

THE MILITARY CAMP OF CHARLES XII AT VARNIȚA NEAR THE BENDER FORTRESS

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Moldovan historians and archaeologists have always had a great interest in the study of the short but rich period of time when the Swedish King Charles XII, after his defeat to the Russian Army in 1709, searching for protection under the Sultan came to the Bender Fortress, then the territory of the Ottoman Empire. Brief archaeological surveys carried out inside the fortress during the 1970s - 90s by expeditions of the Academy of Sciences of Moldova and the National Museum of History of Moldova (NMHM) were limited to small areas due to the presence of the military and funding constraints (Полевой, Бырня 1974, 84; Гольцева 1990). It is known from historical sources and archival documents that after his short stay inside the Bender Fortress, Charles XII built his residence, Karlopolis, at the outskirts of the village of Varnița on the right bank of the Dniester River (fig. 1). The ruins of this last camp of the king were still visible in the 19th century, when topographers made maps of it (Букарский 1992). One of these drawings from the holding of the Museum of History of Moldova was composed in 1840 on an order from the Odessa Society of History of Antiquities¹. It marks the site of the first camp of Charles XII in the fortress and also shows his last camp near Varnița (fig. 2, 3).

In the early 1990s, an expedition of the Museum went to Varnița for questioning the locals. According to the elder villagers, the assumed area of the camp of the Swedish king was still evident in the 1920s, and the remains of some structures were clearly visible on the surface. For this reason, the Romanian administration of Bessarabia, on a request from the Swedish government, erected there, a commemorative stone obelisk. During the Soviet era the village greatly expanded, absorbing and removing all traces of the former

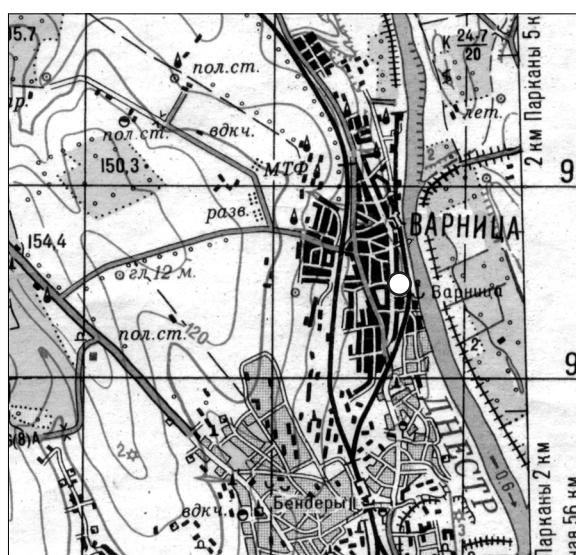
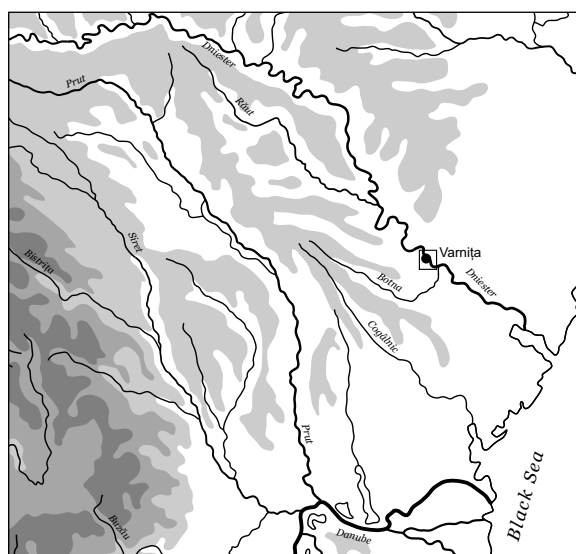


Fig. 1. Topographic map of Varnița with indication of location of "The Camp of Charles XII".

structures. The site of the obelisk became private property (foto 1). In 1992, this land was acquired by the National Museum of History of Moldova, with the prospect of establishing a commemorative museum "The House of Charles XII".

