

Some Comments on the Reconstruction of the Caraşova-Grad Fortress

(Caraş-Severin County)¹

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THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL research at Caraşova (Caraşova commune, Caraş-Severin County, Pl. 1) began during 1998, on the initiative of the National Museum of Romanian History in Bucharest, in partnership with the Museum of the Highland Banat in Reşiţa.

The aim of the research was to verify the old information published in the archaeological literature that was considered suspicious in the absence of field investigations. The fortress plans published in various papers, all different from each other (Pl. 2), leaving undistinguishable the construction phases, were also at least questionable, especially given the fact that almost no stone fortress is built integrally at one time. The descriptions taken over from one author to another, many only based on assumptions, could not be credible and therefore required a verification of the information through archaeological research. The aim did not consist of a full unveiling of the ruins, which could have been jeopardized in this manner, but of a research of certain points considered essential for gathering information.

First of all, the contradictory historical information raise doubts on their veracity and accuracy of interpretations.² The damage caused by treasure hunters and not only was another reason for the investigation. Consequently, three archaeological campaigns were conducted³ and all the available historical information was reviewed.⁴ In parallel, communications were presented,⁵ investigations were conducted on the mortar samples collected, the osteological animal remains and the chemical composition of non-ferrous metal items were analyzed and several additional studies were published.⁶

Caraşova Fortress is located close to kilometer 10 of Highway 58, Reşiţa-Anina, approximately a few hundred meters south of the road, on top of Cheile Caraşului. The fortress is entirely built of stone and was placed on the top of Grad Hill (Pl. 3).

The first documented mention of the fortress is from 1323.⁷ By 1520 when it last appears in documents, it was only rarely mentioned.⁸ Its owners were both the kings of Hungary and the archbishop of Kalocsa, and before Hungary's conversion into a pashalic, the fortress was privately owned.⁹ In the fifteenth century it was part of the defensive system of southern Hungary.¹⁰ During the sixteenth century, after Banat's conver-

sion into a pashalic, it most likely became a border fortification for the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately, we do not have at this time other historical information of the Turkish domination date. Very likely, it had the same fate as the other small fortresses that were reused, when they were somewhat functional.

The archaeological research has brought important clarifications regarding the phases of construction of the fortress and the duration of its use, as well as how it was destroyed, which often contradicted the information published in the '60s,¹¹ even until 2009.¹²

A Few Details on the First Phase of Use of the Fortress

THE BEGINNING of the construction on Grad Hill must be searched during the period prior to the year 1323, when it was first attested. It is however difficult to specify the exact timing of the construction, but it would be placed in the late thirteenth century at the earliest. The discovery of jar base fragments stamped with potter's trademarks in the filling earth between the enclosure and the inside wall which enveloped the rock could suggest that the hill was also used during the thirteenth century. It is however hard to say whether the soil was brought there from near the fortress or it is the one between the defensive ditches and the hill's edges, from the small sloping plateau.

In order to understand the functioning of the fortress and its reconstruction phases, the description of the cliff on which it was placed is very important. In length, it is oriented west-northwest–east-southeast. To the north, the cliff is abrupt, and to the south it has a slightly lower slope gradient.

The fortress was surrounded on three sides by the abyss, and in front of it, toward the hillside, two parallel defensive ditches were carved into the rock.

Initially, it did not occupy the entire top of the hill, but about a quarter of it. To the west, southwest and south there is an oblique slope on whose edge there was a path on the edge of the abyss leading to the tower no. 2, located to the east of the fortress.

A first phase (Pl. 4) of construction consists of the building of an enclosure that came from the east-southeast toward the north, where an integrated, inward tower was erected. At its base, at the ground floor, there was a functional entrance. It should be noted again that at the ground level within the fortress, the route of the enclosure was suddenly changed in a southerly direction and at the ground level of the first defensive ditch it enveloped the rock. Through the breaches existing in enclosure no. 3, from the defensive ditch in front of the fortress it can be seen that the enclosure no. 1 does not have any visible parament, and if it existed even in a not very elaborate form, it has been dismantled, probably at the time when the last wall was erected. Its route in this section demonstrates quite clearly that there was no other tower outside the wall, as the embleton of the wall in S. 5 and S. 10/2000 might suggest.

The enclosure continued then on a southeasterly direction for 8.20 meters, after which it most likely stopped. Inside, between the two enclosures, the top of the cliff was covered with a wall whose width was 4.00 m. Between its base and the enclosure's base there is a relatively significant height difference, especially between tower no. 2 and the one

near the defensive ditch. Given this situation, between the enclosure and the interior wall there is no flat ground. It was created by bringing earth and building a horizontal walking level. Behind the tower no. 1 (Pl. 7), at the base of the enclosure, toward the abyss, there is a small, probably semicircular opening in the wall. An assemblage of stone sling balls was found inside the fortress, near this opening.

A second tower was built at the southeastern end (Pl. 8). The floor was erected on top of the ground floor represented by the 4.00 meters-wide wall and the enclosure. At its base there was the entry that had a “floor” trap opening inside the fortress’ enclosure, under which there was the abyss. In phase one, the tower no. 2 was on the side of the fortress and was not flanked by an enclosure wall on the southern side.

