

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF THE OTTOMAN PALACE IN SZOLNOK

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The Ottomans occupied Szolnok, a town by the Tisza River in the Great Hungarian Plain, in 1552, little more than a decade after conquering Buda. In the following period, it has become a major sanjak (sancak) seat in the northernmost Buda vilayet of the Ottoman Empire. Its administrative position changed in 1596, following the occupation of Eger; when it became part of the Eger pasalik and remained there until the Hungarian armies recaptured it in 1685.

Little is known about the architecture of this period due to the lack of written sources and archaeological research. In his notes on his trip to Szolnok in 1665, Evliya Çelebi only mentions a single building, the royal mosque in the castle, which suggests that there were no other remarkable buildings within the palisade fort at the time. Therefore, the discovery of a two-storey Ottoman monumental building representing a type unknown in the occupied territories before came as a surprise in 2018. This paper presents the identified architectural details, paving the way for future architectural and historical reconstructions.

Keywords: early Modern Age, Szolnok, sanjak seat, palisade fort, Ottoman architecture, palace, clay brick wall

INTRODUCTION

The record of the Ottoman Period, an important source for the research of the material culture of the occupied territories, has been identified earlier in the collection of the Damjanich János Museum (KOVÁCS 1984a; 1984b). While Szolnok was an important centre in this period, urban archaeology barely gained ground in the town until recently: the first large-scale excavations in the area of the palisade fort were carried out only in 2017–2019. The works covered altogether 1,492 m² in eight trenches (*Fig. 1*); however, the total of the unearthed and documented surfaces and layers is multiple times bigger than that. Construction, demolition, and fill layers were isolated within each documented building period and diverse floor layers within the discovered buildings. In our investigations, we could also rely on modern sources (including historical maps) on the history of the area; therefore, abandoning the common practice in Hungarian archaeology, we also paid attention to the 18th–20th-century historical record, unearthing and documenting the related monuments and relics as carefully and meticulously as the remains from the periods before 1711 (KERTÉSZ 2019, 11; 2021, 16; KERTÉSZ *et al.* 2024). As the building in the focus of this paper was demolished at the end of the 17th century to make way for a military practice ground, the discovered remains cannot be checked against historical maps made in the mid-18th century or later. Conclusively, the following interpretation and dating of the Ottoman building is based fundamentally on stratigraphic observations.

The assessing of the find material recovered from the layers of the building is the topic for a separate, extensive study in the future, and the interpretation of the written sources also raises questions. This paper focuses primarily on the architectural remains; it is an attempt to reconstruct, as possible, the building they belonged to, thus creating a firm base for historical and architectural reconstructions. Based on its size, topographic setting, find material, and other features, the building was identified as a palace (KERTÉSZ 2019, 12; 2021, 537; KERTÉSZ *et al.* 2021, 36; 2024). The relative rarity of this building type is another argument for devoting a separate study to the analogies and the possible architectural reconstructions, even if similar attempts had already been published before.

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THE UNEARTHED REMAINS AND ANALOGIES OF THE OTTOMAN PALACE

The large, rectangular, and likely two-storey building constructed with a characteristic Ottoman-Balkan technique was unearthed in Trench 3, opened at the centre of the palisade fort (Fig. 1). The other large, north-south oriented, rectangular building next to its northern side was identified as a barracks (Fig. 2.1). It had been erected short before the fort was captured (KERTÉSZ 2019, 12; 2021, 312–322, 324–330, 332, 335, Figs. 343–363, 339–344, Figs. 365–370, 348–374, Figs. 373–401, 379–388, 391, 393–400, Figs. 407–430, 404, 512–519, Figs. 531–543, 537; KERTÉSZ *et al.* 2021, 36; 2024). The roughly west-east oriented building presented here was built by Ottomans from its foundations (Figs. 2.2, 3); that and the barracks, almost at a right angle to its axis, formed an L-shaped complex (Fig. 2.1–2). Despite only the northwestern part of the building could be investigated in an area covering about 40% of its remains, we could establish that it consisted of two wings (KERTÉSZ 2019, 12; 2021, 537; KERTÉSZ *et al.* 2021, 36; 2024).

Based on excavation data and analogies, the building was originally of about 18.36×9.0 m, with a ca. 165 m^2 area per floor (Fig. 4). The foundations of the main and dividing walls were made of crushed stones of diverse sizes set in clay. The top of the stone foundation was levelled with bricks or even courses of bricks, often comprising pieces broken in half and even smaller fragments and stones (Figs. 5–6) bonded with clay. The wall foundations do not deepen into the ground but were laid on the one-time surface. The external sides were reinforced with clay, brick debris, gravel, and wooden beams (Fig. 7), while the inner side was filled up with clay (Fig. 8). As a result, the building raised a bit above its surroundings (KERTÉSZ 2021, 531–535, 542–545, 552, Figs. 554–556, 565–570, 578).

The external walls and the main dividing wall (separating the wings) in the axis of the building were 70 cm thick, while the lesser dividing walls were only 30 cm thick (Fig. 4). The external walls and the main dividing walls were braced with a beam structure (Fig. 9), the gaps of which were filled with unfired clay



Fig. 1. Bird's view of the Castle Island in Szolnok, bordered by the Tisza River in the south and the Zagyva in the north and west, with the position of Trenches 1–8 unearthed in 2017–2019 (drone photo by Z. Lescsiszki, 2018; graphics by S. Horváth; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 107, Fig. 103)



Fig. 2. Two Ottoman Period buildings in Trench 3 in Szolnok Castle. 1, barracks; 2, Ottoman palace (orthophoto by Pazirik Ltd, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 400, Fig. 430)

bricks (*ciğ tuğla*) and both wall faces were plastered (Fig. 10). During the excavation, we could identify the bonding material, a clay substance of somewhat different colour than the clay bricks, between the bricks (Fig. 11). The joints of the two wall faces and in the upper course of bricks were prepared to document their layout and the wall structure (Figs. 3–6, 8, 10–11; KERTÉSZ 2021, 546–549, Figs. 571–574).

