

Three medieval stove tiles from the Princiar Court of Târgoviște

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Abstract

The town of Târgoviște, once the capital of Walachian rulers, has recently undergone a new stage of the restoration process meant to reintegrate it into the national touristic circuit*. The process concerned also digging cables, water and sanitary sewer ditches, so the medieval archeological site was involved in massive excavation work, resulting in 1.70-2 m deep ditches, which were submitted to archeological surveillance*. As much of the numerous items in the archeological inventory are yet to be analyzed, this article presents three fragmentary stove tiles.

Key-words: medieval stove tiles, Saint George, dancers, Princiar Court, Walachia

Chronologically and ornamentally, the stove tiles from the Princiar Court of Târgoviște are highly heterogenous. The large set of shapes and composition sets it within the chronological framework of the Princiar Court's use.

The tile depicting Saint George (Fig. 1) was discovered in a ditch from the junction between the northern and eastern enclosure walls, most likely originating from one of the two burned down houses (N. Constantinescu, 2009), preceding the supposedly 1584 elevation of the stone and brick precinct. The last two tiles were recovered from the southeastern area of the Court, near to the “Bălașa House”, where numerous ceramic fragments from the original heating system were also recovered. One of the tiles (Fig. 2) is a fortuit discovery, while the other (Fig. 3) comes from a medieval garbage pit with several other tiles' fragments*.

1. *Saint George slaying the dragon*

The oldest of the three tiles, presumably from the XVth/first half of the XVIth century depicts Saint George facing the dragon (Fig. 1). It misses the right upper corner, which appears to be recently broken. The quadrangular

21x14.5x1.5 cm tile was made by pouring the rue paste into the matrix, without glazing, with emphasised ornamentation on the whole central space and a standing out roughly 1 cm wide frame. The good quality clay was subjected to oxidation burning. Unlike the fine clay in the core of the tile, the surface shows quartzite sand grains used as degreaser against the sticking of the paste to the wooden matrix.

The tile depicts a religious scene, with a classic theme often used inside and outside the Carpathians (P. V. Batariuc, 1999; D. M. Istrate, 2004; M. V. Rădulescu, 2002; A. M. Gruia, 2004), illustrating the conflict between good and evil, the Christianity against the Pagans, or maybe even representing a Walachian ruler fighting the Ottomans. Saint George is portrayed standing on a horse and lodging the lance held in the left hand into the dragon's head. There seems to be a cap on Saint George's head. The horse retains a slightly raised position, indicating the cursivity of the action. The reins are visible, as well as the star stuck to the leg of the saint, picturing a spur. The cloak is weaving, the saint seems to be looking down, aiming at the dragon's head. There is also a bird in the upper part of the field.

