

EARLY CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURAL COMPLEX IN SOFIA (BULGARIA)

An archaeological monument in the Lozenets living quarter of the city of Sofia, unknown until that moment, was partially destroyed in 2000 by the excavation works carried out to lay the foundations of a modern building. The site is situated to the southeast of the Late Antique building, excavated in the early 1950-es by I. Velkov and the architect S. Bobchev¹, which became known as the “basilica in Gorni Lozenets”². However, after was excavated completely it turned out to be a mausoleum dating back to the Late Roman period³.

The excavations were carried out next to the modern building on an area of ca. 900 sq. m. (fig. 1). The main periods of occupation and construction of the complex were defined⁴. The main periods of the sequence from bottom to top are as follows:

1. Pieces of burnt daub, charcoals, ash and coarse handmade pottery dated back to the Late Neolithic⁵.

2. A fragment of a votive relief and coins dated back to the second half of the 3rd – the first decade of the 4th century AD. No traces of buildings or constructions related to this period were found.

¹ И. Велков, *Из историята на Сердика*. - *Природа*, N 5. София 1954, 117-118.

² Д. Василева, *План и конструкция на базиликата в кв. Лозенец*, София. - *Техническа мисъл*, XXI, N 6. София 1984, 79-84.

³ К. Шалганов, М. Иванов, *Новооткрит късноантичен мавзолей в кв. Лозенец*, София през 2001 г. – In: **Spartacus II (2075 години от въстанието на Спартак /трако-римско наследство/ 2000 години християнство)**. Международен симпозиум 1-4 октомври 2002 г., Сандански. Велико Търново 2006, 314-324.

⁴ М. Даскалов, С. Горянова, М. Иванов, *Спасително археологическо проучване на ранновизантийски църковен комплекс в гр. София, кв. Лозенец-Южен парк (кв. 13, п. I-153 по ЗРП на гр. София) през 2000 г.* - Археологически открития и разкопки през 1999-2000 г. XL Национална археологическа конференция. София 2001, 131-133; М. Даскалов, С. Горянова, К. Трендафилова, *Археологическо проучване на ранновизантийски църковен комплекс в София, кв. Лозенец – Южен парк (кв. 13, п. I-153 по ЗРП)*. – *АОР през 2001 г.*, София. 2002. 123-126.

⁵ The pottery was identified by Tatiana Stefanova (Dept. of Prehistory, NIAM-BAS) and the authors would like to use the opportunity to thank her.

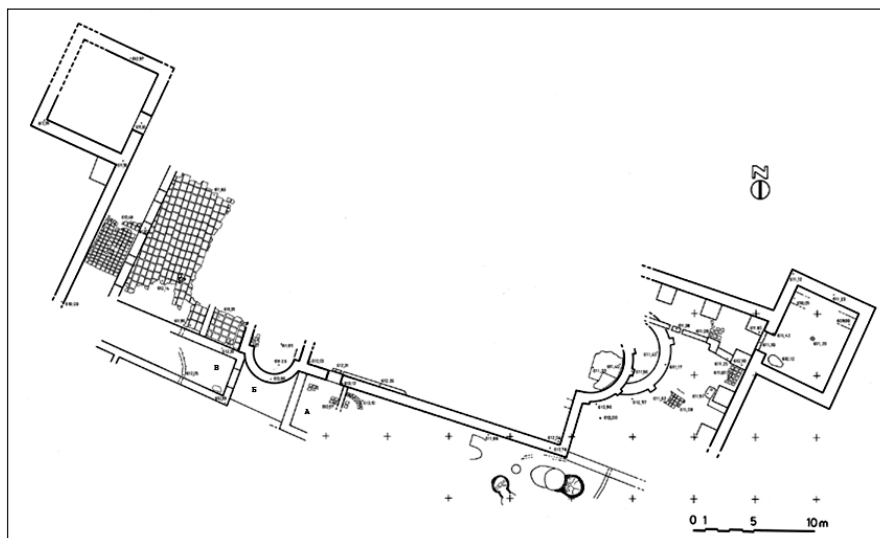


Fig. 1. Plan of the excavated parts of the architectural complex.

Сл. 1. План ископаних делова архитектонског комплекса.

