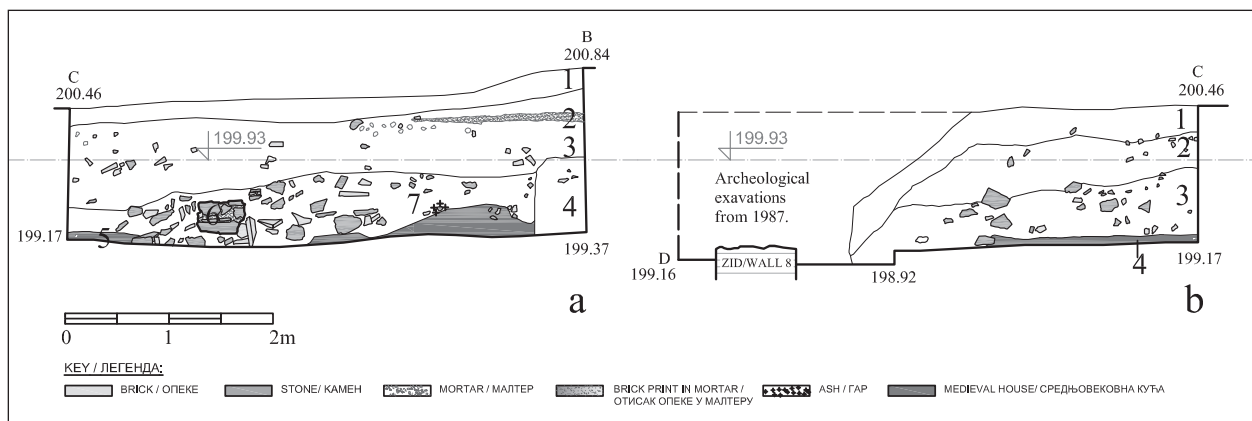


Fig. 5. Sector 1, square A5: a) eastern profile; b) northern profile (Igor Bijelić)

Сл. 5. Сектор 1, квадрата А5: а) источни профил; б) северни профил (Игор Бјелић)

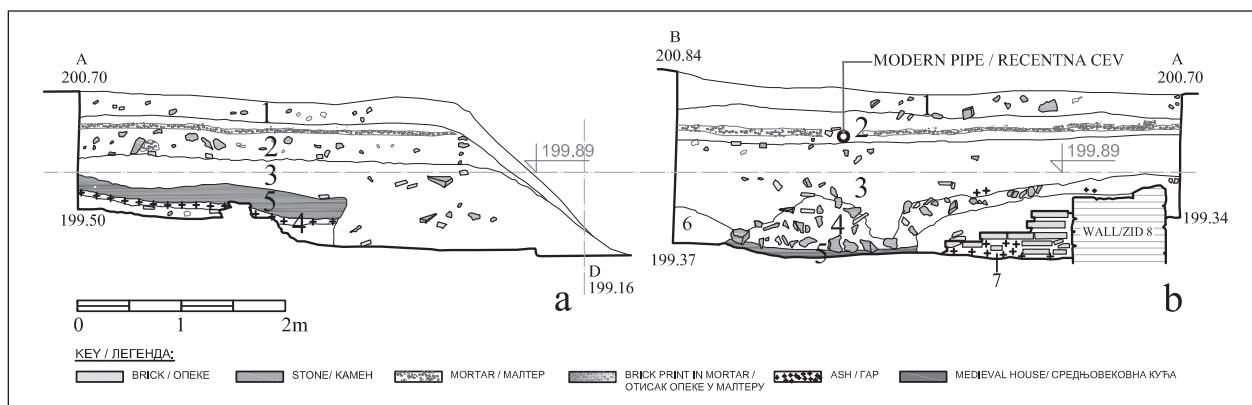


Fig. 6. Sector 1, square A5: a) western profile; b) southern profile (Igor Bijelić)

Сл. 6. Сектор 1, квадрата А5: а) западни профил; б) јужни профил (Игор Бјелић)



Fig. 7, 8. Sector 1, square A5 – eastern profile (prospect from the west) and southern profile (prospect from the north) (Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

Сл. 7, 8. Сектор 1, квадрата А5 – источни профил (поглед са запада) и јужни профил (поглед са севера) (документација: Археолошки институт Београд)

previous layer, in the southern profile of square A5. In the eastern profile, a thin layer of grey loose soil can be recognised, which appears as previous digging from an earlier period in the southern profile on an elevation between 199.54 and 199.14. Layer E is not visible in the northern profile of square A5, while in

the western profile of the square, traces of burning were confirmed.

The discovered archaeological material from square A1 contained numerous fragments of ceramics from the Middle Ages (cooking pots),²¹ fragments of glass vessels (receptacles, upper edges, foot), window

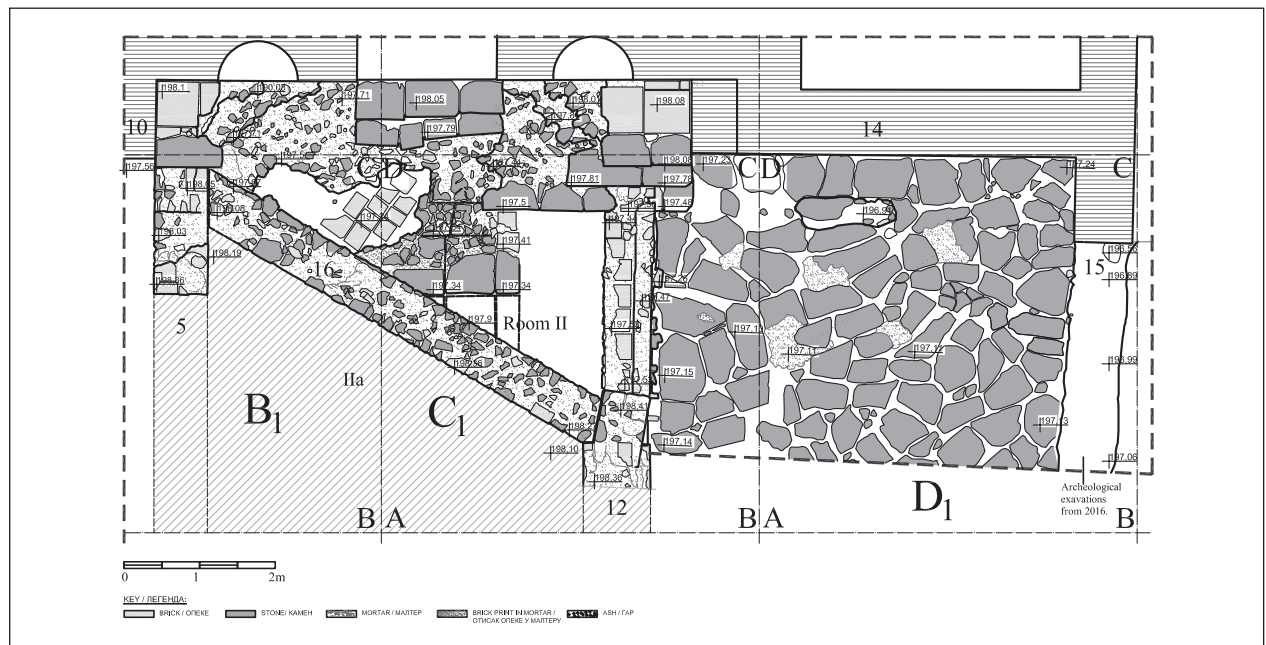


Fig. 9. Sector 2, squares B1, C1 and D1, layout (Igor Bijelić)

Сл. 9. Сектор 2, квадрати B1, C1, D1, план (Игор Бјелић)



Fig. 10. Sector 2, squares C1 and D1; northern part of room VIII:

a) layout of the floor of green stone slabs of irregular shape; b) room VIII from the south (Igor Bijelić)

Fig. 11. Sector 2, square C1, prospect from the south (Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

Сл. 10. Сектор 2, квадрати C1, D1; северни део просторије VIII:

a) план пода од зелених камених плоча неправилног облика; b) просторија VIII, поглед са југа (Игор Бјелић)

Сл. 11. Сектор 2, квадрат C1, поглед са југа (документација: Археолошки институт Београд)