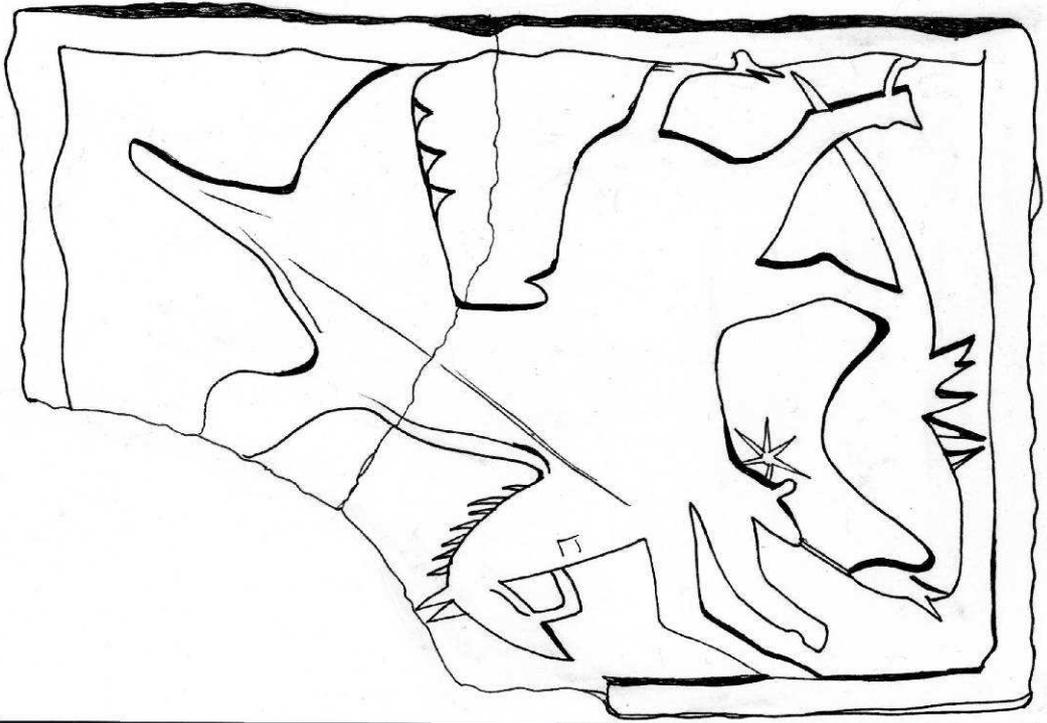
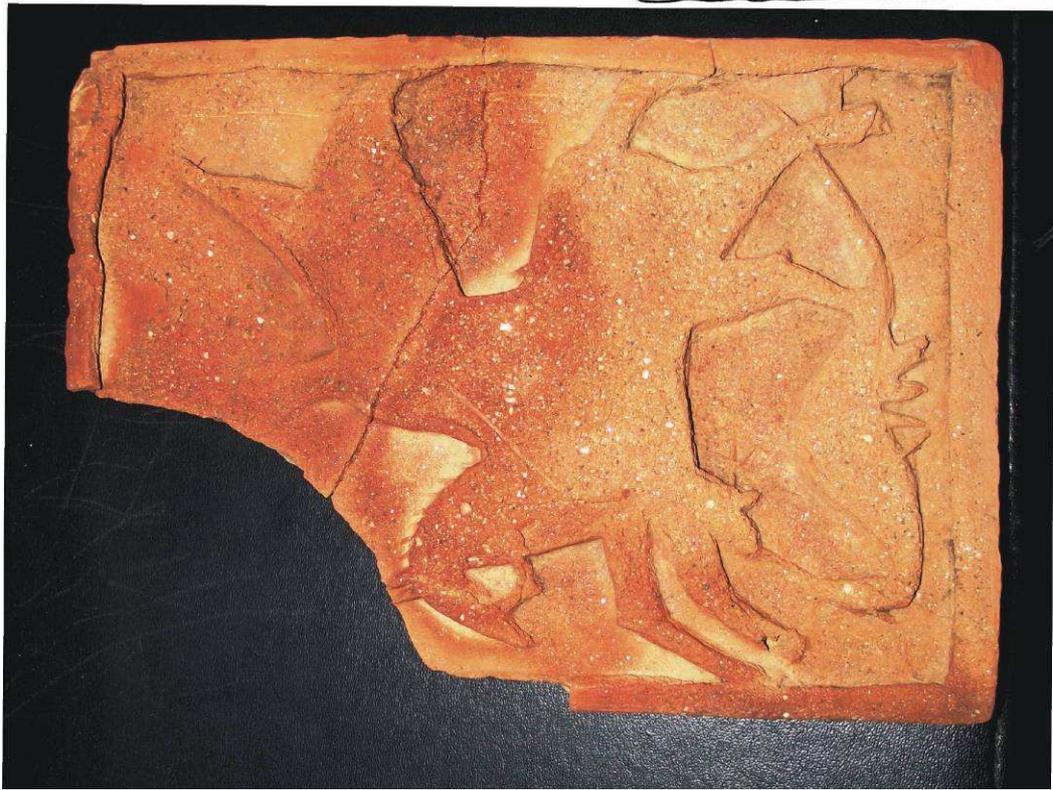
