

ZBORNIK INSTITUTA ZA
ARHEOLOGIJU

SERTA INSTITUTI
ARCHAEOLOGICI

KNJIGA
VOLUME 6

SREDNJOVJEKOVNA NASELJA U SVJETLU ARHEOLOŠKIH IZVORA

*MEDIAEVAL SETTLEMENTS IN THE
LIGHT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES*



Zagreb, 2017

SREDNJOVJEKOVNA NASELJA U SVJETLU ARHEOLOŠKIH IZVORA

*Zbornik radova drugog međunarodnog znanstvenog skupa srednjovjekovne arheologije Instituta za arheologiju
Zagreb, 2. – 3. lipnja 2015.*

Zagreb, 2017.

ZBORNİK INSTITUTA ZA ARHEOLOGIJU
SERTA INSTITUTI ARCHAEOLOGICI
KNJIGA / VOLUME 6

IZDAVAČ / PUBLISHER

Institut za arheologiju, Ulica Ljudevita Gaja 32, 10000 Zagreb

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UVODNA RIJEČ

Drugi po redu međunarodni znanstveni skup srednjovjekovne arheologije u organizaciji Instituta za arheologiju održan je u Zagrebu 2. i 3. lipnja 2015. godine pod nazivom *Srednjovjekovna naselja u svjetlu arheoloških izvora*. Cilj je bio prezentacija rezultata novijih sustavnih i zaštitnih arheoloških istraživanja koja su se provodila u sklopu velikih infrastrukturnih projekata Republike Hrvatske u posljednjih desetak godina, ali i okupljanje stručnjaka i znanstvenika koji se bave relevantnim temama vezanim uz srednjovjekovnu nasebinsku arheologiju te međusobna razmjena iskustava i znanja. Skup je održan u Velikoj dvorani Matice hrvatske s cjelodnevnom programom. Ukupno je sudjelovalo 58 sudionika i to 11 inozemnih i 47 domaćih koji su prezentirali 9 inozemnih i 22 domaća izlaganja te 16 postera.

Izlaganja na temu srednjovjekovnih naselja obuhvatila su široki zemljopisni prostor i široko vremensko razdoblje. Kroz dva dana trajanja znanstvenog stupa pružena je jasnija slika o stanju istraženosti srednjovjekovnih naselja, rezultatima i ciljevima na koje su se posljednjih desetak godina usredotočili određeni istraživači i timovi istraživača, kako oni s područja Republike Hrvatske, tako i kolege iz okolnih zemalja: Mađarske, Češke, Srbije i Slovenije. U svim segmentima uočen je veliki pomak u obradama i interpretacijama rezultata istraživanja. Na skupu su doneseni i rezultati starijih istraživanja koja do sada nisu bila objavljena, a prezentirani su i novi pristupi i metodologije u sagledavanju pojedinih mikroregija ili širih područja tijekom srednjovjekovlja.

Kako bi znanstvenoj i stručnoj javnosti, ali i široj zainteresiranoj zajednici omogućili bolji uvid u novija istraživanja ili reinterpretacije starih nalaza, prikupljeni su radovi sa skupa u pisanom obliku, okupljeni u Zborniku koji je pred nama. Ovdje koristim priliku još jednom zahvaliti svim sudionicima skupa te Ministarstvu znanosti, obrazovanja i sporta RH koje je financiralo izdavanje ovog broja Zbornika (*Zbornik Instituta za arheologiju / Serta Instituti Archaeologici 6*). Nadam se da će u jedinstvenoj publikaciji okupljeni radovi o nasebinskim nalazištima biti poticaj kolegama, a posebno mlađim generacijama arheologa, za daljnje bavljenje srednjovjekovnim naseljima i njihovim obradama te da će napretkom novih metoda, posebno interdisciplinarnih i multidisciplinarnih istraživanja, u budućnosti tražiti i pronalaziti nove mogućnosti i nove izazove u tumačenju i interpretacijama srednjovjekovlja.

Tajana Sekelj Ivančan

TO LIVE IN A DITCH: PECULIARITIES OF THE TOPOGRAPHY OF MEDIAEVAL BELGRADE

Preliminary communication / *Prethodno priopćenje*

In the course of the excavations at the Belgrade Fortress, a peculiar settlement zone has been uncovered in the fortified area of the former riverbank. This area was divided into two units – the Western Suburb and the Lower Town – by the rampart and the defensive ditch running alongside it. There were several successive phases of buildings with wattle and daub walls leaning on the rampart, some of them with stone retaining walls, testifying to an intensive secondary use of the ditch, which started after it had lost its original defensive function. That the time-span of this settlement was from 1427 to 1521, i.e. from the period of Hungarian rule in Belgrade, is confirmed by the chronology of the fortification, stratigraphy of cultural layers and small archaeological finds. The article analyses the features and functions of these buildings, and their inventories. Together with the relations of this settlement with the neighbouring spatial and fortified units, the circumstances which could have led to settling this ground by the river, significantly lower than the rest of bank belt, are discussed.