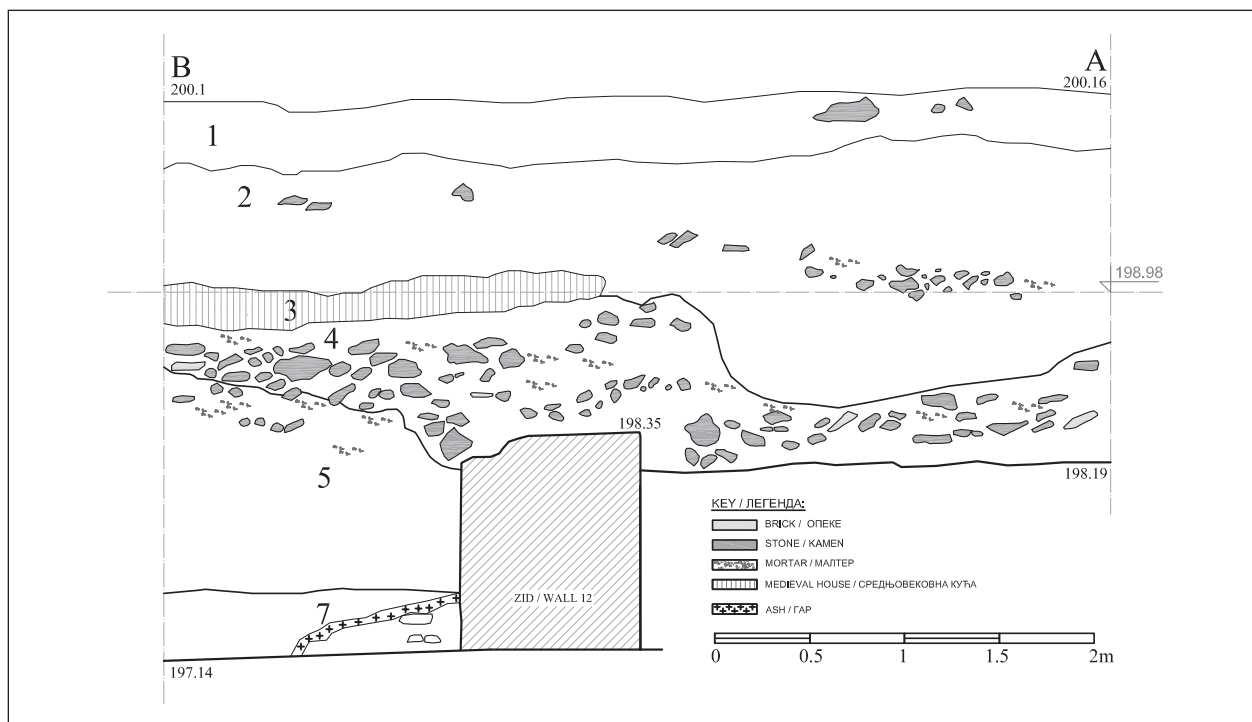


Fig. 12. Sector 2, square C1, southern profile (Igor Bijelić)

Сл. 12. Сектор 2, квадрат C1, јужни профил (Игор Бјелић)

glass and animal bones. In the eastern part of square A5, in layer E, two ceramic discs perforated in the centre were found, representing two fragments belonging to two different bone combs.

Sector 2 comprised the area of squares B1, C1 and D1 (square C1 continued with its eastern side on the sondage from the 2016 excavations).²² The angles of squares C1 and D1 are right next to the southern wall of the octagonal room (Fig. 9–11).²³ Because of the stratigraphic situation and the fact that the excavations were carried out only in the south-western half from the southern entrance of the octagonal room (looking towards north), the division of the eastern and western half of the southern profile of square C1 facilitated the following stratigraphic layers in the mentioned area (Fig. 12). Southern profile, eastern half: first layer (layer A) is formed of humus with vegetation; relative thickness is around 0.35 m, with the lower border at an elevation of 199.73. The second layer (layer B) is dark grey soil with small fragments of bricks, stone and lumps of mortar. The relative thickness of this layer is 0.60 m. The third layer (layer C) is dark grey compact soil, probably representing the layer of nivelation, with the lower border at an elevation of 198.93. The

fourth layer (layer D) is a layer of intensively loose rubble, consisting of plaster rubble with large and small fragments of stones and bricks with traces of plaster (lower border at an elevation of 198.70). The fifth layer (layer E) is dark grey intensively loose soil, with stones, bricks and lumps of mortar. In this layer, the crown of the wall (oriented N–S) was discovered at an elevation of 198.34. The lower border of layer E is at an elevation of 197.39 where a thin layer of burning (3–5 cm thick) is visible. The sixth layer (layer D) is light brown compact soil, around 0.25 m thick, above the level of the floor made of stone slabs (lower border of this layer is at an elevation of 197.15). Traces of intensive burning

²¹ The authors would like to express their sincere thanks to Dr Vesna Bikić for kindness in offering her preliminary remarks about the ceramic finds from Sectors 1 and 2 of the building with octagon, which will be elaborated on Dr Bikić's analysis in near future.

²² The northern side of square C1 is situated right before the southern entrance to the octagonal room of the building and was excavated in 1988.

²³ Angle B of square C1 is situated right above the floor of the building, as a result of the landslide of the western profile of sondage 1 from the 2016 excavations.



Fig. 13. Sector 2, square C1, eastern part of the southern profile, prospect from the north (Documentation Institute of Archaeology Belgrade)

Сл. 13. Сектор 2, квадрати C1, источни део јужног профила, поглед са севера (документација: Археолошки институт Београд)

in the soil and small lumps of burnt soil were found lying on the stone slab floor (Fig. 13).

As has already been mentioned, sector 2 also comprised the area of square D1, which was included in the 2016 excavations, but not its corner (on the conjunction of the eastern and southern wall of the octagonal building). The area excavated in this year's excavations in square D is 0.7 x 0.5 m (the 0.7 m side is oriented E–W), and the approx. thickness of the excavated layer is between 0.3 and 0.5 m.²⁴ This layer, known in the 2016 excavations as level b, is a layer of dark loose soil, with an intensive concentration of smaller fragments of bricks and roof tiles *imbrices*. As during the excavations in 2016, many fragments of

roof demolition (*tegulae*, *imbrices*, bricks, traces of burning) were discovered. Layer B lies directly on the stone slab floor of the building, which would confirm the demolition of the building in a fire.

In the excavations carried out in square B1, west of the southern entrance of the octagonal room (towards the southern profile of the investigated squares), the crown and lateral sides of the wall built in the *opus mixtum* technique were cleaned and it was discovered that during the building of the wall, mortars of different structure and colour were used (mortar of white-grey colour and mortar of reddish colour with smaller pebbles).

Architecture

As was already mentioned, the building with octagon is situated *intra muros* of the northern wall of the Turkish fortress, on the site known as „Gradsko polje” (Fig. 1).²⁵ The object is of a longitudinal plan, oriented with its longer side towards north, with minor deviations to the east. The northern part of the building has been completely researched (Fig. 2). It is of a complex ground plan, with outer dimensions of 19.20 x 11.5 m. It is formed of five rooms, with a central room of octagonal shape (each side of the octagon wall is 3 m long), inscribed in a square with outer dimensions of 9.2 x 9.20 m. Four minor square rooms were symmetrically situated – two rooms on the west side (III and IV) and two rooms on the east side (V and VI).

The inner dimensions of these smaller rooms are from 4.10 to 4.30 m. Communication between the rooms was facilitated by two entrances from the central octagonal room (I) and with entrances between rooms III and IV on the west side and rooms V and VI on the east side. In the central room (I), at a height of between 1 and 1.20 m, on the north-western, north-eastern and south-eastern wall, semicircular niches were discovered, around 1.35 m wide, 0.66 to 0.98 m deep and 0.70 m high. Another niche of similar or the same dimensions is presumed on the south-western wall, in the place where the object was mostly devastated. The floors in the rooms were covered with mosaic carpets with geometric motives.²⁶ The interior of all rooms

²⁴ This layer was, during the 2016 sondage excavations, marked as level b.

²⁵ Petrović 1993, 68–69; Petrović 1994, 19–20; Petrović 1995, 231–232; Gušić 1993, 167–168.

²⁶ Јеремић 2007, 87–97.

contained traces of fresco-painting. Under the room floors, hypocaust pillars were discovered and on the eastern side of the object, in room VI, wall heating was also confirmed.

The building has not been excavated in its southern part. Partial excavations were conducted on the area just in front of the monumental entrance to room I and on the western wall of the building (8) (Fig. 4, 9). The existence of two more rooms, south and south-east of the main entrance of the northern part of the building, is presumed. Room II was south of the entrance to the octagonal room and only its width (5.17 to 5.20 m) is known, with the western wall (5) and eastern wall (12) as its boundaries. According to archaeological documentation from 1987–1988, wall numbers 5 and 12 were made from bricks and were built in the second building phase, being of unequal thickness (the western wall is 0.75 m thick, and the eastern wall is 1.20 m thick). On an elevation of 197.50 m in front of the steps, a mortar floor is confirmed, which is 0.73 m lower than the floors of rooms I, III and IV. A wall (no. 16), oriented northwest-southeast, and 0.65 m thick, was discovered in room II. The area between walls 12, 14 and 15 is marked as room VIII, partly defined by the excavations from 2016. The existence of a floor made of stone slabs of irregular shape was discovered in it and on the western wall (15) there was a passage whose size is not known in detail, because it goes into the southern profile of the excavated area. It was concluded that the conserved part of wall no. 15 represents a northern jamb.²⁷

On the western part of the building, in the narrow excavation, a western wall (no. 8) was discovered, with a length of around 31.5 m. Two entrances were confirmed in it; the first entrance was situated 1.70 m south of the wall no. 10 of room IV and was walled up with large pebbles (Fig. 2). The second, more monumental entrance was discovered at 28.5 m, is 2.76 m wide and has a stone step made of two large profiled stone blocks.

In the rubble on the elevation of the stone blocks, numerous fragments of fresco mortar with traces of colour, destroyed by a fire were found. On the opposite, eastern side, there is another wall which, at approximately 4 m in length, forms a corridor (Fig. 4).²⁸

Based on the results of 1987–1988 excavations, it was presumed that the southern part of the building was resolved in the form of the approach corridor, divided by columns on three naves.²⁹ With the discovery of a coin of Maximinus Daia, it was presumed that the

building with octagon was built in the first decade of the 4th century.³⁰

The results of the archaeological research carried out in 2018, although of a modest range, contributed considerably to our knowledge of the building with octagon at the locality of „Gradsko polje” and raised new questions in connection with its architecture.

