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SCODRA AND THE LABEATES. CITIES, RURAL FORTIFICATIONS AND TERRITORIAL DEFENCE IN THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

Abstract: The large-scale research project in the territory of Scodra, conducted by the Institute of Archaeology Tirana, in collaboration with the Center for Research on the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe (University of Warsaw), has broadened our knowledge of territorial occupation in the region of Scodra. The article places rural fortifications into a local context and in relation to the main cities in an effort to give a rounded view of the Hellenistic landscape of Scodra. The model of territorial organization around Scodra is a typical *polis*, very similar to models known already from the Greek world. The construction of rural fortifications corresponds in time to a long period of insecurity during most of the Hellenistic period, starting from the wars of Teuta against the Romans up to the last war of Genthios. This regional study contributes in a small way to the broader discussion of rural towers and associated installations in the territory of the Kingdom of the Ardiaei as a whole, giving in perspective a better framework of the organization of space and the relation of the Hellenistic Illyrian cities to their hinterlands.

Key words: Scodra, Meteon, Bushati, Genthios, Labeates, Ardiaei, rural fortifications, tower, Hellenistic period

Introduction

Investigations on a large scale in the territory of Scodra, conducted by the Institute of Archaeology Tirana in collaboration with the Center for Research on the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe (University of Warsaw), have contributed extensively to the study of occupation patterns in the region.¹ Many sites from the Iron Age to the Hellenistic period have been documented, most of them fortification walls, small forts or control towers, providing a much more dynamic and complex picture [Fig. 1]. The principal objective of this paper is to consider these rural fortifications in a local context and in relation to the main cities in an effort to present a rounded view of the Hellenistic landscape of Scodra. The study of the micro-region is fully justified considering the obvious importance of the territory as a strategic corridor for regional communication as well

¹ The project is directed by Prof. Piotr Dyczek and the author of this paper. It is financed by the Polish National Science Centre under the grant DEC-2014/14/M/HS3/00741. The first phase of the project, 2011–2015, was focused on geophysical prospection and trial trenches in the upper and lower city of Scodra and a relevant

publication is in preparation. The second phase of the project, 2016–2020, concerns excavations and survey in Scodra and its territory. The present article is thus a preliminary review of sites from the Hellenistic period situated in this territory.



Fig. 1. General map of the territory of the Labeates and the principal sites mentioned in the text (S. Shpuza)

as an obvious point of departure for the Greeks penetrating the interior.² The present study contributes also in a small way to the wider discussion of rural towers and associated installations in the realm of the Ardiaei as a whole.

Substantial written sources are available for the period represented by these fortifications, which corresponds to the first Roman interventions in Illyrian affairs at a time when Macedonian monarchs exercised control not only over the Greeks, but also over areas of Illyria. The Greek and Roman authors give names of tribes and cities involved in the major military events, but with few details. Thus, one of the purposes of the present project in the territory of Scodra is to contextualize territorially the long lists of place names attested in the ancient literary sources.

² BEAUMONT 1936, p. 184.

The Labeates and their territory

Greco-Roman literary sources generally offer brief texts with little in the way of detailed information on the borders of the Illyrian tribes and their structural organization. It is difficult to draw a political map of the long list of tribes left by ancient geographers. There was little interest in these tribes owing to their peripheral position in relation to the Greek world, hence the scarcity of data available on each of these tribes. The practice of transhumant pastoralism also contributed to confused ethnic and territorial boundaries. A large part of these tribes did not have fixed settlements before the Hellenistic period and political circumstances or economic conditions dictated their rallying, always precarious, to this or that ephemeral tribal confederation.

In the case of the Labeates, there is fortunately some important literary data for determining the extent of their territory as best as possible [Fig. 1]. Describing the position of Scodra during the events of the war of Genthios against the Romans, Livy stated that the Illyrian king was the ruler of the Labeates.³ He also referred to Lake Skadar as *lacus Labeatium*.⁴ Thus, the area around the lake must have been at the very core of the territory of this tribe. Additional information from Polybius helps to enlarge this territory, for he mentions the site of Meteon in the territory of the Labeates when describing the meeting place of the envoy of Genthios and Perseus in 168 BC where the alliance against the Romans was struck.⁵ Livy also records this site, “Meteon, city of the Labeates”, as the place where Genthios’ wife, Etleva, his two sons and Genthios’ brother, Caravantius, found refuge at the end of the war.⁶ This implies that the city was also part of the tribe’s territory until the Roman takeover. Meteon is identified beyond any doubt with the modern village of Medun. It may also be considered as a borderline between the Labeates and the Docleatae.⁷ The latter tribe occupied the area between the rivers Zeta and Morača. In the Flavian period, a colony bearing the name of Doclea was established in this area.⁸ In the east, the territory of the Labeates presumably did not extend beyond the Montenegrin Alps and in the west, the Adriatic Sea acted as a natural frontier. Finally, to the south, the Taulantii, who are known to have occupied the coastal area between Lissos and Dyrrhachion, seem to have been their neighbors. These historical indications place the entire territory around the lake in the hands of the Labeates tribe.

The city of Lissos is situated in the southern part of Labeatian territory.⁹ Interestingly, it never appears in connection with the tribe of the Labeates. All things considered, it should have been founded in a Labeatian context, but probably by the end of the third century BC, after Teuta’s fall, the city was already organized as a proper *polis*. A similar turning away of a city from its ethnic context and its identification as a *polis* has been remarked also in the case of Olympe, a city of the *koinon* of the Amantini in south Illyria.¹⁰ In both cases, the dissociation coincided with the occupation of some cities in Illyria by Philip V of Macedonia in 214–213 BC.¹¹ At Olympe, the identification as a *polis* is attested by numismatic as well as epigraphic data, whereas in the case of Lissos, the only evidence is numismatic. Stephen of Byzantium mentions another small Illyrian tribe, the Abroi, in the area around Lissos, on the frontier with the Taulantii.¹² No other authors refer to this tribe. The Taulantii were another Illyrian tribe said to occupy the territory south of the Drin River. Their territory seems to have extended up to Dyrrhachion, at least between the seventh and fifth centuries BC.¹³ The city of Olcinium seems to have been on the northwestern

³ Livy 43.19.3, 44.31.1–2.

⁴ Livy 44.31.10.

⁵ Polyb. 29.3.5.

⁶ Livy 44.32.3.

⁷ GARAŠANIN 1976, p. 321.

⁸ Plin. *HN* 3.22 (143); App. *Ill.* 16.