The ground floor likely consisted of four rooms in the second half of the 16th century (Fig. 4) and eight from the late 1590s to about 1685/1687 (Fig. 12). Altogether seven of these were investigated in the excavation, five in the northern wing and two in the southern (KERTÉSZ 2021, 541). The function of two small rooms in the western part of the northern wing remained unchanged throughout this period (Figs. 3, 4.1–2, 12.1–2). The niche in the northwestern corner had a wooden plank flooring (Figs. 3,



Fig. 3. Partially unearthed Ottoman palace in the southern zone of Trench 3. Szolnok Castle, second half of the 16th century–1685/1687 (orthophoto by Pazirik Ltd, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 526, Fig. 549)

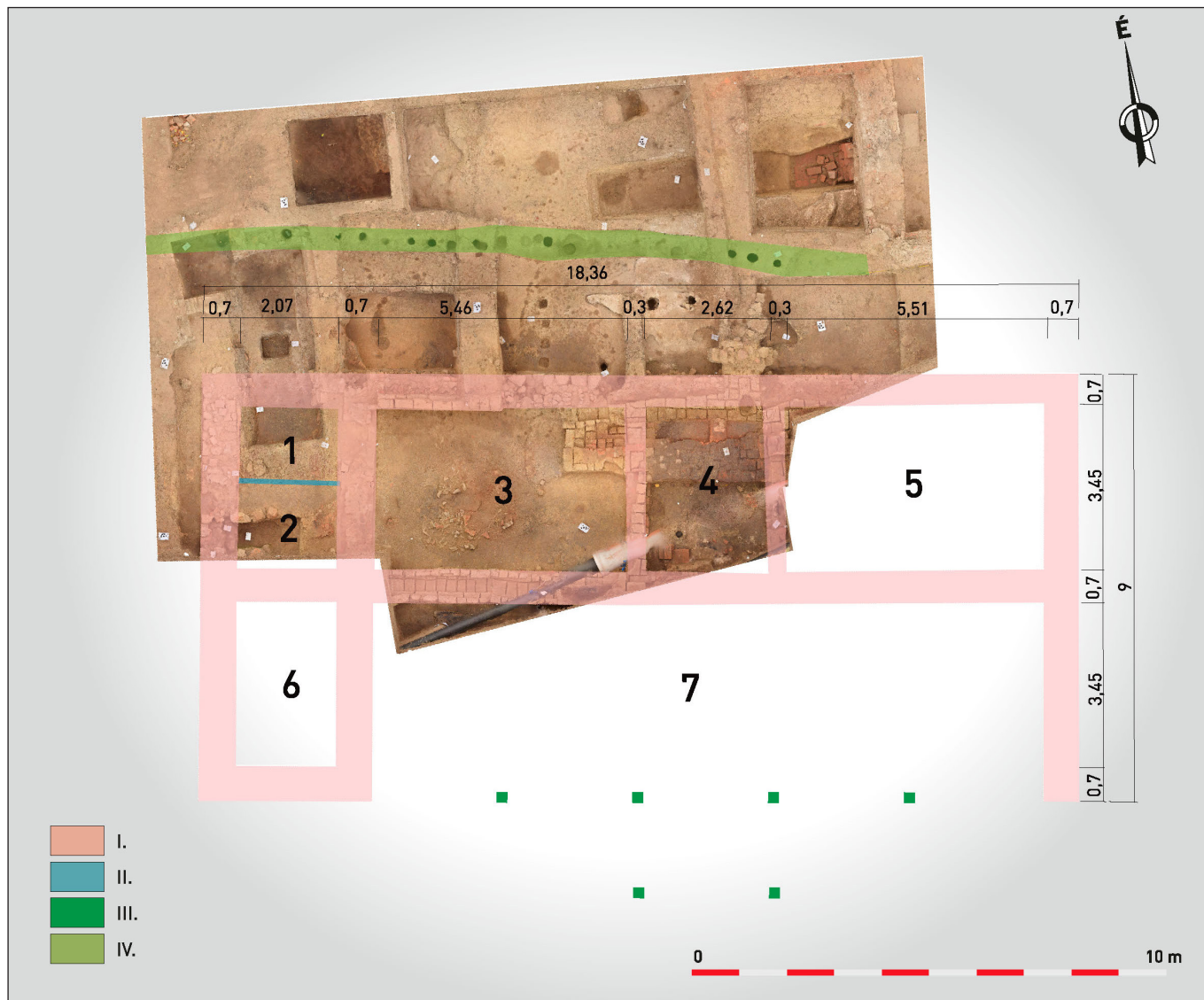


Fig. 4. Reconstruction of the ground floor of the Ottoman palace, building phase: second half of the 16th century. 1, Small room or niche with wooden plank flooring; 2, small room or niche with a cesspit; 3–5, diverse size rooms; 6, room opening to the inner courtyard, from which the plank floor- and cesspit-rooms could be entered; 7, sofa. Colour legend: I, post-framed clay brick wall; II, post-framed wall; III, supporting posts of the ground floor sofa and the stairs in front of it; IV, identified section of the single-row palisade wall engirding the building in the north (ortophoto: Pazirik Ltd, 2018; design by R. Kertész, graphics by S. Horváth)

4.1, 12.1, 13), while the one south of it housed a cesspit connected directly to the toilet on the upper floor (Figs. 3, 4.2, 12.2, 14; KERTÉSZ 2021, 538, 553, Figs. 559, 579).

The analogies of coeval buildings in diverse parts of the Ottoman Empire may help interpret the discovered architectural details. The ground plan and structural solutions of the building unearthed in Szolnok are similar to the oldest Ottoman edifice, erected in the mid-16th century, in the Sarayönü mahalle in Bursa in northwest Anatolia (ELDEM 1984, 50). Other, 17th-century analogies include a representative of the so-called ‘sultan-type houses’, the Halıcı İzzet house (also in Bursa; ELDEM 1984, 64) and especially the Genç ağa house in Tekirdağ by the Sea of Marmara in the southern Balkans (Figs. 15–16; ELDEM 1984, 74). Their orientation matches that of the building in Szolnok, and the southern wings on both floors of all three are practically open *sofas* (large open halls) supported by wooden beams.

