Watchtowers and *burgus*-type structures
reflected in Roman epigraphic sources (1st-3rd century A.D.).

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The watchtowers and the *burgus* type structures are considered in the modern literature minor fortifications or medium-sized fortifications, based on their reduced surface.[1] This study will bring together the epigraphic sources dated between 1st and the 3rd century A.D. concerning these structures, being also an attempt to establish, if possible, the terminological nuances and the given functionality in the frontier mechanism.

Before we start the excursus, it is worth mentioning that there are several Talmudic sources[2] dated in the 1st-3rd century AD which refer to some sort of minor fortification and their role in the frontier system of *limes Palestinae* and in the imperial road network. The fortifications are called ןימגרוב (*burgin*) translated as *burgi*[3] and ןיטרוב (*burgussin*), some sort of smaller road defense fortification, most probably the equivalent of a watchtower.[4] In a Tannaitic account dating back to late 2nd early 3rd century AD there are several *burgi* (ןיטרוגב) attested on the Imperial road north of Ptolemais, being mentioned also a Syrian *burgarius* (בוטרה – *burganin*[5] – station guardsmen[6]) on the name of Mavgai.[7]

The role of these installations as it is reflected in the above mentioned accounts is to guard the traffic on the imperial roads and also to provide shelter and camping points[8] for the caravans that traveled from Arabian or Mediterranean trading posts.[9] But how did these words (especially *burgin*) of clearly Latin extraction have entered in Hebrew? E. Pennick's theory seems very suitable in the context of Roman conquest of Judeea (70-74 A.D.) but also in the tradition of frontier defenses dating back to the Judean monarchy.[10] As he explained, the term is '*un terme dérivé directement de burgus et emprunté au parler populaire, à la langue des soldats romain* (n.a. *sermo castrensis*[11]) *qui ont occupé le pays.*'[12] These installation are similar in functionality with the ones from the frontiers of Egypt and Arabia called *hydreuma* – ὕδρευμα (pl. *hydreumata* – ὕδρευματα[13]) with the mentions that these structures are also

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1   Bejinaru 2010, 9.

2   See *infra* the *Appendix*.

3   *Mekhlita Ba-Hodesh*, 1933, 194; *Tossephta, Erubim*, VIII, 5; *Leviticus Rabbah* 7.4; *Midrash Tehillim* 10.2;

4   *Mekhlita Ba-Hodesh*, 1933, 194.

5   *Midrash Tehillim* 10.2.

6   Cohen 1981, 236.

7   *Tossephta, Pesachim*, i.27 apud Isaac 1990, 181, n.109.

8   Isaac 1990, 183.

9   Cohen 1981, 235.

10 Cohen 1981, 231.

11 Pennick 1945, 10.

12 See for example Haynes 2013, 301-338.

13 Online LSJ Greek-English lexicon: ὕδρευμα from ὕδωρ (water).

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guarding water tanks so necessary for the garrisons camped there and for the caravans.[14] The watchtowers are also attested here, flanking the roads and signaling small raids responsible for banditry or marauding.[15] These watchtowers are called *skopeloi* and the men in charge are called *skopelarioi*; their commander is called *dekanos*-δεκανός.[16]

Returning to our topic, we have to underscore the main theories regarding the origin of these two terms. Firstly, the origin of the term *burgus* is divided between two theories. The first one stipulates that the term has a German extraction, an argument for its German origin being represented by the place names that contains the word part – *burgium*, as for example *Teotoburgium*[17] or *Asciburgium*. The second theory states that the term has a Hellenistic origin, being a derivate of πύργος[18], initially some sort of fortified watchtower.[19] This is why in my opinion the term *burgus* and the structure itself is frequently considered a watchtower.[20] As we will see, there is fairly obvious difference between a *burgus* and a *turris*, reflected both in the epigraphic sources and in landscape location and functionality. As Zs. Visy observed, the term does not occur in the literary sources of the period which interests us.[21]