Room II (Sector 2 – parts of squares B1 and C1) (Fig. 9–11)

Room II is in front of the entrance to the central, octagonal area of the building. On this elevation of the excavations, its width has been determined (5.20 m), with walls on the east (wall no. 12), west (wall no. 5) and the wall of the octagonal room. A diagonally placed wall (no. 16), oriented northwest – southeast, post-dates the room. The area between wall no. 16 and the southern profile has not yet been defined. On the discovered part of the room, different building techniques building materials can be observed.

The eastern wall (no. 12), oriented north – south, directed toward the northern part of the building, was cleared to a length of 4 m (Fig. 9, 14, 15). It is situated east of the main entrance to the octagon, between rooms II and VIII. The southern part of the wall goes in the profile and functions as a part of a column (or wall?) 0.90 m thick, supporting a structure above. It was built with bricks (0.05 m), placed in horizontal lines, in limestone mortar 0.03 m thick. A wall 0.60 m thick, discovered in a length of 3.40 m, is leant on the column.

On the southern part, the preserved part of the wall represents a jamb of dimensions 0.65 x 0.60 m, with a preserved height of 1.30 m. The southern jamb is also built from bricks (0.43 x 0.34 x 0.05 m), using a thick layer of white-grey mortar (0.05 m) with the addition of coarse gravel. At its highest preserved part, it was built with an alternation of stone and brick and is quite damaged in its lower, southern part. The jamb is leant on the column up to 1 m, from which point the building continues. The northern part of the wall is preserved on the elevation of the entrance's doorstep and

²⁷ This part of the building was marked as room VIII in the excavations from 1987–1988. (Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade, diary of archaeological excavations for 1988). Compare Jeremić, Petrović 2016, 86, Fig. 1.

²⁸ Gušić 1993, 167–168 and Fig. 90.

²⁹ Petrović 1995, 234, 242, Fig. 1.

³⁰ See page 4 in this paper, Јеремих 2007, 95.

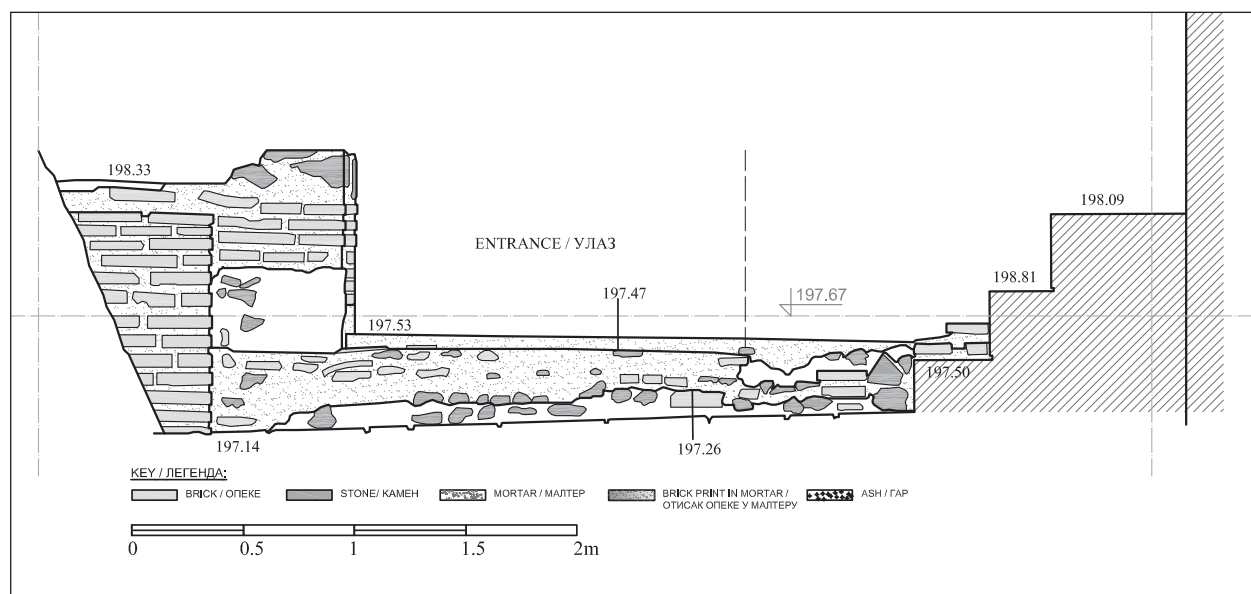


Fig. 14. Sector 2, square C, eastern wall no. 12 (*Иџор Бјелућ*)

Сл. 14. Сектор 2, квадрант С, источни зид бр. 12 (*Иџор Бјелућ*)

can be followed to the second step of the eastern postament on the entrance to the octagonal room I. In this part the wall is built from bricks and stone, bound together with white-grey mortar. It was built on the floor of green stone slabs in room VIII. Between the wall and stone floor, a substruction made from pebbles and brick fragments, with mortar poured on it can be seen extending beyond the line of the wall's face. According to the photo documentation from 1988 and 2007, it can be seen that the northern part of the wall was preserved in the upper level, and it went over the step of the postament and was leaning on the southern wall of the octagon, partly closing the eastern entrance niche (Fig. 2, 16).³¹ It can be observed in the photographs that wall no. 12 is not leant directly on the south-western corner of room VI, but that it is moved towards the west by about 0.50 m and that the described area was also filled with bricks, leading researchers to assume that the wall was 1.20 m thick.³²

The 1.80 m wide passage can be clearly seen on the wall. The doorstep of the entrance is built on two levels with an overall width of 0.62 m (Fig. 9, 17). The difference in the heights of the lower, eastern level and higher, western level of the doorstep is 0.06 m. The higher, western level of the doorstep (0.42 m) is built from large brick fragments (0.30 x 0.30 m), arranged in two lines and bonded with reddish mortar with gravel.

On the eastern face of the wall, a thin layer of reddish mortar coating is preserved, which clearly implies the size of the entrance.

The eastern wall (no. 5) is situated in the north-western corner of rooms I and IV and goes over the approach staircase of the western postament of the access construction. The crown of the wall to a length of 1.70 m (Fig. 9) was discovered. Judging by the look of the building, the eastern wall no. 5 is built in the same way as the eastern wall no. 12 of room II.

The northern excavated part of room II represents the approach staircase with lateral postaments, situated between the walls of the eastern and western rooms (overhang, *risalto*), with a length of around 7 m. The main entrance to the northern part of the building is set in the axis of the southern wall of the octagonal room I. Two stone steps were preserved in the width of the entrance (0.90 m). The first, lower step, 0.30 m wide, was built from four large stone blocks of irregular size. The other, higher step was built from three large blocks with a tread width of around 0.50 m. The height of the tread

³¹ We would like to express our gratitude to Dr Igor Bjelić for the photograph.

³² With the conservations works in 2012, the upper layers of the wall nos. 12 and 5 were removed.



*Fig. 15. Sector 2, square C, eastern wall no. 12, prospect from the east (from room VIII)
(Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)*

*Fig. 17. Sector 2, square C1, entrance and doorstep on wall no. 12, prospect from the north
(Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)*

*Сл. 15. Сектор 2, квадрант С, источни зид бр. 12, поглед са истока (из просторије VIII)
(документација: Археолошки институт Београд)*

*Сл. 17. Сектор 2, квадрант С1, улаз и сипењеник на зиду бр. 12, поглед са севера
(документација: Археолошки институт Београд)*



Fig. 16. Building with octagon, object in 2007 (photographic documentation of Igor Bijelić)

Сл. 16. Грађевина са октогоном, сјање објекта 2007. године (Игор Бјелић)

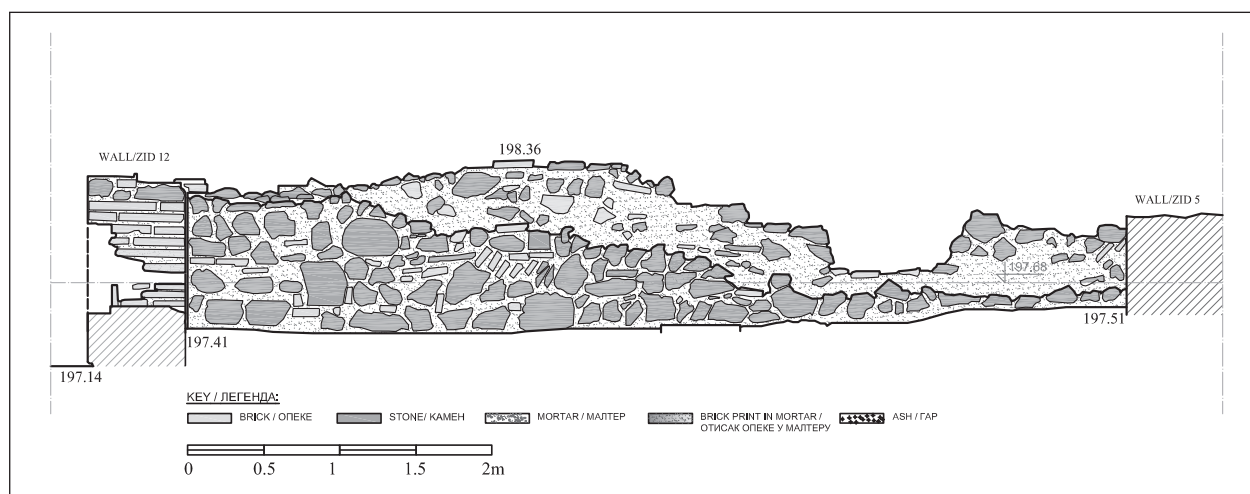


Fig. 18. Sector 2, square C1, north-eastern prospect of wall no. 16 (Igor Bijelić)

Сл. 18. Сектор 2, квадрант C1, поглед са североисточа на зид бр. 16 (Игор Бјелић)

between these two steps was 0.30 m. The level of the doorstep was damaged and preserved only in negative. It can be presumed that it was slightly higher than the elevation of the higher step (Fig. 9).