The fortress was atypical. Basically, the curtain wall did not end toward the south-east with tower no. 2, but concealed the rock wall for another few meters, thus from the outside giving the impression that it was larger than it was in reality. The southwestern side, partially parallel with the abyss side, stopped abruptly mid-route to the interior wall, where likely there were two small rooms separated by a wall coming from the enclosure. Towards the end of the second room, north-westerly, a wall 4.00 meters-wide was built from the interior wall.

Most likely, the enclosure and the towers did not have paraments distinct from the emplecton. The mortar used varied in quality and the thickness of the walls was variable, especially in the area of the towers.

Outside the fortified area, near tower no. 2, there is a water tank dug in the rock.

Expansion of the Fortress

IN THE second phase (Pl. 2), its surface was considerably increased, occupying almost the entire hilltop. A wall was built in several stages, starting from the abyss, from the south to the northwest, to the old enclosure, in its southwest corner. Its building technique is totally different than the one used in the first phase of the fortification. It maintains a height of 4.78 m, a length of 19 m and a width of 2.80 m. On the inside and the outside it had paraments made of quarry stone blocks, among which there were others, varying in size and drowned in mortar.

Reconstruction of the fortress

A FINAL phase (Pl. 6) of the fortress restoration dismantled most of it and rebuilt it, including the two towers. Unfortunately, we do not know the reasons for this massive restoration. There are three assumptions at the present time. The first is linked to a possible violent destruction, which could be due to a possible attack. A second hypothesis takes into consideration a possible earthquake that caused major damage to the fortress. The last supposition may be related to the need to rebuild the fortress, according to the new requirements imposed by the evolution of fighting techniques.

On the east-northeast side, from the end to tower no. 1, the direction of the curtain wall was similar to the one in the first phase. The old construction elements, namely the openings at its base, were kept and rearranged. From tower no. 1, the enclosure headed toward the southwest, close to the abyss, near the old path. There, it most likely turned around a corner or had a semicircular route (that wall fragment no longer exists, as it is completely destroyed) and headed beside the path on a southeasterly direction until close to the end of the wall of the second phase of expansion. There it turned around a corner and it closed perpendicular to the last wall mentioned. A fracture was discovered on its route, suggesting a small entrance.

Tower no. 1 was expanded westward. Tower no. 2 was also subjected to a major intervention. Most likely, the 4.00 meters-wide wall was partially dismantled, near to its base, then it was rebuilt with two sides reoriented first in the southwest-northeast direction and the second in the northwest-southeast direction. Thus, the trap at the entrance of tower no. 2, which in the first phase was most likely inside, remained outside in this last phase, right in front of the entrance. Unfortunately, preserving only the embleton in elevation does not provide much detail on the appearance of the tower and its planimetry in this phase.

The curtain wall on the east-southeast side was partially dismantled, up to the ground level arranged inside. It is very difficult to say whether or not the southwest side was also completely dismantled. However, it was most likely at least partially dismantled, if we consider the small wall found in S. 2/2000, to the northwest. It appears that it had the role of closing the free area between the curtain wall of the first phase of use and the interior wall, or at least of limiting the access to that area.

After the final destruction of the fortress, which should most likely be placed towards the end of the sixteenth century, the fortress was quite probably used only as a point of observation of the area. The small indoor rearrangements made over the massive destructions demonstrate that the fortress had lost its role, especially after the annexation of the Banat of Severin to the Ottoman Empire.



Translated by Alexandra Decu

Notes

1. This paper was presented on 29 October 2015 in Timișoara, at the international conference *Politică și societate în Europa centrală și de sud-est (sec. XIII-XVI)*.
2. Jenő Szentkláray, *Krassó vármegye Öshajdána*, (Budapest, 1900); Traian Simu, *Originea crașovenilor*, (Lugoș, 1939), 93, Th. Trăpcea, "Despre unele cetăți medievale din Banat," in SIB I/1969, p. 23-82. (see Carașova); Ștefan Pascu, *Voievodatul Transilvaniei*, vol. I, (Cluj-Napoca, 1971); Idem, *Voievodatul Transilvaniei*, vol. II, (Cluj-Napoca, 1979) (see Carașova), Ioan Hașegan, "Cavalerii teutoni în Banatul Severinului (1429-1435)," in *Tibiscus* 5/1978, 193; Șt. Matei, "Fortificațiile de pe teritoriul Bantului în lumina izvoarelor scrise," in *Banatica* 5/1979, 255-263; Idem "Aspecte ale evoluției arhitecturii de fortificații din Banat în perioada feudalismului timpuriu," in SIA I/1982, 103-123 (see Carașova), Theodor Gheorghiu, *Arhitectura medievală de apărare din România*, (Bucharest, 1985) 42, 69, 225; Dumitru Țeicu, *Banatul montan în evul mediu*, (Timișoara, 1998), 434.