The first epigraphic mentions of *burgus*-type structures occurs in the reign of Antoninus Pius, even if the function of *burgarius*[22] is attested a little bit earlier than the term *burgus*,[23] in the reign of Hadrianus.[24] There are two inscription which attests the building program of Antoninus Pius for securing the Thracian roads[25] and also the terrestrial link with Asia[26]: '*Imp(erator) Caes(ar) T(itus) Ael(ius) Hadrian(us) / Antoninus Aug(ustus) Pius p(ater) p(atriae) trib(unicia) / potestate XV co(n)s(ul) IIII* **pr(a)esidia / et burgos ob tutelam provinci(ae) / Thraciae fecit** *curante C(aio) Gallonio / Frontone Q(uinto) Marcio Turbone leg(ato) / Aug(usti) pr(o) pr(aetore) per fines civitatis / Serd(ic) ensium regione Dyptens(ium) /* **praesidia n(umero) IIII burgi n(umero) XII phruri // n(umero) CIX.**'[27]

The inscription dated between 151-152 AD states clearly the reason for this building program: *ob tutelam provinciae Thraciae*, the guardianship of Thrace. C. Băjenaru observed that there is a logic betwen the numbers as for every *praesidium* there are three *burgi* and for every *burgus* there are nine *phruri* or watchtowers.[28] As we can see there are different terms to name different structures. Some autors considered that in this case the *burgi* are towers and the *phruri* are some sort of guard posts.[29] However, there are several researchers that considered based on the numbers that the *praesidia* are the biggest structures, the *burgi* are the middle ones and the *phruri* the smallest,[30] being established in that way a tripartite scheme, applied mostly in the case of non-linear frontier system where we can clearly observed an organization on three lines: towers, *burgi* and auxiliary forts.[31] We can see that in this case, the construction of road installations was under the supervision of the *legatus Augusti pro praetore*. M. Gichon suggested that the *burgi* from these inscription could be a sort of static installation with troops drawn from *praesidia*, (*burgarii*?) the larger installations, for mobile actions,[32] administrating also most probably the *phruri*.

An almost identical inscription, dated between 154-155 AD testifies again the building program of Antoninus Pius, the idea being the same: *burgi* and *praesidia* built for the province's safety, under the supervision of a *legatus*

14   Bagnall 1982, 125-126. See also the account of Pliny, *HN*, VI, 102-104; 417.

15   Bagnall 1982, 126. See also Bagnall, Bülow-Jacobsen, Cuvigny 2001, 325-333.

16   Bagnall 2006, 110.

17   Visy 2009, 989.

18   In ThLL 2250, 17, the Greek counterpart of *burgus* is πύργος; Procop. *Aed.* III, 6 and IV, 6, 36 uses the transliteration βούργος, late in the 6th century AD. For a theory concerning the Greek origin of the term see Pennick 1945, 5-21.

19   Alföldi 1941, 47; Visy 2009, 989.

20   See for example Goetz 2010, 426.

21   Visy 2009, 989.

22   CIL III 13795 and CIL 13796 = ILS 9180.

23   ThLL II 2249 f; Diz. Ep. IV, 1089 f.; Isaac 1990, 179.

24   Isaac 1990, 179. For the role and the evolution of the *burgarii* see mainly Labrousse 1939, 151-167.

25   Kovács 2008, 134.

26   Gichon 1974, 538.

27   AÉ 1957, nr. 279 = AÉ 2000, nr. 1291. See also AÉ 2000, nr. 1268, from the same building program of Antoninus Pius (------] / [--- curante C(aio) Gal]/lonio Fr[ontone Q(uinto) Marcio] / Turbone leg(ato) A[ug(usti) pr(o) pr(aetore)] / per fines civitat[is Mar]/cianopolitano[rum re]/gion[e] Gelegetio[rum in? propi?]/nquo **phruri n(umero)[---]**).

28   Băjenaru 2010, 56.

29   Fuhrmann 2012, 224.

30   Alföldi 1941, 41-48; Mihajlov 1961, 42-56; Isaac 1990, 180; Kovács 2008, 134.

31   See for example the case of Dacia Porolissensis in Zăgreanu, Cociș *et alli* 2017, 25-45.

32   Gichon 1974, 538.