¹ NMHM, FB-6720.

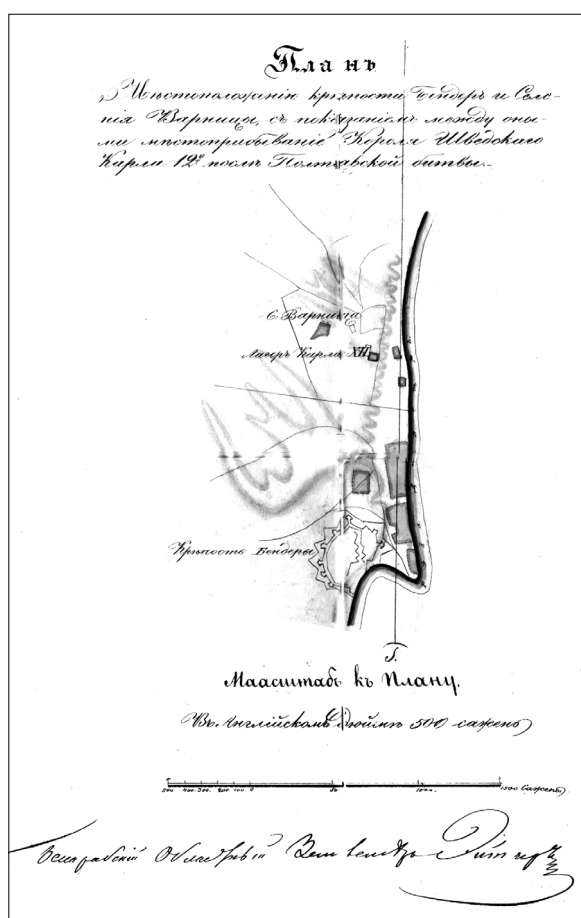


Fig. 2. Situation of "The Camp of Charles XII" and the Bender Fortress (according to the map compiled by Eitger, NMHM, FB-6790).

In 1993, an archaeological expedition of the Museum (led by Al. Levinschi) conducted a survey at Varnița, choosing the spot on the high right shore of the Dniester River, where supposedly Charles XII and the Swedish forces broke their last camp (Chetraru 1994). The expedition had the goal of looking for cultural remains consistent with the beginning of the 18th century, verifying the reliability of the preserved historical evidence, and validating information received from locals.

The study of the area in the vicinity of the obelisk allowed us to establish certain connections with facts mentioned in historical sources. The stone altar of the old church that Charles XII attended was preserved 200 m to the north from the obelisk, and 150 m further, along the river's stream had preserved a ravine, over which, according to the sources, the king ordered to build a bridge for the convenient walk to the church.

The freshly plowed land on the territory acquired by the museum revealed a spot of the ashen

ground in its north-eastern sector. All over the rest of the area, debris of limestone and small pieces of lime mortar were found. Also found on the surface were four hammered iron nails that differed in length and thickness, ranging from 5 cm to 21,5 cm. A former owner of the land collected, over the years, about 50 iron cannon balls (foto 2). All but three of them were melted down. These three cannon balls were brought to the museum, and they are now kept in the collection².

After this brief visual inspection, administration of the Museum decided to conduct limited excavations, in order to check the presence of cultural layer and understand its depth directly. According to the map of the camp of Charles XII from the NMHM, the stone house of the king and his chancellery were oriented by the long side along the shore of the river, to NNW-SSE (fig. 4). For this reason, the perpendicular trench seemed the best choice for finding the remains of structures. An area in the north-eastern sector of the museum territory, parallel to the north side of the obelisk and in 2,1 m from it was chosen for excavations. An additional cross-section had been planned for investigation of the ashen-burnt spot of the ground noted during the visual observation; two areas intercrossed under the right angle (fig. 4). Thus, the investigated area equaled to 56 m².