3. The results of the excavations were published in three archaeological reports in *Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice din România* (Silviu Oța, Liana Oța, Sorin Ionescu, "24. Carașova, jud. Caraș-Severin, punctul 'Grad'," in CCA, (Bucharest, 1999), 22-23; Dumitru Țeicu, Silviu Oța, Liana Oța, "36. Carașova, jud. Caraș-Severin, Punct: Grad," in CCA (Bucharest, 2001), 57-59; Dumitru Țeicu, Silviu Oța, Liana Oța, "50. Carașova, com. Carașova, jud. Caraș-Severin, Punct: Dealul Grad," in CCA, (Bucharest, 2002), 85-87.
4. Silviu Oța, Liana Oța, "Historical and archaeological data regarding the fortress from Carașova-hill Grad, commune of Carașova, Caraș-Severin district," in MN 18/2006, 3-13; Idem, "Câteva date privind încetarea funcționării cetății de la Carașova-Grad (jud. Caraș-Severin)," in *Materiale S.N 5/2009*, 193-201.
5. National and international conferences in Sibiu, Deva, Bucharest, Buziaș, Făgăraș, Alba Iulia.
6. The total number of papers is eight, published in the reviews *Materiale* (three), *SUC* (one), *ATF* (one), *Apulum* (one), *AnB* (one), *MN* (one).
7. György Györffy, *Az Árpád-kori Magyarország Történeti Földrajza*, vol. III, (Budapest, 1987), 469, 476.
8. Silviu Oța, Liana Oța, "Câteva date privind încetarea funcționării cetății de la Carașova-Grad (jud. Caraș-Severin)," in *Materiale S.N 5/2009*, 194-195.
9. Frigyes Pesty, *Krassó vármegye története*, vol. II/1, (Budapest, 1884) 264-265.
10. Erik Fügedy, "Castle and Society in Medieval Hungary (1000-1437)," in *Studia Historica* 187/1986, 134; See Map. 18, 138, Map. 19, 146.
11. Theodor Trăpcea, "Despre unele cetăți medievale din Banat," in *SIB* I/1969, 23-82.
12. Dumitru Țeicu, *Cetăți medievale din Banat*, (Timișoara, 2009), 66-68, 79, pl. 20, 80, pl. 21.

Abbreviations

ATF – Acta Terrae Fogarasiensis, Făgăraș
 AnB – Analele Banatului, Timișoara
 Banatica – Banatica, Reșița
 CCA – Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice din România, Bucharest
 Materiale – Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice, Bucharest
 MN – Muzeul Național, Bucharest
 SIA – Studii de Istorie a Artei, Cluj-Napoca
 SIB – Studii de Istorie a Banatului, Timișoara
 SUC – Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis, Series Historica, Sibiu
 Tibiscus – Tibiscus, Timișoara

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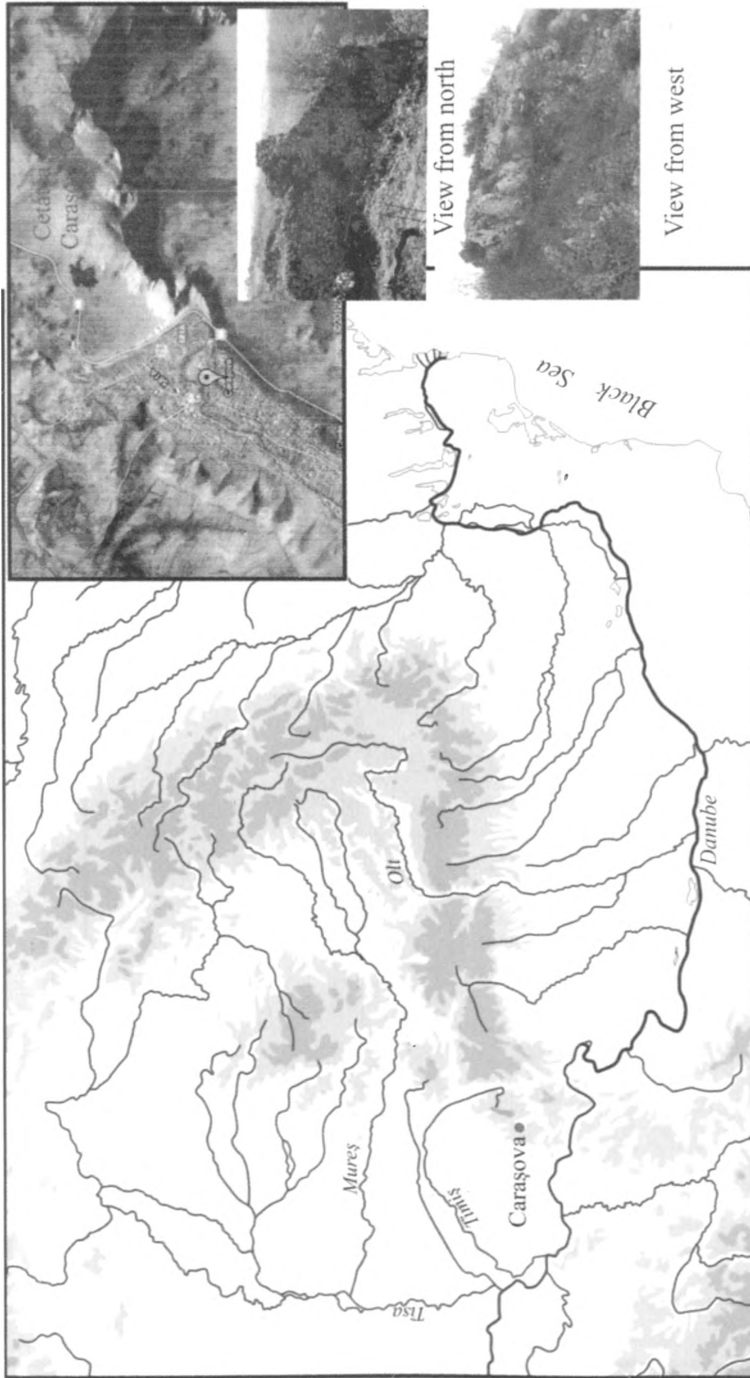
Abstract

