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## Fortifications in Chaonia, Epirus. Some remarks on function and masonry styles

Julian Bogdani

### Introduction

The area of ancient Chaonia, the northernmost part of Epirus, nowadays corresponding to the southern edge of Albania, has for a long time been scarcely known, if not for a few but paramount sites. The monumental work of N.G.L. Hammond<sup>1</sup> has been for decades the only reliable source of information for an impressive number of fortified Epirote sites, even if this English scholar could not always rely on the field conditions required to draw accurate plans or have the archaeological remains cleaned from vegetation and debris in order to provide a detailed and exhaustive description. More than fifty years after its publication, this book is still an essential reference point for studying the ancient landscape of the area.

Before the Second World War, a huge work on the archaeological exploration of the region was done by the Italian Archaeological Mission, that largely focused its investigations on the centres of Phoinike and Butrint and some few nearby sites<sup>2</sup>. In the 1950s, these areas underwent a rather heavy land-reclamation programme that progressively but radically changed the shape of the landscape, putting at risk some archaeological sites and bringing to light many others. The attentive documentation work of Dhimosten Budina led to the publication of two long articles containing the archaeological

map of the Chaonian region<sup>3</sup>. It was Dhimosten Budina who identified and excavated for many years the second large town of Chaonians, *Antigonea*<sup>4</sup>. Spot contributions on single sites or fortifications have sporadically been published in *Iliria*, the journal of the Albanian Institute for Archaeology. A thorough revision of the available archaeological documentation on the archaeological sites of Chaonia, with a particular focus on Hellenistic fortified sites, was published in 2012 by the author of this paper and E. Giorgi<sup>5</sup>. This revision summarised the previously edited and archival material and added newly collected on-field data, the outcome of survey campaigns with the support of the Italian Archaeological Mission in *Phoinike* promoted by the University of Bologna. The inner part of Chaonia, the valley of Drinos, is under investigation by the Italian Mission of the Macerata University, whose final publication is still under preparation, but has been anticipated by some articles<sup>6</sup>.

Research on Chaonian fortified sites is still quite active, as the return to the most ancient phase of the city walls of Butrint by the University of Bologna<sup>7</sup> as well as the constant efforts in the Drinos valley clearly demonstrate. These works will surely contribute in future years to clarifying some of the many and tangled research questions that still arise from the publications. Nevertheless, some general

1 HAMMOND 1967.

2 The results of these investigations were published in a monographic series named *Albania Antica*. Some minor sites investigated by the mission, like Çuka e Aitoit, Kalivò, Malathre, Çuka/Metoqi, etc., remained mostly unpublished until recently, cf. UGOLINI 2005B; CARDINI, FRANCIS, GILKES 2005.

3 BUDINA 1971; BUDINA 1974.

4 BUDINA 1972; BUDINA 1976; BUDINA 1993.

5 BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012.

6 For a general summary of our archaeological knowledge of the Drinos valley, with a detailed review of previously published research, cf. PERNA 2016.

7 Cf. the paper by Enrico Giorgi in this volume.

points can be presently treated with greater experience and awareness. One of these points definitely regards the masonry style of the walls, a very old and perhaps worn-out topic, yet always central when other clues for the definition of chronology and interpretation are missing. Thanks to the deeper knowledge we have today on many fortified sites of different sizes, on their topographical and geomorphological position, on their relation to agricultural resources (and, to a lesser extent, to the pastoral routes), we can offer here a synthesis of building techniques and masonry styles used in Chaonian area, with a greater attention on context, function, commissioning authority and with a vaguer focus on chronology.

We will exclude from our analysis sites and structures predating the Iron Age<sup>8</sup>, because the investigation would go far beyond the physical limits of this paper and because it is a topic that needs further thought and deeper collaboration between specialist of different chronologies. Roman and post-Roman phases have also been programmatically left out with the hope that future field research will bring new information on the interesting relationship between Hellenistic and Late Antique occupation, since many (or most) of the Hellenistic fortified sites were re-fortified in this period<sup>9</sup>.

### The fortification systems of Caonia

Based on the archaeological research published until present, there are two documented paramount moments for the building of defensive walls and similar structures in Chaonia, between the Iron Age and the Roman Empire, namely the Late Archaic-Classical period and the Hellenistic one (fig. 1). The first moment is limited to what can be called “the Butrint system” and the second may be referred to as “the Phoinike system”. These labels themselves bring into the discourse a very specific interpretation and disputable hypothesis of the archaeological remains, that needs some explanation. Probably, not all scholars will agree on such a city-centred view, and this schema is highly conditioned by the scarcity of reliable data. But, rather than an arriv-

al point, this hypothesis might be considered as a point of departure that will certainly be further articulated in the future, in the light of new archaeological information. The affinity between a fortified site and a system is stated mostly on geographical and topographical grounds, as in most cases there are no archaeologically valid clues to forward undisputed connections. Stylistic considerations on the masonry and building techniques remain highly ambivalent, and no generalisation can be made on a regional scale.

### The Butrint system

The existence of this first system is founded basically on the remains of a polygonal wall, terracing and defending the uppermost part of the acropolis of Butrint (fig. 2). Most certainly, this wall did not enclose the entire hilltop, but only parts of it that were not defended naturally by cliffs and precipices<sup>10</sup>. Butrint is a highly peculiar case in the context of pre-Hellenistic Chaonia, a condition determined by the presence of Corinthians and Corcyreans in the peninsula in front of the colony of Kerkyra, at the narrowest point of the Corfu Channel. The low hill of Butrint emerged between the calm waters of the Vivari lake and the Ionian coast, in a perfectly and naturally protected geographical position, with an optimal visual control over the maritime route linking Greece with Southern Italy and Sicily. Pottery finds show a precocious frequentation by Corcyreans, probably in the same years when the colony of Kerkyra was being founded<sup>11</sup>. A recent study by David Hernandez has tried to bring together the scattered and scarce fragments of the puzzle referring to the Archaic phase of the site and has proposed a highly monumental face for the centre, dominated by an architectonically important

10 The wall was defined “pelasgic” and dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE by Luigi Maria Ugolini (UGOLINI 1942, pp. 26-28). N. Hammond (HAMMOND 1967, pp. 99-111) did not agree with the planimetry and date of the defensive circuit proposed by Ugolini. A more ancient date (7<sup>th</sup> century BCE) was advanced by Astrit Nanaj (NANAJ 1985) on the basis of stylistic parallels. Finally, 500 BCE was fixed as *terminus post quem* for the construction of the polygonal walls after the excavation of some trenches at the beginning of the 1990s (ARAFAT, MORGAN 1995; HADZIS 1998). The archaeological finds that determined this *terminus*, nevertheless, have never been published.

11 For an overview on the early phases of life in Butrint cf. BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 261-266.