In the Genç ağa house in Tekirdağ the toilet (*hela*) opening from the *sofa* on the upper floor had another small niche, an air vent (*havalık*) on its northern side (Figs. 15–16; ELDEM 1984, 74). Based on this analogy, the northwestern part of the upper floor in the palace in Szolnok was likely also divided in two, a



northern *havalık* and a southern *hela* (Fig. 17.1–2). The division of the rooms on the ground floor must have matched the upper floor (Fig. 17, III): the two adjoining rooms were divided by a post-framed wall (Figs. 4, II, 12, II), the imprint of which in the floor could be clearly discerned in the excavation (Fig. 13). Based on the analogy of the Genç ağa house (Fig. 15), both could be entered from the western room of the southern wing (Figs. 4.6, 12.6), opening from the inner courtyard, whenever it was necessary (for emptying the cesspit).

Based on the observed archaeological features, the function of the other three rooms in the northern wing changed markedly with time. Neither was equipped with any heating facility in the second half of the 16th century, in contrast with the late 1590s.

Conclusively, these rooms were originally designed to be storerooms rather than living area. East of the two small rooms directly connected to the toilet and its air vent on the upper floor was a large room (Figs. 3, 4.3, 5, 18) in the northeastern corner of which a large tile stove was built in the late 1590s (Figs. 5–6, 12.3, IV, 18–19). The next room in the northern wing was a smaller one (Figs. 3, 4.4) with a large open



Figs. 5–6. Unearthed sections of the foundations and clay brick walls of the palace. Szolnok Castle, Trench 3 (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 534–535, 542, Figs. 556 and 566)



Fig. 7. Crushed bricks and stones set in clay to reinforce the foundations of the building from the outside and the imprint of a wooden beam pierced by an iron nail. Szolnok Castle, Trench 3, Ottoman palace (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 544, Fig. 568)



Fig. 8. Clayey fill inside the palace. Szolnok Castle, Trench 3 (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 545, Fig. 570)



Fig. 9. Remains of the sill beam of the main dividing wall, dividing the palace into a northern and a southern wing. Szolnok Castle, Trench 3 (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 546, Fig. 571)



Fig. 10. Imprint of a completely decayed wooden beam in the core of the main dividing wall, made of unfired clay bricks Szolnok Castle, Trench 3, Ottoman palace (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 549, Fig. 574)

fireplace paved with diverse size bricks set in clay, also established in the late 1590s (Figs. 3, 5–6, 12.4, VI, 20). This room was clearly a kitchen (*mutfak*) The last room in this wing is a large one (Figs. 3, 4.5) with another tile stove, only the western edge of which could be excavated, in its northwestern corner (Fig. 12.5, V). The tile stoves in the two rooms on the two sides of the kitchen opened directly to the open fireplace (Figs. 3, 5–6, 12, IV–VI, 18, 20–21), proving that the two heated rooms were smoke-free living rooms (*oda*) at least from the mid-1590s. Only the western, the one with the wooden plank flooring, be excavated entirely (Figs. 3, 5, 12.3, 18). Likely to enhance the stability of the structure, the planks were nailed to the joists beneath them; the remains of the nails were found when the room was unearthed (KERTÉSZ 2021, 554–557, Figs. 580–581, 583–584, 586).



Fig. 11. Clay bricks of the main dividing wall, cleaned and ready to be removed; the bonding material (also clayey) is a shade different. Szolnok Castle, Trench 3, Ottoman palace (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 548, Fig. 573)

Based on the analogy of the Genç ağa house (Fig. 15; ELDEM 1984, 74), most of the southern wing (save for the small room leading to the one with the cesspit; see Fig. 4.6) of the Ottoman palace in Szolnok was a *sofa* in the second half of the 16th century (Fig. 4.7). Most rooms in the northern wing could be entered from here. The open southern side of the *sofa* was supported by wooden beams; in front of that, a stairs led to the upper floor (Fig. 4, III; KERTÉSZ 2021, 570–572, Figs. 605–606). A small part of the *sofa* was transformed in the late 1590s: when the central room of the northern wing was converted into a kitchen (Fig. 12.4), the wall dividing the wings was dismantled there, likely because a section of the *sofa* was separated from it and joined with the central room to expand the kitchen (Fig. 12.8). This transformation of the inner space was necessary because originally, the ground floor only comprised rooms with no heating and, therefore, had no chimneys at all. However, the functions have changed in the late 1590s, and the smoke from the two tile stoves heating the new living rooms and the open fireplace in the new kitchen must have been led away, which was only possible through the door of the new room in the southern wing.