In the process of excavating the following stratigraphy was observed:

Layer 1. Up to 0,25 m – the plowed black earth with extensive inclusions of small debris of limestone and small pieces of lime mortar.

Layer 2. Up to 0,5 m – uncultivated layer dated to the beginning of the 18th century. It also contained extensive inclusions of small debris of limestone and small pieces of lime mortar, as well as sherds of vessels, fragments of glass bottles and thin windowpane; at the base of the layer were the remains of stone foundations of walls from the long structure and structures adjoin to it. In the middle part of the excavated area the ground was heavily burnt. Excavations were limited by the uncovering, cleaning, and fixing the structures without their disassembling; all finds were collected, and the remains of complexes were covered with ground.

² NMHM, FB-29175/4-8.

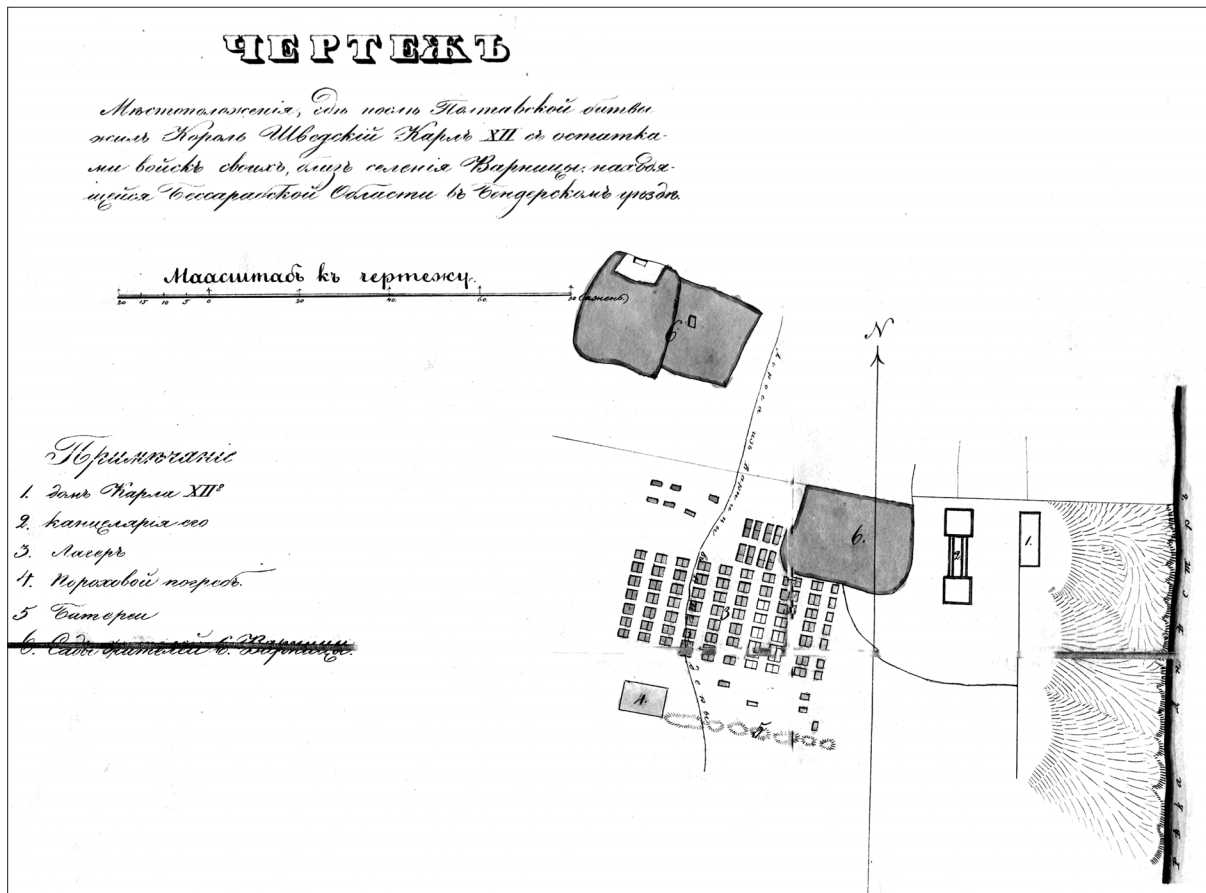


Fig. 3. Plan of “The Camp of Charles XII” (according to the map compiled by Eitger, NMHM, FB-6790).