⁹ For recent discoveries on Hellenistic Lissos, see OETTEL 2014, pp. 23–39.

¹⁰ CABANES 2011, pp. 81–82.

¹¹ PAPAZOGLU 1986, pp. 438–448; CABANES 1988, pp. 480–487.

¹² Steph. Byz., s.v. Ἄβροι.

¹³ Thuc. 1.24.1–2. However, writers of the first century AD such as Pliny the Elder (*HN* 3.22 [144]) and Appian (*Ill.* 16 & 24) seem to believe that the Taulantii were living near the Naro River.

frontier. Livy mentions it by this name, which is echoed also in the form *Olciniatae* as the name of its inhabitants.¹⁴ In ancient sources, *Olcinium* appears alongside *Rhizon* as a station for Roman garrisons during the year 168 BC. Pliny mentions it as an *oppidum civium Romanorum*.¹⁵ Like *Lissos*, it is not related to the *Labeates* in any of the surviving ancient sources.

Thus, the identification of the tribal boundaries of the *Labeates* takes on importance when considered in the light of the extreme political fragmentation dictated by the compartmentalized character of the topography that marks the history of the pre-Roman Balkan tribes. In geographic terms, the territory features important rivers, such as *Drin* (*Oriund*), *Buna* (*Barbana*), *Kiri* (*Klausali*), and *Morača*, as well as alluvial plains around the lake. Only *Drin* and *Buna* were navigable in antiquity; *Kiri* and *Morača* were little more than seasonal torrents. In numbers, the total area belonging to the *Labeates* would be 2000–2500 km² with around 500 km² being occupied by the lake.

During the third century BC the *Labeates* were under the dominion of the *Ardiaei* who had become a predominant tribe,¹⁶ giving rise also to the last royal dynasty of the Illyrians (starting with *Agron* around 231 BC and ending with *Genthios* in 168 BC). The *Ardiaei* appear to have superseded in importance the *Autariatae*, another major Illyrian tribe, which seems to have dropped from the historical sources after the fourth century,¹⁷ and the *Taulantii* and *Enchelei*, who had fought the Macedonian kings frequently in previous centuries. Thus, the *Ardiaei* seem to have absorbed smaller groups, such as the *Labeates*, who, to believe Pliny, preserved their identity until the early Roman period. Presenting the situation in this region during the first century AD, Pliny referred to them as a population still maintaining their name. He also lists several other tribes, like the *Enedi*, *Rudini*, *Sasi*, *Grabaei* as well as *Cavi* — which are mentioned also by Livy¹⁸ — who were neighbors of the *Labeates*, but who do not surface in any other accounts.¹⁹ In the end, in the new administrative organization set up by the Romans after the fall of *Genthios*, the whole region took the name of the *Labeates*.

The imposing number of Iron Age fortifications identified in the territory of *Scodra*, situated on most of the mountains and hills that control the territory and constructed probably by the Illyrian tribe of the *Labeates*, constitutes the most comprehensive evidence of settlements in pre-urban Illyria.²⁰ Little is known about these fortifications. Many of them are built on rocky ground and cannot therefore be excavated for a better dating, and it is likely that more may be discovered in the future. Even so, the current survey of the territory of *Scodra* has given sufficient data for a provisional reconstruction of the chronology, density, geographical distribution, and typology of these fortifications, enabling an understanding of their function, which is today the main research issue despite a long history of investigation. Since these fortifications belonged to non-urban communities, they must be seen as only one element of the territorial organization and it is in this close connection with all other forms of settlements that their utility should be considered.

The known examples, more or less explored from an archaeological and topographical point of view, date generally to the end of the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. This embraces a very large timespan from the eleventh to the fifth century BC. This broad chronology results as much from the long life of these sites as from their rather uncertain periodization. A series of necropolises in the plains of *Scodra*, in the region of *Shtoj* and *Shkrel*, as well as on the Mountains of *Kakarriqi* and *Renci* southwest of *Scodra*, belong to the same general period.²¹ More than just exemplifying

¹⁴ Livy 45.26.2, 45.26.13.

¹⁵ Plin. *HN* 3.22 (144).

¹⁶ App. *Ill.* 3; Cass. Dio, fr. 49.3 (book XII; Boissevain I, p. 181). On the territory of the *Ardiaei*, see PAPAZOGLU 1963, pp. 71–86.

¹⁷ PAPAZOGLU 1978, pp. 87–129; WILKES 1992, p. 140. According to Strabo (7.5.11), the *Autariatae* were once the greatest and the most powerful of the Illyrians. Pseu-

do-Aristotle ([*Mir. ausc.*] 844b, 138) describes a conflict between the *Autariatae* and the *Ardiaei* over a salt-source near their common border.

¹⁸ Livy 44.30.7, 44.30.9; Plin. *HN* 3.22 (143).

¹⁹ Plin. *HN* 3.22 (144).

²⁰ SHPUZA 2014 and the references therein.

²¹ KOKA 2012; KURTI, RUKA, GJIPALI 2014, pp. 181–190.

the characteristic material culture of the Illyrians, these tumular necropolises suggest a close relation between the communities and their territory, excluding any form of nomadism. Control over the territory must have been exercised especially through production patterns based on cattle farming as well as exploitation of agricultural resources. In view of this, the fortifications are better perceived as part of a general territorial organization in terms of agro-pastoral efficacy and economic hierarchy. In addition, they must have played an important role in the polarization of the society: as an expression of economic control they would have been perceived also as a mark of political power. Without any relation to the urban aspects, they likely played a mix of roles: political, economic, perhaps symbolic and sacral. The density of these fortifications on one hand shows the permanent control exercised by the Labeates over their territory since the Bronze Age, but on the other hand, it shows that construction was relatively easy. Rubble walls were easily built, hence their proliferation in the rural landscape²² and because they did not require special building skills, they kept on being constructed on a continuous basis, making dating them even more difficult. Although used by small tribal communities, they were part of a larger and homogenous territorial structure of the Labeates, a point brought home by the impressive shape of some of these fortifications. None of them could have withstood an attack alone, but as part of a tribal organization system they constituted a formidable whole.