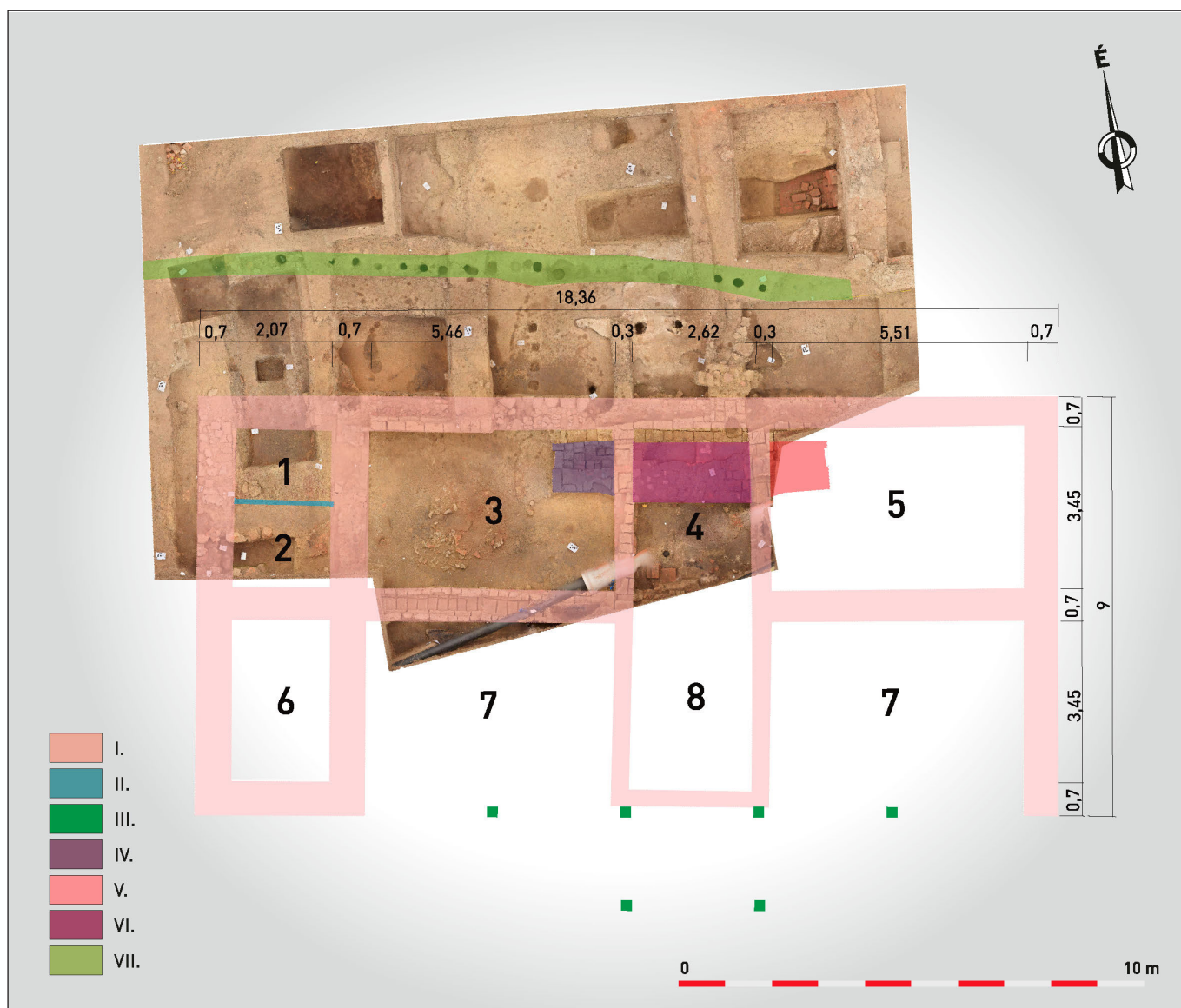


Fig. 12. Reconstruction of the ground floor of the Ottoman palace; building phase: late 1590s–1685/1687. 1, Small room or niche with wooden plank flooring; 2, small room or niche with the cesspit; living room (*oda*); 4, kitchen (*mutfak*); 5, living room (*oda*); 6, room opening to the inner courtyard, from which the plank floor- and cesspit-rooms could be entered; 7, sofa; 8, part of the sofa which was separated and joined with the kitchen. Colour legend: I, post-framed clay brick wall; II, post-framed wall; III, supporting posts of the ground floor sofa and the stairs in front of it; IV, tile stove of the western living room; V, tile stove of the eastern living room; VI, open fireplace in the kitchen; VII, identified section of the single-row palisade wall engirding the building in the north (orthophoto: Pazirik Ltd, 2018; design by R. Kertész, graphics by S. Horváth)



Fig. 13. Detail of the wooden plank flooring of Room 1 in the northwestern corner of the palace and the remains of its southern, post-framed. Szolnok Castle, Trench 3 (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 538, Fig. 559)



Fig. 14. Profile of the cesspit by the wall at the western edge of the northern wing of the Ottoman palace. Szolnok Castle, Trench 3 (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 553, Fig. 579)

The size, two-wing structure, solutions applied in its construction, materials used, find context, and unique find material suggest that the building was the residence of the actual *sanjak-bey* (*sancakbeyi*) (KERTÉSZ 2021, 541). There are buildings with a similar status known from the territory of the Ottoman Empire: for example, the *pasha's* palace erected in the 17th century at the Castle Hill in Buda (PAPP 2013, 168) and the Bosnian *pashas'* palace in Travnik between 1684 and 1850 (KREŠEVLJAKOVIC 1956, 15–16). Sometimes after the death of a *pasha*, the next official received from the treasury a part of his wealth, including his house (FODOR 2002, 223). The barracks next to the palace (the other excavated building, mentioned above) probably housed the military escort of the *mirliva* (*sanjak-bey*) (Fig. 2.1; KERTÉSZ 2021, 543).

In the north, the palace was accompanied by a single-row palisade wall, the eastern end of which joined the southwestern wall of the barracks (Figs. 4, IV, 12, VII, 17, VII, 22). This protective wall certainly con-