At the end of the works it was learned that the obelisk was erected inside of remains of one of the stone buildings shown on the map. To the time of excavations the clear light stripes of the limestone preserved from the walls; these stripes were filled with separate limestone fragments of various sizes and numerous small pieces. As a result, it is possible to give a partial characteristic of the structure.

The building with the stone foundation was oriented in the N-S direction, with a small degree away to the W. Its width was 10 m, and its length over 10 m. The thickness of the outer walls was 1-1,15 m, and the remains of one of the prolonged walls were found within the outer walls; the thickness of this wall of 0,8 m and it divided the space into two almost equally wide rooms that were joint with an “isle”. The well-tamped ground served as the floor; the foundation of wall was dipped in to 0,2 m beneath the level of this floor. Near the western wall of the excavated pit, on its inner side, there was a great pile of ashes, and the



Foto 1. Varnița. Commemorative obelisk erected at the location of “The Camp of Charles XII”.

remains of two lengthwise charred beams of 0,16 m and 0,18 m from the broken floor of the upper room. While being on fire, the wooden construction left on the floor a burned area ca 1,4 m. At this spot, large fragments of two gray clay bowls were found. Within 2 m of the burnt spot and in the fill of the soil about 200 large fragments of the thin windowpane (foto 3), a few fragments of