Key words: fifteenth century, Belgrade, defensive ditch, secondary use, settlement, wooden buildings, pottery

The location on the plateau above the confluence of two major rivers, the Sava and the Danube, at the junction of two different geographical units – the flat Carpathian Basin and the hilly Balkans, makes Belgrade remarkable among the towns in its vicinity. The establishment and layout of the settlements and fortifications were certainly dictated by the topography of the terrain, and especially by the hydrological conditions (Popović 2006: 27–31). Yet, at the same time, the relief was modified according to the needs of the town's population, first of all strategic. From an elongated reef dividing the Upper Town into two unequal parts – where in the south-western corner the castle was to be built – the terrain sloped down in three directions; these rocky cliffs were partly cascading, to form small flat spaces. There were no such areas by the river, only a narrow zone (about 50 to 60 meters wide) of a muddy bank. Much as in the case of the settlement layout, natural preconditions, that is great descents in the terrain, influenced the spread, orientation and plans of the buildings as well: most of them cascaded down the slopes (Popović, Bikić 2004: 42–43).

Together with natural accumulation of river-mud, intensive space use led to the correction of the shoreline and widening of this area already in the Antiquity. The scope of the fortifications and the layout and size of spatial units from the Antiquity, Middle and Modern Ages are illustrative of these processes (Popović 2006: 27–31). As regards the enlargement of the settlement area, on this occasion our attention is directed to the bank belt, which in the Mediaeval Period had been developing as a distinct zone. The archaeological data testify to that effect (Popović, Bikić 2004: 23–24, 42–43). Namely, as early as the sixth century some 1.5 m thick cultural layer was formed there, and in the eleventh-twelfth centuries this area was double in size compared to the period before the Roman conquest, that is more than 100 metres wide. Yet, the greatest relief modifications date from the beginning of the fifteenth century. Due to the subsequent occupation of the Upper Town the descent in the terrain was significantly reduced and a rather flat surface was formed, while embanking the Lower Town's fortifications resulted in the formation of the plateau there as well. It was some 250 metres wide in the direction of the north-eastern rampart (Fig. 1).

At that time Belgrade was *seven-peaked*, as its topography and spatial units were described in the Life of Despot Stephen Lazarević by Constantine the Philosopher. His description, after Jagić (1875: 286-287) and here shortened, reads:

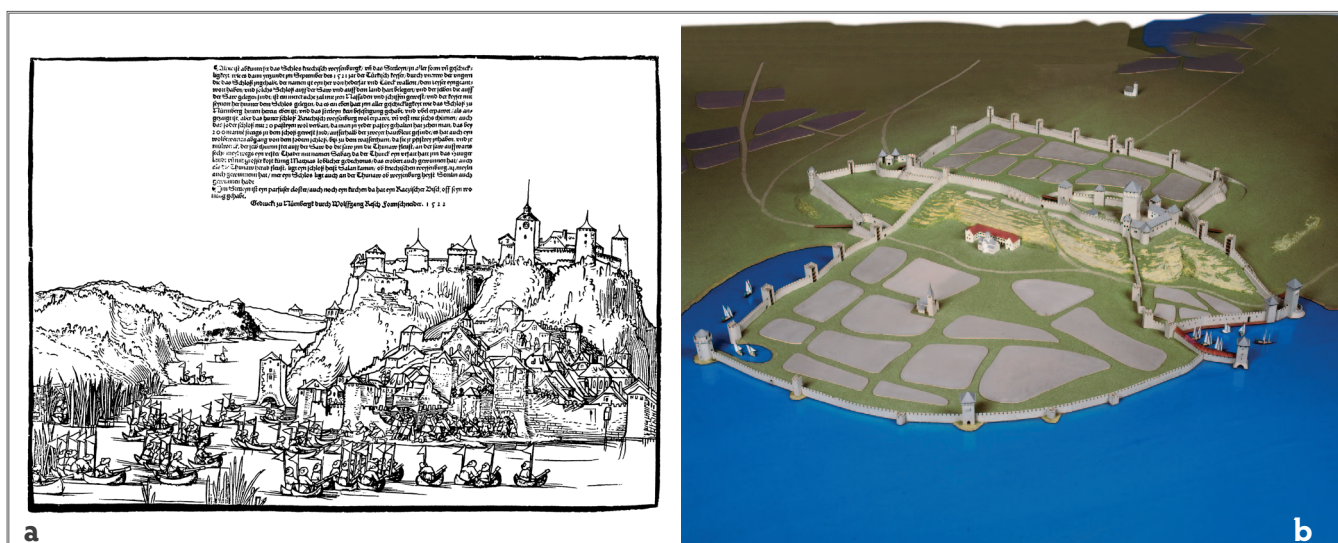


Fig. 1 a) Belgrade 1521, woodcut by W. Resch; b) Belgrade Fortress, general view of the defences in the 15th century, 3D restitution (after: Popović 2006: Fig. 67)

It (Belgrade) was indeed seven-peaked. Because the highest rise (in Belgrade) and the most admirable one for its appearance (the Upper Town), resembling the Mt. Zion in the Holy Jerusalem... And the second (peak, the Lower Town) was by the rivers to the north of the big town where the pier for ships was... It (Belgrade) has a heavenly river flowing to the East... The third peak (the port on the Sava) is by the dock for the Imperial ships and many fortifications. The fourth peak is a large tower (the Castle), similar to the very home of David for its ditches, buildings and spaces. And after this one is passed by is the fifth (peak, the Court in the western part of the Castle); all the Imperial treasures are in it. The sixth is to the East from it, a pier (the Donjon) dividing both towers... Like some extraordinary miracle, fortified with towers it can be seen from all distant places. The seventh (peak) is in the West (the Western Suburb), with the second noble home of the Emperor. Through them the pious one (i.e. Despot Stephen) has been passing towards the ships as if it were a secret path...