Postaments of 2.60 m length (oriented east-west), 1.12 m width and 0.70 height, were formed on the lateral sides of the staircase (measured in relation to the floor of stone slabs in room II). Two steps of total tread width 0.60 m and of total height 0.60 m lead towards the postaments. The approach to the eastern postament is better preserved. The first, lower step is preserved to a length of 2.80 m, while the other, higher step is preserved to a length of 1.65 m. Stone blocks of similar dimensions to the blocks used for the staircase of the main entrance were used for the building of the postaments and the approach. The character, building technique and used building material implies that the staircase with the postaments was built at the same time. The finishing parts of the postaments and step tread were built from larger stone blocks, while the substruction of broken stones and bricks mixed with mortar to which rubble was added (Fig. 9).

The north-eastern and north-western angles of the postaments were built with bricks *bipedalis* (0.58 x 62 m). Two semicircular niches of similar construction and dimensions to the niches in the central room I were built in the walls above the postaments.

In front of the main entrance, a floor made of square, regular set, limestone slabs was discovered (Fig. 9). A few slabs were preserved in their entirety (0.65 x 0.75 m),

along with many damaged, broken slabs of different sizes (0.65 x 0.45 m; 0.30 x 0.60 m).

The preserved parts of the slabs (0.50 x 0.50 m) go under the construction of the main approach staircase. East of the stone slab floor, towards the wall no. 12, with a total width of around 1.50 m (?) and on the same elevation, the remains of the mosaic carpet were discovered (Fig 2, 9). In the middle northern part of the room (1.20 x 0.80 m), a brick floor was confirmed (0.28 x 0.40 m), oriented northeast-southwest. Some fragments of the floor were ornamented without deviation. The elevation of this floor is slightly lower than the elevation of the stone slab floor.

In the middle part of the excavation, a crown and the north-eastern face of the wall no. 16 (Fig. 18) were discovered. The wall, oriented northwest-southeast, was set diagonally in room II. It was leant on partition wall nos. 5 and 12. Their total length is 5.87 m and width 0.67 m. The crown of the wall is not equally preserved: near wall no. 12 it is around 0.90 m, while on the north-eastern end, near wall no. 5 it is around 0.50 m. The discovered face of the wall was built from broken and cut stone, laid in relatively regular horizontal lines, in a mortar of poor quality and of grey-whitish colour, with added large gravel. On some parts, as an equalizing layer, bricks set in horizontal or slanted rows were used. The interior of the wall was filled with broken stones of different sizes and with brick fragments bonded with mortar of white-grey colour, with added coarse stone and gravel.

Room VIII (Sector 2 – parts of the squares C1 and D1) (Fig. 9, 10)

Room VIII (5.50 m in a west-east direction) is situated east of room II and south of room VI. Its southern part goes under the archaeological profile, so for now its exact size is not known in the north-south direction. The level with green stone slabs is mostly excavated, while in 2016 it was uncovered again and cleaned.³³

In 2018, the excavations of the cultural layers towards the southern profile and wall no. 12 were continued. The floor slabs are cut from large pieces of green stone slabs, irregularly shaped and with a smooth surface. The floor slabs are bonded by mortar joints (white-gray mortar), with aggregates of small stones and gravel. On one slab a layer of mortar is preserved. In the middle of the northern part of the floor, where one of the slabs was forcibly moved, it was confirmed that the slabs were set on a mortar layer (10–15 cm), which comprised stone fragments and gravel.

Building material, construction and the chronology of the building in the Sector 2

The method of building the walls and floors in rooms II and VIII confirms the characteristics of the building documented in previous excavation seasons of the building with octagon, in which different techniques of building with stone and bricks have been recorded. Broken and cut stone with a combination of bricks in the techniques of *opus vitatum* or *opus mixtum* was used. For the construction of jambs, niches and the outer angles of the building, just bricks (*opus latericium*) of different sizes³⁴ were used, with a thin or thick layer of mortar joints. On certain parts of wall no. 12, on the uncovered part of the column and eastern face of the doorstep, areas of smooth plastering are preserved as a layer of thin reddish mortar.

Although the excavated area in Sector 2 was limited, certain presumptions about the building chronology can be made.

Preserved elevations of steps, postaments and floors imply the exact order of building (Fig. 9). The floor of bricks represents the lowest elevation in room II and goes under the staircase construction that is up to the edge of the first lower step. It can be considered as the first and oldest building phase. The floor made of large green stone slabs in room VIII and part of the column (or wall) in the southern profile of the excavation belong to the same building horizon. In the second, chronologically younger, building phase, a floor of stone slabs set

in regular rows was put over a brick floor and to this building horizon the mosaic from the eastern part of room II could also belong. This floor of slabs also goes under the construction of the entrance staircase. The mortar layer preserved on one of the green stone slabs in room VIII implies that a higher quality floor could have been put in this room. The brick floors in room II and the floor of green slabs in room VIII could belong to the oldest building layer but also could be a sub-phase in the setting of the decorative floor from stone and mosaic in these rooms.³⁵

The determining of the building phases of the main entrance with postaments is still a matter for debate. The method of setting of stone blocks and negation of existing floors imply the reconstruction of the entrance part which was done in the same time. The construction of the approach staircase and postaments covers and negates a part of the brick and stone floors in front of the entrance to the octagonal room, clearly implying that the reconstruction of the entrance part started when the floor in room II was already finished or at least started to be set. Therefore, it could be presumed that the older entrance was of a more modest appearance and that it did not meet the standards of the user or owner of the building. As a result, during this reconstruction, particular attention was directed towards achieving a representative entrance to the northern part of the building with octagon. The entrance space is emphasised with the setting of the main staircase, with two symmetrically set or reconstructed postaments, joined together with a stone step with a total width of 7 m. Two steps, which are set symmetrically, facilitate the approach to the postaments. A differently performed denivelation between the main staircase and the approach to the built postaments, emphasises the entrance to the octagon (Fig. 19). Semicircular niches where statues were put also emphasised the general impression and indicated the interior decoration of the main octagonal room.

³³ Due to the lack of time and finances, the entrance on the eastern wall no. 15 of room VIII was not cleaned during the archaeological excavations in 2018.

³⁴ 0.30 x 0.30 x 0,04–0,05 m; 0.65 x 0,45 x 0,05–0,06 m; 0.65 x 0,75 x 0,05–0,06 m; 0.30 x 0,60 x 0,05–0,06 m; 0,48 x 0,28 x 0,04 m; 0.28 x 0.40 m.

³⁵ The analogy can be observed in the floors from bricks and mortar in Constantine's villa at Mediana, in the rooms where the finishing setting of mosaics or marble slabs on the floors wasn't finished.

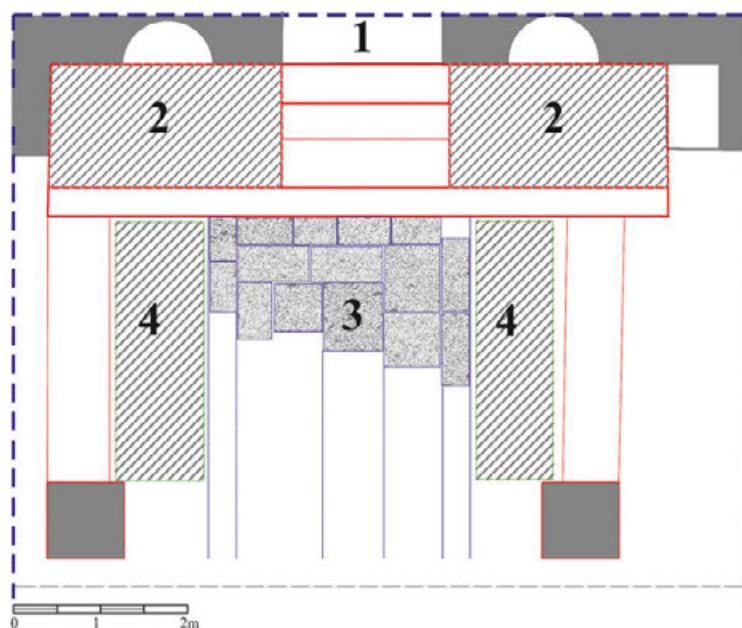


Fig. 19. Sector 2, squares B1, C1, D1, reconstruction of the access road
 1) The entrance to the octagonal room;
 2) Postament; 3) Stone slab floor;
 4) Mosaic (G. Milošević Jevtić)

Сл. 19. Сектор 2, квадрати B1, C1, D1, реконструкција прилазног пута:
 1) улаз у октогоналну просторију;
 2) постоамент; 3) под од камених плоча;
 4) мозаик (Г. Милошевић Јевтић)

Important changes in the appearance of the building and the frontage of the south façade were made by building wall nos. 5 and 12 in room II. The walls were leant on the southern wall of the octagon and they do not fit with the appearance of the frontage of the approach and the construction of the platform, suggesting they are from a later building phase. Because of the lack of documentation from the first archaeological excavations, it is not possible to determine in which way the connection between the niche on the eastern side of the entrance and wall no. 12 was made.