The cities

It has already been shown in previous research that none of the numerous Iron Age sites in Labeatian territory was transformed into an urban centre at the beginning of the Hellenistic period.²³ Scodra is the main city, clearly known as the city of the Labeates [Fig. 2]. It was the chief city of Genthios to believe the historical and numismatic evidence, but its status before Genthios is not known, although it was apparently part of the Ardiaean Kingdom. Zonaras does not specify the city when speaking of the envoy of the Roman delegates sent to Agron as King of the Ardiaei.²⁴ It may be presumed that it was either Lissos or Scodra, because it is unlikely that the Romans would have sent delegates to unknown regions and at the end of the third century BC they were not at all familiar with the other cities north of the Adriatic. Thus, Scodra and Lissos may be both identified as the chief towns of the Ardiaei from the times of Agron and Teuta. After them, there is no certainty which of the north Illyrian cities was the residence of Scerdilajdes and Pleuratos, as there are no mentions whatsoever in the literary sources.

The Hellenistic site of Scodra is very difficult to access archaeologically.²⁵ The only evidence of the ancient enclosure is located at the entrance to the present fortress. Well preserved until the beginning of the fifteenth century, it was visible as a fragment 16 m long, integrated into the wall built by the Venetians. Presumably nothing else survived of this Hellenistic wall, otherwise it would have also been integrated into the Venetian fortress. Nonetheless, it is very probable that the Hellenistic enceinte surrounded the whole plateau. The upper town is situated on a fairly steep hill, and consequently the city was organized in two separate parts, one on the hill and the other on the surrounding flat ground. For the moment, there is proof of fortifications in the upper town

²² FACHARD 2016, pp. 220–221.

²³ SHPUZA 2014, pp. 117–123.

²⁴ Zonar. 8.19. It should be kept in mind that Zonaras was an eleventh–twelfth century historian, who based his work on the writings of earlier historians, mostly Cassius Dio, and consequently was prone to error, for instance, using the name Sardiae for the Ardiaei tribe. This brings to mind the name of a city, Sardis, men-

tioned by Stephen of Byzantium. The inhabitants of the city were called Sardenoï. The location of this city is unknown, but the name resembles that of the medieval city of Sarda, situated in the Drin Valley, only a few kilometers southeast of Scodra. Moreover, Pliny the Elder (*HN* 3.22 [142]) and Ptolemy (*Geog.* 2.16.5 [Müller]) mention an Illyrian tribe in Dalmatia called the Sardiatoi.

²⁵ DYCZEK, SHPUZA 2014, pp. 387–398.



Fig. 2. Aerial view of the fortress of Scodra (photo M. Pisz)

and no trace of ramparts in the lower town. However, a passage from Livy, which describes the installation of the Roman army near the city walls, indicates that the lower city was also fortified.²⁶ The late antique wall situated on the riverside of the Drin incorporates many Hellenistic blocks,²⁷ which may have been part of an Illyrian fortification in the lower city. There is no sign of towers and given the topography, there was probably only one gate to the upper city, situated where the entrance of the medieval fortress is situated nowadays.

Scodra of Genthios is described in the historical sources as a city surrounded by rivers and benefiting from natural defenses.²⁸ Importantly, Roman sources continue to speak of the city of the Labeates despite its new role as the main residence of the Illyrian king. Here, as elsewhere in Illyria, we observe a coexistence of the ethnic element and the city throughout the Hellenistic period. It is also interesting to note that in Livy's book Genthios is named *rex Illyriorum* most of the time²⁹ and only once referred to as the king of the Labeates.³⁰ Calling Genthios "king of the Illyrians" is not quite correct on one hand, as he did not have authority over all the Illyrians, but on the other hand, naming him "king of the Labeates" suggests that his real power was in Scodra and the territory of the Labeates. It looks as if by the period of Genthios, the connection between the Illyrian dynasty and the tribe of the Ardiaei had been all but lost.

²⁶ Livy 44.31.6–8.

²⁷ HOXHA 1994, pp. 243–244; CEKA, ZEKO 1984.

²⁸ Polyb. 28.8.1, 28.8.3; Livy 43.20, 44.31.2–3, 44.31.12, 44.32.1, 44.32.3, 45.26.1, 45.26.11, 45.26.14; Flor. 2.13; Zonar. 9.24.

²⁹ Livy 40.42.1, 42.26.2, 42.29.11, 42.37.2, 43.9.5, 44.23.1.

³⁰ Livy 43.19.3: *et transitus ea est in Labeates, ubi Genthios regnabat.*

The defeat of Genthios at Scodra marked the end of the dynasty of the Illyrian kings. According to the ancient sources, the city was left by the praetor Anicius, who defeated Genthios, in the command of one of his generals, Gabinius.³¹ The inhabitants of Scodra were required to pay to Rome half the taxes they had been giving to the king.³² Scodra does not appear again in the ancient sources until a century later when Appian mentions the city as a frontier between the territories of Octavian and Anthony in 42 BC.³³ During the reign of Caesar in Illyricum, Scodra became an *oppidum civium Romanorum*,³⁴ meaning that it already had a post of Italian traders, the first step to making it possible to establish a Roman colony in the city.

Meteon was also considered as a city according to Polybius and Livy.³⁵ Livy in particular uses the term *urbs* when speaking of Meteon: *Meteon urbs Labeatium*. The best account of the site is given by Camillo Praschniker and Arnold Schober, who describe the preserved part of the fortification³⁶ [Fig. 3]. Four towers were still visible, standing at a distance of 24 m from one