Unlike the fifteenth-century fortification, thoroughly explored and analysed in detail (Popović 2006: 85–157), traces of urban structures remain largely unknown. Huge building undertaking from the time of Austrian reconstruction of the fortress (1717–1736) included large-scale terrain leveling, in the course of which in many places cultural layers were removed almost down to the virgin soil. This is also true of large areas with layers from the Middle Ages, both in the Upper and Lower Towns. Thus, every discovery of what was left from Mediaeval settlement areas is very important, as was the case with the excavations of the Metropolitan's Palace complex at the foot of the Danube slope (Popović, Bikić 2004).

Not so long ago, a breakthrough in our knowledge was achieved by excavations along the above-mentioned rampart, once dividing two units of Mediaeval Belgrade – the Western Suburb and the Lower Town.¹ Fortification of the bank belt, which started in the first half of the fourteenth century with enclosing the Western Suburb on a part of the slope and the flat area approaching the Sava river, was completed with the erection of new ramparts at the part of the plateau near the confluence. In that way the Lower Town was finally shaped as a fortified settlement. The building activities were finished just before the death of Despot Stephen Lazarević in 1427. This part of Belgrade was not to be changed during the Hungarian rule, up until the Ottoman conquest in 1521 (Fig. 2).

The most important change in the fortification came with the construction of the outer defense line, 4.20 m in front of the Western Suburb rampart. The newly-built rampart also followed the configuration of the terrain, descending towards the Sava riverbank. It was very well masoned and constructed completely as a retaining wall, with its outer face slightly escarped (Fig. 3). The face stones are rounded and damaged, apparently from fire, a matter to be discussed below. Although it was dug deeper than the inner rampart, due to unstable muddy ground on part of the rampart route the cracks from soil subsidence and ground movements are visible. Judging by the preliminary results of geoelectrical survey (specific electrical resistance method)² the rampart was not built continuously but in sections. The same was observed on

1 Four excavation campaigns were organised in 1997 and between 2002 and 2004 by the Institute of Archaeology – Scientific-Research Project for the Belgrade Fortress; the preliminary results were published by the present author (Bikić 1997).

2 The measurements were taken and processed by Momir Vukadinović of the Jaroslav Černi Institute for the Development of Water Resources (JCI), Belgrade. Unpublished.