3. The first period of construction activity on the site resulted in a church, from which only an apse and a piece of a mortar plastered floor survived. The coins of reliable stratigraphic position date back the building between the end of the 330-es and the beginning of the 340-es.⁶ This Early Christian church functioned as late as the first decade of the 5th century. Its destruction is marked by two coin hoards, one of them discovered on the threshold of the altar in the mortar debris. The latest coin in these hoards belonged to Emperor Honorius and was struck between 408 and 423. The church was destroyed during the construction of a later building of basilical plan and part of the materials were reused in the construction of the new building as well as for raising and leveling the outside and the inside surfaces.

4. A fortified architectural complex was built at the end of the first – the beginning of the second decade of the 5th century. It comprised a basilica, an atrium to the west of it, enclosure walls with porticos and additional premises facing an inner courtyard, two corner towers (at the northeastern and northwestern corner) and rooms situated in a courtyard to the south of the basilica. Three phases of construction of this architectural complex have been identified. The church functioned during the 5th and the first quarter of the 6th century.

5. The next period of occupation was related to a complete change in the complex functions. Potter's workshop functioned in the space enclosed by the wall to the south of the basilica. Three kilns have been unearthed until present and the archaeological excavations reveal that the reconstructed buildings or some of their premises situated nearby had been occupied by the people working at the potter's workshop. Most probably, by that time the church had

⁶ Б. Божкова, *Монетни находки от археологически комплекс (IV-VII в.) „Южен парк – Лозенец“*, София. – Нумизматика, сфрагистика и епиграфика 1, София 2004, 73-86.

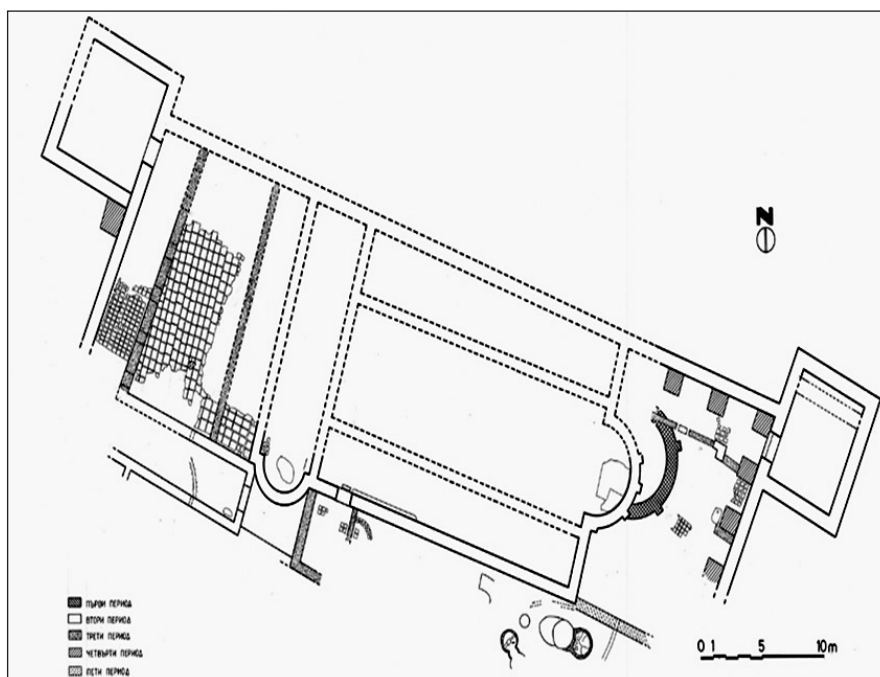


Fig. 2. Reconstructed plan of the two churches with their construction phases and functioning.

Сл. 2. План реконструкције две цркве са фазама њихове изградње и функционисањем.

stopped functioning. The production center existed until the 620-es. Its end is marked by a coin hoard, the latest being folises of Emperor Heraclius struck in 614/5⁷⁷. The latest coin found at the site (yielded by the debris in the courtyard in front of the western façade of the basilica) was a folis of the same emperor struck in 615/6.

6. The period after the demolition of the houses dated back to the second half of the 6th – the beginning of the 7th century is marked only by the remains of a hearth in the debris of a house premise. It is hard to define the period of its existence because this layer did not yield any materials.

7. The Ottoman period is represented only by the lower part of an oven made of bricks, tiles and clay, and situated to the east of the southern nave of the basilica. The oven overlaid a layer of debris and based on the typical pottery shards with yellow or green thick glaze was dated back to the 18th – 19th century.

8. The latest intrusions at the site were made by excavations for extraction of building materials, most likely for the construction of a *tabiya* (an Ottoman fortification structure) in the 19th century and small houses with shallow foundations in the 20th century.