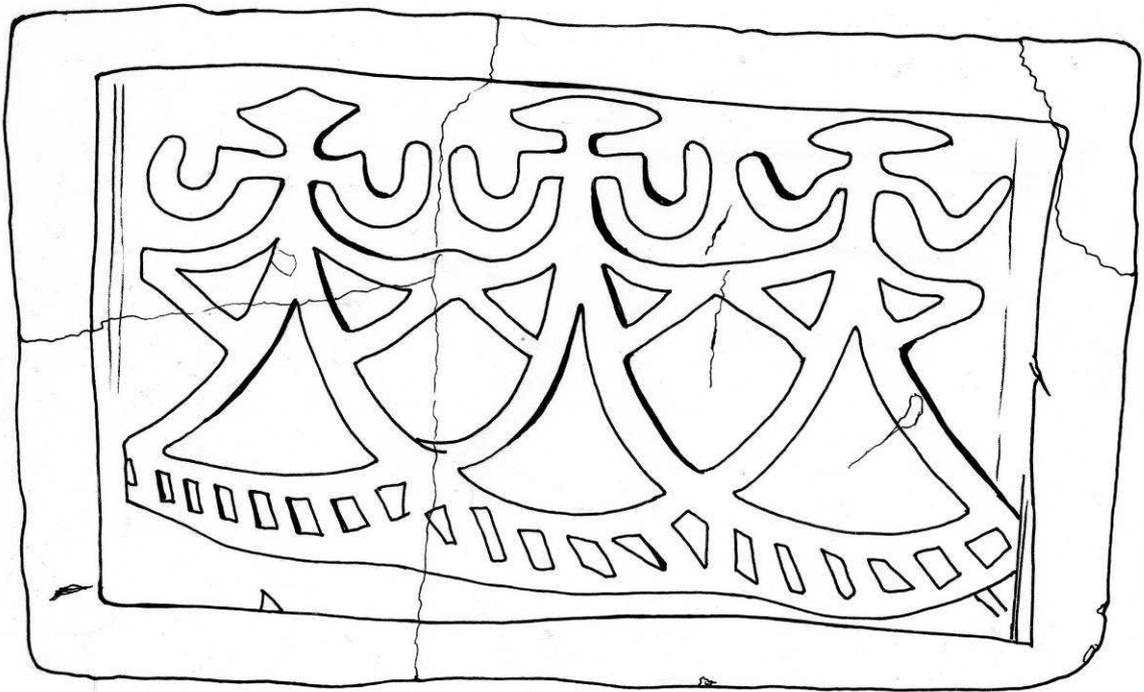