Some Comments on the Reconstruction of the Carașova-Grad Fortress (Caraș-Severin County)

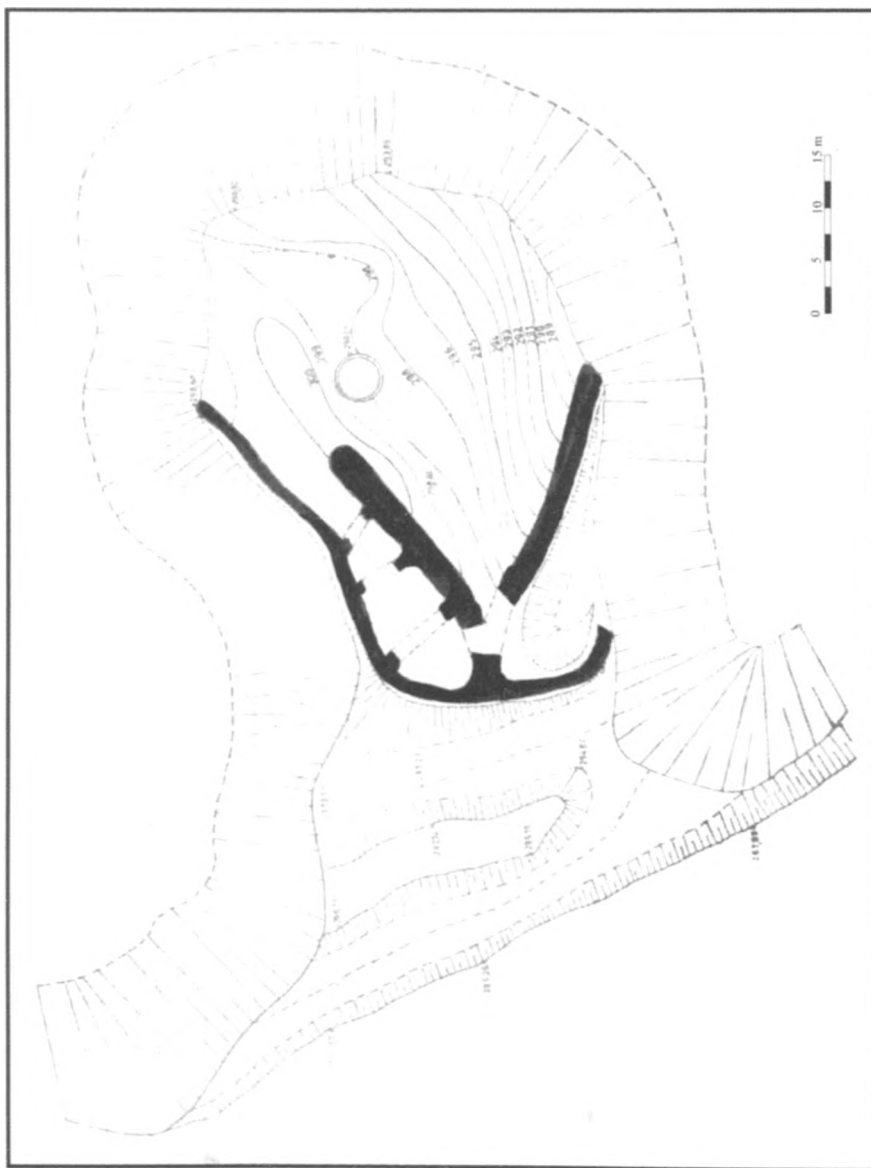
The fortress in Carașova is entirely built of stone and was placed on the top of Grad Hill. The first documented mention of the fortress is from 1323. Until 1520, when it last appears in the documents, it was only rarely mentioned. Its owners were both the kings of Hungary and the archbishop of Kalocsa, and before Hungary's conversion into a pashalic, the fortress was privately owned. In the fifteenth century it was part of the defensive system of southern Hungary. During the sixteenth century, after Banat's conversion into a pashalic, it most likely became a border fortification for the Ottoman Empire. The purpose of this paper is to synthesize the available data regarding the main construction phases of the fortress.