⁷⁷ Б. Божкова, *Съкровище от ранновизантийски монети от София*, Нумизматика и сфрагистика 2, София 2000, 18-37.



Fig. 3. Surviving part of the narthex with the southern conch and parts of the premises to the southwest of the basilica.

Сл. 3. Сачувани део нартекса са јужном нишом и деловима просторија на југозападу базилике.

The archaeological excavations yielded more than 2 600 finds – coins, coin-like tokens, architectural details, fragmented glass vessels, metal adornments for costumes and personal ornaments, tools and everyday life objects, metal parts of weapons, rejects from the pottery production, etc.

The paper is aimed at presenting the two consecutive Christian complexes, which have been built up and functioned during the reign of Constantine the Great and his descendants (fig. 2).

Only part of the semicircular apse with two pilasters has survived from the earlier church. The foundations of the building are made of rounded undressed stones arranged in regular rows and bound together by white mortar. When constructing the second (later) church, the builders destroyed the walls of the earlier one down to the floor of the altar, which was made of a thick layer of pink mortar. Since only a small portion of the substructure of its southern wall has survived, it is hard to determine whether it was a small one-nave church or a three-nave basilica.

The new Christian temple erected in the beginning of the second decade of the 5th century on the remains of the earlier one was a three-nave one-apse basilica. It is east-west oriented (the apse is slightly deviated to south) and constructed in the *opus mixtum* technique. The stones and the bricks are bound together by fine-grain mortar and crushed bricks. The brick band is preserved at the apse (up to 6 rows of bricks) and at the southern wall (up to 4 brick rows).



Fig. 4. The southern part of the portico in front of the basilica's entrance.

Сл. 4. Јужни део степеништа испред улаза у базилику

The apse was probably vaulted and the vault was probably made of bricks as evidenced by the special brick formatting. The brick band of the south wall is traced out up to 0.55-0.65m above the construction level. At the apse the brick masonry starts immediately above the construction level.

The basilica is 31 m long; its restorable width in the eastern part of the naos is 16.8m and 17.4 – in the western part. The apse is 5.5m wide and 3m long. The eastern façade of the apse is divided by five pilasters, each of them 0.6m wide and 0.18m long. There were probably window niches between the pilasters, an assumption supported by the numerous pieces of window glass found there.

Data about the internal division is provided by the remains of a stylobate 0.70-0.72m wide to the south of the apse entrance. The naos is 27.80-28m long; its outer northeastern corner is a bit smaller than 90° probably intended to avoid the asymmetry caused by the northern enclosure wall. The restorable inner dimensions of the naves (not including the width of the stylobate) are the following: the central one is 7.4m and the northern and the southern - 3.1-3.2m each. A hypothetical restoration of the northern enclosure wall leads to the suggestion that the naos was ca. 0.5-0.6m wider in its western part or the northern wall was thickened or doubled.

The floor of the basilica was made of mortar mixed with crushed bricks plastered on top of a layer of crushed stones and pieces of bricks and tiles. The floor level in the southern nave corresponds completely to the construction level outside the church in southern direction. The construction level along the eastern wall exterior of the southern nave lowers to the level of the floor plaster in



Fig. 5. The atrium with the tile cover.

Сл. 5. Атријум прекривен плочицама.

the apse of the earlier building. Its wall was intentionally destroyed down to the floor level in order to create a walking level to the east of the basilica apse. The displacement is about 0.6m

The basilica has a narthex to the west. No information about its internal division has been provided by the excavations. The narthex ends to the south with a semicircular conch with a diameter 3.5m. However, it is not clear whether there was a second conch at the opposite end or the basilica was asymmetrical in plan. The narthex without the conch was probably as wide as the naos and 4.2m long. There was a deep narrowing down oval pit in the conch floor, which was filled in with construction wastes only; no other materials were found there. It is possible to assume that the pit was related to the *mensa martiriae* (fig. 3).

An open portico (2.8m wide in the southern part and 2.4-2.5m wide in the northern one) existed in front of the western façade of the basilica (fig. 4). The wall discovered here was interpreted as a stylobate based on its shallower foundations. A bed of a column base as wide as the stylobate is preserved in its southwestern corner. The portico was constructed later than the basilica and the courtyard in front of the western façade. This conclusion is based on the fact that the stylobate foundations disturb the floor cover of the portico and the courtyard made of bipedal bricks measuring 0.52 x 0.60m.