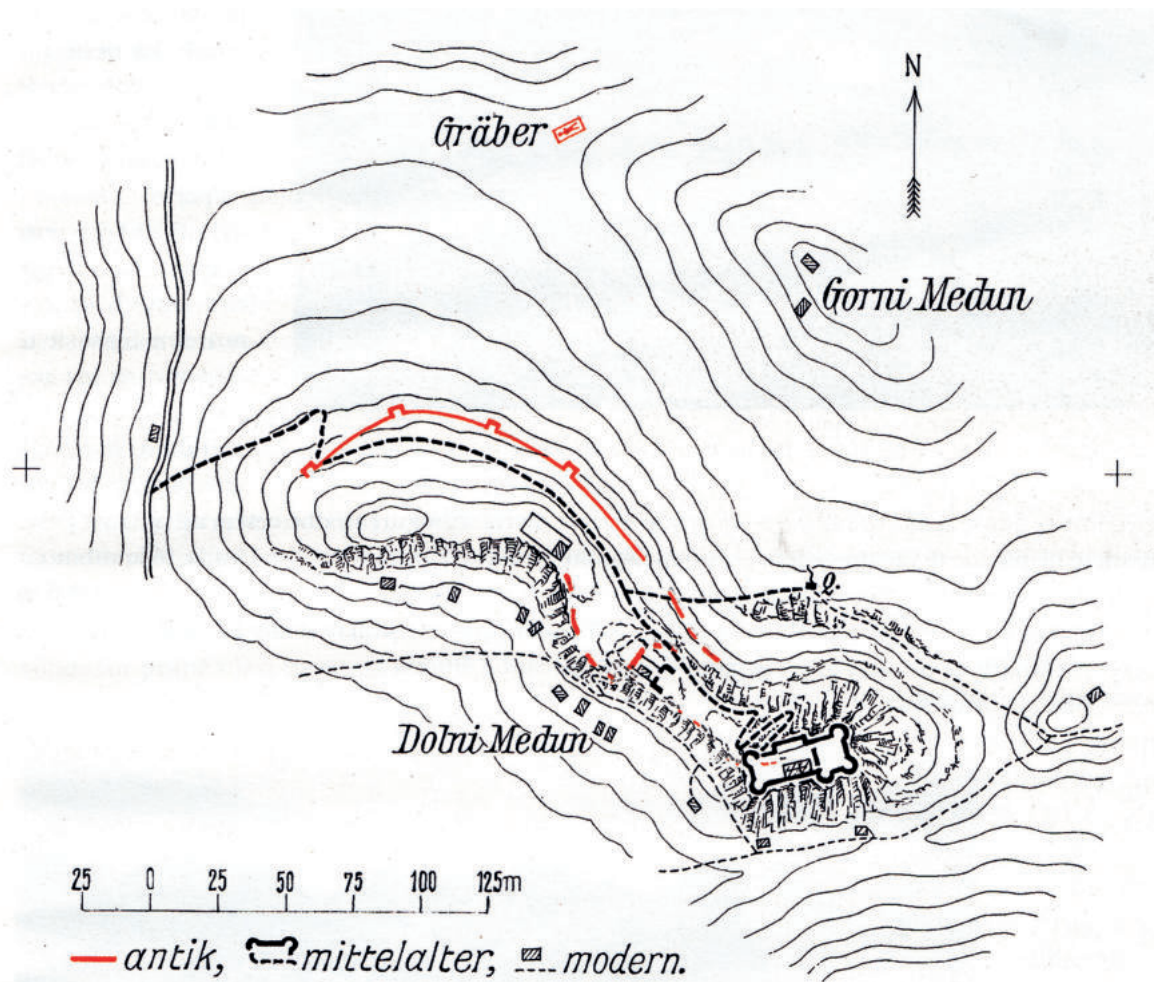


Fig. 3. Plan of the fortification of Medun (after Praschniker, Schober 1919, p. 5, fig. 7)

³¹ Livy 45.26.1.

³² Livy 45.26.14.

³³ App. *B. Civ.* 5.65.

³⁴ Plin. *HN* 3.22 (144).

³⁵ Polyb. 29.3.5; Livy 44.32.1.

³⁶ PRASCHNIKER, SCHOBER 1919, pp. 3–8.

another. However, despite the monumentality of the existing fortification walls [Fig. 4], a visitor will easily see that the remains are a military fortification rather than a city. The extant walls seem to surround a rocky spot of about 0.5 ha, quite inappropriate for habitation. Probably Livy's use of the word *urbs* was not meant to signify a "city" and it would have been more proper to use the appellation *civitas*.³⁷ This particular case demonstrates the need for caution when analyzing literary sources as the authors seem to have had little knowledge of the urban situation in Illyria in that period. In view of this, Meteon should be considered as a stronghold in the territory of the Labeates, rather than a proper city, a statement that needs to be tested archaeologically in the future.



Fig. 4. Fortification wall at Medun (photo S. Shpuza)

Although Scodra and Medeon are the only cities mentioned by the ancient authors, archaeological exploration in the area has identified a new site, Bushati, situated on a hill 15 km south of Scodra. There is no doubt that it was in Labeatian territory, while the hill itself is a rare high point in an area otherwise consisting mostly of plains. From Bushati there is a clear view to Beltoja and Scodra in the north, as well as all the fortified sites situated on Sheldia Mountain to the east [Fig. 5].



Fig. 5. Rural fortifications situated on the Sheldia Mountain seen from Bushati (photo S. Shpuza)

³⁷ In his book *Strategemata* (3.6.3), Frontinus uses these two distinctive names when describing the military actions of Pyrrhus: *civitas* for the capital of an Illyrian eth-

nos and *urbs* for smaller localities in the area. See also CABANES 1989, p. 60.

Judging by the topography of the hill and the visible remains of a fortification wall, the enclosure surrounded some 20 ha. In area, this corresponds to a middle-sized Hellenistic city in the region. However, considering the discovery of a Hellenistic fountain in the plain east of the foothills, the site may have at one point extended beyond the city walls.³⁸ Moreover, some agricultural tools from the Hellenistic period were found in the 1980s in the village of Melgusha located north of the hill³⁹ and a bronze figurine of Hermes (Mercury) from the first century AD surfaced in the village of Trush.⁴⁰ This makes the close relation of the fortified hill with the territory around it evident.

An analysis of the standing remains suggests that the wall was constructed on the top of hill surrounding a small valley situated on a much lower level than the fortification walls. The enceinte starts on the highest part of the hill, 195 m above sea level, and drops gradually to the lower part of the plain, 65 m above sea level. It forms a longitudinal shape oriented north–south with an inclination of around 130 m. The wall is better preserved on the western flank where it can be followed in two continuous parts, 30 m and 70 m long. Blocks observed on the surface between them show that the line of the wall continued in the western part. The situation on the eastern flank is less clear, there being very little evidence to be seen on the surface.

It is interesting to note the use of different kinds of stone for building purposes: conglomerate, limestone and sandstones. All three have been noted geologically in the hills of Bushati. Conglomerate seems to have been used for the upper part of the fortification and the dressing of the blocks shows skilled craftwork despite the difficulty of cutting this kind of stone. Sandstone seems to have been used mostly in the western part of the fortification wall.

Recent archaeological excavation in the lower part of the city revealed a gateway protected by a rectangular tower [Fig. 6]. A series of towers may have been situated in the lower part of the fortification, which was less protected naturally. The general layout of the Bushati fortification resembles a triangle and is comparable to the fortification of Zgerdheshi (Albanopolis), where most



Fig. 6. Aerial view of the excavations at the southern gate of the fortification (photo M. Lemke)

³⁸ LAHI 1995, pp. 231–240. Bashkim Lahi excavated the Hellenistic fountain and dug some trenches on the site of the fortification wall. He also mapped the structures visible on the surface. The plan was never published, but I am especially grateful to Lahi for giving me access to it.