Keywords

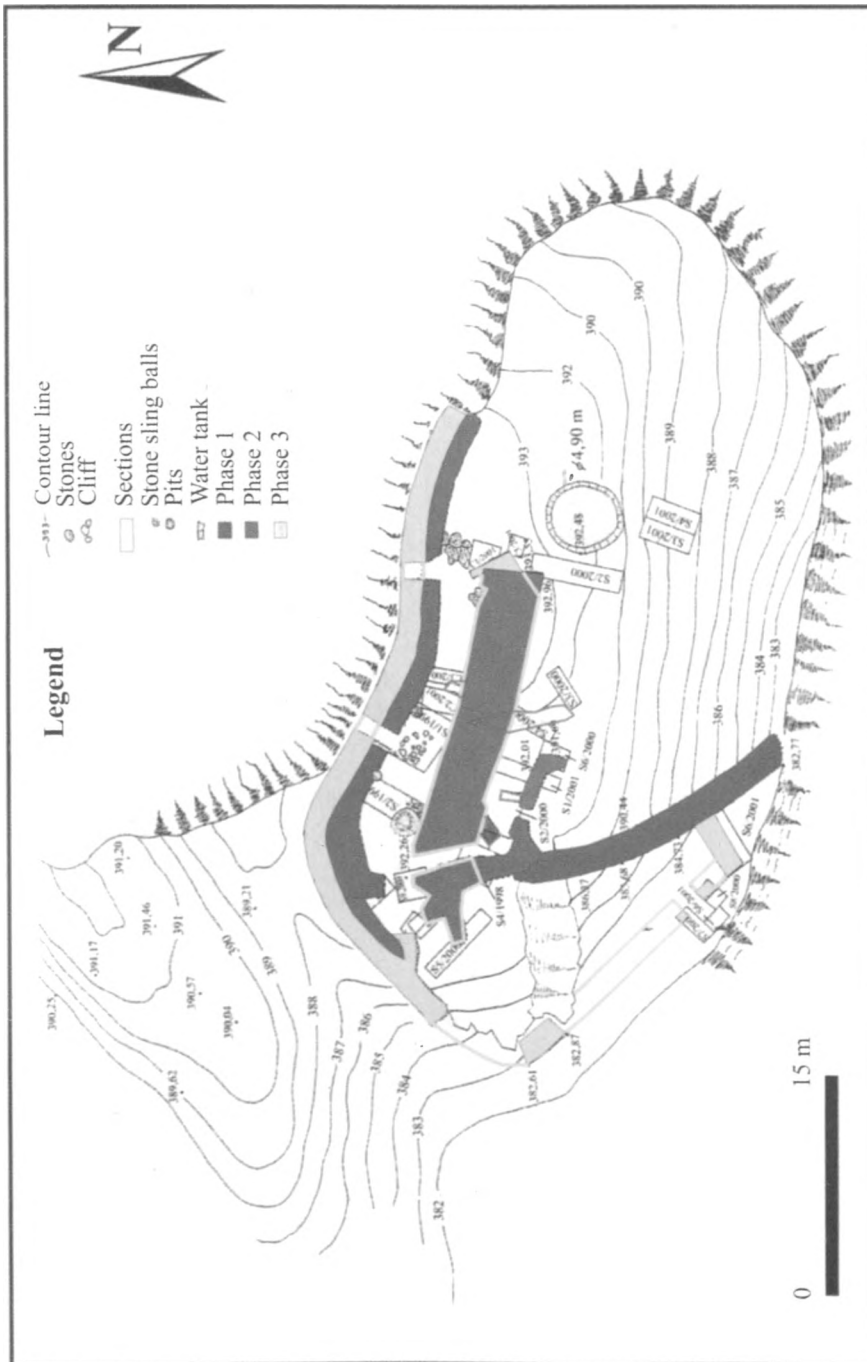
fortification, wall, tower, water tank, cliff, stone



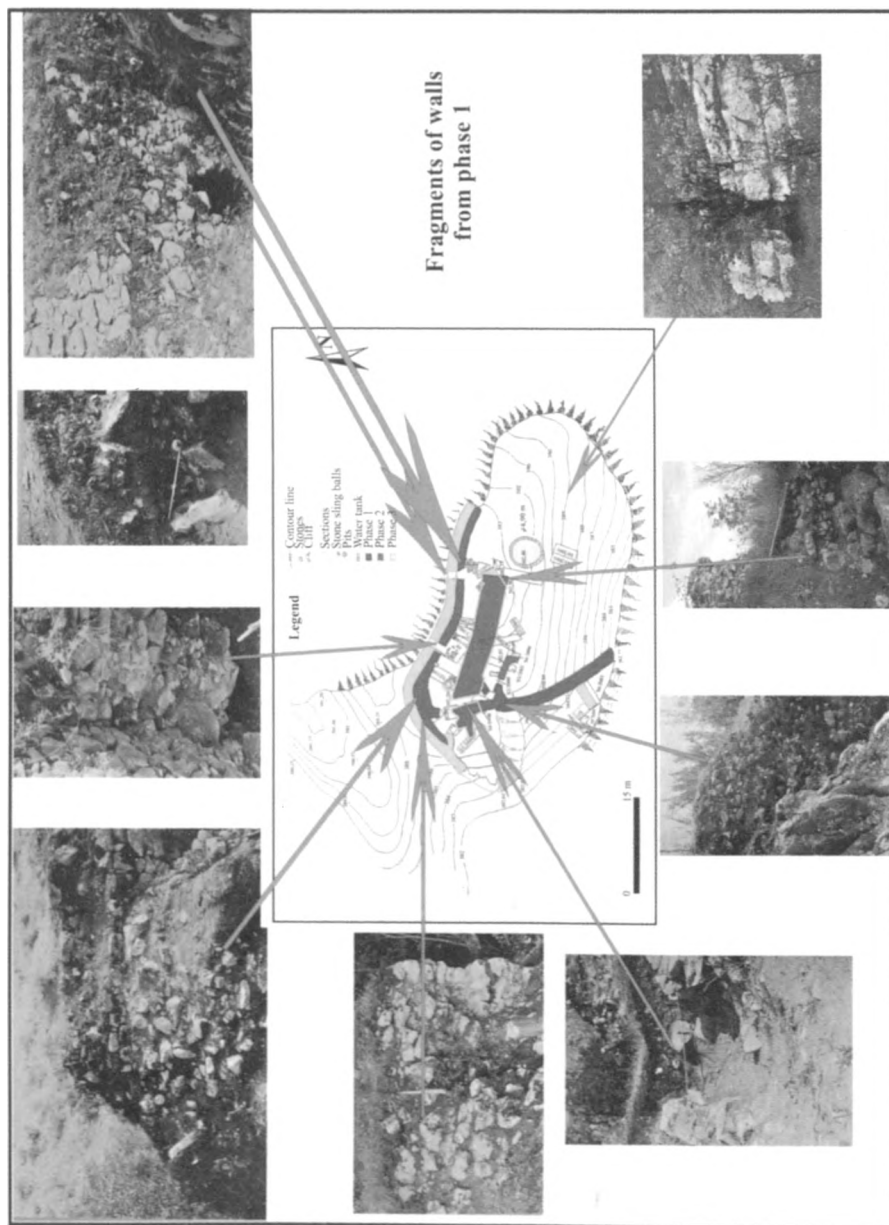
Pl. 1. Map.