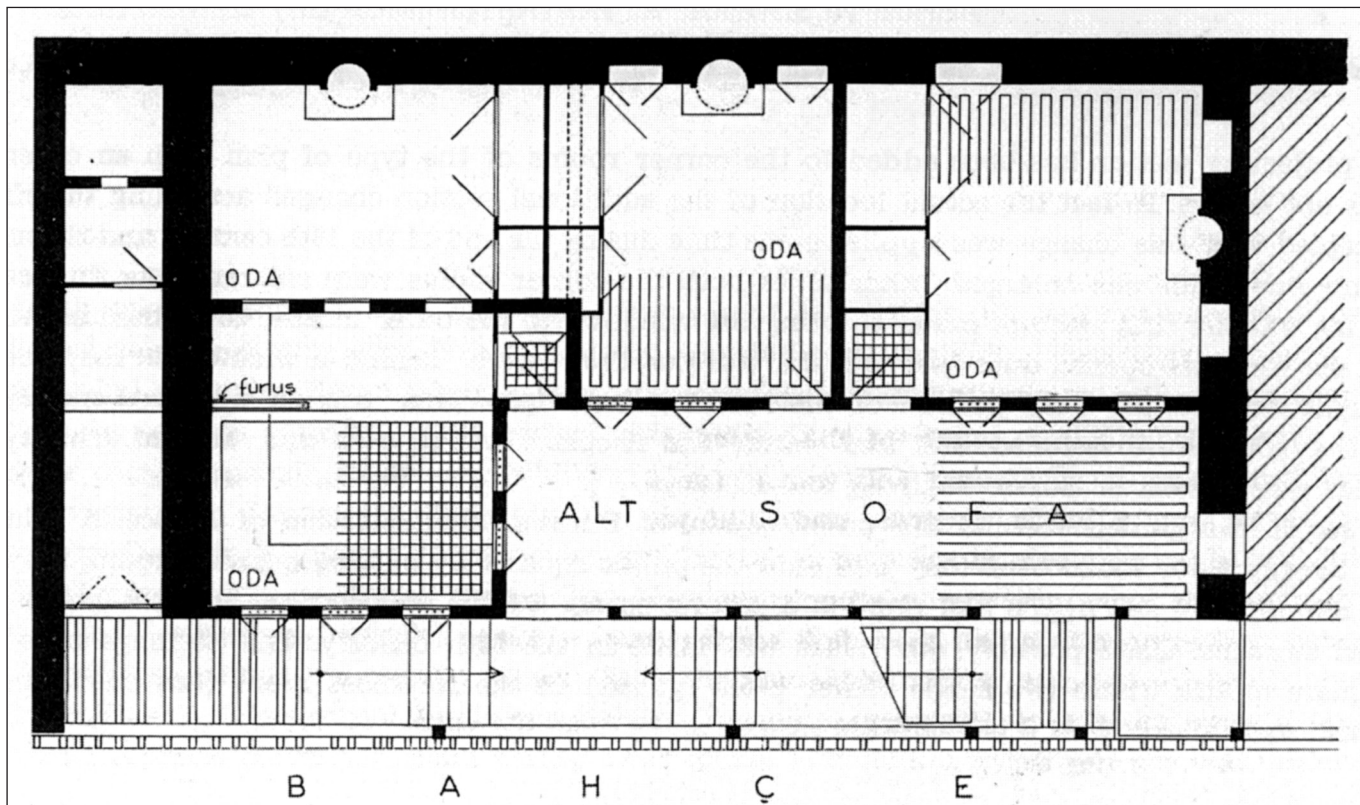


Fig. 15. Ground plan of the ground floor of the Genç ağa house in Tekirdağ, 17th century (ELDEM 1984, 74)

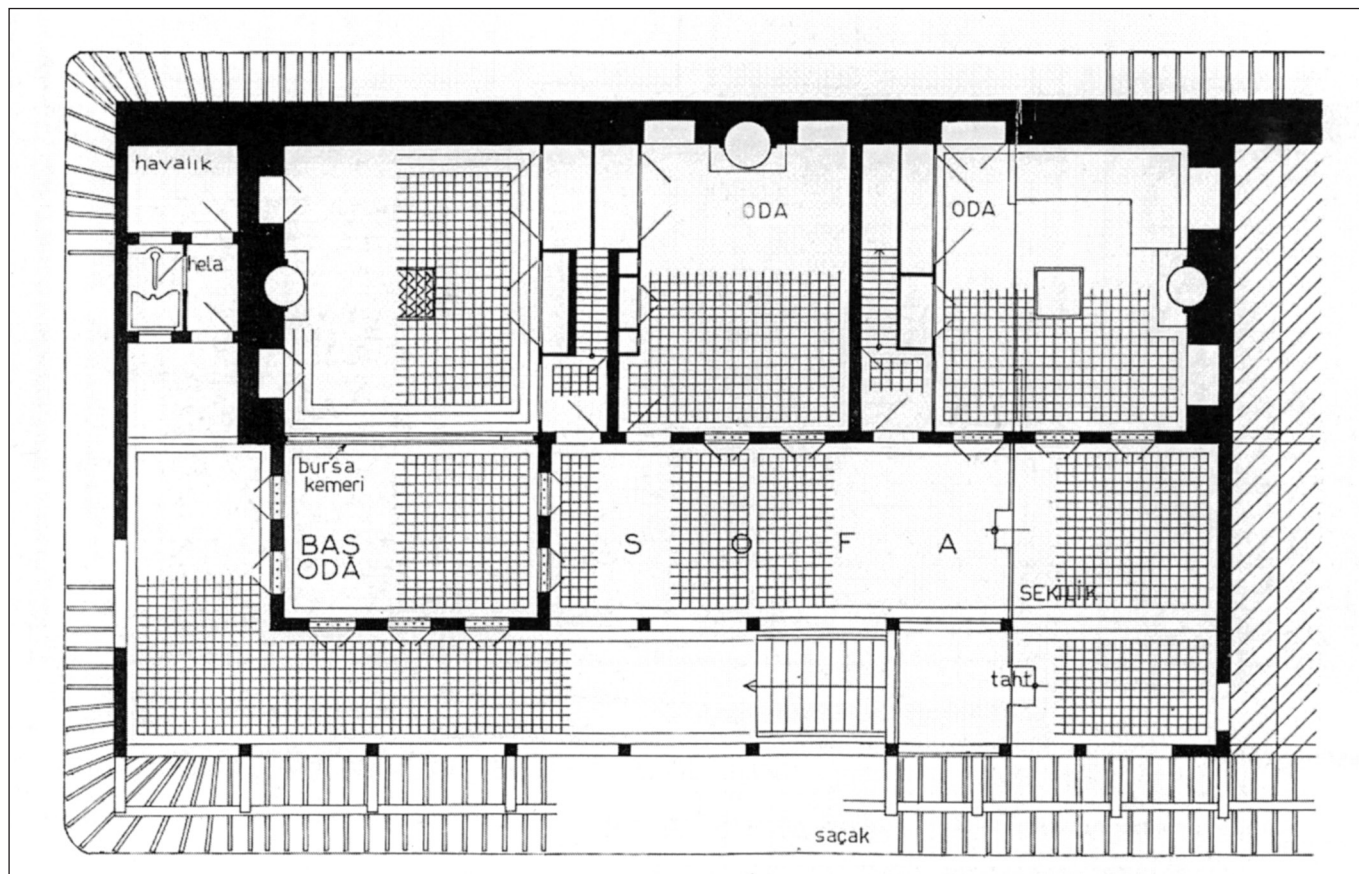


Fig. 16. Ground plan of the upper floor of the Genç ağa house in Tekirdağ, 17th century (ELDEM 1984, 74)

tinued, also surrounding the other walls, isolating the palace from the other parts of the inside of the fort (KERTÉSZ 2021, 537, 576, Fig. 611) and indicating that its resident was part of the highest echelons of the Ottoman society. The palace garden was likely located between the palace and the palisade wall in front of the southern wall of the building, offering a beautiful sight from the open, columned *sofas* on the ground and upper floors of the southern wing (KERTÉSZ 2021, 637, 646–647, Figs. 695, 704–706). The garden must have been an unparalleled feat within the palisade fort, especially in light of the description by Evliya Çelebi, who, upon his visit to Szolnok in 1665, wrote, “as the inside of the fort is lacking space, there are no gardens and vineyards around the houses” (SUDÁR 2017, 123). Albeit it was many times bigger than the building in focus, the eastern wing of the palace of the *pasha* of Buda is a good analogy (GERÖ 1999; PAPP 2013; 2018a, 111–113; 2018b, 257–262; 2019; PAPP *et al.* 2017) as its garden was also positioned in front of the *sofa*. Based on excavation results, the commander’s palace at the centre of the fort of Babócsa was also situated amidst a garden surrounded by a wall (MAGYAR 1990, 56–57, 128, 138, 135, 208, Figs. 17, 43–44, 16; 1994, 78–79, 82, Figs. 4, 7; 2002, 93–98, Figs. 2–3, 5).