8 For a recent overview, cf. GJIPALI 2018.

9 For a review of the archaeology of the Late Antique period, cf. BOWDEN 2003.

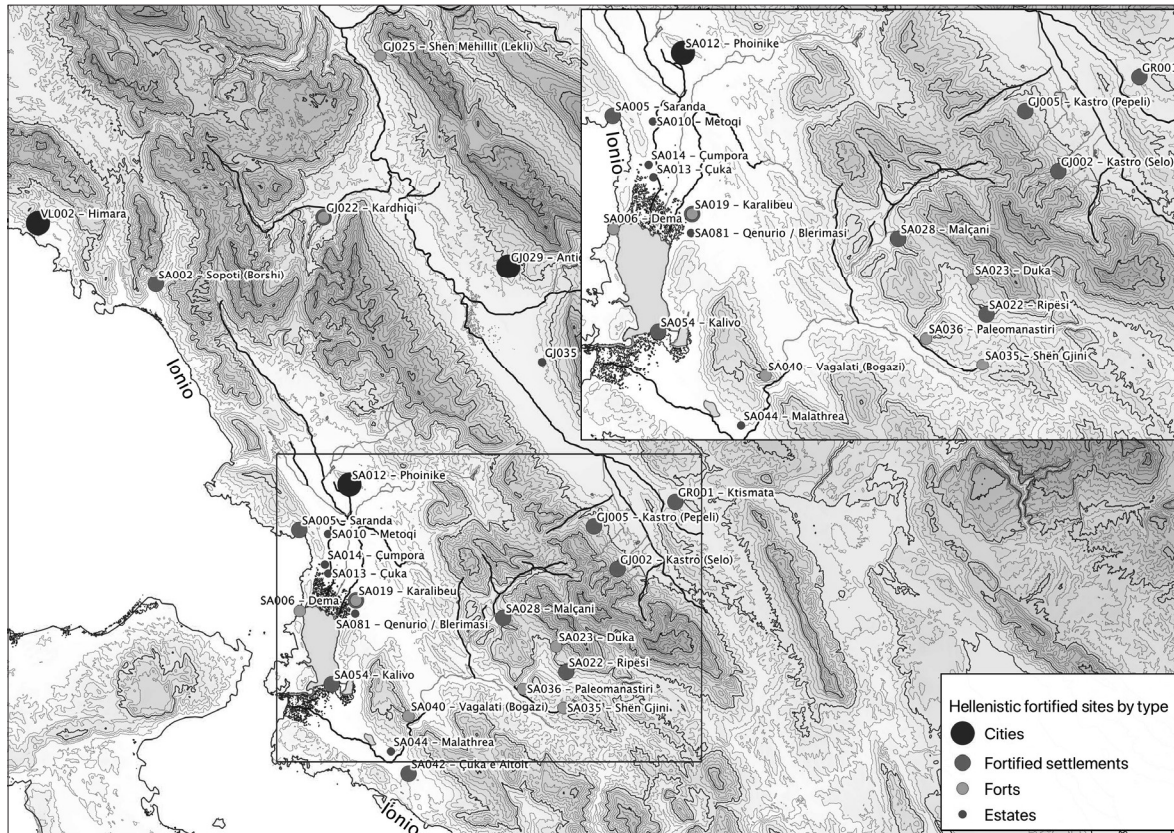


Fig. 1. Fortified sites and settlements of Chaonia in Classical and Hellenistic Period.

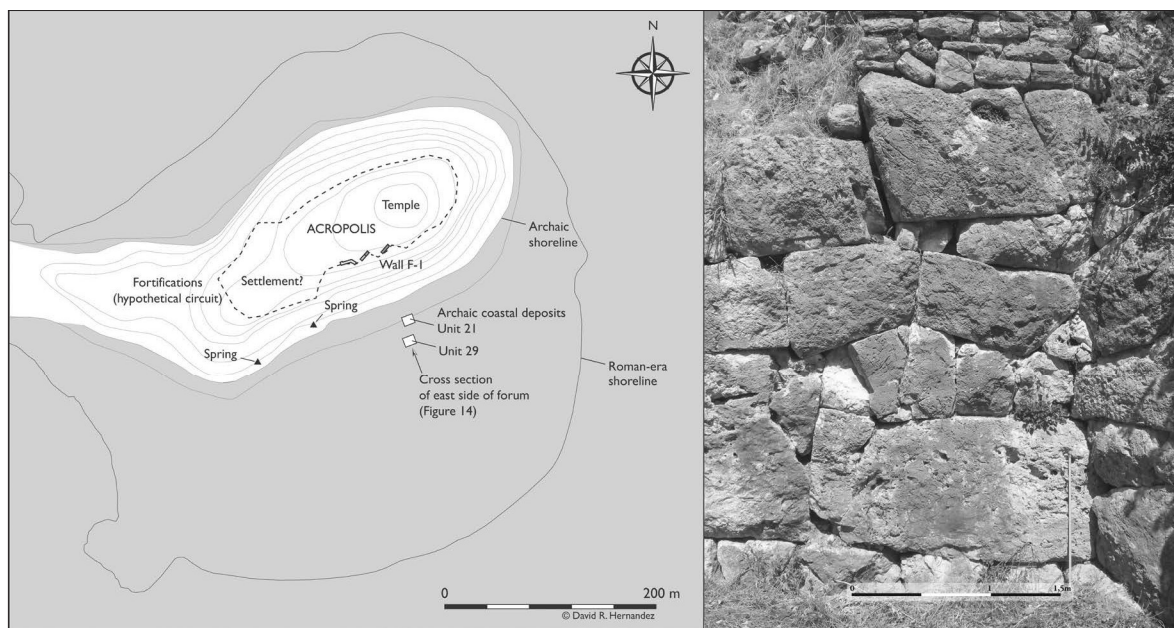


Fig. 2. On the left, map of the most ancient fortification of Butrint (from HERNANDEZ 2017, Fig. 13, p. 227); on the right detail of the polygonal walls (photo by the author).

temple and a possible settlement that at present has yielded no evidence<sup>12</sup>.

The walls are built in an accurate polygonal technique, using blocks of large to very large dimensions: in some cases, the single blocks measure more than two meters. The joining faces are carefully finished, while the front face is hammered. This working technique has presently no parallels in the region: while other sites make use of polygonal masonry<sup>13</sup>, none of them employs blocks of such large dimensions. On the other hand, if only the size of the blocks is considered, few other sites, namely Phoinike and Karalibeu, make use of blocks of such large dimensions, i.e., measuring up to 2 meters, but these stretches of wall are not built in polygonal style.