³⁹ DIBRA 1981, pp. 235–238.

⁴⁰ LAHI, RROTANI 1989, pp. 269–270.

of the towers are situated in the lower part of the fortification, too. However, careful observation of the western part of the fortification indicates that in Bushati, as in most of the other Illyrian sites, towers were replaced with a series of recesses in the line of the wall.⁴¹

New archaeological data suggest that the foundation of this city was contemporaneous with Scodra and Lissos, dating to the end of the fourth and beginning of the third century BC. Reporting on the war between Genthios and the Romans, Livy mentioned three cities: Bassania, Dirnium and Caravantis.⁴² The latter two seem to be situated in the territory of the Cavi, but neither has been identified; indeed, the territory of the Cavi is not known. Livy fails to give more information apart from situating Bassania five miles from Lissos.⁴³

Part of the ceramic assemblage from the surface in Bushati is of late antique date. Combined with Bep Jubani's information on a late antique necropolis nearby, it would suggest that the site was occupied also in the late antique period.⁴⁴ However, it seems to have been abandoned during the Roman period. As on most Illyrian sites, a demographic movement may be observed from the fortified sites to the fertile plains in the vicinity and near the bigger cities.⁴⁵ Roman-period remains were found, for example, in the village of Trush very close to Bushati, during some drainage works. They probably belong to farm complexes existing in the territory of Scodra during the Roman period.

Rural fortifications

Various terms are used to identify fortifications situated in the city hinterland: extra-urban fortifications, rural fortifications and territorial fortifications among others.⁴⁶ Two groups of structures can be distinguished among the extra-urban fortifications in the territory of Scodra: small fortresses and isolated towers. The towers are referred to as *phryktoria*, the etymology deriving from their function as signal posts using fire as light.⁴⁷ Their main characteristic is an open view over a large territory.

Situated in isolated places, these rural fortifications are preserved in much better condition than the urban ones. For example, two of the most important Hellenistic cities in the region, Scodra and Olcinium, have undergone extensive urban transformation during their history, especially in the Venetian and Ottoman periods, to the detriment of more ancient structures. For the same reason, however, extra-urban fortifications are less known, less excavated and less studied. Neither have the reasons for their construction been explored, although, generally, the building of rural fortifications testifies to a city's interest in protecting its extra-urban territory. Such concern for the *chora* starts in the fourth century BC.⁴⁸

The fortification nearest to Scodra is Beltoja. It lies on a hill located just 2 km south of Scodra, on the way to Bushati. Archaeological excavation have revealed two phases of the fortification walls, dated by the assemblages of finds.⁴⁹ The Hellenistic phase seems to cover a very short time-span, starting from the second half of the third century BC and ending by the middle of the second century BC. The site has been damaged heavily by modern activity. The remains tell very little about the general layout of this fortification, which does not seem to have encircled the whole area.

⁴¹ BAČE 1987, pp. 37–46.

⁴² Livy 44.30.7, 44.30.9.

⁴³ C. Praschniker and A. Schober situated the site in the village of Pillana on the grounds of this geographical information. They found some pottery on the surface but no associated structures; see PRASCHNIKER, SCHOBER 1919, p. 84.

⁴⁴ JUBANI 1986, p. 125.

⁴⁵ SHPUZA 2009.

⁴⁶ FACHARD 2016, pp. 207–230.

⁴⁷ ADAM 1982, p. 71.

⁴⁸ HELLMANN 2010, p. 343.

⁴⁹ LAHI 1988, pp. 69–92.

Most of these rural fortifications are situated on Sheldia Mountain, situated southeast of Scodra. Starting from north to south, we can distinguish the isolated towers at Renci, Ganjolla and Spathar. The Renci tower is situated on the hills of a village of the same name [Fig. 7]. It is also known by the toponym *Qyteza*, which means “small town”. The altitude is only 178 m above sea level, but the panoramic corridor in which the tower is positioned, allows it to overlook Gajtani and the Drin valley beyond to the east. One can see the towers of Ganjolla and Acrolissos on the south and Beltoja, Bushati, Scodra, Vorfa, Mokseti and Lake Skadar on the west and north.

The tower has roughly coursed, almost polygonal masonry that includes stones of massive size [Fig. 8]. The blocks underwent minimal dressing with most the effort going into the front surfaces. The walls are preserved to a height of no more than 1.5 m, so little can be said regarding the



Fig. 7. Aerial view of the tower at Renci (photo M. Pisz)



Fig. 8. The walls of the tower at Renci (photo S. Shpuza)

original elevation of the tower. The site is very rocky with no flat surfaces for building; hence, the tower was constructed on the southern hill slope, the longer base of the trapezoid plan set against natural rock and built up with some blocks. The eastern wall of the tower is the best preserved and runs for a length of 18.5 m; the western wall is less preserved and difficult to follow along its entire length, but it also seems to have incorporated natural rock into its structure.⁵⁰ The extreme part of this wall is better preserved and it can be followed for 10 m to the end of the tower. A wall 2.80 m long closes the tower on the fourth side. Considering the sloping ground on which it was constructed, the tower comprised two levels. A wall, which was 3 m long, divided the tower into two parts as well as two different levels. The upper part of the eastern wall gives the impression of an entrance gate to the tower, an idea supported also by Gjerak Karaiskaj who first published the tower.⁵¹ However, the structure is not sufficiently well preserved for the presence of a gate to be confirmed. Inside the tower there is nothing beside natural rock; even the wall thickness cannot be established because of the resemblance of the structure to general fill. In this sense, the structure is similar to a long wall constructed on the hill slope rather than a tower.

The fortification at Ganjolla is the only one to be documented by archaeological excavations.⁵² The Hellenistic tower was built on the site of a preexisting Late Bronze / Early Iron Age fortification [Fig. 9]. It is the highest point of all the fortifications on Sheldia Mountain and it has a clear view of the plain of Zadrime and the Drin River. Bashkim Lahi dates the construction of this tower to the first quarter of the second century BC and relates it to the preparations of King Gentios for the war against the Romans.⁵³



Fig. 9. Aerial view of Ganjolla (photo M. Pisz)

⁵⁰ However, modern military intervention at the site cannot be excluded in view of the presence of a military base until the 1980s.