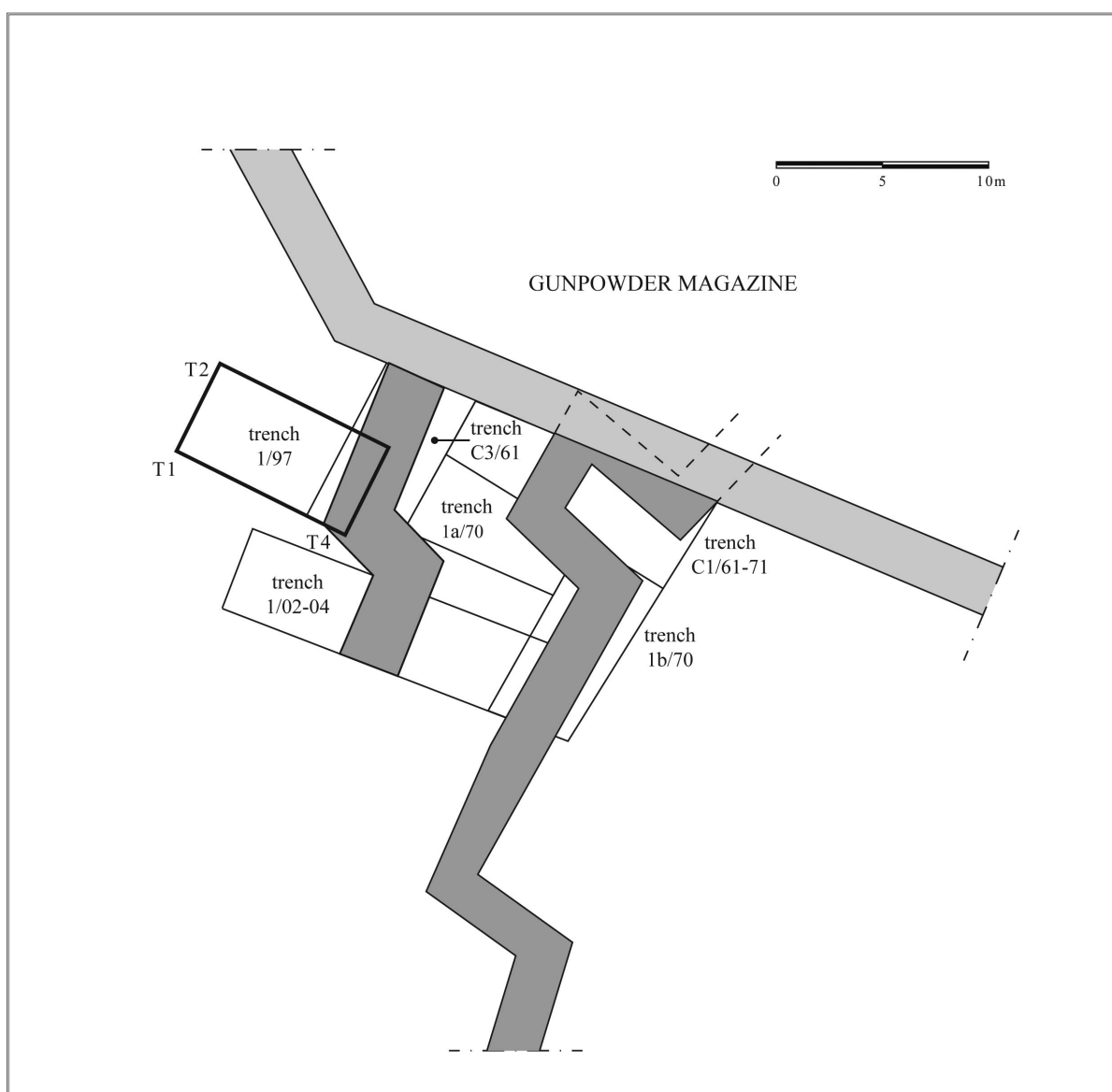


Fig. 2 Detail of the fortress with the position of the ramparts and archaeological trenches (Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

the north-western rampart of the Upper Town fortification (Popović 2006).

The stratigraphic sequence of cultural layers is highly illustrative of developments in this part of the bank belt, and of changes in space use. The situation between the two fortification lines matches that in the Western Suburb, predating the construction of the outer rampart; the inner one was dug through earlier layers, dating from the tenth-eleventh and the third centuries, respectively. On the other hand, outside the outer fortification the situation changes drastically. The layer from the middle and the second half of the fifteenth century, covered with material from the 1521 siege fire, is directly superimposed over the Roman horizon. After comparing the altitudes of the two ramparts and the fifteenth-century layers in the Lower Town, starting at 76.50–75.00 m above sea level and descending towards the northwest and southwest, it was concluded that in front of the outer rampart there had been a ditch, some 4 m deep. With respect to the rampart's height – usually 7 m with the additional 2.30 m for battlement – the ditch was supposed to be ca 14 m wide. Dug to just above the Roman layer, its bottom was flat. Traces of wood and soot were found on it.

After Belgrade was handed over to the Hungarians in 1427 as a consequence of the 1426 Tata treaty (Kalić–Mijušković 1967: 101–102), the ditch lost its original function. A settlement was to be formed inside it, providing a specific archaeological context. Spanning just under a century (1427–1521), it contributes considerably to our understanding of various phenomena in the field of settlement archaeology. The stratigraphy comprises a sequence of relatively thin layers with the



Fig. 3 Outer rampart – the view during the excavation: a) in 1997, b) in 2002-2004 (Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

same cultural content, mirrored in traces of architecture and other settlement structures with levelling layers of yellow and ochre clay (Fig. 4). The assemblage of small finds is notably homogeneous. Datable to the fifteenth century, it also points to intensive secondary use of this space as a settlement area.

The overall character of the material traces testifies to a short use of the buildings. Before one was constructed, the area was levelled and partly filled with clay. In the 2.30 m thick settlement horizon, at least three levels could be observed, all of them with traces of buildings, pits, and waste deposit areas. Although the buildings could only be partly explored due to the maximum possible width of the excavation trench, some common features were observed (Fig. 5). Their plans were marked with post-holes, and only incidentally with dry-stone walls (building 3). As a rule, the buildings were parallel to the rampart, apparently with their longer sides, and only in some cases, such as that of building 2, perpendicular routes of the walls could be documented.

The only building with a stone retaining wall had a mortar floor as well, found only in traces, while all the other build-