There is an atrium to the west of the portico (fig. 5). It is trapezoid in shape and has the following dimensions: length along the north-south axis – 16m, width – 10.5m (at the south end) and 8.5m (at the north end). The atrium was covered with bipedal bricks carefully arranged in north-south oriented rows. The tegulae are placed directly on a leveling layer of sandy soil and the gaps



Fig. 6. The northeastern tower, parts of the northern and the eastern enclosure walls and the attached elements.

Сл. 6. Северноисточна кула. Делови северних и источних зидова ограде и придодати елементи.

between them are filled in with a fine grain mortar mixed with a large amount of crushed brick. The courtyard level is 0.25-0.30m slanting down from south to north, where probably the rain and snow water was cached and directed outside the enclosure wall. To the south the atrium abuts a room, to the west and probably to the north it abuts a portico leading to the enclosure wall of the complex. No well was found in the atrium.

The basilica is situated in the northern part of the enclosed space shaped as an irregular quadrangle. Parts of the northern, eastern and the western enclosure walls have been unearthed until present. The northern wall has a restorable length of 52m. The fence was made of stones bound together by mortar and most probably there were leveling brick bands. The fence is 1.05-1.10m thick and a plinth course up to 7cm wide was found to the north/at the north end. A thin layer of mortar to the south marking the construction level of the wall and the basilica corresponds to the plinth course.

Two towers have been unearthed in the northeastern and the northwestern corner.

The northeastern tower is connected with the northern and the eastern enclosure walls (fig. 6). It is rectangular in plan and its outer dimensions are 9 x 7.5m. The thickness of the walls is identical to the one of the fence. The original plan of the tower was a quadrangular one measuring 7.5 x 7.5m. It was enlarged 1.5 m to the north during the construction probably in pursuit of constructing



Fig. 7. Portico at the western enclosure wall.

Сл.7. Стениште и западни зид ограде.

the body of the tower before the front of the northern curtain and in search of stability of the terrain. A joint is clearly visible at the outer side of the original delineation. The tower was constructed in the *opus mixtum* technique. The front part of the stones is carefully dressed. Bricks were used to construct the corners and the sides of the entrance (1.58m wide). The joints are as wide as the bricks and most probably the same masonry continued along the complete height of the opening. The western side of the threshold is also made from bricks. A massive stone threshold, whose size matches the size of the entrance and the height of the brick threshold, was found in the excavated soil (1.48-1.5m long, 0.64-0.65m wide and 0.40-0.42m high). Holes (5-8cm in diameter) for the axes of a two-folding door are visible at both ends. Stone quadrae had been used for the construction of the northeastern corner of the tower.

The northwestern tower is destroyed considerably more than the northeastern one. It is also rectangular in plan measuring 9 x 8.5 m. **There is a constructional joint** between its southern wall and the outer face of the western enclosure wall. A large drop has been registered under its foundations, filled with pieces of bricks, tiles and small and middle-size stones, probably debris from the earlier church. The outer side of the foundations is dug in deeper (down to 0.80-1 m), which is closer to the depth of other parts (down to 1.1-1.2 m), while inside the foundations are considerably shallower (down to 0.3-0.6 m). A layer

of soil mixed with pottery shards, coins and other finds was piled at some places on top of the 1 m thick debris layer. The situation is additionally complicated by the 19th century destruction of the walls for stone extracting, which prevents observations on the construction of the superstructure. It was only possible to define the southern side of an entrance from the direction of the atrium, which was also made from bricks. The connection between the tower and the northern enclosure wall is disturbed by the modern construction trench.

The foundations of the enclosure wall, the northeastern tower and the basilica were built the same way – masonry of rows of middle and larger size crushed stones bound together by white mortar. The depth varies from 1 to 1.3 m being shallower at the south wall of the basilica and deeper at the northern enclosure wall and the northeastern tower. No entrance was located in any of the excavated parts of the architectural complex.