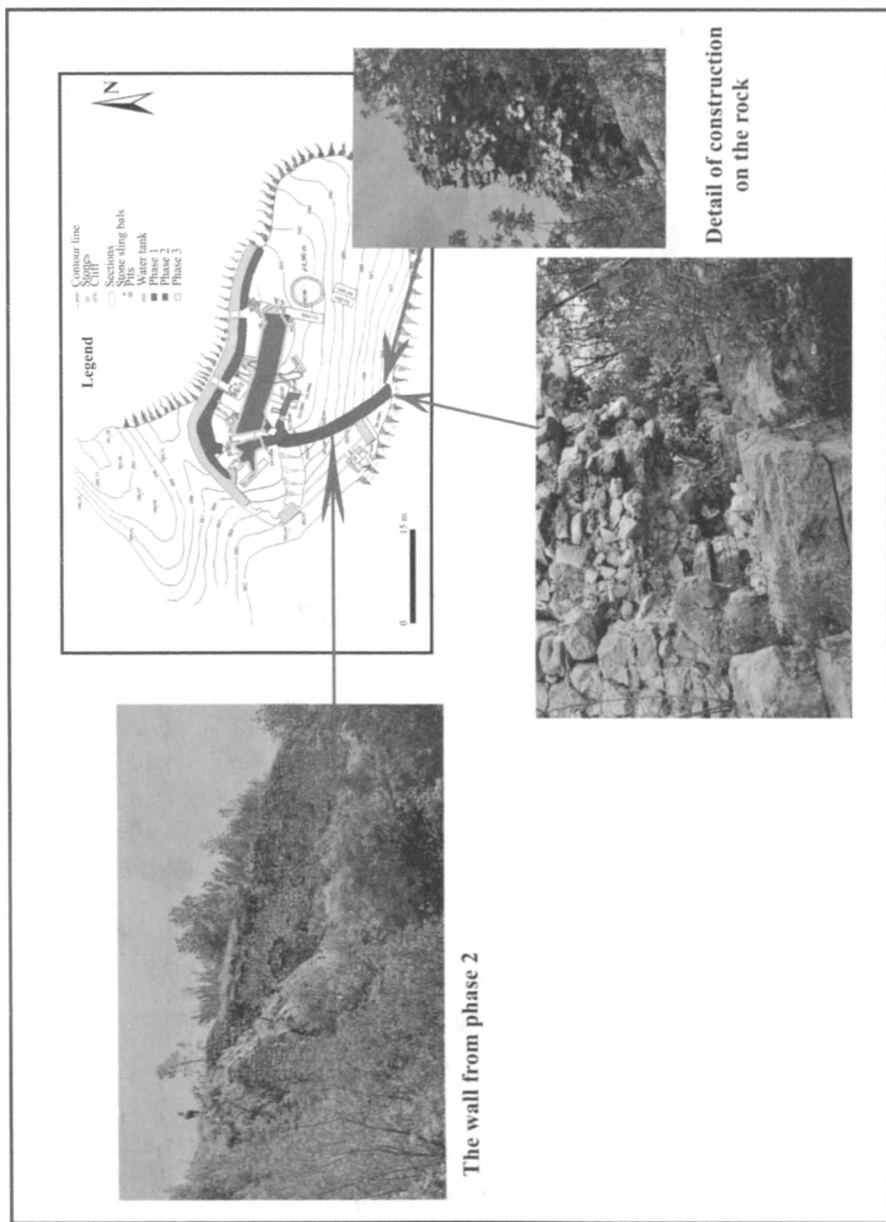
Pl. 2. The plan of the fortress, made without a preliminary excavation, published in at least four books and papers (according to Teicu 2009).