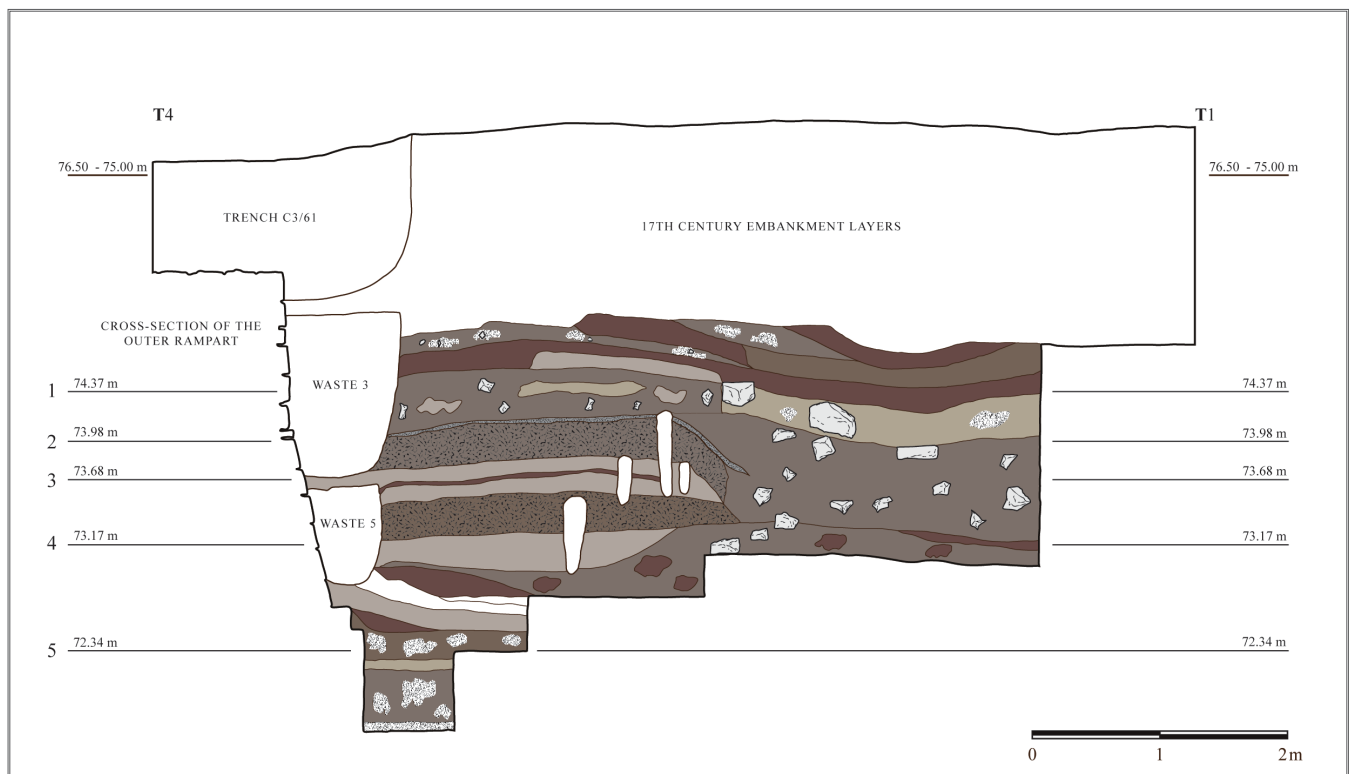


Fig. 4 Stratigraphic sequence along the outer rampart: 1 – building 1; 2 – building 2; 3 – hearth 2; 4 – building 3; 5 – bottom of the ditch (Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