Archaeological remains dating back to the Archaic and Classical period in the region are scarce and uncertain (fig. 3). Among them, one probably include the so-called wall of Dema, described by Luigi Ugolini, Nicholas Hammond and Neritan Ceka<sup>14</sup>. This is a two-curtain wall built in fine ashlar style that runs in the narrowest point of the Kasmili peninsula, stretching from the coast of the Ionian sea to that of the lake of Vivari (fig. 4). The wall is unevenly preserved, partially due to the construction of the Shën Gjergji (Saint George) monastery at the highest point of its line. In this later phase (around the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE), portions of the ancient wall were also restored or fully rebuilt<sup>15</sup>. Neritan Ceka believed that this barrier was built by the *Koinon* of the *Prasaiboi*<sup>16</sup>, a political community created under Rome's aegis in the second century BCE<sup>17</sup>. While there is no sound archaeological evidence supporting this hypothesis, the precarious political context of the state of the *Prasaiboi* is very unconvincing for the construction of such a solid barrier. There

is a general consensus of the academic community for an early date for this fortification, which would have served the very direct control of Korçyra on its *perea* on the eastern shore of the Corfu Channel<sup>18</sup>. Consequently, the fortifications of hilltop of Butrint and those of Dema are interpreted as being part of the same defensive strategy, despite the fact that their building techniques differ radically<sup>19</sup>.

Possible similarities to the polygonal walls of Butrint have been pointed out on some parts of the defensive circuit of Kalivo, a hill located less than 2km east of Butrint, on the other side of the Vivari channel, along the southern shores of the lake<sup>20</sup> (fig. 5). These fortifications are built using multiple variations of polygonal masonry, some of which look very similar to the walls of Butrint. Unfortunately, the archaeological research has not provided definitive evidence for the chronology of the site. The floating pottery shards belong to a very long time-span, with fragments dating from the Late Bronze Age to the Medieval period and with an even representation of the intermediate periods<sup>21</sup>. A generic date of 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE has been proposed on stylistic grounds for the circuit<sup>22</sup>. From a topographic and strategic point of view, it is very difficult to imagine a safe settlement on the hill of Butrint without a secure control of the nearby hill of Kalivo, especially considering that archaeology clearly records a continuous frequentation or possible occupation of the latter. Nevertheless, no certain evidence is presently available to clearly refer any segment of the remaining fortifications to this early date. If the masonry style is of any help in creating links and relations between different sites—and the example of

12 HERNANDEZ 2017.

13 In Chaonia, polygonal masonry is not very widespread; common usage only appears in Kalivo, Ripësi and Çuka e Aitoit (cf. *infra*) and only limited an occasional usage in other sites, such as Phoinike, Antigonea and Melani. This pattern seems overturned if one considers other areas of Epirus, for example Thesprotia where polygonal is widely and often exclusively used, cf. SUHA 2016; RIGINOS *et alii* 2018.

14 UGOLINI 1927, p. 151; HAMMOND 1967, p. 99; CEKA 1976, pp. 36-37.

15 MOLLA, HODGES 2012; HODGES 2014.

16 CEKA 1976, pp. 36-37. This interpretation was also followed by Gjerak Karaiskaj (KARAIŠKAJ 2009, p. 50).

17 For the *Koinon* of the *Prasaiboi*, cf. CABANES 1986; CABANES 1999.

18 BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 361-363; HERNANDEZ 2017, pp. 251-253. For parallels of similar, regional-scale defences, cf. FREDERIKSON 2011, p. 16.

19 The same defensive strategy does not inevitably presume an identical chronology. It is still possible that the two structures might have been built in different moments, at a distance of a few decades for example, and by different craftsmen, yet serving the same purpose.

20 BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 258-260 with previous bibliography.

21 The site has been surveyed by but never published by Ugolini (UGOLINI 2005b; UGOLINI 2005a). It was also visited and possibly excavated by a joint Soviet and Albanian team (BUDINA 1971, pp. 324-327) and finally newly cleaned and redocumented between 2001 and 2004 by the Anglo-Albanian team working in Butrint (CROWSON 2005b; CROWSON 2005a), when trial excavations were carried out.

22 Andrew Crowson (CROWSON 2005a) proposed to date the wall to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, following the stylistic parallel of Type 8 (and possibly 7) of Klavs Randsborg's typology (RANDSBORG 2002).

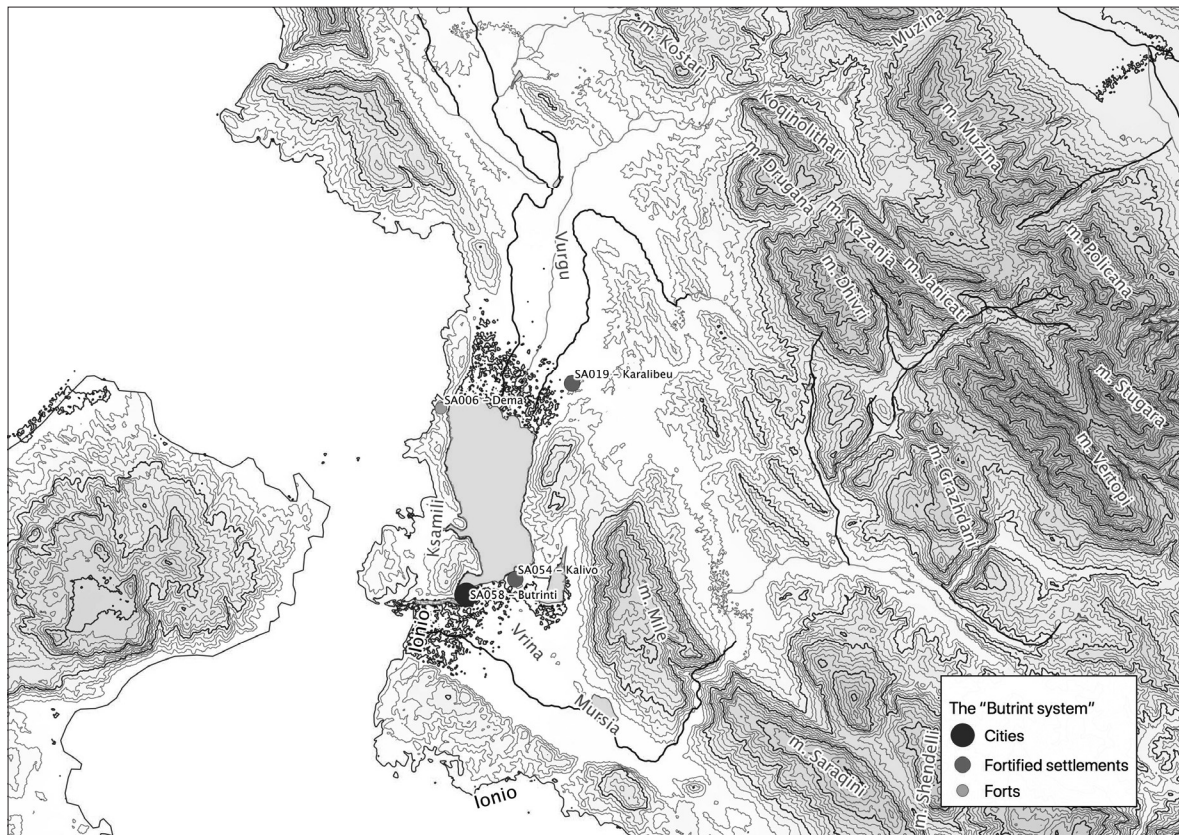


Fig. 3. The Butrint system (SITARC, J. Bogdani).