THE CHRONOLOGY, BUILDER, AND RESIDENTS OF THE PALACE

Based on the succession of coin-dated floor levels (Fig. 23) and other data, the palace certainly existed from the second half of the 16th century, and remained in use until short after the Christians recaptured the fort in 1685. Some evidence indicate that the building was not erected right after the Ottomans conquered the fort: the remains of a post-framed building, built after the Ottomans moved into the fort and its orientation matching that of the palace, was found under the gravel-in-clay wall foundations of the palace set on the one-time surface (Fig. 24; KERTÉSZ 2021, 537–539, Figs. 560–561).

The excavation of the building with clay brick walls yielded several interesting finds. A unique artefact, a copper alloy dragon figurine (Fig. 25), probably a scabbard ornament from a Central Asian workshop,

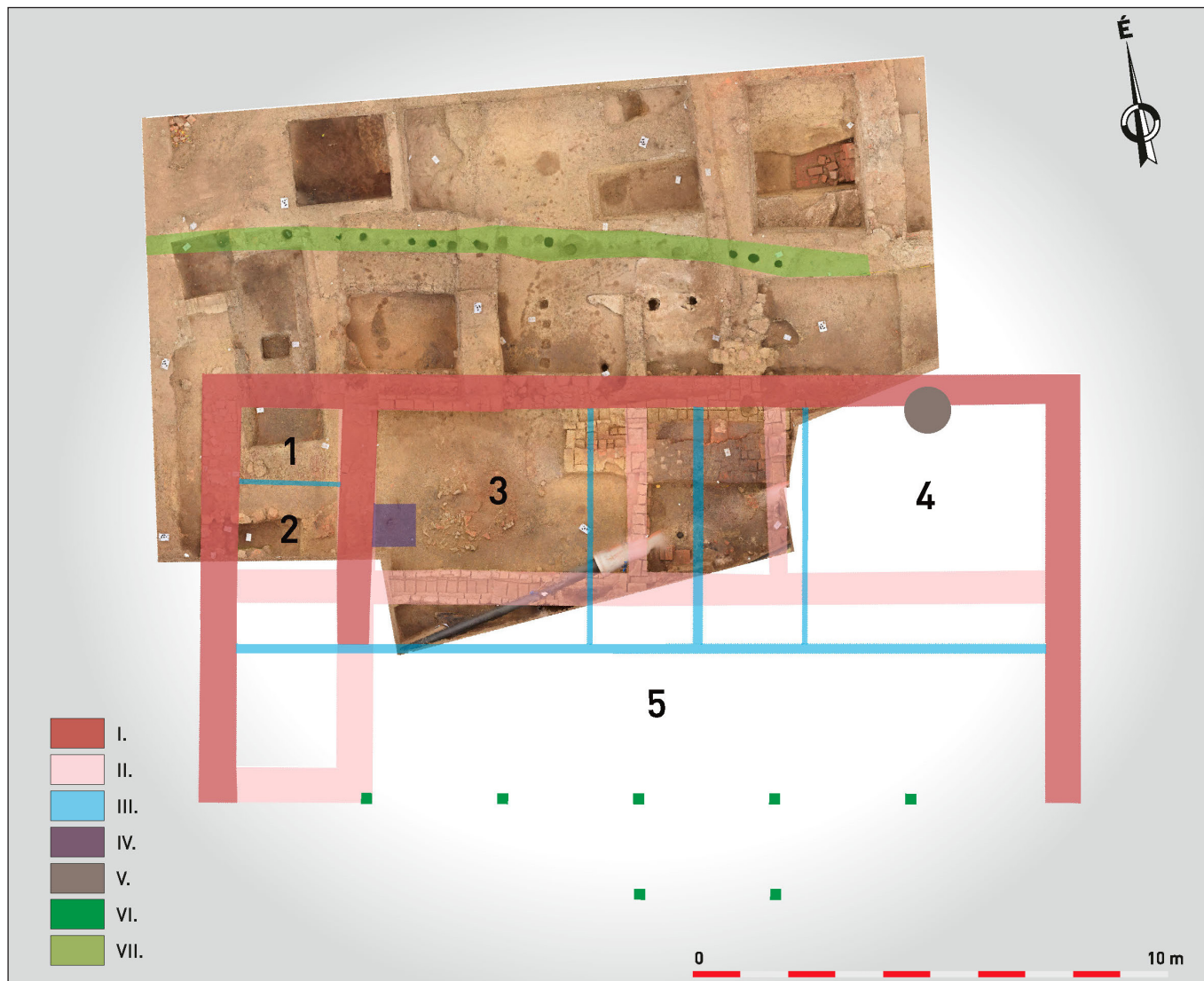


Fig. 17. Reconstruction of the upper floor of the Ottoman palace in Szolnok; building phase: second half of the 16th century–1685/1687. 1, Air vent (*havalık*); 2, toilet (*hela*); 3, living room (*oda*); 4, living room (*oda*); 5, sofa. Colour legend: I, post-framed clay brick wall (upper floor); II, post-framed clay brick wall (ground floor); III, post-framed wall; IV, tile stove from Mihály Miskolci's workshop; V, tile stove; VI, supporting posts of the ground and upper floor sofas and the stairs in front of them; VII, identified section of the single-row palisade wall engirding the building in the north (orthophoto: Pazirik Ltd, 2018; design by R. Kertész and B. Szőke, graphics by S. Horváth)