The construction of the diagonally set wall no. 16 and the making of a new, triangle shaped foyer in front of the octagonal room belong to the youngest building phase in room II. The communication between the octagon, foyer and other southern rooms was possible only through the entrance on partition wall no. 12, which existed in this phase of the use of the building.³⁶

The relatively insignificant extent of the archaeological excavations conducted in this area, which has been excavated several times makes any conclusion about the precise dating of the separate building interventions on the building in rooms II and VIII, quite difficult. On the basis of the archaeological material, architecture and the clear connection of the building techniques with the found coinage of the 4th century in the wall of the octagon, it could be presumed that the first three building phases (brick floors and floors from green stone slabs; floors from properly set square slabs,

the floor in the mosaic in rooms II and VIII and the monumental entrance with postaments and the frontage on the southern wall of the octagonal room) can be dated in the period of the building activities of emperors Licinius and Constantine the Great in Naissus.³⁷

As was already mentioned, with the building of the wall nos. 5 and 12, the appearance of the frontage of the northern rooms of the building changed, but not their function. Without more significant excavations and a more detailed analysis of the archaeological material, the question of whether these building interventions can be ascribed to the period of Constantine's heirs or the period of Justinian's reconstruction of the buildings in Naissus and its surroundings remains open. The question relating to the building of wall no. 16 in room II and the connection with the hypothesis of previous research regarding the existence of the workshop for the processing of leather and wool also, for now, remains open.³⁸

³⁶ It is not possible, without access to the complete documentation from the archaeological excavations in 1987–1988, to determine whether the level of the mortar floor mentioned in the diary of archaeological research also belongs to this building phase.

³⁷ Мирковић 1974, 139–150; Vasić 2000, 245–251; Vasić 2008, 9–23.

³⁸ The report from the archaeological excavations in “Gradsko polje” for 1987 and 1988 (Petrović, Čerškov), Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade.

³⁹ See pages 3–4 in this paper.

**Remains of the house from the Middle Ages
(Sector 1, square A5)** (Fig. 20–21)

Archaeological excavations conducted in square A5 confirmed the assumption of previous research regarding the size of the southern part of the building with octagon. Over the total length of the square, at a distance of 0.15 m from the western profile, the continuation of the western wall of the building (wall no. 8) was discovered, which was partly excavated in 1987–1988. Wall no. 8, 0.80 m thick, was discovered in the western part of square A5, with a length of 5 m. The southern part of the wall was built from large stones, and broken stones with limestone mortar over them, in the technique of *opus incertum*. The core of the wall was filled with small stone and brick fragments, and again with

limestone mortar. On the eastern part of the wall traces of coarse plastering are preserved. On the northern part of the square, on the wall, a change in the method of building can be observed. Only bricks of different size are used (*opus latericum*), bonded with limestone mortar (0.04 m) (Fig. 22). The similar conditions and the building technique on the walls of the northern rooms of the building with octagon allow us to presume that it could be a jamb of a monumental entrance documented in earlier research.³⁹

In the southern part of the excavation, beside wall no. 8, a construction made of bricks, oriented west-east (length 1.20 m), was leant on it. The construction consisted of four rows of bricks (height around 0.50 m) (Figs. 6b, 8, 20). The first, lowest line is made of four

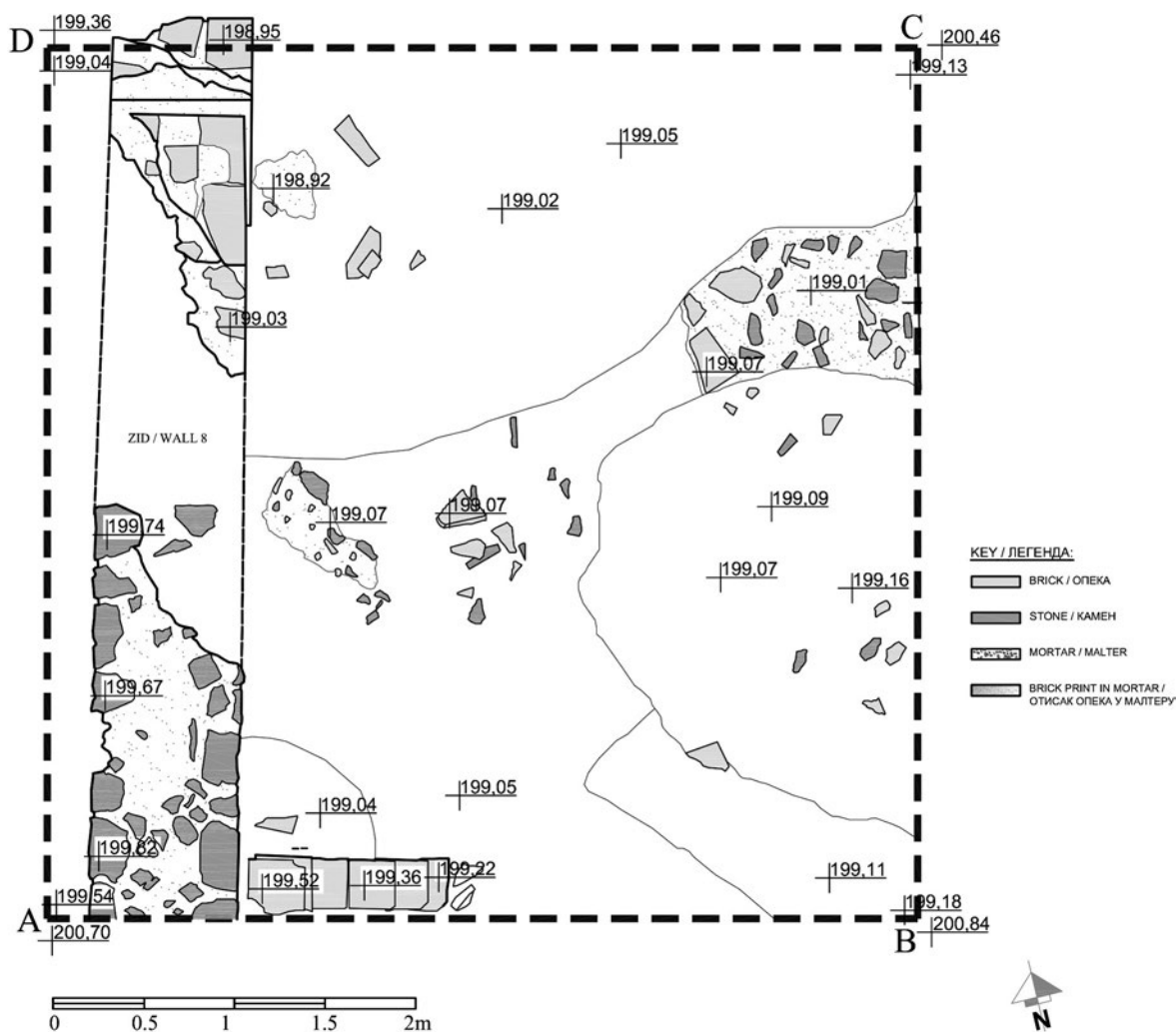


Fig. 20. Sector 2, square A5, layout on the level of the house from the middle age period (Igor Bijelić)

Сл. 20. Сектор 2, квадрант А5, план на нивоу средњовековних кућа (Игор Бјелић)

bricks, while the two upper lines of the construction have only one brick. In the corner that is bordered by wall no. 8 and the construction from bricks, a furnace (fireplace) was discovered. In the eastern part of the excavation, 3.80 m from wall no. 8, part of a wall built of broken stone can be observed.

Archaeological excavations in square A5 stopped in 2018 on a level of reddish-yellowish compact soil, which is the level of the house floor (Fig. 20–21). The house has not been discovered entirely yet, particularly its northern part. However, based on the stratigraphic situation in square 5, it can be assumed that the house was oriented north-south on its longer side and that its dimensions follow the orientation of square A4. The eastern part of the house is determined with an antique wall in the eastern profile of the excavation (the size of this part of the house, at 3.80 m in the direction west-east, corresponds with the size of the antique room). The place and construction of the northern wall are not

clearly defined, which leaves the question of whether its northern border is beside the wall oriented west-east to the entrance on the western wall, open (Fig. 3).