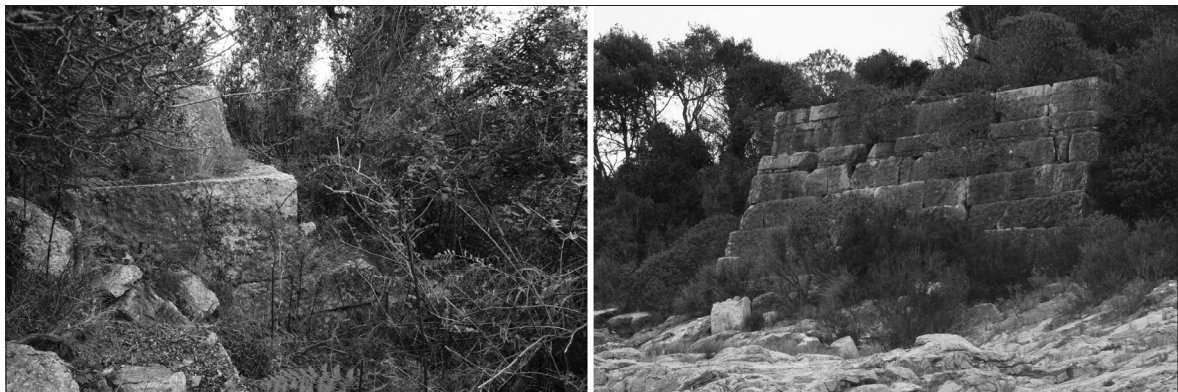


Fig. 4. The "Dema Wall", SA006. Detail of fine finishing of the blocks, on the left and general view of the Jonian bastion on the right.

Dema seems to reject this idea—we might assume that the resemblances of parts of the Kalivo walls to the earlier phases of the fortifications of Butrint might provide some hints in making a parallel. In either case, we are entirely relegated to the domain of hypothesis and uncertainty.

Lastly, one less-known site can be listed as a hypothetical member of the Butrint system. This is the site near Karalibeu (present-days Dritasi), a low hill on the northern foot of mount Mile with a wide panoramic view of the Ksamili peninsula and the plain of Vriion, between the Vivari lake and the hill of Pho-



Fig. 5. Details of Kalivo walls (CROWSON 2005b).

inike<sup>23</sup> (fig. 6). On the western ridge of the central plateau, at the height of about 80 m asl., there is still a scarcely visible segment of a wall about 15-20 m long, hidden and covered by the lush vegetation. It seems to be a double-faced wall, but the inner face is completely covered by trees, plants and earth. During a brief survey in June 2019, it was possible to document the outer shell, built with roughly quarried-face blocks of large dimensions, with a rectangular and trapezoidal shape and laid in regular rows (fig. 7). The joints are very approximate and large interstices were left between them; in some cases, the interstices were filled with smaller stones. Later natural or anthropic events — even very recent ones, such as the construction of the current gravel road and buildings in the upper terrace — have possibly caused the poor current state of preservation.

23 This important aspect was noted also by the important geographical work of Alfred Philippson (PHILIPPSON 1897, p. 222).

The dimensions of the blocks, most of them measuring 1.5 x 0.8 m, recall the large to very large blocks of the Butrint fortifications or those of the easternmost (and older) part of the fortifications of Phoinike. Yet, the trapezoidal and rectangular shape of the blocks differs from the polygonal masonry of Butrint. From a topographical point of view, some considerations on the function of the site can be advanced. First of all, while the small plateau has a very good visibility, it is not the best place to build a naturally defended control point. There is a higher peak (116 masl) about 1.4 km south of it, much more appropriate as a visual control point, but that offers no naturally wide flat area. The latter element, seems to be an important requisite for the choice of a location, and the lower plateau offered a rather level area of about 6.5 ha<sup>24</sup>.

24 There is no detailed survey of the area, but from the freely available Digital Elevation Model from the Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (<https://www2.jpl.nasa.gov/srtm/>), with ground resolution of 30 m, it is possible to calculate a rather flat area of about 6.5 ha at



Fig. 6. Panoramic view from Karalibeu on the Vrina plain. In the background the Ksamili peninsula and Corfu island are visible.

It is therefore plausible to conclude that the fortified site of Karalibeu included a settlement that at present has yielded no archaeological evidence, due to the lack of systematic research and/or because of the latter occupation of the site. The hypothesis is based on the assumption that the entire plateau was defended, in accordance with the reconstruction of Nicholas Hammond<sup>25</sup> who calculated an overall length of 1 km for the fortification wall. Hammond, who did not have the time to complete a careful survey of the whole area, had much better visibility than we do today, since he was able to recognize a second segment in the southern part of the hill, which had already disappeared (destroyed or buried) in the 1960s<sup>26</sup>.

elevation 60 m (ellipsoid). There is no evidence, however, that the entire area was defended by walls.

<sup>25</sup> HAMMOND 1967, pp. 98-99.

<sup>26</sup> The description provided by Dh. Budina (BUDINA 1971, nr. 28, pp. 303-304) is closer to the present-day situation, since he could not see the southern segment. In any case, Dh. Budina did not have the opportunity to have the site cleaned from the vegetation either.

While the last word must inevitably be left to desirable future field research, some final considerations may be advanced on a larger-scale topographical basis. On a regional scale Karalibeu has a naturally well-defended position, since the lake of Vivari and the marshy area north of it provide a formidable barrier against unexpected attacks. It is located at the mouth of the rather large valley, east of mount Mile, that connects the plane of Phoinike with the Thesprotian area in the south. In the context of a politically unified Chaonia, Karalibeu is a by no means a strategic place or a strategically crucial point in need of particular defence. This does not exclude, nevertheless, the possibility that a local community might have decided to invest important resources to strengthen its own identity by building an impressive fortification wall. Alternatively, the walls can be referred to a period when an actual border divided the coastal region around Butrint from inner Chaonia, and the large dimen-





Fig. 7. Details of the walls at Karalibeu.

sions of the blocks—as argued above—support such an earlier date. In the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, when the political interests of Chaonians conflicted with those of Corcyrean<sup>27</sup> it would not be surprising to guard the north-south route linking the plain of Phoinike to the Vrina (or Butrint) plane. *Mutatis mutandis*, Karalibeu can be hypothetically viewed as a complementary site to Dema in controlling the northern border, with additional settlement functions that we are not currently able to fully focus.

It is fairly clear that the supposed Butrint system is based mostly on topographical considerations, and finds a much weaker support in the compari-

son of masonry styles and broader archaeological evidence, which is largely unavailable. In any case, the important stylistic and technical differences in building these fortifications seem to testify against a decision made at a single point in time, an organic plan and probably against an homogeneous chronology. The Corcyrean *perea*<sup>28</sup> was probably established, stabilized and consolidated gradually, a process that is not otherwise documented in our sources. From a historical point of view, it would be highly interesting to extend the study further south, in an attempt to better locate and define the Corcyrean *perea* on the basis of the archaeological record.