Fig. 18. Western room in the northern wing of the Ottoman palace; it was heated by a tile stove (marked by an arrow) from the late 1590s to 1685/1687. Szolnok Castle, Trench 3 (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 554, Fig. 580)



Fig. 19. Debris of the tile stove in the western room of the northern wing; it was demolished and levelled after the recapturing of the fort in 1685. Szolnok Castle, Trench 3, Ottoman palace, period: 1685/1687 (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 555, Fig. 583)



Fig. 20. The open fireplace of the kitchen (*mutfak*). Szolnok Castle, Trench 3, Ottoman palace, building phase: late 1590s–1685/1687 (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 556, Fig. 584)



Fig. 21. Tile stove in the northwestern part of the eastern living room (*oda*) of the northern wing; its mouth opened directly to the open fireplace in the neighbouring kitchen (*mutfak*). Szolnok Castle, Trench 3, Ottoman palace, building phase: late 1590s–1685/1687 (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 557, Fig. 586)



Fig. 22. Remains of the single-row palisade wall engirding the palace from the north. Szolnok Castle, Trench 3 (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 540, Fig. 563)

was found on the wooden plank floor of the *sofa* in the southern wing, which burnt down in the mid-1590s (KERTÉSZ 2019, 12; 2021, 541, 562–568, Figs. 592–603; KERTÉSZ *et al.* 2021, 36–37; 2024). Currently, this artefact has no analogies; moreover, a typical Ottoman building like this palace or the material of its walls, unfired clay bricks, have not been discovered on any excavation in the territory of the lands occupied by Ottomans in the Hungarian Kingdom.

Written sources, including the one by Evliya Çelebi, do not mention a palace in Szolnok (SUDÁR 2017, 120–124). The L-shaped building complex that was the residence of the *bey* appears in the southwestern part of the palisade fort in the *veduta* (panorama) published by Georg Hoefnagel in 1617 (BRAUN & HOGENBERG 1617) but the value of the engraving as a historical source is questionable in many respects: the image depicts a northern view rather than a western as indicated by its legend, and the Zagyva River arrives in it from the northwest to the northwestern bastion of the palisade fort (which is inaccurate). Moreover, (which is an even more serious problem), the ground plans of both the town and the fort are also depicted inaccurately; the fort, which has an irregular quadrangular outline, appears in the image as a regular trapezoid complex and it is even rotated by 180° (KERTÉSZ 2021, 31, 33–35, Fig. 27; KERTÉSZ *et al.* 2007, 6–7, Fig. 6). Besides, soil mechanical coring has revealed that where Hoefnagel placed the fort in its panorama was a



Fig. 23. Floor levels in a profile cut into the floor of the western room of the northern wing. Szolnok Castle, Trench 3, Ottoman palace (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 538, Fig. 560)



Fig. 24. Detail of the foundation trenches of the post-framed building that stood at the centre of the fort preceding the Ottoman palace. Szolnok Castle, Trench 3 (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 539, Fig. 561)

former branch of the Zagyva River, only filled up in the autumn of 1550 (KERTÉSZ 2014, 9, Fig. 3, 11–13; 2021, 61–66, Figs. 58–60, 122). This practically excludes the possibility that a major building persisted there for a longer period because the fill layers could not get compacted enough in the short time between the filling and the supposed constructing of the palace to provide a stable ground for an edifice with such a weight; thus, had the palace been built there, it would have sunken and collapsed in a short time, as it happened in the area of the castle before the Ottoman occupation (KERTÉSZ 2021, 403–410, Figs. 433–442; KERTÉSZ *et al.* 2024). This mistake was also made, even if only to a lesser extent, during the construction of the palace: the western ca. third of the building, including the two joined small rooms or niches (Figs. 4.1–2, 12.1–2), the next room to the south (Figs. 4.6, 12.6), the western half of the next room (Figs. 4.3, 12.3), and the western edge of the sofa (Figs. 4.7, 12.7), was built on top of the moat of the former comes's fort, filled up shortly earlier; accordingly, this part sunk visibly with time (Fig. 5).



Fig. 25. Unique find with a dragon figure from the Ottoman palace. The wings on the casting were enhanced by punching. Szolnok Castle, Trench 3, second half of the 16th century; length 8.4 cm, width 1.1–3.8 cm, height 1.35–2.95 cm (photo by K. Kozma, 2018; after KERTÉSZ 2021, 564, Fig. 594)

What Hoefnagel's panorama presents is basically a typical 'Flemish town' but with a mosque and a minaret and, akin to his other works, several other details which are hard to imagine in such a settlement in the Kingdom of Hungary, still less in the territory under Ottoman occupation – typically the way residential houses and streets are depicted. Szolnok appears to be more urban on its *veduta* than Győr or Érsekújvár (today: Nové Zámky, Slovakia) on theirs. Hoefnagel created his panoramic views of western European towns and cities based on longer observations; accordingly, the appearing townscapes are more precise and less orderly. As for the existing panoramic images of Szolnok, it has been proven that all include accurate elements; however, any appearing natural or artificial element can only be considered accurate if it is confirmed by at least one other independent source (KERTÉSZ 2012a). In summary, the data on the residence of the *sanjak-bey* in the *veduta* by Hoefnagel can be considered accurate inasmuch as the building complex is depicted as L-shaped and situated within the palisade fort. However, the identification of the Ottoman palace and barracks from their archaeological remains (Fig. 2.1–2) has proven that the residence of the *bey* and his military entourage was at the centre, and not in the southwestern part, of the fort, and that their images and the fort's must be rotated by 180° for a correct interpretation.

Only a single authentic depiction is known of the palace; this image proves that the building remained intact during the recapturing of the fort in 1685. The coloured ink drawing by Leopold Hendl features the outlines of a smaller and two bigger buildings (KISARI BALLA 2000, 629). One of these, a rectangular edifice at the centre of the fort (Fig. 26.1), is likely the palace, while the other, next to the southern wall of the fort by the Tisza River (Fig. 26.2), is the mosque (marked by a bigger circle) with the minaret beside it (marked by a smaller circle) (KERTÉSZ 2021, 41, 537). The southern wing of the palace was open on both floors; its main façade faced the Sultan's mosque (Hünkâr camii) erected in the 1550s by the Yahyapaşazade family, one of the most influent in the region until 1566 (KERTÉSZ 2021, 506; KERTÉSZ *et al.* 2012, 111–120; SUDÁR 2014, 506–507). This orientation, confirmed by excavation, may reflect a chronological difference (KERTÉSZ 2021, 508–509, Figs. 528–529), while the post-framed building with an orientation matching that of the palace, the remains of which have been found under the foundation of the palace, must have been erected after the mosque had been built.