The construction of secondarily used antique bricks found on the southern part of the building could have been placed beside the southern wall of the house. There are no traces of digging or burning of the wooden constructions of the walls or roof, which implies that antique walls were used for the planning and building of the house. The layer of antique building rubble from the larger area beside the eastern profile and in the middle of square A 5 (which is certainly from the wall observed in the eastern profile of the excavation) also suggests that which has been previously mentioned. In the period of the construction of the house, the antique walls of the building with octagon were preserved up to a certain height and probably presented a solid support for the roof of the house. Near the eastern profile of the excavation, several frag-



Fig. 21. Sector 2, square A5, layout on the level of the house from the middle age period, from the northwest (Igor Bijelić)

Сл. 21. Сектор 2, квадрант А5, план на нивоу средњовековних кућа, поглед са северозапада (Игор Бјелић)

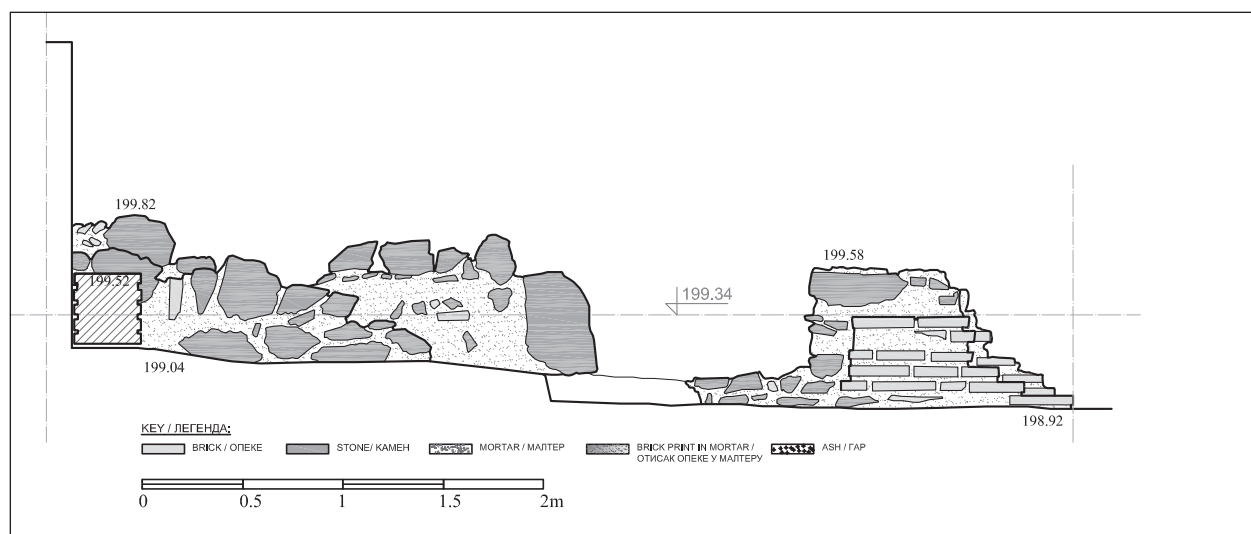


Fig. 22. Sector 2, square A5, eastern prospect of wall no. 8 (Igor Bijelić)

Сл. 22. Сектор 2, квадрант А5, источни изглед зида бр. 8 (Игор Бјелић)

ments of a fine polished clay with which the antique wall was coated, probably during the Middle Ages, were found.

It is very probable that the house in square A5 does not represent the only one on the area of the building with octagon. In the western profile of the square, on the same elevation, a layer of reddish-yellowish compact soil is clearly seen (length of the layer is 2.60 m, from south to north), which certainly indicates the floor of another house (object). Also, on the southern profile, on the same elevation, there is a layer of reddish-yellow compact soil (length of the layer is 2.35 m), which implies yet another house (object).

The house from the Middle Ages on the locality of „Gradsko polje” belongs to the residential settlement layer, from the period of the 11th–12th century, when late antique episcopal centres were reconstructed by Byzantine authorities.⁴⁰ Different privileges given to some of the renovated church and administrative centres characterised those centres as so-called „proto-urban” centres.⁴¹

All the settlements of rural character represented the beginning of the reconstruction of city life in the territory of the Central Balkans after a long period of the ruralisation of the antique centres, which began with the invasions of the Germanic tribes at the end of the 4th century until the complete defeat of the Romans in Northern Illyricum by the Avars and Slavic tribes in the 6th and the 7th century.⁴²

Inside the area bordered with antique walls in Naissus, a new settlement was formed, which can be followed in the middle and south-western part of the later Turkish fortress.⁴³ Although devastated, the antique infrastructure was still visible, but it didn't significantly influence the forming of the settlement by the population to which the techniques of antique building were strange and unknown. The traditional way of building houses from wood was used for a long time in the middle age settlements, and the antique walls, although mostly damaged, were used as parts of wall constructions or represented secondarily used building material.

The origin and functions of octagonal form

Although the excavations of the building with octagon discovered only the northern part of the object,

⁴⁰ Naissus represented a very important Episcopal centre in the Central Balkans from the period of Late Antiquity. In the 9th and 10th century, the area of Niš belonged to Bulgaria, therefore the Niš episcopate belonged to the Bulgarian church. However, at the beginning of the 11th century, the Byzantine Empire ruled the Balkans, so Niš became once more a very important centre, Калић 1984, 6–7.

⁴¹ The beginning of the restoration of city life and the forming of urban centres in the territory of the Central Balkans was archaeologically confirmed in Belgrade, Sirmijum, Niš, Mačvanska Mitrovica, Милошевић 1997, 113, 122–124.

⁴² Роровић 1982, 545–566; Максимовић 1980, 17–57.

⁴³ Милошевић 1997, 65.

some assumptions about its function can be made at this stage of the research. As historians of antique and late antique architecture frequently point out, the octagonal shape was quite fashionable in the architecture of the 4th century. However, the octagonal structure had its history before the 4th century and in that context rooms of that shape had different functions, as can be seen from the 1st century examples of Imperial palaces (like *Domus Aurea*) the *Domus Augustana* on the Palatine in Rome, the palace of Diocletian in Split, the imperial palace in Thessaloniki, baths in Ephesus etc.⁴⁴ From the 1st century to the period of Late Antiquity, octagonal rooms and halls are known to have been parts of *villae*, palaces, buildings of religious context (*baptisteria*, early Christian churches) or *memoriae* and *martyria* (like, for example, the martyrium at Nyssa).⁴⁵ Regarding Nero's *Domus Aurea*, the octagonal court in it was flanked by two of the principal dining rooms and probably had the function of a banquet room.⁴⁶ The closest parallels for Nero's *Domus Aurea* octagonal room are to be found among halls known as „nymphaea”, like for example the Small Nymphaeum of the so-called Villa of Cicero at Formia from the 1st century B. C., but the precedents of the octagonal structure were probably derived from the East, which is suggested by the striking similarities between the octagon of *Domus Aurea* and a hall with additional chambers which belonged to the tomb complex of Souk el-Wardian near Alexandria.⁴⁷

In the period from the 2nd to the 5th century, octagonal rooms became more frequent in baths,⁴⁸ although they had other functions as well: the function of nymphaeum (like in the villa Valdetorres de Jarama near Madrid),⁴⁹ peristyle (like in the Palazzo Pignano⁵⁰ or as a spectacular peristyle from villa of Rabacal in Portugal⁵¹) or dining room, like that from the villa of Desenzano.⁵² Vestibules in the octagonal form are also known, such as the one behind the Hall of the Doric Piers in Tivoli, which led to the Piazza d'Oro.⁵³ Some octagonal spaces were mausolea, like the one in Diocletian's palace at Split (Spalato) or palace churches, as in one at Antioch in Syria.⁵⁴ For some octagonal rooms, their function is still unclear, like for example for the octagon in the Tetrarchic palace at Thessaloniki, where the octagon was situated at the north end of a peristyle and joined via a vestibule. The niches in the octagonal hall at the imperial palace at Thessaloniki could imply the function of a banquet room, but the octagon could have also been a reception room⁵⁵ or even a throne room.⁵⁶ Of course, from the 4th century,

⁴⁴ Brandt 1601.

⁴⁵ In that context, in previous literature about the building with octagon from the site of “City field” in Niš, it was presumed that its architecture could have been inspired by the rooms in late antique *thermae* or mausoleums. In the opinion of P. Petrović, the building with octagon from Niš could have changed its function during this period of time, Петровић 1993, 68–69; St. Gregory of Nyssa described the martyrium at Nyssa as octagonal, Freze 2015, 279.

⁴⁶ The octagonal court (hall) in *Domus Aurea* led to rectangular vaulted rooms on five sides, of which two rooms were principal dining rooms. The room of an octagonal plan in *Domus Aurea* had a concrete dome, probably originally covered in glass mosaic, and was top-lit through a broad oculus in the dome (it had no windows). However, since it opened on five sides to rooms which were lit from above by concealed light wells (around the outer edge of the dome), it had sufficient light. As D. Watkin suggests, the open dome “may have been surmounted by a structure described by Suetonius as “rotunda” and thus, as Suetonius writes, created the effect of revolving constantly and looking “like the heavens”, Watkin 2005, 72–73; Svetonije 1978, 237.31

⁴⁷ The tomb complex of Souk el-Wardian near Alexandria belongs to the underground type of tomb complex, dating to the late 1st century. Although the tomb complex from Souk el-Wardian is of a later date than *Domus Aurea*, its design could reflect earlier domestic architecture present in Alexandria that could predate the type of structure presented in Nero's *Domus Aurea*, Hemsoll 1989, 14–15.

