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THE FORTIFICATIONS
OF THE ENTRANCE GATE
IN THE WESTERN DEFENSE WALL
OF WESTERN TANAIS

Abstract: *Since 1999 the Polish Archaeological Expedition has been working in Western Tanais. One of the important structures recovered in Trench XXV is the entrance gate.*

Keywords: *Tanais; Hellenism; fortifications; gate*

Excavations in Western Tanais began in the middle of the 20th century. A few seasons of fieldwork by the Lower Don Expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, headed by D. B. Shelov, uncovered remains of the outer defensive walls and some town architecture (Pl. 1). Houses with uneven stone walls, narrow winding alleys and poor archaeological inventories indicated a tribal population (Trench VI). The preserved section of defensive wall (Trench IX), uneven and without towers, also appeared to confirm Shelov's theory (Shelov 1970). Perceiving little cognitive perspective in this direction, the expedition concentrated on excavating Eastern Tanais, which was considered to have been the Greek part of the town.

In 1999 work was resumed in Western Tanais, this time by a team from the University of Warsaw (the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe Research Centre and the Institute of Archaeology), working until today as part of the Russian Archaeological Expedition directed by T. M. Arsen'eva. Approximately 1000m² of the area of the western town has been uncovered

so far (Trench XXV) (Pl. 2). At least two building phases were identified, the second one being dated to the end of the 2nd and beginning of the 1st century BC. The defences as well as neighbouring dwelling quarters were given a general overhaul, changing in effect the spatial planning of this part of the town (Scholl 2011a). The entrance gate, a major strategic point of any defences, was fortified with particular care (Pl. 3: 1).

The southern line of the defences was moved back about 4m, presumably because the original defences had started to slide down into the defensive ditch. The ground was levelled and a platform at least 0.8m high was constructed alongside the ditch. It was made of small boulders set in clay. At least three courses were laid, possibly at one time, each successive layer carefully tamped down. The walls and houses were erected simultaneously. There are no foundation trenches. A strategic street was traced and at least two quarters of dwelling units were built, separated by another street leading straight to the entrance gate in Eastern Tanais. The bridge over the ditch may have also been reconstructed at this time. The original wooden construction was dismantled and a stone-and-timber structure built in its place (Scholl 2011b). This structure is entirely unique in the Greek world (in terms of its state of preservation). Its orientation was changed slightly, its eastern part running at an acute angle with regard to the line of the defences. The gate itself was destroyed, only one orthostatic slab being preserved on the northern side. It was evidently cut to mount the doors, which must have been of wood; only one bronze rivet has survived from the fittings of these doors (Pl. 3: 2). The presumed width of the gate was 1.7m, that is, the width of the access road into Eastern Tanais, between the third and fourth towers. The first curtain (I) was approximately 3m wide, running parallel to the defensive ditch and at right angle to the western part of the bridge. Behind the entrance, on the northern side, the wall is continued for 1.4m by a second curtain wall (II) of the same thickness as the first one. The curtain then turns to the west, running perpendicularly to the eastern part of the bridge and reaching 5m further on the wall from the first building phase. Further to the north, the walls from the first and second building phases were erected in their original positions. The space between the outer face of the defensive wall from the first building phase, the second curtain and the entrance way appears to have been used as a kind of tower. The foundation trench of the outer face of the first wall was extended and deepened, adding a kind of a parapet on the eastern side. This formed a support for the tower. The space between the walls was filled with stone rubble bonded in clay and paved. Some of the stones from the inner face