27 On the divergent political interest of Chaonians and Corcyreans, which were on opposites sides during the Peloponnesian War, cf. BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 362-366.

28 For recent overview of the historical relations of Corcyra and the Epirote coast, cf. INTRIERI 2018.

### The “Phoinike system”

While their precise chronology is still a crucial issue for most of the Chaonian fortified sites, there is no doubt that their most monumental aspects, i.e. fortification walls, were shaped during the Hellenistic period. The major sites, the proper cities, namely Phoinike, Antigonea and Butrint, where systematic research has been carried out for decades, are decisive in defining an overall relative chronology, that heavily relies on the presumption that the majority of the sites are tightly connected to each other, in the context of a centrally orchestrated process of a radical reorganisation of the political framework of the region. This thesis, already introduced in previous works<sup>29</sup>, is based on the definition of a functional typology of the fortified sites, always a rather arduous and problematic process considering the meagre archaeological evidence. Nevertheless, some important elements, such as the perimeter length of the enceintes, the surface of the defended areas, the presence or absence of residential buildings inside or nearby the fortifications and their detailed topographic analysis may profitably be taken into account. Table 1 summarises some of this “quantitative” data and draws our attention to its value, sometimes very relative. Above and beyond the highly uneven exactitude of the underlying topographical surveys from which surfaces and perimeters have been calculated<sup>30</sup> and the often highly approximate reconstruction of the un-preserved stretches of walls, a careful consideration of the archaeological evidence may drastically re-size the significance of bare numbers. For example, Phoinike is by far the largest site of the list, which is not surprising for the capital of the Chaonian region, and yet about one third of the defended area was left unbuilt and was separated by a long north-south *diateichisma*<sup>31</sup>. Similar considerations can be

made for Kalivo, whose enceinte doubles the size of the defended area of Butrint: the walls enclose large parts of the slopes of the hill that were never occupied by buildings. In all likelihood, strategic purposes led to the defence of empty areas with the double aim of providing a safe refuge in case of peril to people that lived not far away, in unfortified settlements, and to remove critical locations from the easy disposal of possible attackers.

All the same, some clusters can be identified beyond any reasonable doubt. On a higher level we find the major sites, the cities of Phoinike, Antigonea and Butrint. The last one, despite its limited size, plays an important role thanks to its long history and thanks to the good fortune of the sanctuary of Asklepius<sup>32</sup>. Next come smaller centres, with enclosed areas of about 7.5-3.5 ha, such as Malçani<sup>33</sup>, Melani<sup>34</sup> and possibly Çuka e Aitoit<sup>35</sup>. Their dimensions and the evidence of residential and possibly public buildings allow us to classify them as fortified settlements<sup>36</sup>. These sites are located on rather low hilltops with a formidable visibility towards the surrounding landscape, not far from lowlands, most likely home to agricultural and pastoral activities (fig. 8).

A rather different case seems to appear with a series of much smaller sites, like Kastro, near Selo<sup>37</sup>,

reconstruction proposed by Dhimosten Budina (BUDINA 1993, p. 114, Tab. 1.) and updated by Dhimitër Çondi (ÇONDI 2014; PERNA 2016, p. 204, fig. 11; ÇONDI 2018) is highly hypothetical. In any case, it was a common feature in Late Classical and Hellenistic towns to leave empty a sometimes sizeable space, HANSEN 2006, pp. 38-47. On the same argument MUGLIA 1997.

32 MELFI 2007; MELFI 2012.

33 On the site, there is still clear evidence of a large building, occupying an area of at least 23x23m, with a regular orthogonal planimetry. The building and the site have never been investigated stratigraphically, BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 184-186 site SA028.

34 N. Hammond and Dh. Budina report the possible presence of a temple under the structures of the Bektashi tekke in Melani. Also, the presence of a Hellenistic necropolis not far from the site has been reported (BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 209-211 site GJ038).

35 There are many residential units inside and outside the defensive walls, many of them cut directly into the rock. No clarity has been reached as to the interpretation of the so-called Palace, a rather big and monumental complex located outside and not far from the enceinte, BOGDANI 2006.

36 According to Sylvian Fachard (FACHARD 2016), whose efforts are aimed at “demilitarizing” the overall interpretation of the fortified countryside, there is no a fixed rule apt to make a clear distinction between fortified settlements from fortresses (or garrison forts). The widespread presence of residential units and/or public/religious buildings might be considered a strong criterion to rely upon.

37 The case of Kastro is very problematic due to the total lack of archaeological research in the site. The few monumental defensive structures that can be observed at the foot of a steep and high hill, are

29 Cf. BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 375-395.

30 Very few of them were obtained by direct topographical survey using electronic devices such as GPS or Total Stations. For the most part a mixed technique has been followed, by combining scanned maps from previous bibliography with the analysis of freely available satellite imagery (provided mainly by Google and more recently Bing), BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 154-162.

31 Cf. BOGDANI, GIORGI, LEPORE 2007. On the possible functions of the *diateichismata* see MÜTH 2016a, p. 187; MÜTH 2016b, pp. 171-172. On the other hand, the urban topography of Antigonea is not clear enough as to exclude a priori the presence of a *diateichisma*. An area free of constructions has been recently hypothesized by Dh. Çondi (ÇONDI 2018, pp. 530-531) in the southern part of the city. The urban

|    | Site                        | Surface (ha) | Perimeter (m) | Buildings inside |
|----|-----------------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| 1  | Phoinike (SA012)            | 50.3         | 4528          | X                |
| 2  | Antigonea (GJ029)           | 34.8         | 3801          | X                |
| 3  | Kalivo (SA054)              | 21.8         | 2149          | X                |
| 4  | Butrinti (SA058)            | 11.7         | 1511          | X                |
| 5  | Malçani (SA028)             | 7.6          | 1281          | X                |
| 6  | Karalibeu (SA019)           | <6.6         | <1462*        |                  |
| 7  | Çuka e Aitoit (SA042)       | 5.5          | 1188          | X                |
| 8  | Melani (GJ038)              | 3.3          | 879           | X                |
| 9  | Paleomanastiri (SA036)      | 1.4*         | 489*          | X                |
| 10 | Ripësi (SA022)              | 1.1          | 474           |                  |
| 11 | Paleokastra (Labova, GJ033) | 0.8          | 421           | X                |
| 12 | Dhrovjani (SA147)           | 0.5          | 261           |                  |
| 13 | Vagalati (SA040)            | 0.4          | 252           |                  |
| 14 | Kastro (Pepeli, GJ045)      | 0.3          | 186           |                  |
| 15 | Duka (SA028)                | 0.1          | 160           |                  |
| 16 | Shën Gjini (SA035)          | 0.1          | 140           | X                |
| 17 | Zuhora (SA145)              | 0.1          | 143           |                  |

Table 1. List of the principal Hellenistic sites with information on the defended surface and on the perimeter of the walls. values marked with asterisks are highly approximative.