Blocking, partition and additional walls were found in all excavated parts of the enclosure. South of the northern wall at a distance of 2.9m a parallel wall 0.44-0.45m thick was built up. Its western part is on top of the apse of the earlier church and extends to the eastern wall of the northern nave of the basilica. It abuts at east an L-shaped pilaster measuring 1.05 x 1.05m (at the outer side), 0.55m (to the west) 0.65m (to the south). Its eastern side is abutted by a wall similar in construction but a bit wider (up to 0.6m) reaching the inner face of the eastern enclosure wall. Its foundations are ca. 0.65-0.75m shallower than the foundations of the basilica, the enclosure walls and the above mentioned L-shaped pilaster. It is difficult to offer an interpretation of this partition wall because its eastern part was seriously damaged by one of the later pilasters abutting its inner face. A suggestion that this space was accessed from the south can be made. The area in front of and inside the space was covered by tegulae; the pavement is partially preserved and was probably laid down simultaneously with the erection of the wall. The L-shaped pilaster was built at the same time as the basilica and the enclosure wall and probably supported a construction connected to rooms at different floor levels of the tower. The depth of the foundations as well as their construction is identical to those of the basilica. Massive pilasters measuring 1.4 x 1.3m abutting the eastern part of the northern and the eastern enclosure walls at a distance of 2 – 2.5m from each other were built during the next construction phase of the architectural complex. They probably supported a loft or rooms on the upper floor (fig. 6).

A portico was constructed in front of the narthex along the inner face of the western enclosure wall at the same time as the portico (fig. 7). It was 2.9-3m wide and probably had reached the northern enclosure wall. Its construction has also disturbed the bipedal brick pavement. The space covered by the portico was not paved at that period but much later, during the reconstructions in the 6th century and was related to some kind of household structures. The excavations provided the following information about the construction of the portico: the stylobate is 0.70-0.72m wide and column bases made of massive stone blocks or large size stones were found *in situ*. Most probably there were six bases. Some of them have been poorly preserved (the two from north are destroyed by the modern construction trench). The bases are as wide as the stylobate; their length varies from 0.7 to 0.9m and the distance between them is 1.9-2m. The



Fig. 8. Capital from the portico at the western enclosure wall.

Сл. 8. Капител са степеняща на западном зиду ограде.

upper part of some is plastered with mortar; mortar was also used to bind them to the stylobate. The debris in the courtyard yielded various architectural details – column sections, capitals and bases – providing information about the colonnade order. The columns had a base consisting of a rectangular plinth placed in a bed and a cylindrical shaft. The shaft consisted of two sections, each of them 0.9 m long. There was a small reduction in the diameter along the height of the column sections. They had been pegged together using metal pins. The columns had been crown with cylindrical capitals with a quadrangular abacus. The capitals were carved with palm or lotus leaves (fig. 8).

Several rooms were unearthed to the south of the basilica. They are designated from east to west with the Cyrillic letters A, Б and В (fig. 1 and 2).

Room A is situated immediately to the east of the arch of the conch of the narthex. It measures 4 x 3m and is constructed in the *opus mixtum* technique. The mortar is mixed with crushed brick. The walls are 0.45 m thick. The original plan comprised a floor made of mortar plastered on a layer of fragmented tiles and stones. A cover made of reused tiles was placed on the plaster during later reconstructions. Room A was relatively later than the basilica. Its walls abut the outer face of the southern wall; their foundations are much shallower; they are above the construction level of the basilica marked by a layer of scattered mortar and a mortar edge along the wall face. At some point after the walls had been destroyed, they were re-erected again but in a different manner – they became 0.60-0.62m thick and the stones were bound together by crumbly white large grain mortar. A cornice was also reused in the masonry. A ceramic water

pipe (14 cm in diameter) was walled up in the western wall under the construction level of the room. Since it is not completely excavated, any conclusion about its functions would be hasty.

Room Б covers the space with the narthex width. However, it was built much later. Its southern wall was made of stones bound together by mud and had very shallow foundations.

Room B is situated to the southwest of the outer corner of the narthex. Only 1/3 of its area has been excavated; the rest was excavated only down to the level of the debris of its southern wall surviving up to 0.8m at this place. The room is rectangular in plan. The excavated part is 11.4 m long, 4.4m wide (at the eastern end) and 4.2m wide (at the western end). The direct connection of the room with the southwestern outer corner of the basilica has been established, i. e. the connection between its northern wall and the southern wall of the narthex. However, there is no connection where it leans against a sector of the outer arch of the conch. The foundations are similar to those of the narthex. The walls are 0.62-0.64m wide and are built up in *opus mixtum* technique. The boundary between the sub- and the superstructure is marked by a plinth course along the inner face of its southern wall. A sewer goes through the wall, immediately above the plinth course. The sewer is lined with dry bounded tile halves and is dug into the brown sandy layer leveling the floor within the room. The sewer and the tile pavement in the atrium are at the same level. There is a 1.63m wide entrance to the room's eastern wall; the entrance sides are made of parallelepiped-shaped quadrae with nicely dressed edges, placed on the foundation. In a later period of its functioning the entrance was blocked by one-face masonry of undressed stones, bricks and mud and the floor was raised by 0.25m. This reconstruction is related to the final stage of room B functioning when it turned into a house with a clay floor. A hoard of 43 Early Byzantine coins was discovered on the house floor.