Fig. 1 - Saint George slaying the dragon



1cm

Fig. 2 - The Dancers

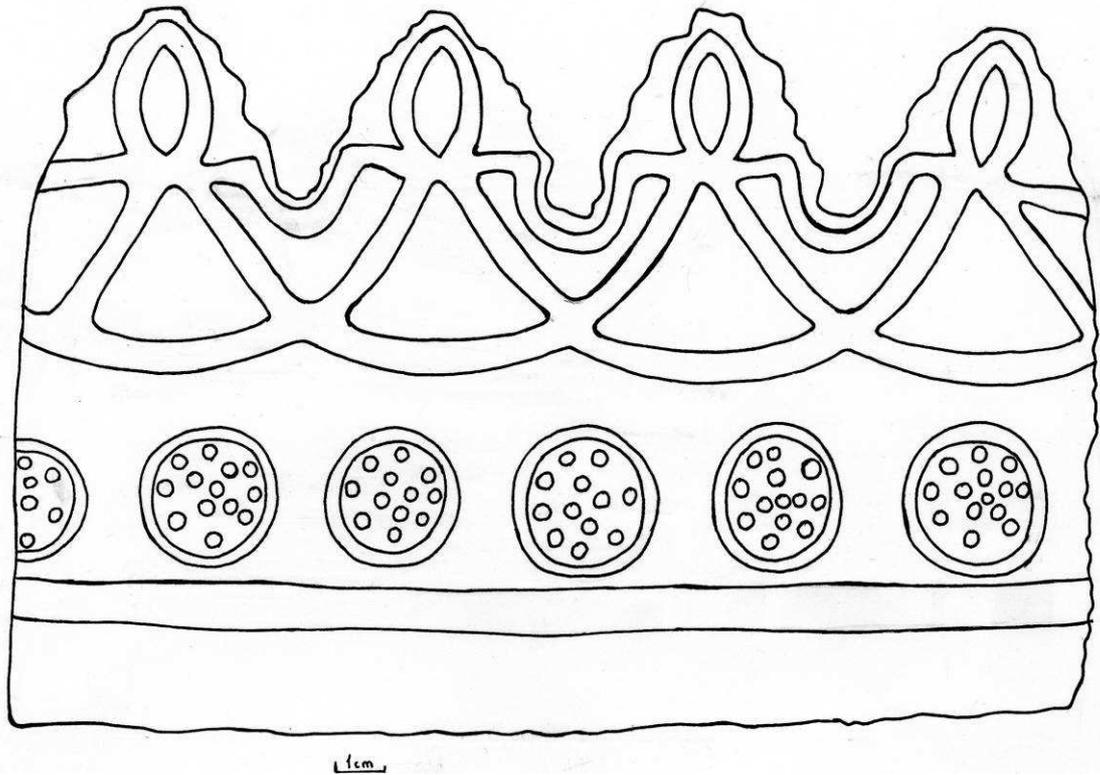


Fig. 3 - The capping tile

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Such tiles were also discovered in Bucharest (G. M. Adameșteanu, M. V. Rădulescu, 2007-2008) and the Suseni quarter of Târgoviște (G. Mihăescu, 1980-1981), in a XVth century burned house. Among other ceramic items, there were 14 quadrangular 20-22x15x1 cm stove tiles from the second half of the XVth century, with standing out frames and the traditional scene of Saint George slaying the dragon as ornament; the latter represents two depictional types: Saint George with „cape and pompon”, or Saint George with „tunic and crown”.

2. *The Dancers*

We named the second quadrangular unglazed 21x13x1 cm tile „The Tile with Dancers” (Fig. 2), for it depicts a unique scene among those represented in the Princiliary Court. After pouring the crude paste into the matrix, the tile was submitted to oxidation burning; the quality of the paste is medium good, with small sand grains used as degreaser. The tile’s surface, especially the right side, shows small burning stains.

The ornamentation seems to represent three female dancers on a platform or a stage, sketched with straight intersecting lines, forming rhomboidal and triangular spaces. The dancers’ heads are lozange, arms as hooks, and clothing forming a slightly curved-base tip-up triangle from which the legs appear stucked to the stage. The spaces between the dancers form two rhombs. The platform is crossed by oblique lines, while the whole scene is framed by a 1 cm wide band. The back of the tile was smoothed with a spatula.

The tile could be traced back to the XVIIth-XVIIIth centuries, when „Bălașa House” was in use, probably coming from one of the inside stoves.

3. *The capping tile*

The last of the three pieces is a 22x14x1.5 cm glazed capping tile (Fig. 3) recovered in fragments and successfully restored in the laboratory. The execution technique involved using fine sand as degreaser, pouring the crude paste in the matrix, followed by oxidation burning, and olive green glazing. The tile is quadrangular, with four serrated edges triangles in the upper part. The upper part of the decor is formed by four intersecting half circles, united inside the four triangles where they form four bulbs. The latter are also united by lines

descending under the space between the serrated edges triangles. The lower part of the tile shows six 3 cm diameter circles, filled with standing out protuberances. The compositional field ends in a 0.5 cm wide baguette.

Beyond the dense ornamental technique description, one might think the tile as stylizing also a group of four dancers caught in a hora (Fig. 2), as the one previously described. It is a compositional scene common for the representative scenery of the Romanian medieval spiritual realm.

* Realised during 2008-2010, the project was named *Reintegrating the Capital of Târgoviște into the Historical Circuit. The Princiliary Court Objective*. M. C. Năstase and I were directly involved in the archeological surveillance. More of the details regarding the nature and extent of archaeological researches in the Princiliary Court during 2008-2010 are to be found in the official research report. We express our gratitude to Dr. Daniela Iamandi, who restaured two of the tiles (Fig. 2, 3) in the laboratory of the CNMCD Târgoviște, and also to Florin Dumitru from Valahia University who provided the drawings.

* The remains of one of the houses with numerous common ceramic fragmented vessels are visible at the surface. As for the second house, this one is also cut by the precinct’s northern wall. Apparently, previous archaeological works mention remains of such houses, without detailed researches – N. Constantinescu, 2009, p. 167 and plate 15/2.

* The items come from 1.70 m depth, from the end of a 0.50 m wide water supply and sewer ditch. Difficult working condition only allowed the observation of the edge of a pit from where the fragmented tiles were extracted. There were no conditions for extending the observations to the bottom of the pit or to other potentially interesting spots.

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