

The Impressive Antique fortifications along Osum River Valley

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Abstract

The fortifications are important evidence to know the way how people were protected from their enemies. The study of fortifications is quite wide areas. Is this the reason that I choose to study a part of those, only antique fortifications.

The goal of this study is to highlight the importance of the territory along Osum valley in antiquity that indicate the necessity to construct the fortification to protect these areas.

This study, which uses descriptive research method, draws upon some of the fortifications with their construction elements. In addition to analysing the position, plan, and the construction technique, I listed some of these fortifications. The archaeological evidences prove that fortifications are significant aspects of Illyrian and Albanian culture and civilization.

So, the archaeological evidences indicate a continuity from Illyrians to Albanians passing from antiquity to late Roman and medieval period.

KEYWORDS: fortification, Osum valley, construction, archaeological, evidence.

Fortifications are one of the most important elements of the architecture and activity of construction. The object of this study are the fortifications built along Osum valley, in the region of Berat and Skrapar in Antiquity. Osum valley was one of the most important road arteries in the Antiquity. In this valley are a number of Illyrian fortified settlements as fortification of Gorica, Mbolan, Balibardha, Dimal, Peshtan, Gradishta e Qereshnikut in Berat district and fortification of Bargullas, Tërrovë, Zelencka, Qeshibesh, Lavdar of Dhoresit, Rehovicë, Prishtë, Potom, in Skrapar district (Fig.1).

It is very clear that builders had had a good knowledge about the place where they built these fortifications. They knew very well the morphological characteristics of the areas where they built them. These new fortified settlements integrated with the older ones were established at the time when it was dangerous to stay outside the castles. Two fortifications served to protect each other during the counterattack of one of both. In military terms, such placement creates difficulty for the siege of fortifications by the attackers. Below we will see some of these fortifications.



Fig. 1 Map of antic fortifications in Osum valley

Berat castle and Gorica castle

Historically the most important, impressive and well-known fortified settlement of this region is the fortified city of Berat. Obviously the expansion of the ancient city of Berat was inhabited and fortified hill Gorica located on the other side of the river. This castle is in front of ancient city of Berat.

Berat Castle lies throughout the hill, high above the Osum River which offers a strategic position, effective defense and a good visibility controlling the whole territory between Osum and Velabisht valleys. The northern side of the hill is steep and in the southern, eastern and western side it mitigated. Because of its natural characteristic that doesn't help in protection, this part is supplemented and strengthened by the presence of towers. In the northern wall is built on rock. The building technique of wall is the same as the first period of Berat castle.

Gorica Castle is dated to the same period as the Berat Castle¹ (Fig.2). The castle has two entrances. The main entrance is in the southwestern side near a tower which wall line forms a hall. The next entrance is in the east and is parallel to the defense wall. This castle is dated in the end of bronze period and in the beginning of iron period, to the 3th and 4th BC² (Tab. I,1).

¹ MANE, 1976, p. 403; 1987, p.147.

² MANE, 1987, p.151.



Fig. 2 Gorica Castle



Fig.3 The portico in Dimal

Dimal

Dimal is known in nowadays as Krotina Castle. It is situated on two hills between Allambres and Bistrovica villages (Tab.I,2) During the discovery of this city was founded four fragment tiles which have the inscription Dimalitan,³ that helps to identifies the city as Dimal.

The walls were construct with big blocks stone. The trace of walls of the city are not very preserved. They are made by separated blocks of stone with rectangular shape which surround two hill ridges. In the highest part is acropolis.

A stoa approximately 30 m long has been unearthed by the archeological excavations. The portico discovered in this castle clearly resembles to Apollonia one, indicating the strong links between these two cities. It dated to 3-th century BC.⁴ It is a very impressive monumental construction (Fig.3).

It has been one of the most fortified cities of southern Illyria which played an important role during the wars between Illyrians and Romans. In the year 219 BC Demeter Fari had placed a garrison in Dimal. Roman Armies commanded by Luc Emily attain to prevail against the city after a siege with majority using attacks tools.⁵

In 205 BC surrounded again by roman armies, but this time it was in the hand of the Macedonians.⁶ In term of peace wich was submitted to Philip V by roman proconsuli Semproni Dimal passed into the hand of romans. One of the most reasons that both these powerful states put the eyes over Dimal and fight for its domination was the strategic position that it had.

Mbolan Castle

Mbolan Castle is located upon a hill situated between Sinja and Arpaxhias villages (Tab. I, 3). It is knowed as “Cicle of Kula”.⁷ The wall surrounds a surface of 3 ha. The walls are made of small and medium stone. In the center of castle, in the highest part is the acropolis.

³ DAUTAJ, 1974, p. 477.

⁴ DAUTAJ, 1975, p. 19.

⁵ Polib, III, 18, ed, Illyrians and Iliria by antique authors, Tiranë 1965, p. 50.

⁶ Liv, XXIX,12, ed, Illyrians and Iliria by antique authors, Tiranë 1965, p.106.

⁷ STAROVA, 1988, p.211.

The acropolis has a rectangular shape. The walls surround a surface of 1,4 ha. Two straight walls protrude from the acropolis. The first wall leads to the northern gate and other wall continues near the southern wall. The castle has two entrances in the north and in the east. This fortification is considered like a transitive phase of first and second period of iron⁸.

Balibardha Castle

Balibardha Castle, known as Gradishta of Balibardha is situated between Balibardha and Qereshnik villages, on top of a high hill, 697 m above sea level. This castle has a dominant position on the Balibardha village. In southwestern castles look Osum valley, in west Myzeqe field, in north the hills of Sulova and in southeastern Tomor mountain.