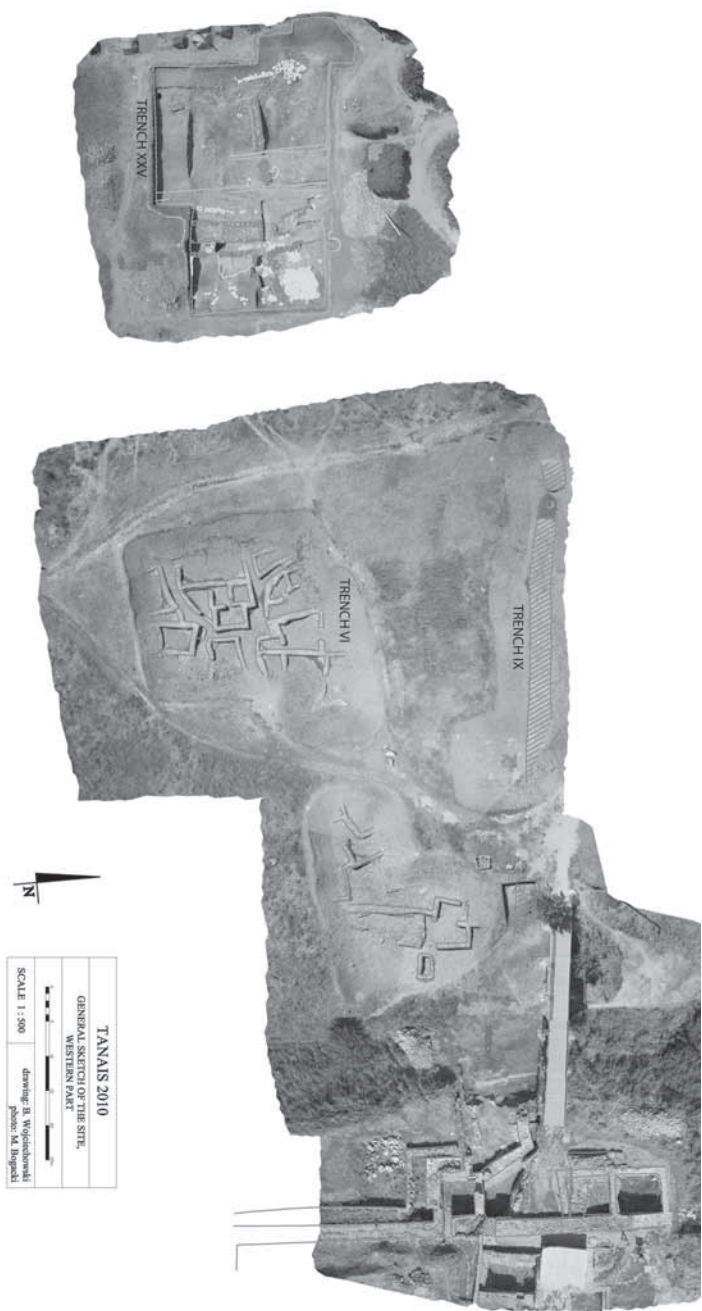
of the older defensive wall were left in place, helping to stop further sliding of the wall down into the ditch. The structure could not have been lower than 2m, because it supported the outer face of the second curtain wall. It also contributed further protection for the entrance gate, which was exposed to attack from the northwest, that is, from the steppe.

This sheltering of the entrance to the town is proof of extensive knowledge of the art of fortification. It also indicates a serious financial and organizational effort. Such a task would have exceeded what a small town like Tanais could afford, hence it is likely that the work was commissioned and financed by the king of Bosphorus, that is, Mithridates VI Eupator.

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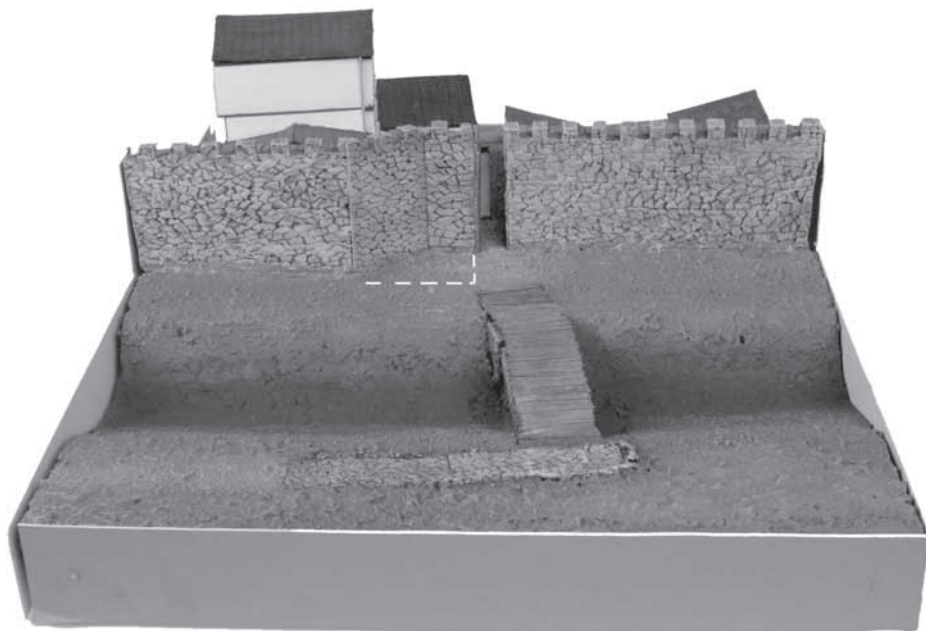
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Pl. 1. General sketch of Western Tanais, scale 1:500.
Drawing by B. Wojciechowski, photo by M. Bogacki



Pl. 2. Trench XXV. Photo by M. Bogacki



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Pl. 3. 1 – Entrance to the Western Tanais, Trench XXV, model. Made by P. Warczyński
2 – Bronze rivet. Photo by the author