Paleokastra near Labova and Kryqit<sup>38</sup> in the Drinos valley, Ripësi and Paleomanastiri in the Pavla valley<sup>39</sup>. In the same list, one might include two lesser-known sites in the Bistrica valley, namely Dhrovjani and possibly Shkëmbi i Kuq<sup>40</sup>. Neither site was visited by the SITARC project<sup>41</sup> and their location

probably a small part of the original site, mainly covered by dense vegetation (for a general overview of the remains, BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 275-276 site GJ002). S. S. Clarke noticed the presence of cisterns (HAMMOND 1967, pp. 205-206) that seems to postulate a much more articulated site.

38 The highly strategic position of this site, located on a mountain ridge at 727 m asl, grants a wide panoramic view over almost the entire Drinos valley and on the valley of Selca, a natural corridor towards east. Once again, there is clear archaeological evidence in the site of buildings, probably residential, and cisterns for the water. For a complete description with bibliography, cf. BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 215-218 site GJ033.

39 Both sites combine impressive fortifications with traces of houses and or cisterns, cf. BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 180-181; pp. 190-192 sites SA022 and SA036.

40 A third site, Zuhora near Gardhikaqi (BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 223-224 site SA145) was excluded from this list because the elliptical shape of the enceinte, the rubble masonry, and the pottery finds that N. Hammond (HAMMOND 1967, pp. 119-120) reported on the site, which seem to refer to an earlier (protohistoric?) period.

41 The description provided in BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 224-226 sites SA147 and SA149 relies on the one provided by N. Hammond.

has been only approximately reconstructed. More recent high-resolution imagery made available by Bing<sup>42</sup> does provide a reliable identification of the former site on the hill of Kastri (486,5 m asl.), located northwest of the village of Dhrovjan i Posh-tëm (fig. 9). On these images it is possible to follow the north-eastern part of the circuit for about 90 m and to clearly identify a projecting tower. Further investigation is needed to locate the second site, Shkëmbi i Kuq or Koqino Lithari following the Albanian spelling of the Greek version of the toponym reported by N. Hammond<sup>43</sup>, who did not visit the site, but followed the description made by S.S. Clarke. Two towers, many scattered fragments of “red coarse pottery” and a 1 m square cistern is all we actually know about this site.

The common characteristics of these sites are their small dimensions, under 1 ha, their clear evidence of residential functions and their rather remote location on high spurs with an optimal visibility on

42 The area is covered by images provided by DigitalGlobe and HERE and are distributed as XYZ service by Microsoft Bing (<https://www.bing.com/maps>).

43 HAMMOND 1967, p. 120.

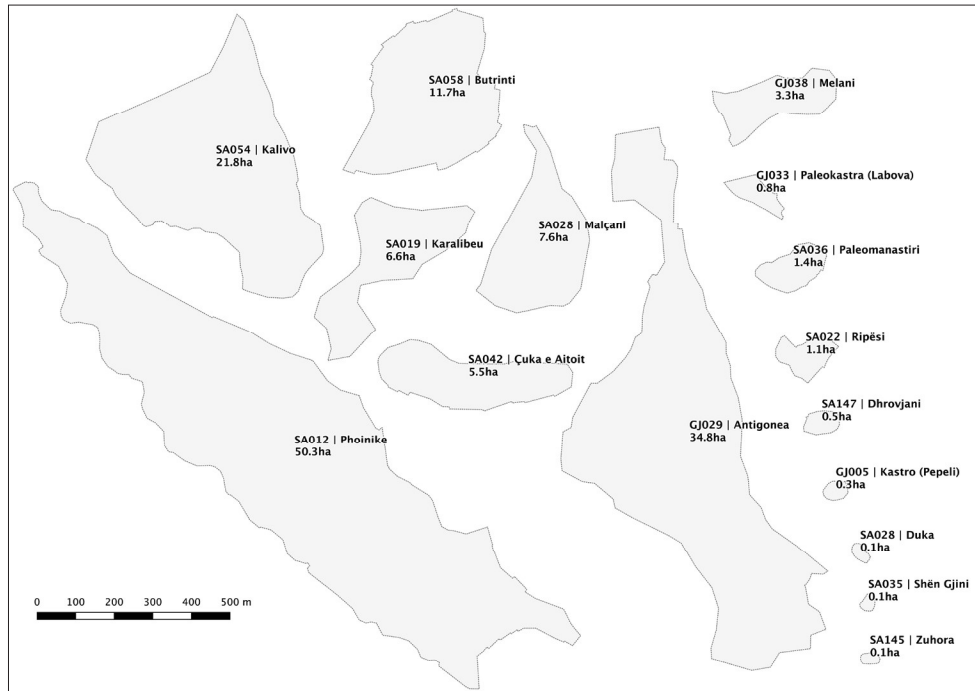


Fig. 8. Comparative table of main fortified areas.

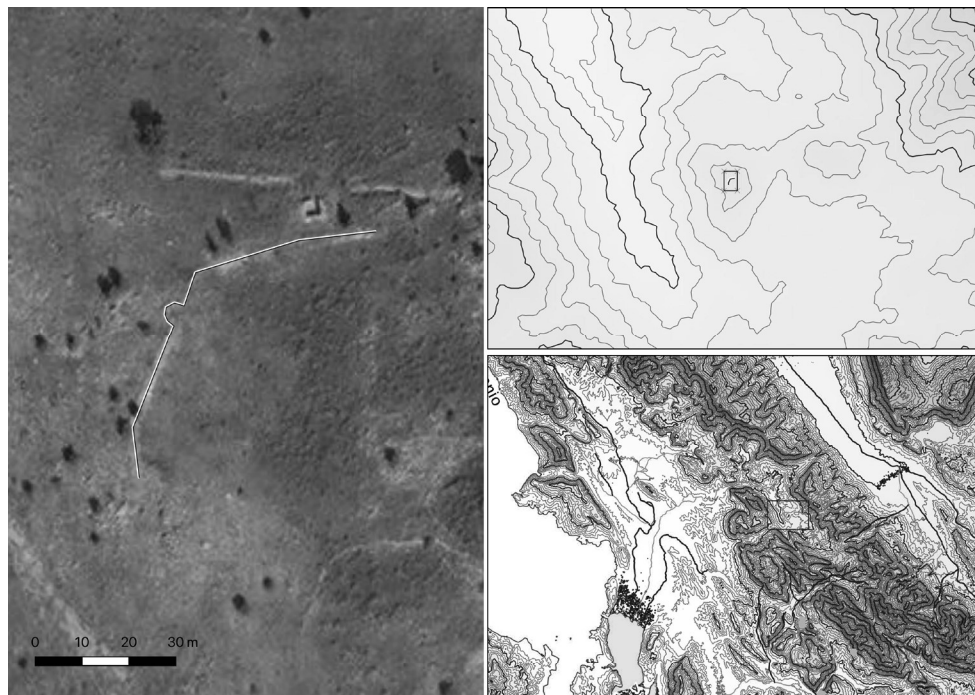


Fig. 9. Integrated map of Kastri, Dhrovjani (SA147, SITARC, J. Bogdani).