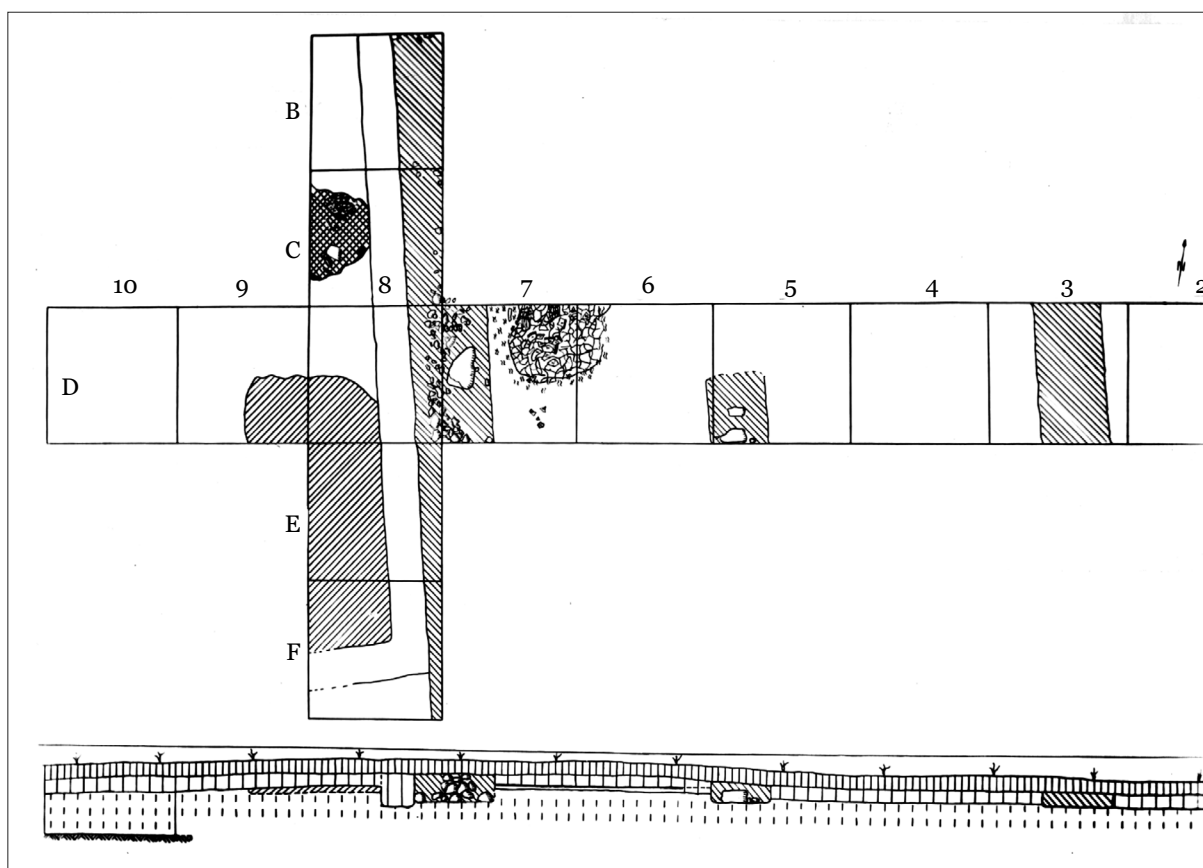


Fig. 4. Varnița. Plan and section of archaeological excavations conducted on the territory of "The Camp of Charles XII".



Foto 2. Varnița. Cannon balls.

glass bottles (foto 4), and fragments of various ware, including the red grazed plate (foto 5), were excavated. Also a part of a pise structure with the wooden carcass was unearthed here; the charred remains of this carcass left the cluster of the burnt soil up to 0,2 m thick. Within the excavated area, the projected part of the structure had 0,9 m length and over 1,3 m width; its eastern edge was partially cut by the trench dug after the structure was made, which ran alongside the outer foundation of the wall. Pieces of charred wood of various

lengths and thickness had filled the burnt soil. Besides those, the following objects were found: a flat arenaceous stone, measured 0,25×0,18×0,13 m – on the top part, in its south half; a greatly corroded iron candlestick – in the middle part; a

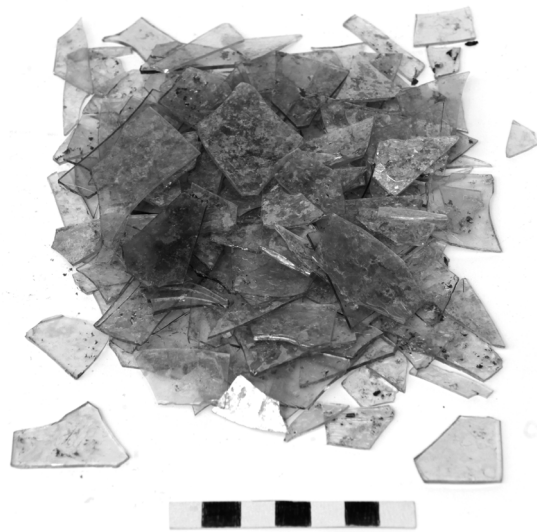


Foto 3. Varnița. The windowpane.



Foto 4. Varnița. Fragments of glass vessels.



Foto 5. Varnița. A fragment of the decorated vessel.

broken gray clay vessel, apparently burnt in a fire, – in the northern part of the area of the spot.

A large part of the horizontal rectangular platform paved with small river pebbles has been traced in 1,5 m to the south from the pise structure, also on the outer side of the western wall.

The eastern and southern parts of the platform were cut off by the same tranche run alongside of the outer foundation of the wall that turned to the west under the right angle. This platform has a size of 4×2 m, with 1,1 m of the pebble layer, and oriented north-south alongside the wall with its long side.

The trench dug adjacent to the western well had run almost over the whole length of the unearthed area reaching more than 9 m. It makes a right angle to the west at its southern end. The width of the trench was 0,5 m and its depth – 0,3 m from the level it was noticed or 0,1 m below the foundation of the wall. The contour of the trench was distinguished by a darker shade of the black earth; the soil was mellow and filled with fragments of limestone. It is very possible that the trench was dug in the 1920s, when the remains of the walls were surveyed and measured before the installation of the obelisk.