The geophysical survey provided information about the southern enclosure wall and a number of premises in the enclosed space. The facts that the entire complex was enclosed by a defense type of wall as well as the number of other premises surrounding the basilica lead to the suggestion that the Early Christian complex has functioned as a residence. The future excavations will provide opportunity to define the functions of the complex and the capacity of the potter's workshop established on top of its remains.

Translated by Tatiana Stefanova

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РАНОХРИШЋАНСКИ КОМПЛЕКС У СОФИЈИ

Приликом копања темеља за изградњу нове зграде у градској четврти Лозанец у Софији током 2000. године делимично је порушен археолошки комплекс, непознат до момента његовог девастирања. Откривена је површина величине око 900m². На горњој површини ископа налазио се део ранохришћанског комплекса. Утврђено је постојање остатака из различитих временских периода и различитог интензитета: од касног неолита, преко друге половине III до почетка IV века, као и две хришћанске цркве, које су биле у функцији од треће четвртине IV до прве четвртине VI века, затим грнчарска радионица датована од VI до почетка VII века и незнатни трагови становања датовани од XVIII до XX века.

Од прве цркве сачуван је само део полукружне апсиде са два пиластра. Откривени делови цркве изграђени су од необрађеног облог камена, поређаног у правилне редове и повезан белим малтером. Под олтарске апсиде је од дебљег слоја малтера црвенкасте боје.

На почетку друге деценије V века, изнад остатака старије цркве, изграђена је друга хришћанска црква – тробродна базилика са једном апсидом, оријентисана у правцу исток-запад са мањим одступањем апсиде према југу. Дужина цркве је 31m. Ширина на источном делу наоса износи 16,80m, а на западном делу 17,40m. Распон апсиде је 5,50m, а дубина апсиде износи 3m. Источна фасада апсиде била је издељена са пет пиластра између који се налазе прозори. Под базилике је од малтера са примесама млевене опеке и комадима ломљеног камена (на врху подлоге) и фрагментима грађевинске керамике. На западу је образован нартекс који се завршава полукружном конхом. У поду конхе су остаци дубоког, већег укопа за који се претпоставља да је у вези са постојањем стола – *mensa martiria*. Испред западне фасаде базилике изграђен је ходник (портик), одвојен од атријума касније придодатим стилобатом. Под ходника је поплочан бипедалним опекама. Атријум базилике је трапезоидног облика величине 16 x 8,50-10,50m. На југу атријума налази се подужно постављена просторија, а на западу и северу портик постављен уз оградни зид комплекса. У атријуму није очишћен бунар.

Базилика се налази на северном крају ограђеног простора неправилног четвороугаоника. Откривен је део северног, источног и западног зида. Оградни зид је грађен каменом у малтеру са редовима опеке за изравнање. Северни зид је дужине 52m. Дебљина оградног зида је од 1,05 до 1,10m. На североисточном и северозападном крају откривене су две куле, правоугаоне основе. Североисточна кула има димензије 9 x 7,50m, а северозападна 9 x 8,50m. Улази кула воде према унутрашњости ограђеног простора.

Доњи делови оградног зида, кула и базилике изграђени су од ломљеног камена средњих и већих димензија у белом малтеру. Дебљина зидова је од 1 до 1,20m. Источно од базилике, са унутрашње стране оградног зида били су прислоњени ступци већих димензија који су носили некакву галерију или конструкцију постављену на горњем, вишем нивоу. Са унутрашње стране западног оградног зида изграђен је портик. Стилобат портика је дебљине 0,72m. На горњем делу портика сачувани су *in situ* остаци стубаца рађени од монолитних блокова или од већих комада камена, постављени на растојању између 1,90 и 2m. На југу базилике налазиле су се стамбене просторије, од којих су две биле изграђене у техници *opus mixtum*. Биле су изграђене и коришћене у време изградње базилике. И после рушења базилике и организовања грнчарске радионице на том месту у VI веку, ове су просторије имале и даље стамбени карактер.

Приликом геофизичких истраживања регистровано је место и правац пружања јужног оградног зида, и постојање просторија у његовој близини. Пажљиво утврђивање базилике и постојање грађевина у њеној непосредној близини недвосмислено указују на резиденцијални карактер представљеног ранохришћанског комплекса.