the surrounding areas. The residential structures seem to bring these sites closer to the fortified settlements. Indeed, these sites are fortified settlements, yet we do not have evidence to clearly affirm that the inhabitants were civilians and not soldiers,

as the remote and strategic position of the sites and their very small dimensions would strongly suggest. It was certainly for military purposes that a tower of Vagalati was built, on top of the southern part of mount Mile. No defensive purpose can be pos-

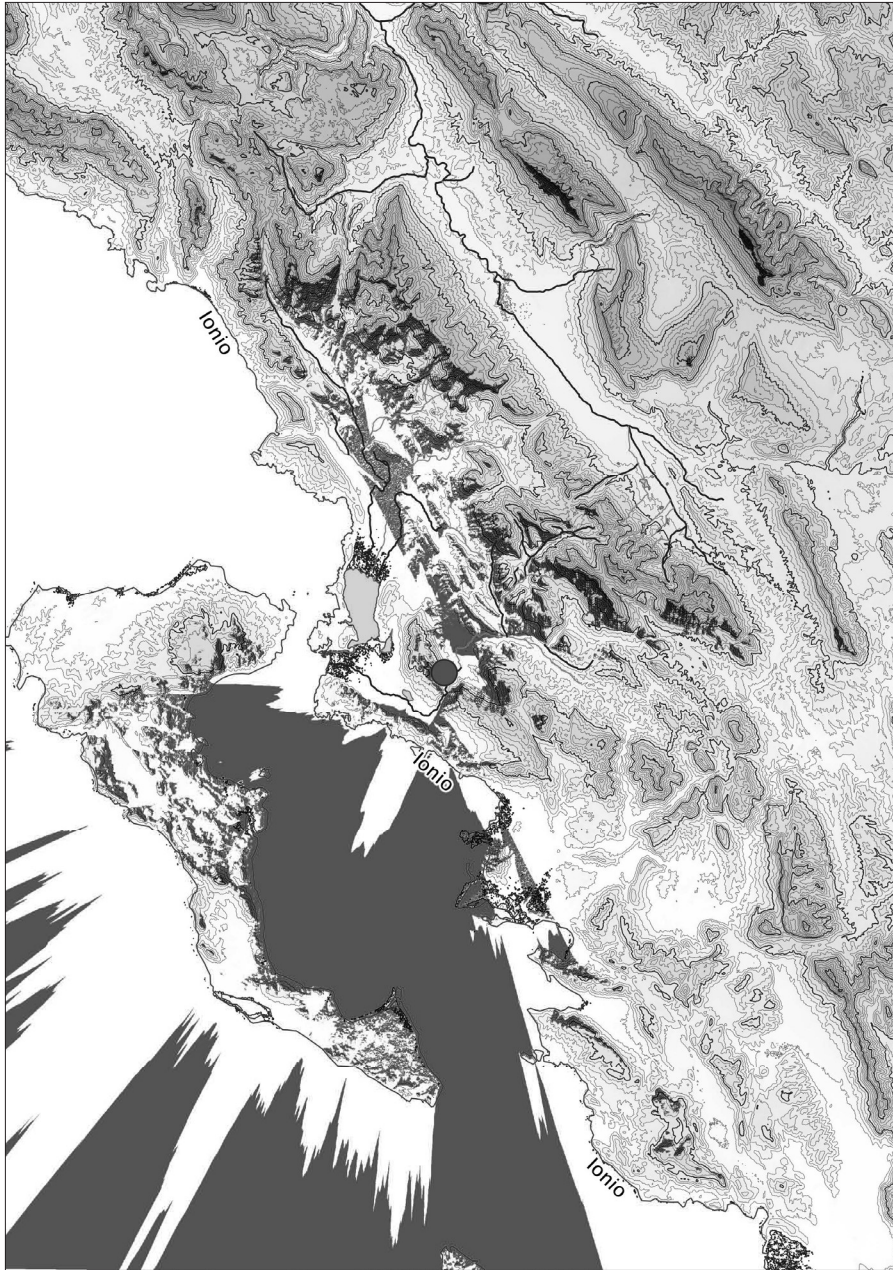


Fig. 10. Viewshed analysis based on the tower of Vagalati (SA040, SITARC, J. Bogdani).

tulated for this structure, preserved for a height of more than 7 m (fig. 15), since the place is almost unattainable due to the ruggedness of the relief: the ridge where the site is located is suddenly interrupted by a precipice, creating the gorge of Bogazi. No threat can be brought to this height, and the site was chosen because it offers unparalleled visibility over all of western Caonia, the Strait of Corfu and the island of Corcyra itself (fig. 10). Clearly, the monumentality of this structure is purely symbol-

ic, in absence of any practical or functional need: an observation point of this kind could have been structured in a much less demanding way<sup>44</sup>. Other

44 It should be stressed that the Hellenistic site is built near a semi-circular enceinte constructed in rubble masonry that has been dated to the protohistoric period (CEKA 1976, p. 36), although there is still no clear archaeological evidence to this day. Some very unreliable clues, such as the fact that the rubble enceinte seems to have been built with two-shelled walls, might reopen the chronological discussion. N. Hammond did not visit the site and follows the description by S.S. Clarke, yet he provides two photographs (HAMMOND 1967, p. 96,

minor and extremely small sites might be added, but their poor state of preservation leaves no room for certainty.

The above-mentioned sites differ in many aspects, including their dimensions, geographical and geomorphological location, purposes and functions, but one very important common trait should be noted, i.e. the common—albeit not exclusive—usage of trapezoidal masonry. It is true that different variants are attested, with important differences both in the shape of the blocks—ranging from very regular, to L-shaped and almost polygonal—and in the accuracy of the stone cutting and finishing. Yet, it must be stressed that, beyond local differences ascribable to specific and important peculiarities of these sites, their trapezoidal masonry rises as an increasingly standard way of building fortifications and, more in general, massive stone walls. Robert Scranton has clearly pointed out that trapezoidal masonry must not be considered as a poor version of ashlar masonry, but a style on its own<sup>45</sup>. Its primary characteristic is its mostly regular coursing, that forms parallel horizontal rows, in some cases broken by L-shaped blocks; the vertical joints are mostly oblique, although perfectly vertical joints are also frequently used. One of the most interesting aspects of trapezoidal masonry regards information on some aspects of the “building experience”<sup>46</sup> it provides. In terms of quarry organisation, transport, expertise of masons and time required to build the wall, trapezoidal masonry lays half-way between polygonal and ashlar masonry. Most of the finishing work could be done in or near the quarry, before the transport to the actual location of use, like ashlar masonry, but oblique vertical faces must have been adapted and finished at the moment of building, since each block should perfectly fit the previous ones, similarly to polygo-

nal masonry<sup>47</sup>. It must be also pointed out that our knowledge of quarry and transport organisation in Caonia is very poor, due to the slight interest that technical aspects of the building and restoration processes have received in the previous studies<sup>48</sup>. Petrographic and mineralogic studies, which might provide precious information on the supply chain of the stone used in fortifications, are largely unavailable and the case of Phoinike, where mineralogic and petrographic analyses have ascertained the local provenance of the raw material, is exceptional<sup>49</sup>. The use of locally extracted stone, ascertained for Phoinike, is likely quite common, and probably the general rule. It may be useful to highlight few significant cases where macroscopic observations allow us to clearly affirm the use of locally extracted stone in the construction of the walls. These cases also provide significant exceptions of the above-stated rule of the prevalence of trapezoidal style masonry in Hellenistic Caonia, since these are the only examples of the employment of rectangular (ashlar) style in fortification structures<sup>50</sup>. The case of Antigonea is emblematic, since its walls make widespread use of perfectly shaped rectangular blocks, that have few other parallels in the Drinos valley, in Lekëli and in the already mentioned Melani (fig. 11). In addition to their masonry style, these walls differ from the other fortification structures of the region for their use of a local conglomerate stone, quite different