⁴⁸ As O. Brandt writes, octagonal halls are found in the baths of the Heliocaminus in the Villa Adriana at Tivoli (the 2nd century), in the baths of the Olympieion in Athens (the 2nd century), the bath of Butrint in Albania (early 2nd century), the Antoninian baths of Carthage in Tunisia, the Forum baths at Ostia (the 2nd century), the southern baths of Bostra (the 2nd or the 3rd century), the baths of Dchar Jdid, “C” baths in Antiochia (the 3rd century), Diocletian's baths in Rome (298–305/6), the baths of Maxentius on the Palatine in Rome (306–312), the baths of Constantine (315), the baths of Piazza Armerina in Sicily (320–340), the northeastern baths of Bulla Regia (maybe the 4th century) and the baths of Toprak-en Naroidja from the 5th century, Brandt 2011, 1601.

⁴⁹ A very famous villa when considering the topic of Late Antiquity statuary, the villa in Valdetorres de Jarama was built in the late 4th century and had an octagonal structure with four apses, because of which it is presumed that it belonged to a bath or *nymphaeum*, Stirling 2005, 179.

⁵⁰ The northern Italian villa, Palazzo Pignano was built in the 4th century and occupied throughout the 5th century. Besides having a basilical reception room and polychromatic mosaics (like the building with octagon in Niš), it had an octagonal peristyle, Stirling 2005, 177.

⁵¹ The villa of Rabacal in Portugal was built in the 4th century, in the period of the Tetrarchy when building activity was booming in the area of Conimbriga, Kulikowski 2011, 132.

⁵² The villa of Desenzano, near Milan, was built in the 2nd century but was renovated in the early 4th century. The octagonal room in the villa was near the garden and was probably part of a dining complex, Stirling 2005, 177.

⁵³ Coarelli 2014, 486.

⁵⁴ Armstrong 1974, 12–13.

⁵⁵ Mayer 2014, 115.

many baptisteries in Italy, Southern France and the East, were of an octagonal structure.⁵⁷

However, in the context of the analogies with the building with octagon from the locality of „City field” in Niš, the villa Valdetorres de Jarama in Spain dated to the late 4th century should be mentioned. The villa is known not only as a unique villa in Spain for its octagonal form, but it is also famous for its numerous finds of late antique statuary.

In the central octagonal room of the villa, pieces of carved ivory panels were found, dating to the late 4th or early 5th century and analogous to the find from the building with octagon from the locality of „City field” in Niš, where a large number (210 pieces) of decorative fragments made from red deer antler cortex, was found.⁵⁸ It is presumed that ivory panels from the villa Valdetorres de Jarama, which are stylistically similar to the fragments (particularly those with abstract decorations) from the building with octagon in Niš, decorated some furniture piece or chests.⁵⁹ It is interesting that both ivory and red deer antler finds were discovered in the central octagonal rooms of the buildings, where they probably decorated some luxury piece of furniture, thus emphasising (beside other architectural elements like niches with monumental statues and mosaics) the grandeur of the centrally positioned octagonal room.

Bulgarian researchers consider that a large number of public buildings in Serdica were reserved for members of the imperial family and that they were used as residences of the emperors Galerius and Constantine. The octagonal form was quite popular (for example St. George’s octagonal atrium with apse, and the smaller *balneum* with octagonal caldarium etc.), as part of public and private buildings.⁶⁰

A close analogy can be also found in an octagonal building discovered during archaeological excavations in locality 85 in Sirmium in 2014 and 2015. The building of sacral function, where around 50 fragments of porphyry sculptures were discovered,⁶¹ was actually a building of a complex construction, actually a hexadecagon (with 16 sides), massive walls (1.80 m wide), firmly rooted column bases and a diameter of exactly 80 Roman feet.⁶² Its building chronology (the beginning of the building of the object is defined by coins of Maximian Herculus, from 301 and the last building phase is defined by coins of Valentinian, 367–375)⁶³ and its monumentality represent a close analogy to the building with octagon from the locality of Gradsko polje in Niš.

The inclination of the builders of the 4th century towards the use of the octagonal form in private rooms of a ceremonial character can also be observed in the organisation of the villa with octagon from the locality of Medijana (Mediana) in Niš. The building was of a complex and rugged plan, with the western part of the octagon having a deep apse to the west. The archaeological context of the villa with octagon at Mediana shows that the users and / or owners of this villa belonged to the upper classes of Roman society and that their need for luxury in decoration was, besides high quality architectural plastics, mosaics and marble sculptures, also expressed in the shaping of the large reception rooms like the one in the shape of an octagon. The building of the villa with octagon at Mediana is directly connected to the organisation of the imperial domain and the Constantine Villa at Mediana⁶⁴

⁵⁶ As M. Vickers points out, the octagon in Tetrarchic palace at Thessaloniki couldn’t be a mausoleum or a church, although both suggestions have been made in the scientific literature. In his opinion, the octagon from imperial palace at Thessaloniki was a secular building of great importance within the palace, perhaps a throne room as its monumental proportions imply, Vickers 1973, 119–120.

⁵⁷ As O. Brandt writes, the earliest known central-plan baptistery is the octagonal hall of the Lateran baptistery, dated to the middle of the 4th century. He suggests that octagonal design may have spread from the Lateran to Milan and North Italy (Ravenna, Albenga, Aquileia) and influenced the architecture of the baptisteries in Constantinople (octagonal baptistery of Haya Sophia, early fifth century) and martyr churches in the East (baptistery of St. John at Ephesus, baptistery of Qal’at Sim’an in North Syria, baptistery of St. Menas, Abu Mina in Egypt, all dated to the 5th century), Brandt 2011, 1592–1593.

⁵⁸ A large quantity of decorative antler fragments with abstract, floral and zoomorphic (fish and birds) ornaments, was found in the centre of the octagonal room, in the layer of ashes and charcoal, right above the mosaic and red burnt soil. The pieces are heavily burnt and it is presumed that they represent decoration of one single object, probably furniture piece like chair or chest. Whether the find was an import or locally manufactured can’t be established with certainty, Čerškov et al. 2016, 104–111.

⁵⁹ The ivory panels found in octagonal room of villa Valdetorres de Jarama were imported from probably Egypt and confirm expensive taste of villa’s owner for imported luxury goods, Stirling 2005, 181–182.

⁶⁰ De Sena 2014, 66 – 72.

⁶¹ Popović 2016, 371–374; Поповић 2017, 49–53.

⁶² We would like to express sincere thankfulness to colleague Dr Stefan Pop-Lazić, for his kindness in informing us in more detail about the octagonal building excavated in 2014 and 2015, in locality 85 in Sirmium.

⁶³ Поповић 2017, 51–53.

⁶⁴ The villa with octagon at Mediana is dated to the 4th century, Milošević, Vasić, Gavrilović 2013, 7–26.

Conclusion

In light of the new archaeological excavations in 2018, the significance of the building with octagon on the site of „Gradsko polje” is confirmed as a very important *topos* in the urban development of antique Niš. It is very probable that at the end of the 3rd, and particularly in the 4th century, Naissus was a large military, commercial and economic centre and that, according to its status, it had public buildings for the needs of the city administration, but also appropriate rooms for the accommodation of emperors and their administration in the city.⁶⁵

The architecture of these buildings was different by its appearance, construction and, particularly, its decoration. In the organisation of the building with octagon at the site of „Gradsko polje” in Niš, the mentioned elements are identified through the combination of the central layout with the octagon to the north and the longitudinal layout on the southern part.

The construction of the central room is projected as an octagon surrounding a square base. In the triangular parts, deep niches were set, which allowed a simpler transition to the roof form of a dome, but also lessened the weight of the walls and gave to the interior layout an indented character. Fresco painting on the walls, mosaics on the floors, architectural plastics and sculptures decorated the rooms of the building with octagon. The lateral rooms with their dimensions exit the central plan with the dome and, in the form of shallow overhangs, which on the northern and southern part of the building give the impression of an indented layout, emphasise the magnificence and splendour of the building's facade.

The central room (I) was the reception hall, while the lateral rooms could have been part of an official area or private rooms. Room II was a part of the yard,

on the western and eastern side of which were situated half-open or closed rooms. A strongly accentuated communication through this yard led to the central octagonal room. The transition between these two different building constructions is emphasised with the representative entrance with two niches and the approach construction with the staircase and built postaments.

The building with octagon was a part of the city district, in the north-western area of the antique city⁶⁶, in which different public buildings were situated, according to the rules and standards of Roman architecture. Besides public baths (*thermae*), which were close to the building with octagon, other public buildings can be expected in its vicinity, mentioned by Vitruvius in his book „On architecture”: „*For persons of high rank, who hold office and magistracies, and whose duty it is serve state, we must provide princely vestibules and broad avenues finished in a majestic manner; further, libraries and basilicas arranged in a similar fashion with magnificence of public structurism because, in such palaces, public deliberations and private trials and judgments are often transacted*”.⁶⁷

Based on the currently discovered monumentality and luxury of the architecture and decoration of the building with octagon in the locality of „City field” in Niš (marble architectural plastics, fresco-painting, mosaics, etc.) and the structure and central location of the octagonal room, which implies the function of that space for some grandeur or celebration,⁶⁸ at this stage of the research of the building with octagon we can conclude that it was probably a public building, belonging to those buildings (complexes) of the highest importance in the period of the Late Antiquity in the Central Balkans' Roman provinces.

Translated by N. Gavrilović Vitas

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⁶⁵ Petrović 1993, 60–62; Vasić 2008, 9–23.

⁶⁶ Милошевић 2005, 157, 158, Сл. 7.