⁵¹ KARAIKAI 1974, p. 152.

⁵² LAHI 1993, pp. 201–218.

⁵³ LAHI 1993, p. 204.

Located in the southern part of Sheldia Mountain [Fig. 10], Spathar is a fortification very similar to that of Gajtani and Ganjolla. The wall encircles the upper part of a rocky and beyond it, on lower ground, there is a small flat pasture. The fortification lies 217 m above sea level and is known under the name of *Kalaja e Xhodetit*. Of the two phases of fortification that were distinguished, the first one corresponds to a wall 120 m long and 3 m wide [Fig. 11]. It was probably a rubble wall with no regular faces on either side, as in no place of the preserved section of the wall could a facade be observed. This wall encircles an area of 0.7 hectares, with a precipice providing natural protection in the western part.



Fig. 10. Aerial view of Spathar (photo M. Pisz)



Fig. 11. Rubble wall at Spathar (photo S. Shpuza)

In the second phase, another rampart including a tower was added to the standing fortification wall [Fig. 12]. This second wall has some more advanced technical characteristics. It is 3 m wide and 12 m long. The tower at the end of the eastern part is of rectangular shape, but with irregular dimensions: $7.90 \times 6.90 \times 8.50 \times 8.10$ m. An L-shaped wall was added to the eastern wall of the tower, creating a corridor of unknown function. Only 2–3 courses of stone blocks have been preserved, the tower walls reaching no higher than 1 m. The blocks used for the construction of this tower are much better worked than those of Renci, but more irregular than those from Ganjolla.



Fig. 12. Wall of the Hellenistic tower at Spathar (photo S. Shpuza)

The northern part of the territory of Scodra seems to have been controlled by the sites of Kratul and Vorfa. Situated in the hill area of Boksi, Kratul watched over the Kiri valley [Fig. 13]. The fortification was of ellipsoidal shape, its western part greatly damaged today by military works. A tower stands in the eastern part. It was built of better dressed blocks compared to those used in the walls. Moreover, the fortification wall is constructed as a typical Iron Age structure with two faces and an inner rubble core, whereas the tower wall comprised two rows of stones set back-to-back. The earliest material on the site is of Iron Age date, but most of the pottery and coins, of Scodra and of Genthios, date to the Hellenistic period.⁵⁴ Thus, the wall and the tower apparently functioned during the Hellenistic period. A road paved with stone slabs, still in use today, is preserved nearby; it resembles Roman roads, but in many cases the Romans are known to have paved existing paths from the Hellenistic period.

The fortification of Vorfa is situated further north of Kratul. It lies on a rocky hill around 160 m above sea level, giving a clear view over Lake Skadar as well as Scodra, Bushati, Beltoja, Kratul, Renci, Ganjolla and Mokseti. The entire hill seems to have been protected by fortification



Fig. 13. The tower at Kratul (photo M. Pisz)

⁵⁴ FISTANI 1983, pp. 113–115.

walls. However, it seems that different techniques were used for their construction [Fig. 14 a, b, c]. In the northeastern part of the hill, the wall is built of partly worked stones of huge size ($1 \times 0.80 \times 0.80$ m). The wall is 2 m wide, but only the northern face is preserved, the southern one having collapsed completely. The fragment still standing is 1.50 m high. Stones of apparently bigger size were employed in the southwestern part of the hill. The impression is that we are dealing with sizable chunks of rock integrated with the fortification wall. Smaller and better worked stones form the upper courses of the wall above the rock. There seems to be no inner face in this part of the wall. The line of the western fortification can be traced on the ground at the beginning of the slope almost without interruption toward the northern part. In this case, too, only the inner face has been preserved; the wall stands to a maximal height of 3 m and the facade is constructed of small-sized unworked stones. It is not clear whether the differences in construction techniques correspond to different phases of the site. However, the material found on the surface is of Hellenistic date.



Fig. 14. Different techniques of the fortification wall at Vorfa (photo S. Shpuza)

Control over Lake Skadar seems to have been the main interest of the Labeates. In fact, it looks like navigation on the lake was quite regular during the Hellenistic period. During the siege of Scodra by Anicius, Genthios navigated the lake hoping for more troops from his brother Caravandis.⁵⁵ Moreover, considering that the Buna was navigable and the main entrance to the Adriatic from Scodra, Illyrian *lembi* could have easily used the lake as a stationary base. Two fortifications that ensured control over the lake have been identified: Mokseti and Samobor. Mokseti is situated on a high hill with a clear view of the lake and direct visibility of Scodra and Kratuli.⁵⁶ A short section of the Hellenistic wall is preserved in the southern part of the hill [Fig. 15]. Facing it on the other side of the lake is Samobor⁵⁷ [Fig. 16], a site with a relatively well preserved fortification wall, standing to a maximum height of 2 m, including an entrance gate and a tower. The construction technique of the wall and tower is very similar to that found at Renci, that is, rough masonry of big blocks with very little dressing. Pottery and coins from the site are dated to the third–second centuries BC.⁵⁸



Fig. 15. Hellenistic wall at Mokseti (photo S. Shpuza)

⁵⁵ Livy 44,31.11.

⁵⁶ HOXHA 2004, p. 247.

⁵⁷ The site is known since long ago, the first topographical plans being made by Nopça first and then Praschniker and Schober.

⁵⁸ PRASCHNIKER, SCHOBBER 1919, pp. 91–94.