In lack of any mention in written sources, it is challenging to identify the builder of the palace and the person responsible for its later transformation. However, by jointly assessing available archival documents and the results of archontological research on the local *sanjak-beys*, one can connect archaeological and historical evidence and draw some conclusions. Based on that, the builder of the palace was likely Aranid Mahmud *bey* (KERTÉSZ 2021, 541, 543), a late descendant of a noble Albanian family, appointed around 1553–1556 for the first time to be the head of the Szolnok *sanjak* after the occupation of the fort (DÁVID 2005, 306–308). Later, in the second half of the 16th century, he was appointed three more times (1558–1559, 1562–1563/1564, around 1569–1579), which is unparalleled in the history of this *sanjak* seat (TOMKÓ 2004, 14–22, 26–29, 40; DÁVID 2005, 306–308).

But the *sanjak-bey* after his first period in service was his former deputy (*kethüda*), Şehsüvar *bey* (1579/80–1585), whose rising career landed him as the *beylerbeyi* (*beylerbeyi*) of Bosnia right after that (TOMKÓ 2004, 29–32; DÁVID 2005, 291, note 89; SUDÁR 2014, 508; 2017, 119). Like Mahmud, Şehsüvar seemingly also had long-term plans with Szolnok: despite spending only a single cycle as *mirliva* at the *sanjak* seat, he established a private foundation (*vakuf* [*vakf*]; KERTÉSZ 2012b, 390).

A decade after Şehsüvar Bektaş, a son of Aranid Mahmud and *pasha* of Buda later, became the leader of Szolnok and, thus, likely the next resident of the palace (1595–1598; TOMKÓ 2005, 17–19; KERTÉSZ 2012a, 50; SUDÁR 2014, 508; 2017, 119).

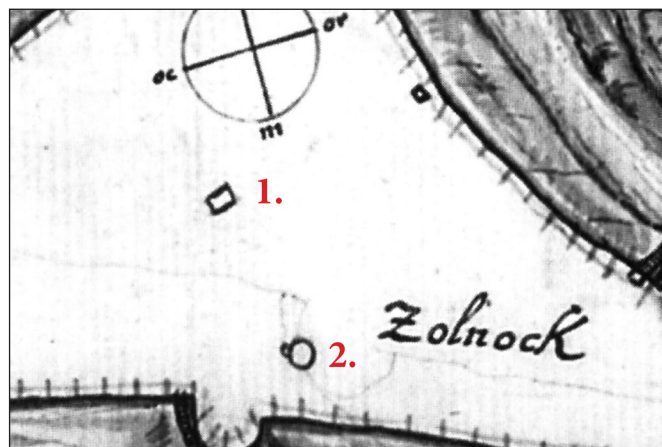


Fig. 26. Detail of the Fort of Szolnok, recaptured from the Ottomans, on a coloured ink drawing by Leopold Hendl. 1, Ottoman palace; 2, Sultan's mosque (KISARI BALLA 2000, 629)

His contemporary, the humanist historian Miklós Istvánffy noted that Bektaş was born in Szolnok, spoke Hungarian well, and was familiar with the local relations (BENITS 2009, 389). The greatest geographer of the time, Ebu Bekir bin Behram ed-Dimaşki noted in his later work, entitled *Tercüme-i Coğrafya-i Kebir* (also known as *Nusretü'l-islâm ve's-sürur fi tahrir-i Atlas Mayor*, 'The Translation of the Atlas Maior'), that Bektaş had a mosque and a bath erected in the town (FEKETE 1930, 16). The mosque was run by a *vakuf* he had established at the end of the 16th century (KERTÉSZ *et al.* 2012, 111). Of the *mirlivas* of Szolnok in the early 17th century, Hüseyin must be mentioned, who spent five cycles as the head of the town in 1598–1599, around 1600, in 1604, 1604–1611, and 1611–1612, as well as Muharrem *bey*, later *pasha*, with two cycles in 1627–1631 and from around 1633 to 1643 (TOMKÓ 2005, 23–32, 39–50, 58–59).

During the Long Turkish War, likely in October 1595, the palace got damaged and parts of it probably burnt down when Archduke Maximilian (the later Maximilian II) and the Upper-Hungarian Army besieged Szolnok and bombarded the fort with cannons (TÓTH 2000, 177). The barracks (Fig. 2.1) was destroyed completely then; it was rebuilt only partially, with a smaller ground plan, in the 17th century, with walls made of stone set in clay (KERTÉSZ 2021, 404, 520–525, 541, Figs. 544–548).

Following the siege, the function of the palace remained unchanged, but the renovations, commissioned by Bektaş, were carried out with a keen eye on local customs and environmental conditions. This resulted in several transformations, like establishing a heating system with stove tiles made by local workshops in the two largest ground floor rooms of the northern wing in the late 1590s (Figs. 12, IV–V, 18–19, 21; KERTÉSZ 2021, 555, 557, Figs. 583, 586) and creating a kitchen with an open fireplace in the room between them at the same time (Figs. 12, VI, 20; KERTÉSZ 2021, 556, Fig. 584).

The Ottoman palace remained in use only for a short time after the town had been recaptured: it was dismantled completely in two years, as attested by a copper etching from 1687 where only the Sultan's mosque is depicted within the fort (KERTÉSZ 2021, 42–43, Fig. 32). This was the time when the ramparts were built and every building within the Burgwall-type fort, save for the Sultan's mosque and the Turkish bath east of it, was levelled to ground. Even the surface under the demolished palace was levelled – that is why only some features of the ground floor were present in the archaeological layers – and its wider area at the centre of the fort was converted into a relatively large, rectangular, north-south oriented, open space that served as practice or parade ground (KERTÉSZ 2021, 45–48, Fig. 36, 689–690, 695).

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