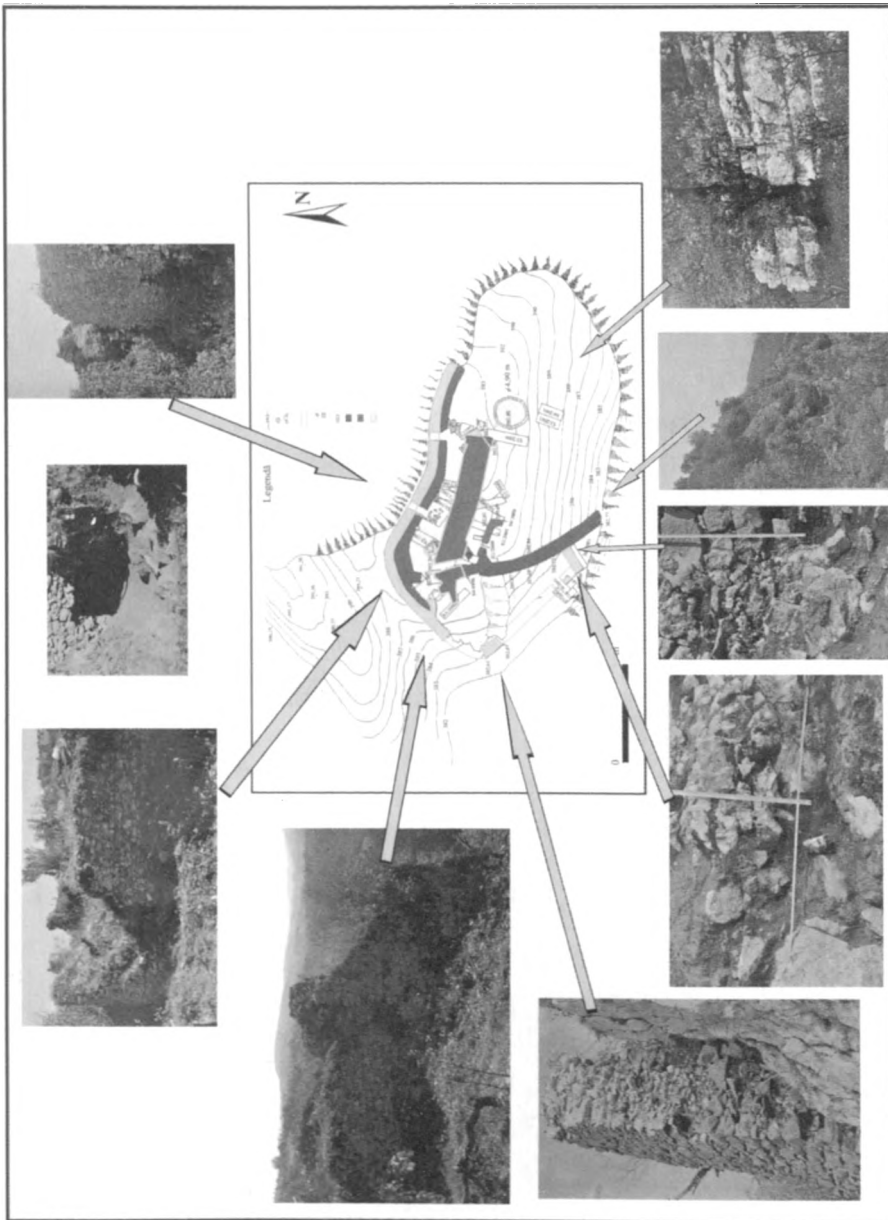
Pl. 3. Caraşova. Plan (Vidu Micli, 2001).



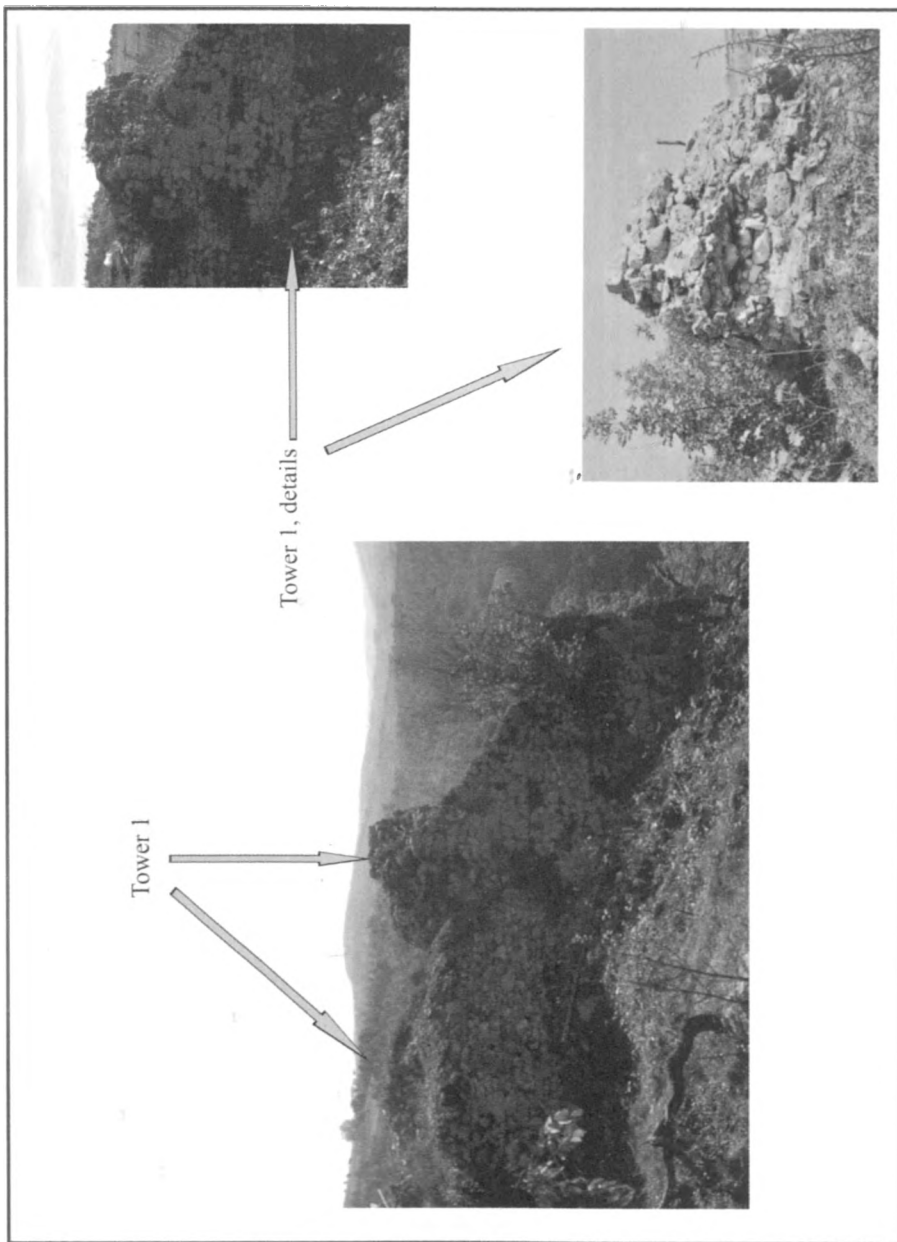
Pl. 4. Caraşova. Phase 1.