The cultural layer and complexes of the late medieval times revealed the following artifacts: 45 ceramic fragments and four broken vessels, which it was possible to assemble to full shape³ (foto 6);

³ NMHM, FB-29175/1-3.

189 fragments of windowpane; fragments of the glass vessels; separate clay and iron objects.

All ceramic vessels from this level are made on the potter's wheel. They can be divided roughly into four groups.

Group I – gray, tempered with sand, reduction firing. Large bowls with slipped inner and outer surfaces, and cooking pots of medium size are represented by 13 fragments and three full shapes.

Group II – 16 fragments of red clay vessels from the ware of similar shapes, tempered with sand, oxidative firing.

Group III – glazed red ware without visible temper, oxidative firing; it is coated with white engobe covered with glaze in green (11 fragments) and brown (3 fragments) shades. Most of the sherds belonged to the bowls. Also is it possible to add a plate on the high ring foot to this group, with the engobed inner surface covered with stripes of brown and yellow glaze “streaming down” to the bottom. The outer surface does not have a gob but is covered with green graze which has effect of brown shade against the red background of the plate.

Group IV – glazed white ware tempered with sand, of oxidative firing. This group includes 2 fragments of a jar both surfaces of which are covered with green-turquoise glaze. Pottery of the first of technological groups shows a traditional, local method of pottery making. But ware of the third and especially the fourth groups was made in technological traditions unknown to the lo-



Foto 6. Varnița. Pottery.

cal masters. The shape of the described plate reminds certain Oriental exemplars, though it is too early for the certain conclusions. Sites with similar assemblage of pottery have been insufficiently studied, and scholars date them very broadly, as broad ranging as the 17th - 19th centuries. However, future excavations on the territory of the former camp of Charles XII could help archaeologists with the creation of a typological schema for potter of the late medieval sites of the region.

The windowpane was made by casting small square or rectangular pieces; this conclusion was made based on an analysis of over 20 fragments with preserved edges. The thickness of the pieces was 0,1-0,15 cm. Out of the entire set of preserved pieces, 170 of them were transparent with light greenish shade, and 19, also transparent, with greenish-yellow shade.

The glass vessels are represented by the concave bottom of the bottle that was square in shape (4×4 cm) and was made out of transparent dark green glass, and by 9 fragments of the bottom part of a vessel of similar shape with a flat bottom. The vessel was made out of transparent colorless glass; and the thickness of fragments varied from 0,3 to 0,5 cm.

At the base of this cultural layer, by the outer side of the western wall of the structure, was found a mouthpiece from a red-clay pipe. Along the remains of walls were lying three hammered iron nails; they had the rectangular cross-section of 0,6×0,4 - 0,9×0,6 cm and their length reached 4,8-6,5 cm. In close proximity to the north-western section of the gravel area was also discovered a fragment of the iron horseshoe of 3,4 cm width, 0,5 cm thickness, and 6,5 cm of the preserved length.

The excavations have confirmed that the unearthed remains of structures dated to the early 18th century are in agreement with the place where historical sources locate the military camp of the Swedish king.

That history brought Charles XII to the shores of the Dniester River is well known: after the defeat of the Swedish Army in the Battle of Poltava by the Russian forces of Peter the Great in June of 1709, the wounded king was taken from the battlefield and, accompanied by his surviving escort, Swedish soldiers, Cossacks, and Wallahs served in the Swedish Army, retreated through the steppes to the Ottoman lands. Sultan Ahmed I, being an enemy of Russia, offered Charles XII refuge near the fortress of Bendery (Tighina). After a short stay in a temporary tent camp, Charles XII ordered to relocate the camp in close proximity to the fortress and built the stone houses, barracks, kitchens, and storages. At this camp, the Swedish king spent several years, planning a new war against Russia. The presence of Charles XII under protection of the Sultan hurt the Russian-Turkish relationship, and in February 1713, after three days, Charles XII was captured by the Janissaries. This attack, known in history as the "Kalabalik," left the place abandoned and eventually turned to ruin. By the middle of the 19th century, the territory was occupied by orchards and gardens (Букарский 1992, 186-187).