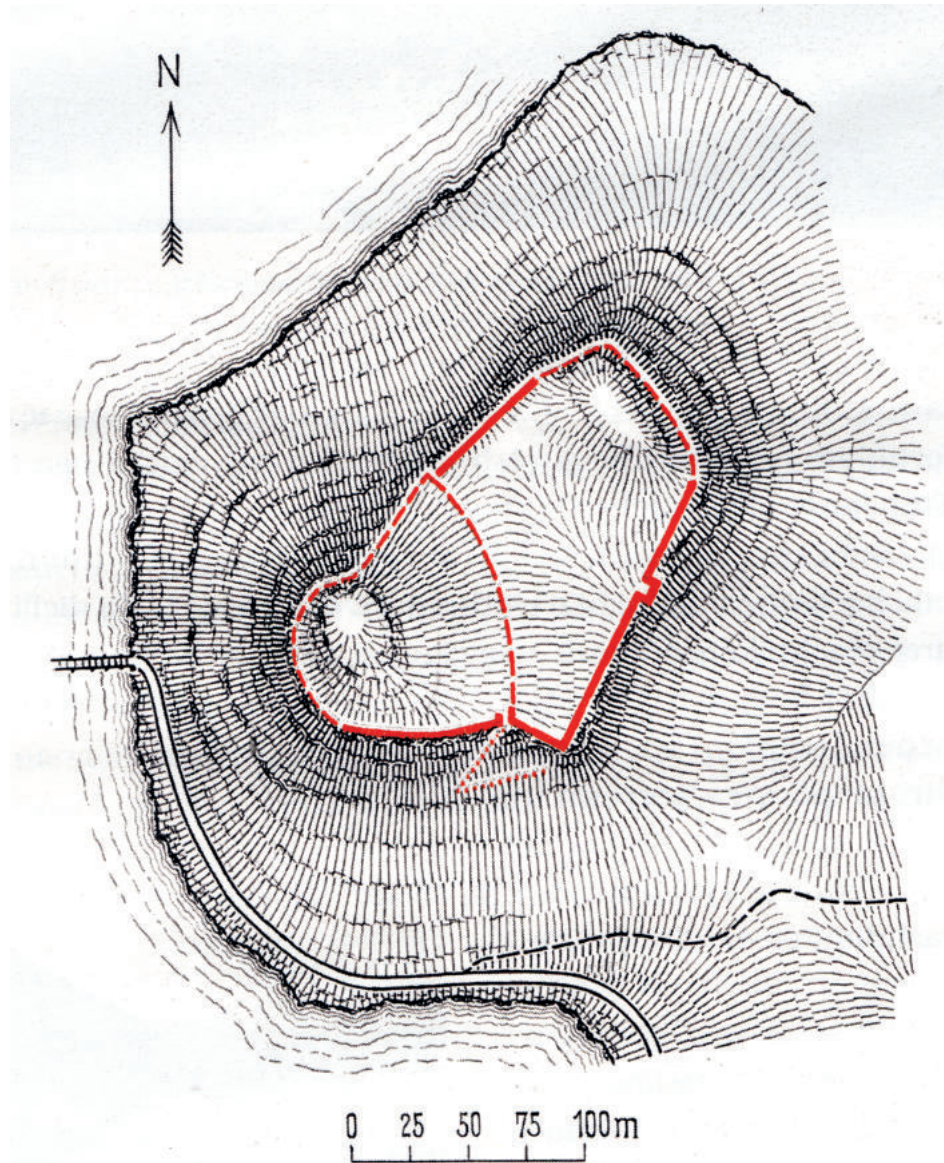


Fig. 16. Plan of the fortification of Samobor (after Praschniker, Schober 1919, p. 93, fig. 109)

Finally, there is Oblun, a fortification built on a hill situated in the Zeta plain, near the Morača river. It lies 214 m above sea level and presents two construction phases, like Ganjolla and Beltoja, one prehistoric and the other Hellenistic when a tower was added. Construction techniques again enabled a distinction between the two phases. The prehistoric structure is a rubble wall, while the Hellenistic one is built of regular trapezoidal blocs.⁵⁹ A similar site from the Hellenistic period, also equipped with a tower, is found in the same area, at Stara Gradina on the Morača river.⁶⁰ The fortification at Mali i Sumes, a wall 150 m long, lies on a hill rising 486 m above sea level, affording a clear view of the other fortified sites on Sheldia Mountain, as well as Scodra and Bushati.⁶¹

⁵⁹ See DIMITRIJEVIĆ 2016, p. 302.

⁶⁰ DIMITRIJEVIĆ 2014, pp. 145–150.

⁶¹ See LULGIURAJ 2017, p. 587.

Function and chronology of the rural fortifications

The network of several signal posts and rural fortifications that the Labeates built to control their territory, maintaining visual contact between them, testify to their excellent territorial knowledge, knowledge that was rooted in ancient times considering that some of the Hellenistic rural fortifications were constructed on existing Bronze and Iron Age sites. In view of this, one can also assume that other Iron Age fortifications, which do not show any remains of Hellenistic walls, but have yielded finds of Hellenistic pottery, were used as signal posts just the same.⁶² Thus, signal posts were not necessarily fortified with either towers or walls. Situated on high altitude and isolated sites, they did not play any function in military operations, their role being just signalization. It may be the case of Marshej, a site with walls apparently from the Iron Age, but with a geographical position that completes the chain of signal posts between Vorfa and Mokseti. The reoccupation of fortified places from the Iron Age can also be related to transhumance itineraries. This relation is very common in other territories, like that of the Molossians, for example, organized as an ethnos in similarity to the Labeates.⁶³

A moot point that arises from an analysis of these data is whether the Labeates built their towers at the frontiers of their territory or as part of a defense system for the hinterland of the city of Scodra. It is difficult to observe the transformation from tribal territory of the Labeates to civic territory of Scodra. Generally, the establishment of cities in Illyria did not replace tribal traditions. Considering that most of the towers were in direct view of Scodra suggests that their construction was effected to protect the *chora* of the city. Their role was to house small garrisons, control the main communication roads, signal troop movements and seldom participate in military actions in order to slow down enemy movement.

The model of territorial organization around Scodra indicates an *asty* and *chora* organization typical of a *polis*. It is very similar to models already known from the Greek world as well as from south Illyria which was closer to the Greeks.⁶⁴ In the territory of Amantia, for example, the existence of *peripoloi* and *peripolarchos* is attested in the epigraphical sources. These were small mobile troops, the primary aim of which was to control the far-off limits of the territory.⁶⁵ However, we do not know at present whether Scodra and the Labeates had the same structural organization as Amantia and the Amantines.

Pending excavation in the future, the chronological overview of these fortification sites must be disappointing for now. Nonetheless, some general conclusions can be drawn regarding the territorial organization around Scodra. Considering that we are dealing with a complex and integrated system of protection of Scodra territory, it has to be taken as a given that these towers were built after the city of Scodra was established, that is, in the end of the fourth century BC, treated as a *terminus post quem* for their construction. At the other end of the spectrum, the fall of Scodra to the Roman in 168 BC can date the end of the usefulness of these fortifications. While they may have been in service until the last years of the Republic, their use must have been sporadic.

The construction of these control towers corresponds to two major political and military situations in the area. First, the building of this defensive system corresponds to a more intense period of activity of the Ardiaean dynasty and may thus be seen as part of their military policy. However, there is no archaeological data to confirm the building activity of the Illyrian kings, regardless of whether it were military fortifications or stimulation of urban life. Historically, Polybius,⁶⁶ Strabo and Cassius Dio⁶⁷ wrote of the dynasts of Illyrian cities. The precise role of

⁶² JUBANI 1972; LAHI 1988; 1993; FISTANI 1983; LULGURAJ 2017.