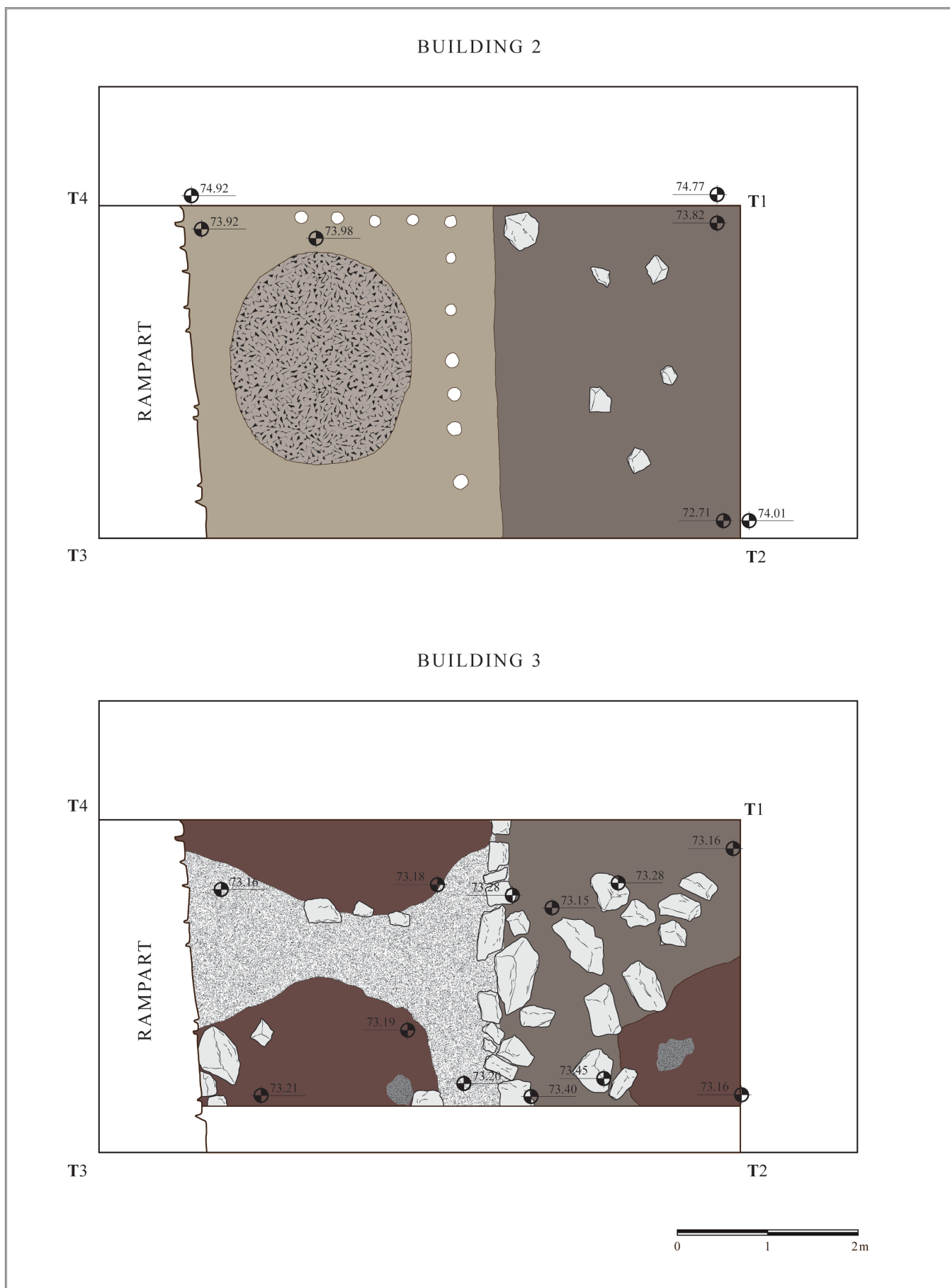


Fig. 5 Ground plans of buildings 2 and 3 (Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

ings had rather solid earth floors. Moreover, judging by the large quantity of fragments of stove tiles, building 3 was the only one with a masonry stove; in building 4 there was a clay oven. Most of the excavated surfaces within the walls were 10 to 12 m² in plan, only some of them exceeding 20 m². Here and there alongside the buildings there were silos and pits. Although this is not enough to determine the size and structure of the buildings, one still gets a strong impression that these were relatively small. The intra- and extramural spaces were clearly demarcated by the routes of the longitudinal walls, and the different kinds of earth and structure of the layers also speak to that effect. Thus it may be concluded that the buildings were single-room dwellings, at least those along the rampart.

All the buildings and waste deposit areas produced uniform ensembles of finds, pottery being by far the most abundant group. Apart from it, only glass fragments were occasionally found, and nails and clamps. Besides the quantity, pottery stands out in terms of preservation too. As frequently in settlement contexts, these pottery vessels are mostly found in large fragments, which makes their graphic reconstruction reliable, and the material fully presentable.

The repertoire of the types is typical of the South Hungarian Region (*cf.* Feld et al. 1989; Gyürky 1989), while the vessels show uniform features. The raw material (clay), production processes, profiles and dimensions, i.e. capacities, are all standardised. Several different kitchenware/heartware types are defined, mostly of pots. Along with thin-walled pots of uniform orange-red or red-brown colours (Fig. 6: 5-8), there were massive baggy pots, coarse in structure and grey or greyish-ochre in colour (Fig. 6: 9-10). Furthermore, the so-called graphite pots of different sizes were significantly represented, most of them bearing the stamps of Viennese workshops (Fig. 6: 11-13; Bikić 1994; Kaltenberger 2009: 173–175, Taf. 72–75).

By all formal and technological features, this assemblage fits nicely into what was already known about the Hungarian-period pottery in Belgrade (Bikić 1994: 73–87). On the other hand, the statistical ratio of the types does not, given the notably large quantity of graphite pots, and that their repertoire is more diverse in terms of profiles and size/capacity. The other peculiarity of this context is that large pitchers appear; they are not only thin-walled (technologically similar to the red pots), but some of them are slightly burnished (Fig. 6: 1, 2). Since the large majority of these pitchers have grids inside the necks, they were most likely used for keeping water and as tableware. Similar to them are the rare finds of cups and beakers (Fig. 6: 3, 4).

Besides graphite pots, imported from the Austrian Danube Region, other pottery was produced in the surroundings of Belgrade, perhaps in the South Hungarian possessions across the Danube; at least this is indicated by the preliminary results of petrographic analyses (Živković et al. 2015: 116). One of the important characteristics of this region's production is that pottery was made in large series, which is convincingly demonstrated in all the excavated units at the Belgrade Fortress dated to the fifteenth century. As most of the (red) kitchenware was delicate, one might suppose that it was easy to break it into shards, i.e. that the period of use of a vessel was relatively short. Yet in our case this is not of decisive importance, because settlement structures were regularly cleaned. Thus it can be noted that the quantity of pottery-finds in some of the buildings was indeed surprisingly large. Namely, building 3, of the earliest date, contained some 10 vessels, and in the later stages that number tripled: the pottery assemblage of building 2 comprised around 30 vessels, and that of building 1, the most recent in the ditch, some 26.

