



Pliska was the first capital city of Danubian Bulgaria. The impressive remains of the old city can be seen 2 km north of the present-day town, located 24 km away from Shoumen. One of the most outstanding early medieval European capitals, Pliska drew the attention both by its architecture and fortification system and by its largeness. Spreading on an area of 23 sq km, it was larger than London and Paris of that time. In Pliska the Bulgarians were converted to the Christian faith the 60ies of the 9th century, during the reign of Knyaz Boris I (852-889). The disciples of St St Cyril and Methodius, the Slav enlighteners and the creators of the Bulgarian-Slav letters, came here, and here again they laid the foundations of the remarkable Pliska-Preslav literary school, the centre of organized educational and literary activities in Eastern Bulgaria. In 893 Tsar Simeon I moved the capital to Preslav, but Pliska continued to develop as a centre of culture, commerce and the crafts. During the excavations three concentric fortification belts clearly came to the fore: an earth fortification, a stone fortress wall and an external wall of bricks. They outline the outer city, the inner city and the royal centre. The outer city where the urban population lived, had been encircled by a deep ditch with an earthen embankment, spreading over a rectangular space of 23.3 sq km. Here the foundations of a great number of public and church buildings have come to light. Clearly discernible are the remains of the Big Basilica – the most monumental Bulgarian medieval church (99 m long and 29.5 m wide) located 1.5 km northeast of the eastern gate of the inner city. The strongly fortified inner city was almost in the centre of the outer city. The fortress wall (2.6 m wide, initially 10-12 m high) had been built of large, stone blocks of regular shape. It is impressive to this day. It has a rectangular shape, its sides orientated to the world directions. There had been a monumental gate on each wall, while a round tower rose at every corner. A five-angled tower had been built between the tower and the gate. The upper part of the fortress wall ended in crenel pinnacles, while in the inside there had been a wide road all along the wall, used by the sentries of the fortress. The eastern gate was the main entrance to the inner city. Besides the remains of the impressive fortifications, the strongest impression, no doubt, produces the Throne Hall, commonly known as the Big Palace. This is comparatively the best preserve building in the inner city. Its dimensions are 52 by 26.5 m. Presumably there had been a ceremonious throne hall on the second floor, where the Bulgarian rulers received official guests and foreign messengers, while the monumental semicircular throne rose in its northern end. The third fortification belt encircled the very heart of the fortified city – the residence of the Bulgarian rulers. This is actually the most complicated architectural compound. Though made of bricks, the wall was very strongly built. It enclosed a rectangular courtyard. Attached to the north wall was the exquisite Little Palace – the most representative building in the citadel. It served as the living quarters of the ruler and his family. It consisted of two rectangular structures, almost identical in plan and building. About 19 m long and about 14 m wide, they had 1.12 m thick walls and were built out of stone blocks, held together by red mortar and cramp irons. The floors of the premises were partly covered by big stone slabs. Traces of a staircase are evidence of the existence of a second floor. In close proximity to the palace the foundations have been

unearthed of a palace chapel, a big water basin, baths, a water collection pit, services and sentry premises and different other smaller buildings. The different buildings have different periods of construction. Pliska did not only have big buildings, but also a high degree of urbanization (a heating installation under the floors, a water supply and sewerage network of clay and lead pipes, etc.). During excavations in the past few years, underground tunnels have come to light under the royal palaces. The system of secret passages had been part of the strategic architecture of Pliska in the course of a century. The passages are 300 m long and 2.20 m high, leading far beyond the fortress walls. They closed by solid wooden gates. At the reserve, there is a very well appointed museum. The grave of archaeologist Karel Skorpil (1859-1944), who initiated the excavations of Pliska in 1899, is also here.