Now the National Museum of History of Moldova is developing a project with the goal to excavate and restore the last military camp of the Swedish king, in order to create the historical and architectural complex that will constitute the fully-operational branch of the Museum.

It should start with archaeological and geomagnetic explorations of the whole area that now belongs to the museum, as well as the adjunct territories that include areas on the high terrace of the Dniester River. The textual and cartographic sources provide information on the approximate location of the military camp of Charles XII will serve as a starting point in mapping the area of the camp. In addition to the mentioned situation plan of the camp's structures dated to 1840 which indicates the house of Charles XII, which, based on a witness' account, was based upon the king's own drawing, other archival sources should be analyzed. Artistic drawings of the camp made by contemporary travelers who visited the king and where landscape and structures are shown realis-

tically present another source of information that are need to be studied. One of the main objectives of the project is to determine among the ruins the house of Charles XII, where he received European diplomats and high-ranking members of the Ottoman court, and from where, in 1713, he began his dramatic return to Sweden.

Charles XII's presence near Bender had a great impact on the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and a dozen European countries, and the place of the camp of Charles XII has to be restored and preserved for the future generations. As the Great Russian poet A. S. Pushkin, who visited the ruins of the camp in 1828 once said, "Respect for the past is the quality that distinguishes enlightened man from the savage".

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Tabăra militară a lui Carol al XII-lea în satul Varnița de lângă cetatea Bender

Rezumat

În anii '90 ai secolului trecut cercetătorii Muzeului Național de Istorie a Moldovei au efectuat cercetări de suprafață pe teritoriul satului Varnița unde, conform izvoarelor scrise și actelor topografice, a fost dislocată ultima tabără a regelui suedez Carol al XII-lea. În urma investigațiilor muzeul a procurat o parte din teritoriu pe care a fost fondată filiala muzeului „Tabăra militară a lui Carol al XII-lea”. În 1993, în apropierea monumentului, care la rugămintea Suediei, în anii '20 ai secolului trecut a fost instalat de Guvernul României, a fost trasată o suprafață în care, ca rezultat al săpăturilor arheologice, s-au descoperit urmele unei construcții de piatră și piese din sec. XVIII. În prezent Muzeul Național de Istorie a Moldovei elaborează un proiect de cercetări arheologice și multidisciplinare cu scopul de a efectua restaurarea și muzeificarea taberei lui Carol al XII-lea.

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Fig. 2. Amplasarea „Taberei regelui Carol al XII-lea” față de cetatea Bender (după planul lui Eitger, 1840. MNIM, FB-7690).

Fig. 3. Planul „Taberei regelui Carol al XII-lea” (după planul lui Eitger, 1840. MNIM, FB-7690).

Fig. 4. Varnița. Planul secțiunii arheologice trasate pe locul „Taberei regelui Carol al XII-lea”.

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Foto 5. Varnița. Fragmente de vas ornamentat.

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Военный лагерь Карла XII в селе Варница возле Бендерской крепости

Резюме

В 1990-е годы сотрудники Национального музея истории Молдовы провели обследование территории у села Варница, где, согласно письменным и картографическим данным, был последний лагерь шведского короля Карла XII. По результатам обследования музей приобрел часть территории, на которой создано отделение музея «Военный лагерь Карла XII». В 1993 г. в районе памятного обелиска, установленного в 1920-е годы правительством Румынии по просьбе шведской стороны, был заложен разведовательный шурф, который выявил остатки каменного строения и артефакты начала XVIII в. В настоящее время Национальный музей истории Молдовы работает над проектом полномасштабных раскопок территории бывшего лагеря Карла XII, с целью его восстановления и последующей музеефикации.

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