⁶³ DAUSSE 2011, pp. 231–243.

⁶⁴ For Epirus, see for example GIORGI, BOGDANI 2012 and PERNA, ÇONDI 2017.

⁶⁵ CABANES 1989, p. 61; CEKA, CEKA 2017, pp. 489–508.

⁶⁶ Polyb. 21.21.3.

⁶⁷ Cass. Dio, fr. 40.3 (book IX; Boissevain I, p. 117).

these dynasts is still unclear, but their existence suggests an interaction between political power and the urban framework in Illyria. Although it seems sometimes that each city had on occasion an autonomous policy within the larger framework of the Ardiaean Kingdom.

Second, the construction of these rural fortifications ties in with a long period of insecurity during most of the Hellenistic period, starting from the wars of Teuta against the Romans to the last war of Genthios. A period of peace with the Romans during the reigns of Pleuratos and Scerdilajdes was still overshadowed by the Macedonian menace on the other side. For example, Philip V of Macedonia drove at creating a gateway to the Adriatic, causing much anxiety in the region. He threatened Apollonia and briefly captured Orikos, but then was detracted to go further north. In 213 BC, he captured Lissos and was threatening Scodra.⁶⁸ Some years later, in 209 BC, the Illyrians and the Dardanians organized some military incursions into the territory of the Orestis,⁶⁹ near Lake Ohrid, and in 208 BC Scerdilajdes and Pleuratos attacked Macedonia.⁷⁰

The construction of isolated towers is not always in relation to the protection of the territory. Some of these structures could have been farm-towers and there is an overall tendency to demilitarize the role of the towers.⁷¹ However, in the case of Scodra, there is no archaeological data from near these fortifications that could be related to an agricultural enterprise. Actually very little is known about agricultural activity in the area around Scodra, possibly with the exception of an open site east of the Sheldia Mountain, where the surface collection of finds suggests a non-military function.⁷² The site at Mataguzi, north of Lake Skadar, may also be related to agricultural activity as it is the only site situated in the plain. Hellenistic blocks are used in the buildings on the site and an important quantity of Hellenistic pottery was found there.⁷³ In addition, two necropolises, one situated near Gajtan and the other one in Gostijl (Montenegro), must have belonged to communities living in the rural hinterland of Scodra.⁷⁴

Fortifications of this kind seem to have been common to most Illyrians. Further north, similar fortifications of the Delmatae, Iapodes and Pannonians were used during the third–second centuries BC as *castella* or *oppida*. As in Scodra, they functioned as an organized system with good intervisibility between them, while they could not have ever functioned as independent strongholds.⁷⁵ No study has yet been undertaken of the territorial defense system in the territory south of Scodra, associated with Lissos, but in that case there was Acrolissos, lying higher than Hellenistic Lissos and fully capable of serving in the signalization role. It was situated in a very high place and commanded an unobstructed view of the four sides of the horizon.

The identification of these towers has contributed an important new element toward an understanding of the Illyrian fortification system in the territory of Scodra. This micro-regional study should be extended to cover a larger area, helping to understand spatial organization within the Illyrian Kingdom as well as enabling a clearer assessment of the frontiers between the Illyrian tribes. There is still much to do regarding the exploration of these rural fortifications, whether to improve the dating or to enhance the archaeological view of these very little known sites.

⁶⁸ MAY 1946, pp. 48–49. The sources do not tell us whether Philip V advanced north of Lissos and how long he remained in possession of this area.

⁶⁹ Livy 27.33.1.

⁷⁰ Livy 28.5.7.

⁷¹ MORRIS-PAPADOPOULOS 2005.

⁷² HOXHA, OETTEL 2016, pp. 215–216.

⁷³ NOVAKOVIĆ 2017, p. 145.

⁷⁴ KORKUTI 1967; BASLER 1972.

⁷⁵ WILKES 1992, pp. 190–192. See also his bibliography on the strongholds of the Delmatae.

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Streszczenie

Szkodra i Labeaci. Miasta, wiejskie fortyfikacje i obrona terytorialna w okresie hellenistycznym

Wiedza na temat zagospodarowania terytorialnego rejonu Szkodry została znacznie poszerzona dzięki szeroko zakrojonemu programowi badań, prowadzonemu przez Instytut Archeologii w Tiranie we współpracy z Ośrodkiem Badań nad Antyką Europy Południowo-Wschodniej (Uniwersytet Warszawski). Z uwagi na daleko idące rozbieżności polityczne przedrzymskich plemion na Bałkanach, na które wpływ miało specyficzne ukształtowanie terenu, ogromnego znaczenia nabiera próba wyznaczenia granic rdzennego obszaru zajmowanego przez plemię Labeatów. Był to teren obejmujący w sumie około 2000–2500 km², z czego około 500 km² stanowiło jezioro.

Omówienie wiejskich fortyfikacji w ich lokalnym kontekście geograficznym oraz w odniesieniu do głównych ośrodków miejskich służy możliwie pełnemu odtworzeniu krajobrazu hellenistycznej Szkodry. Wyraźnie dostrzegalna jest znacząca aktywność budowlana w okresie od IV do II w. p.n.e. Aktywność ta związana jest głównie z wojskowością, ale wynika to przede wszystkim z bardzo ograniczonego zespołu danych archeologicznych dotyczących rolnictwa czy hodowli w całym okresie hellenistycznym.

Model organizacji terytorialnej rozpoznany w rejonie Szkodry jest charakterystyczny dla typowej *polis*. Przypomina modele znane ze świata greckiego, jak również z południowej Ilirii i Epiru, pozostających w sferze greckich wpływów. Czas budowy wiejskich założeń obronnych pokrywa się z długim okresem zagrożenia obejmującym cały okres hellenistyczny od wojen królowej Teuty z Rzymianami po ostatnią wojnę Genthiosa. Niniejsze studium w mikroskali

wpisuje się w dyskusję o wiejskich wieżach obronnych i innych powiązanych z nimi konstrukcjach na terenie królestwa Ardiejów. Rezultaty tych badań stworzą lepsze ramy dla przyszłych badań nad organizacją przestrzenną oraz relacjami między hellenistyczno-iliryjskimi miastami a ich zapleczem terytorialnym.

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