The preserved walls follow the contour of the hill top. The walls are built of sandstone blocks ready, in the isodomik form with proportions 1,3x0,8x0,3m. On the southern side of castles the stone blocks are larger proportions over 3,5x2,1x1 m. The surrounding wall is built on natural sandstone blocks. In the north can be notice the vestige of two parallel stone towers. In the north the structure is stronger and good worked lines with preserved stone blocks where each block has height 0.4 m.

The surrounding surface has a shape of an oblong ellipse. It is dated in the 3th-1st century BC.⁹

The city of Zelencka

The city of Zelencka was built on two sides of Osum River's bank. They were connected by bridge of Sharova. According to archaeological evidence from 400-200 BC the city life in territories of Illyrian tribe of Dasarete had greater development. Part of this area is thought to include the Illyrian city of Zelencka. This city is considered by archaeologists as one that gave rise to current Corovoda city. This connection is based on objects found including the large number of place names.

Prishta Castle

Prishta Castle is located upon a hill, toward the north of Prishta village. It is also known as the "circle of castle" due to its circular shape. Part of exterior perimeter wall of the castle has been maintained until today. This wall consists of medium-size blocks. The dimensions vary between 1,3 to 1,12 m in length; 0,4 to 12,4 in width and 0,25 to 0,26 in height.

The castle has three towers that are positioned on northern and southern side. The entrance of castle located on southwestern side of the hill which presents features of monumental entrance. In part of acropolis of the castle a large number of ceramic fragments of various shapes have been found.

Qeshibesh Castle

Qeshibesh Castle is built on the hill around 1000 m. It is known as "St. Mertiri" or Bank of Pivoli.¹⁰ It serves to control the road on the left Osum valley. The most of walls are ruined. Only on the north it is preserved. They are built of medium-size limestone

⁸ KARAISKAJ, 1981, p.26.

⁹ MANE, 1976, p.405.

¹⁰ ÇUNI, 1982, p. 234.

block. The entrance is on the south and in the north there are two square towers. The walls are similar to wall of Berat castle. It is adated to 3th century BC.¹¹

At the end I would like to emphasize that it is pretty sure that in Osumi valley in antiquity has existed a fortifications system. The evidence of this system's existence is a numerous fortifications constructed along Osumi valley that realized the function of protecting the people by their anemies.

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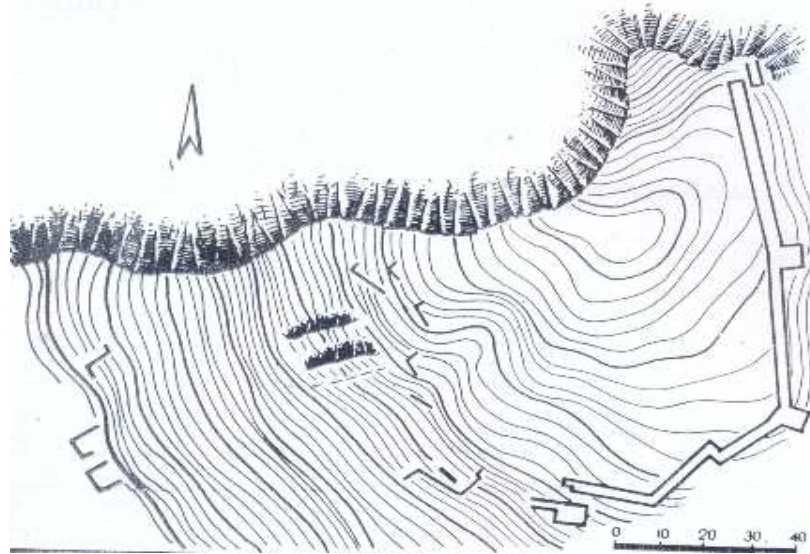
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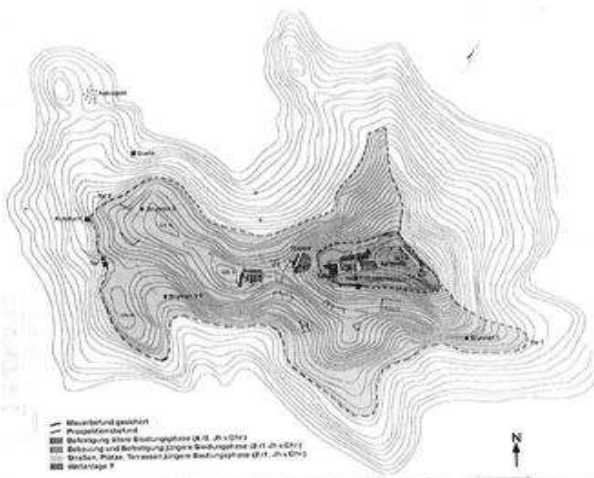
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¹¹ ÇUNI, 1982, p. 235; YLLI, ÇUNI, 1986, p.198.

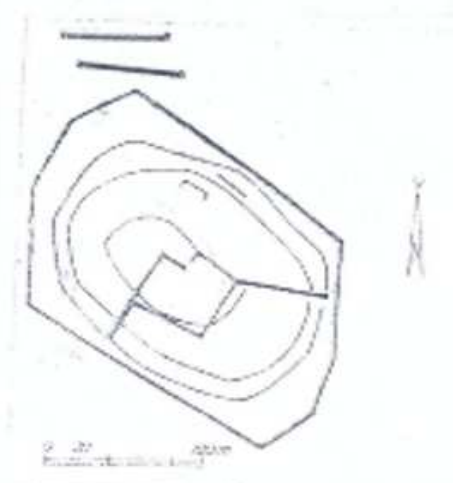
Tabela I



1. Plan of Gorica castle



2. Plan of Krotina castle (Dimal)



3. Plan of Mbolan castle