Considering the position and orientation of the buildings, their seemingly modest construction (although they could not be fully explored), and the unusually large quantity of pottery, one must raise the question if these were proper houses or, perhaps, some enclosed places used for cooking by several households? Our scant knowledge of their interiors also contributes to this dilemma. It is not even clear whether some of the walls were outer or inner ones, and the few furnaces found do not tell us much about the character of the buildings, certainly not enough to classify them as houses. On the other hand, the supposition that the buildings served for cooking is corroborated by the obvious traces of high temperature and fire, which are present during the whole time-span of the setting. All the buildings ended in fire and the stones of the rampart face are rounded and fire-damaged.

From everything discussed above it is clear that the intense stratigraphy in the ditch, comprising a number of settlement levels, building remains and waste deposit areas within a century-long span, reveals a dynamic growth of the settlement on the riverbank. This significantly adds to previous knowledge. A fast succession of these levels, together with the levelling of the terrain, is a unique occurrence in Belgrade, and perhaps even in the wider areas of Hungary of that time. In what follows, we should first recapitulate the most important facts. The building activity in the ditch started soon after it lost its original defensive function, that is after 1427, and can be traced up until the Ottoman Conquest of 1521. If we assume that all the area along the rampart had the same secondary use, then this settlement zone may have been of significant size, some 15 ares (the full length of the rampart was ca 110 m and the supposed width of the ditch was 14 m). Again, it could have been smaller than that, because the parts closest to the river must have been regularly flooded.

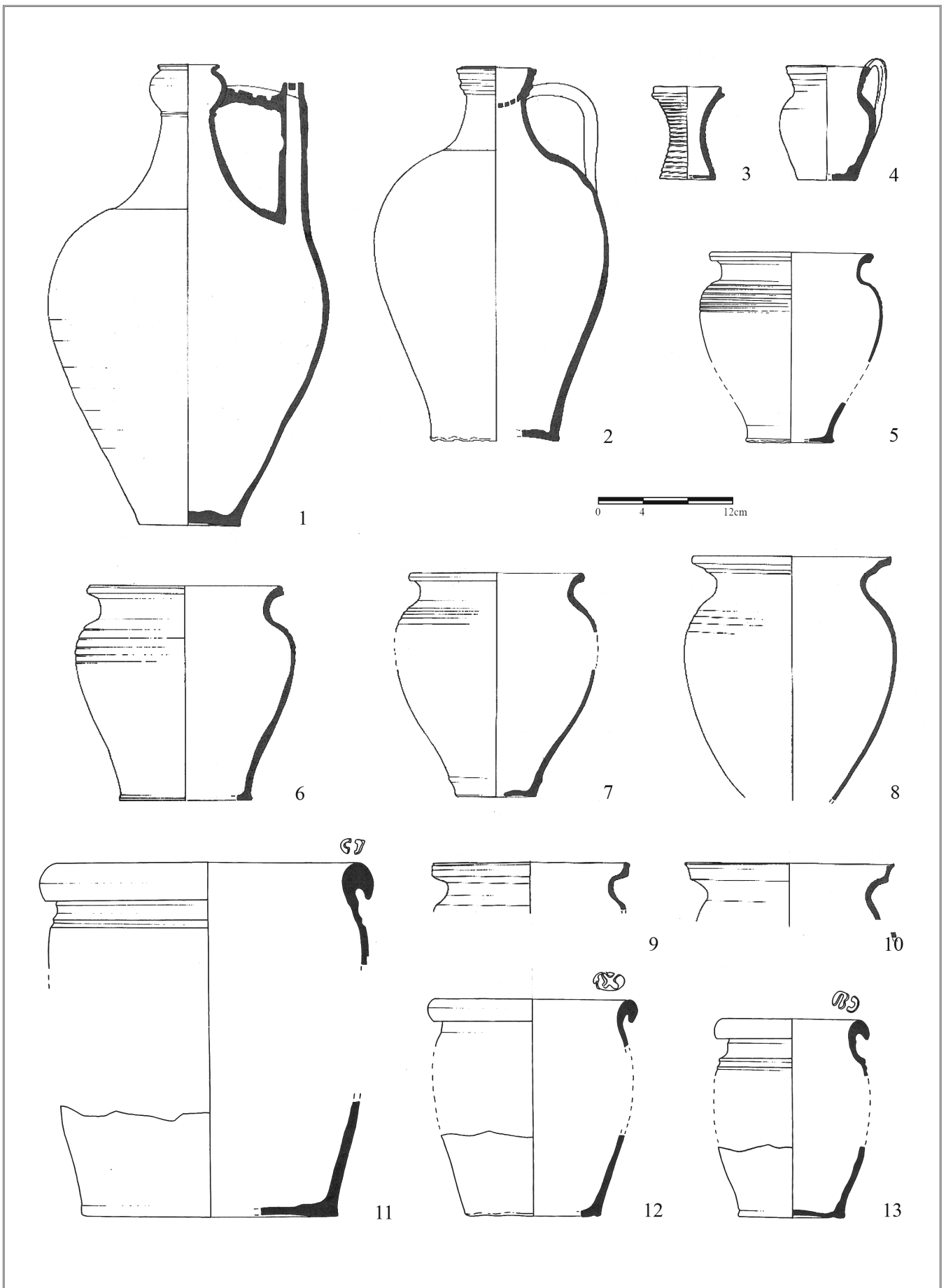


Fig. 6 Selection of pottery from the buildings and waste deposit areas (Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)