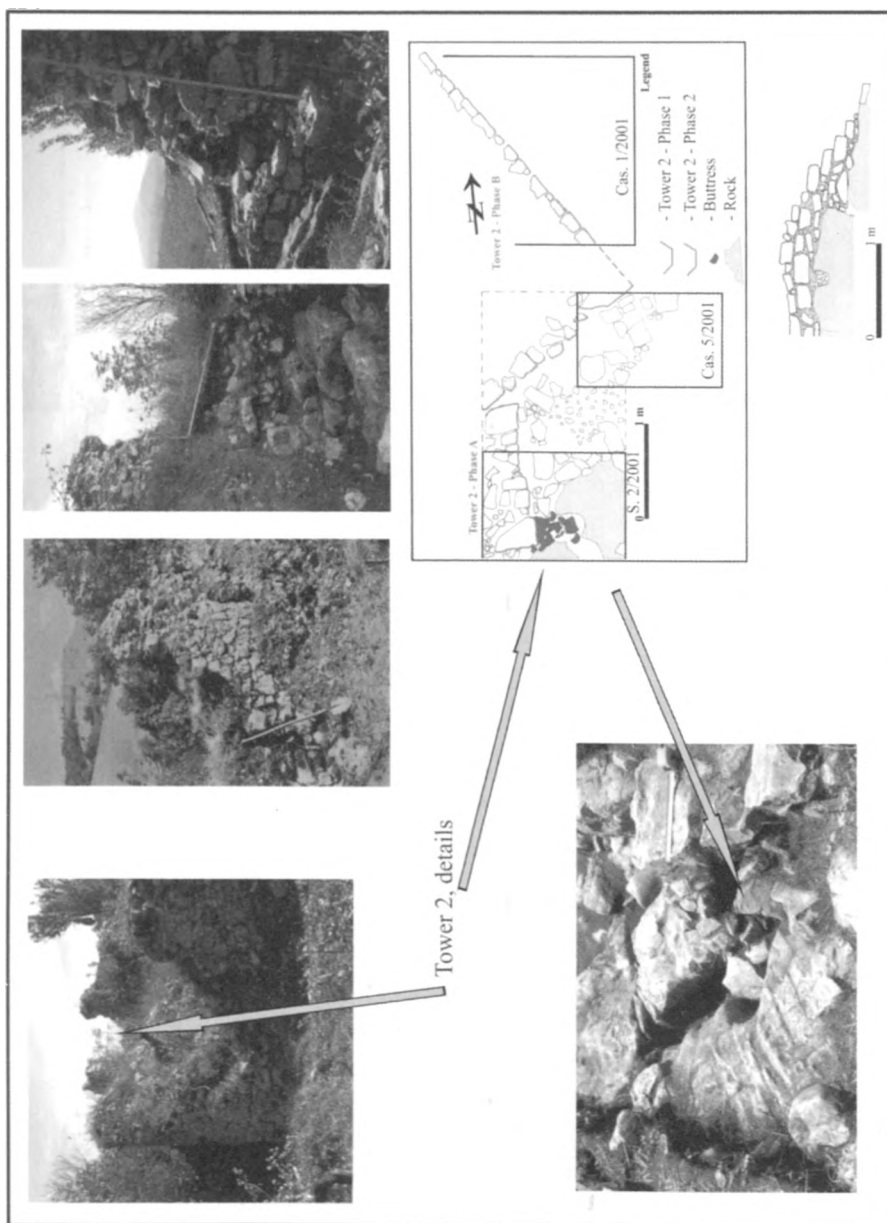
Pl. 5. Caraşova. Phase 2.



Pl. 6. Carașova. Phase 3.



Pl. 7. Caraşova. The tower no. 1.



Pl. 8. Carasova. The tower no. 2.