

**Title:** The Medieval Fortress of Severin

**Date:** 13th-15th centuries

**Geography:** Drobeta-Turnu Severin, Romania

**Culture:** Hungarian, Ottoman, Romanian

**Medium:** stone and earthworks

**Current Institution:** Ministerul Culturii/The Ministry of Culture. The Repertoriul Arheologic Național, CIME/The National Archaeological Repertory has the monument listed with the code 109782.07.01.

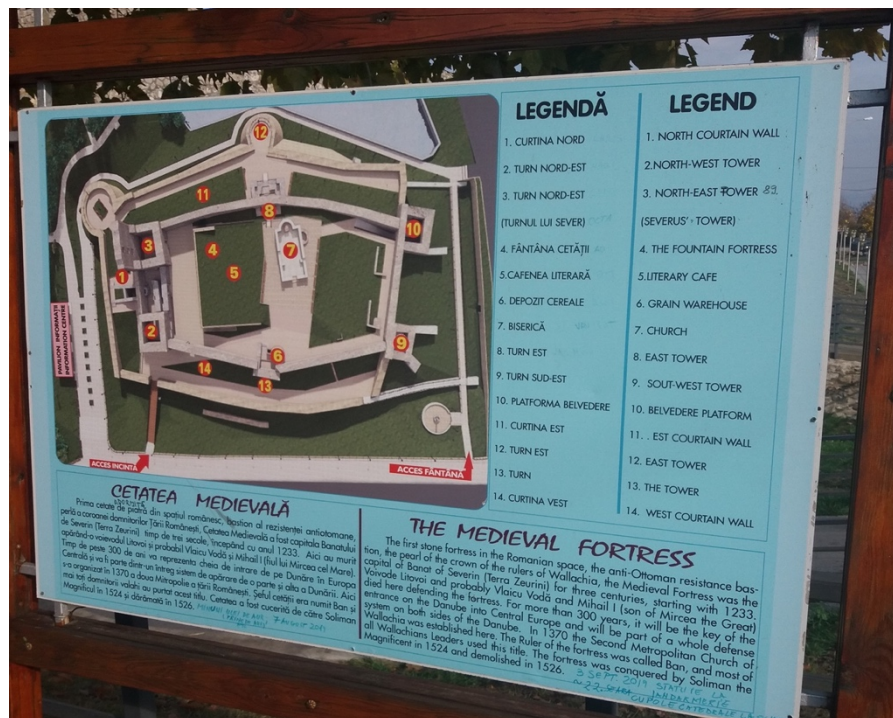


Fig. 1. The outline of the medieval fortress of Severin. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.

alt=" Outline of the medieval fortress of Severin on the Danube in Romania"

**Keywords:** medieval fortress, Danube, Black Sea, Kingdom of Hungary, Gesta Hungarorum, Basarab I, Mircea cel Bătrân/Mircea the Great, Diploma of the Joannites/Diploma of the Knights of St. John

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The medieval fortress of Severin is part of the chain of strongholds that exists along the Danube to the Black Sea. It is located within the city of Drobeta-Turnu Severin, today

Romania, on the above-mentioned river, and in the immediate vicinity of the old Roman fort Drobeta. This strategic position as well as its connection by water with the Black Sea and its culture was the reason for which the citadel has such a long history. The fortress's plan is rectangular with two stone fortified enclosures: one built in the second half of the thirteenth century and one at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

What is now a historical monument was built by the Kingdom of Hungary in the eleventh century under Ladislaus I (c.1040–1095; r.1077–1095) as a shielding point vis-à-vis the Second Bulgarian Empire. The fortress was in use from the eleventh century (and especially in 1233-1524); eventually it fell to the Ottoman Empire (c.1299–1922). In 1233, the fortifications were enlarged and further reinforced in order to defend the southern border of the Banat of Severin: a total of six towers were built and a deep moat was dug at this time. Of these works, one tower and the moat are all that can still be seen. For most of the Middle Ages, the garrison of the fortress was provided by the knights of St. John and the Teutonic Knights.

It is to be assumed that indigenous (Romanian) people were involved in the construction of this edifice. The medieval written sources mention a Romanian state formation around the Iron Gates. These are the *Gesta Hungarorum* (*The Deeds of the Hungarians*), a document written in c. 1200 and 1230 during the reign of King Béla III of Hungary and Croatia (1148–1196; r.1172–1196). The *Gesta* mentions this unit as existing in the area during the tenth–eleventh centuries. The *Diploma of the Joannites* (or *Diploma of the Knights of St. John*), issued in 1247, also refers to the “Țara Severinului” (i.e. Severin Land) as being Romanian land.



Fig. 2. The medieval fortress of Severin. Photo: Elena Ene Drăghici-Vasilescu. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.

alt="The ruins of the medieval fortress of Severin on the Danube in Romania"

Drobeta was originally a Dacian town. Emperor Trajan built a fort here between 103 and 105CE in order to garrison the 500 soldiers that guarded the famous bridge erected by Apollodorus of Damascus. During this period of Roman rule, the site preserved its Dacian name. The name "Turnu Severin" (meaning Tower of Severus) may have referred to a tower built to commemorate a victory by the Roman emperor Septimius Severus. But other sources consider that it comes from a tower built by the Byzantines, or from the tower which can still be seen today after surviving the final Turks assault in 1524.

The rivalry between the Hungarians and the Bulgarian Empire lead by the Asenid dynasty (1185-1280) made Andrew II of Hungary (c.1175–1235; r.1205–1235) to create a new military-administrative entity, the Banate of Severin, in 1233. Luca is mentioned as its first *Ban* (leader), succeeded by Ioan. In 1241, Severin was destroyed to a certain extent during the Tatar invasions but then repaired by the Hungarians. In 1247, king Béla IV of Hungary (1206–1270; r.1214/1235–1270) invited the Knights of St. John to take over the responsibility of defending the citadel.

In the fourteenth century, some Wallachian voivodes (local princes) like Basarab I (c.1270–1351/1352; r.c.1310-1352) became the administrators of the citadel of Severin. (Basarab won a decisive victory against the Hungarians at Posada in 1330, which liberated Wallachia and other territories from the Hungarian control). Voivode Nicolae Alexandru (c.1352–1364; r. with Basarab I c.1344–1352, and alone 1352–1364) also had the fortress of Severin in his administration between 1357 and 1364. Vladislav Vlaicu (?–1377; r.1364-1377) was Ban of Severin between 1364 and 1376. The same title was held by Mircea cel Bătrân (Mircea the Great, 1386-1418) and Iancu de Hunedoara (c.1387-1456; r.1441–1456) for distinct periods during their lifetime. During their rule, Severin was key to the defence of the entire Europe against the Ottoman Empire. After 1419, when the Hungarians administered the citadel of Severin again, repeated conflict with the Turks partially damaged the fortress. In August 1524, the fortress was assaulted and destroyed by the Turkish troops led by Balıteğ-Pasa, one of Soliman the Magnificent's generals.



Fig. 3. The medieval fortress of Severin. Photo: Elena Ene Drăghici-Vasilescu. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.

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### **Biography**

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