It is likely that the wooden architecture and dense layout of the buildings led to relatively frequent construction of new buildings in place of the burnt ruins of the previous ones. The supposition that this space served for cooking meals and baking bread for several households may speak to that effect, and this was a rather common practice throughout the Middle Ages (Carlin 1998: 42-43). As indicated by pottery, the buildings were used by rather wealthy inhabitants of Belgrade. To make a comparison with the Metropolitan's Palace in the immediate vicinity (*cf.* Popović, Bikić 2004: 47–107), the pottery repertoires dating from the full fifteenth century are almost the same, resembling the one from the Buda Castle (*cf.* Gerevich 1966); the only class of pottery missing in the ditch is majolica. This difference can also speak in favour of the second possibility offered, that the buildings were used for food preparation.

But whether these were kitchens or not, one must ask why someone would make any construction in a place like this, at the lowest ground, much lower than the rest of the settlement area, at the foot of the 9 m high rampart above which cliffs rise, with the core of the fortress on top. A practical explanation would be protection from wind; people in the ditch must have felt as if they were in dugouts. At that time, even this low ground was not flooded, except for the part immediately next to the river; the increase in the water level of the Danube came only as a consequence of erecting the hydropower plants Djerdap I and Djerdap II *in the seventies and eighties of the last century*. On the other hand, it would be interesting to study how this area communicated with the other parts of the Lower Town settlement, and especially with the neighbouring Western Suburb.

In broader terms, the explanation for establishing this peculiar settlement unit should be sought in the settlement trends in fifteenth-century Belgrade. In that sense, what we have is actually an illustrative confirmation of data from written sources. An increase in settlement was surely connected with Belgrade having been upgraded to the capital of Serbia, which was followed by giving trade privileges to, first of all, citizens of Dubrovnik, in order to make the town a strong economic centre (Kalić–Mijušković 1967: 91-95). The increase in the number of inhabitants led to enlargement of the town, especially within the limits of the newly-formed Lower Town fortification. This trend was not interrupted by handing the town over to the Hungarians after 1427; the reason for this was the immediate danger from the Ottomans. Even though Belgrade was successfully defended in 1456, local life continued under constant danger of new sieges, which lasted until the conquest of the town in 1521 (Popović 2006: 132-133).

To conclude, the above-presented results of the archaeological excavations in the contact zone between the Western Suburb and the Lower Town significantly added to our understanding of the development of the settlement in the Late Middle Ages. In addition to acquiring new information on spatial spread and constructive features of the buildings, the overall topographical picture gained is by far more complex than what could be reconstructed on the basis of the existing literary descriptions of the town, its pictorial representations and preserved plans (meticulously collected at the Institute of Archaeology – Scientific-Research Project for the Belgrade Fortress), and the previous archaeological research. A number of questions regarding the settlement organisation and building features are still open, one of them being the differences between the construction of the earliest building and the more recent modest ones. The task facing the researchers is not only to reconsider earlier conclusions, but also to plan future systematic research and wide excavations in the remaining parts of the Lower Town in Belgrade.

Acknowledgments

The paper results from the research project of the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade, *Urbanisation Processes and Development of Medieval Society* (№ 177021), funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia. The author would like to thank Dr. Marko Popović for his kind permission to publish the restitution in the model of the Belgrade fortress, and Milica Tomić for processing the illustrations.

Translated by Ivan Bugarski

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SAŽETAK

ŽIVETI U ROVU: OSOBENOSTI TOPOGRAFIJE SREDNJOVEKOVNOG BEOGRADA

Ključne riječi: 15. stoljeće, Beograd, obrambeni jarak, sekundarna uporaba, naselje, drveni objekti, keramika

U toku istraživanja Beogradske tvrđave otkrivena je sasvim osobena naseobinska zona u priobalju, na prostoru odbrambenog rova uz bedem koji razdvaja dve fortifikacione celine, Zapadno podgrađe i Donji grad. Objekti prislonjeni uz bedem, građeni prućem i lepom, u pojedinim slučajevima sa kamenim podzidima, smenjivali su se u nekoliko nivoa, odslikavajući intenzivno sekundarno korišćenje prostora rova nakon što je on izgubio svoju prvobitnu odbrambenu funkciju. Hronologija gradnje fortifikacija, stratigrafija kulturnih slojeva i pokretni arheološki nalazi određuju vremenski okvir ove naseobinske zone u razdoblje između 1427. i 1521. godine, što je podudarno vremenu mađarske uprave u Beogradu. U članku se analiziraju odlike objekata i otkrivenog inventara, takođe i funkcija objekata. Uz pitanje odnosa ove naseobinske zone prema susednim prostornim i fortifikacionim celinama, razmatraju se okolnosti koje su mogle dovesti do naseljavanja na znatno nižem terenu od okolnih naseobinskih celina u priobalju.

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ISBN 978-953-6064-26-7 (tiskano izdanje)

ISBN 978-953-6064-31-1 (e-izdanje)

Izdavanje Zbornika novčano podupire / Financial support
Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja Republike Hrvatske
HR – 10000 Zagreb, Donje Svetice 38