⁶⁷ Vitruvius: *On Architecture*, 1970, Book VI, Cha. V/2, 37, 39.

⁶⁸ Brandt 2011, 1602.

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Резиме: НАДЕЖДА ГАВРИЛОВИЋ ВИТАС, Археолошки институт, Београд

ГОРДАНА Д. МИЛОШЕВИЋ ЈЕВТИЋ, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture

ГРАЂЕВИНА СА ОКТОГОНОМ НА ЛОКАЛИТЕТУ „ГРАДСКО ПОЉЕ” У НИШУ (*NAISSUS*) – НОВА АРХЕОЛОШКА ИСТРАЖИВАЊА

Кључне речи – Грађевина са октогоном, Градско поље у Нишу, касна антика, мозаици, Константин Велики

Прва археолошка ископавања на простору нишке Тврђаве започета су после Другог светског рата, а нов замах добила су током 80-их и 90-их година прошлога века када су и открити делови античког града у централном делу Тврђаве код Арсенала, испред Хамама, уз југозападни бедем и на простору „Градског поља” (делови бедема византијског утврђења са делом улице констатовани су код Цамије, код Јагодинмалске капије и на централном платоу Тврђаве). Поред откривања дела улице са тремовима, улице са делом канализације, објекта под сводовима, базилике, јавних терми и храма бога Асклепија, приликом радова 1987. године на пешачкој стази на простору „Градског поља” (на око 300 м северозападно од централног платоа Тврђаве, између турске Тврђаве и комплекса техничких факултета) откривен је северни део веће античке грађевине (16 м x 31 м по извештају археолога Тонија Чершкова из 1987. године), са централном октогоналном просторијом (октогон уписан у квадратну основу), са чије су се источне и западне стране налазиле по две мање просторије. Грађевина је оријентисана у правцу север–југ и у свим њеним просторијама констатовани су остаци мозаика, фреско-сликарства, архитектонске пластике и подног грејања (у једној просторији су откривени и трагови зидног грејања), док су се у централној октогоналној просторији налазиле и нише за смештај скулптура (у нишама су пронађени трагови црвене боје и беле бордуре, што потврђује да су и оне биле осликане). У централној и северозападној просторији грађевине су констатовани и гробови из средњовековног периода (извештај Тонија Чершкова), као и бројни налази фрагмената керамике, животињских костију, стакла (посуда), већи број коштаних жетона и фрагмената оплате, делови архитектонске пластике и оруђа за обраду коже и вуне. Грађевина са октогоном је опредељена у период Максимиана Даје – на основу налаза новчића у северном зиду просторије III.

После дуже паузе, од скоро 30 година, током 2016. године обављена су археолошка ископавања сондажног типа на простору јужне шарпе ископа из 1987, 1988. и 2012. године (јужно од крајње југоисточне просторије грађевине), која су, на основу геофизичких снимања предузетих 2017. на ширем делу локалитета „Градско поље” ради утврђивања габарита грађевине, године 2018. настављена. С обзиром на ограничена финансијска средства која су добијена, одлучено је да се на основу постављене квадратне мреже у циљу повезивања откривене архитектуре и налаза са новом архитектуром и налазима (квадрати дим. 5 м x 5 м) паралел-

но ископава у два сектора – *сектору 1*, односно простору где је по резултатима геофизичких снимања очекиван крај спољног западног зида грађевине и *сектору 2*, односно простору јужно од улаза у октогоналну просторију грађевине. Ископавања у сектору 1 потврдила су претпоставку ранијих истраживача о величини јужног дела грађевине (квадрат А5 у сектору 1 је отворен јужно од улаза на западном зиду 8), те су ископавања у 2018. години вођена до нивелете византијског слоја (компактна земља црвенкасто-жућкасте боје, заправо слој подница куће из средњег века), у коме је уједно у јужном углу квадрата А5 (уз зид бр. 8) откривено и огњиште (пећ) од опека. Средњовековна кућа није у целости откривена (њен северни крај), али се на основу стратиграфске ситуације може претпоставити да она својим габаритом прати оријентацију квадрата А4, односно распон античких зидова. Кућа у квадрату А5 не представља усамљен случај на простору грађевине са октогоном, јер се и у западном профилу квадрата, као и на јужном профилу на истој нивелети види слој компактне црвенкасто-жуте земље, односно слој подница средњовековних кућа из периода 11–12. века, када су у доба византијске власти обнављани касноантички епископски центри. Претходно речено потврђују и бројни фрагменти средњовековне кухињске керамике локалног порекла.

Ископавања у сектору 2 (квадрати В1, С1 и Д1) настављена су на попличаном простору испред улаза на јужној страни у централну октогоналну просторију у квадратима констатованим и током ранијих истраживања, као и на простору према јужном профилу квадрата Д1 и према квадрату С1. Начин градње зидова и подова у просторијама II (просторија испред улаза у централну октогоналну просторију) и VIII (просторија источно од просторије II и јужно од просторије VI) потврђују карактеристике градње документоване у претходним истраживањима грађевине са октогоном, са различитим техникама зидања каменом и опеком (*opus vitatum* или *opus mixtum*). За конструкцију доврћника, ниша и код спољних углова грађевине користи се искључиво опекa различитих формата (*opus latericium*).

Истраживањима обављеним у 2018. години утврђена је и хронологија градње откривеног дела грађевине са октогоном: најстарији грађевински хоризонт припада периоду градитељске активности царева Лицинија и Константина Великог и тај је хоризонт представљен нивоом пода од опека у просторији II, као и подом од масивних комада каменних плоча зелене боје у просторији VIII и делом ступца у

јужном профилу ископа. У другом грађевинском хоризонту, преко пода од опека положен је под од каменних плоча ређаних у правилним редовима и, можда, мозаик у источном делу просторије II. Слој малтера сачуван на једној од каменних плоча зелене боје у просторији VIII указује на могућу израду завршног квалитетнијег пода у тој просторији. Подови од опека у просторији II и под од масивних каменних плоча зелене боје у просторији VIII могли би бити најстарији грађевински хоризонт, али и само потфаза у постављању декоративног пода од камена и мозаика у тим просторијама. Највеће промене у другој грађевинској фази огледају се у реконструкцији улазног дела у централну октоagonalну просторију, где је највећа пажња градитеља била усмерена ка репрезентативности изгледа улазног pročела у северни део грађевине са октогоном. Улазни простор бива наглашен постављањем главног степеншта са два симетрично постављена или реконструисана зидана постаментна што су међусобно повезана каменним степеником у распону укупне ширине резалита (7 м). Полукружне нише осликане фреско-сликарством и са скулптурама додатно су наглашавале општи утисак монументалности и раскоши грађевине.

У просторији II је током истраживања у 2018. години откривен и зид оријентације СЗ–ЈИ, од крупнијег ломљеног, пригачаног камена, негде и са опеком (унутрашњост зида је израђена од ситнијег и крупнијег ломљеног камена и опеке, са малтером бело-сиве боје који у саставу има крупнији камен и шљунак), у скоро три правилна хоризонтална реда, који својим правцем негира касноантичку архитектуру и свакако припада млађој фази рановизантијског периода. Археолошки материјал у оба сектора што су истраживана у 2018. години састоји се углавном од фрагмената стаклених посуда, архитектонске пластике, животињских костију и бројних фрагмената средњовековне керамике у квадрату А5 и касноантичке и рановизантијске керамике у сектору 2.

Простори октоagonalне форме, у римској архитектури познати од I. века (у функцији свечаних трпезарија, нимфеума, перистила, делова приватних и јавних купатила итд.),

постају нарочито популарни у 4. веку, када је форма октоagonalна, услед симболике коју броју осам приписују хришћански писци, била нарочито омиљена за просторе баптистеријума. Међутим, у случају грађевине са октогоном на локалитету „Градско поље” може се с приличном сигурношћу претпоставити да је централна октоagonalна просторија представљала салу за аудијенцију, у чијим су се троугаоним исечцима постављале дубоке нише које су омогућавале једноставнији прелаз у куполни завршетак, олакшавале тежину зидне масе и унутрашњем уређењу давале разуђен карактер основе. Бочне просторије су могле бити део официјелног амбијента или приватне одаје, а просторија II је представљала део дворишта, на који су са западне и источне стране биле постављене полуотворене или затворене просторије. Прелаз између дворишта и централно надвишене октоagonalне просторије био је наглашен репрезентативним улазом са две нише и прилазном конструкцијом са степенштем и зиданим постаментима. Раскош и монументалност грађевине са октогоном додатно су наглашавали зидови украшени архитектонском пластиком од мермера, фреско-сликарством и мозаицима, који својим мотивима, композицијама и техникама извођења представљају директну аналогију мозаицима из перистила Константинове виле на Медијани. Директну архитектонску аналогију представља и вила са октогоном на Медијани, сложене и разуђене основе у којој доминира западни део октогона са дубоком апсидом на западу (вила је такође била декорисана фреско-сликарством, мозаицима и скулптурама), чија је градња везана за организацију царског домена и Константинове виле на Медијани.

Као луксузан јавни објекат грађевина са октогоном на локалитету „Градско поље” била је део градске четврти смештене у северозападном делу античког утврђеног града, у коме је кореспондирало више зграда јавне намене као што су јавне терме откривене у близини и други објекти који су служили за привремени боравак високих достојанственика, чланова царске породице и царева.