Plates Vc and VIb); for a full discussion cf. BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 194-197 site SA040; GJIPALI 2018, p. 10).

45 Robert Scranton (SCRANTON 1941, pp. 70-98; followed by ORLANDOS 1966, pp. 135-136) distinguished different sub-types type on the basis of the system of coursing (irregular, isodomic and pseudo-isodomic) and on the basis of the face treatment (quarry/hammered, broached/pointed and tooled face). These stylistic considerations are still a valid scheme to use in present-day descriptions, while the chronologic considerations (R. Scranton dates most of the example to the 5<sup>th</sup>-beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> Cent. BCE) are no longer convincing. The dating of the wall is still a major issue (cf. FREDERIKSON 2011, pp. 62-69) and generalization remains a rather dangerous practice.

46 For the meaning of the expression “building experience”, cf. DE STAEBLER 2016.

47 This important aspect is rightly stressed by Jean-Pierre Adam (ADAM 1982, p. 27).

48 Only two quarry site are known in the area, the first not far from Çuka e Aitoit, at Brezi i Shkallës (HAMMOND 1967, p. 95; BUDINA 1971, pp. 321-322 no. 20; BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, p. 253 site SA043) and the second one at Gramata (HAMMOND 1967, p. 124; BUDINA 1971, p. 279 no. 1; BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, p. 235 site VL001). The second site is rather peripheral and accessible only by sea, a fact that brings it closer to the harbours of Epidamnos and Apollonia than to Caonia proper.

49 GURINI 2005; GRILLINI, GURINI, MINGUZZI 2007.

50 Finely finished ashlar style is far from being unknown in Chaonia, but is almost exclusively employed in religious buildings such as temples and *temene* or funerary structures (for an overview of the sacred landscape of Chanonia, cf. DE MARLA, MANCINI 2018). As such, tooled faced rectangular masonry has been used in absence of other archaeological evidence as sufficient clue to suggest an interpretation. It is the case of Gavriła (BUDINA 1971, p. 301 no. 24; BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, p. 175 site SA015), Gravo (BUDINA 1971, p. 304 no. 30; BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, p. 180 site SA021), Panaja (BUDINA 1971, p. 311 no. 38; BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 186-187 site SA029) and the more recent finds near Bajkaj (BOGDANI, GIORGI 2012, pp. 233-234 site SA174), that might belong to a sacred or funerary building. The necropolis of Phoinike (LEPORE, MUKA 2012) provides other examples of usage of carefully finished ashlar masonry.



Fig. 11. Ashlar masonry made of conglomerate stone: Antigonea, Lekëli and Melani.

in granulometry and hardness from the usual limestone and marl employed for this kind of structure. We cannot *a priori* exclude a precise will to mark a specific local identity in the construction of the walls of the city dedicated to the wife of king Pyrrhos and its satellite sites. On the other hand, and from a more practical point of view, it would have been extremely difficult to obtain clear-cut trapezoidal blocks from such a friable stone<sup>51</sup>. From a chronological point of view, historical and abundant archaeological evi-

dence from the site of Antigonea does confirm that chronology is not a determinant factor for the use of a different masonry style.

Far less documented is the already mentioned site of Paleokastra near Labova and Kryqit (fig. 12), which introduces some very peculiar features, once again clearly caused by the local geological asset of the site. The outer face of the walls is characterized by highly regular (isodomic) rows of rectangular blocks. These blocks are quite wide (more than 1.5m) and very low (with a height of about 20 cm), giving a height:width ratio of 1:>5. If the third dimension is considered (more than 1 m) we should not call them blocks but slabs. As far as it is possible to ascertain in the terrain, the fortification wall is formed by a single face, having a very regular shape from the outside and a highly irregular one from the

51 One of the “fundamental assumptions” on which the typological work of Robert Scranton (SCRANTON 1941, pp. 10-13) lies is that the material being used could not determine the use of a masonry style, but only the overall quality of the masonry: “the nature of the building material works with strongly definitive tendencies on the techniques of the building, but *per se* does not determine it exclusively”. If no symbolic reasons underlie the choice of ashlar style (and conglomerate stone), the case of Antigonea and few satellite sites seems to contradict this assumption.



Fig. 12. Ashlar masonry at Paleokastra, near Labova: regular outer shell above and irregular inner face below.

inside. Here the irregular shape of the slabs resulted in an uneven surface. It would have been arduous, if not impossible, to cut regular slabs of such proportions from the bedrock if the natural geological formation was not regularly layered naturally. In fact, slabs of the same height can be seen everywhere on the site, naturally detached from the bedrock. The extraction operation was thus highly aided by the geological nature of the site and the masons only had to carry out the rather simple (and inexpensive) task of working (when need) the outer and vertical faces. In this case, a highly impressive fortification was built with a relatively low-cost effort, highly reliant on natural resources. The easy availability of almost ready-to-use slabs led to the masonry style and prevents us from making any chronological hypotheses based solely on stylistic grounds.

From a stylistic point of view, several subtypes of trapezoidal masonry can be observed, depending mainly on the different accuracy of the fitting of blocks, on their different heights, leading to irregular rows, and finally on the different dressing of the outer face<sup>52</sup>. Irregular cases are most problematic, since multiple variables might have led to their current appearance: poor state of preservation, reuse of building material from previous structures, excessive rush in building them or simply inaccuracy

<sup>52</sup> By now, the most complete and methodologically sound classification and typology for stone-built structures is the one elaborated for Kephallenia by D.V. Christiansen, K. Randsborg, T. Roland and A. Sotiriou (RANDBORG 2002, pp. 207-291). This typology takes into consideration several aspects, including the shape of the masonry, the shape of the surface of the blocks, their dressing and fitting, the average size and the number of preserved courses. It defines 27 different types of stone built walls in the island of Kephallenia.





Fig. 13. Some cases of irregular trapezoidal masonry: Ripësi, Paleomanastiri, Malçani, Shën Gjini, Selo, Duka.

due to inexperienced manpower<sup>53</sup> (fig. 13). No general considerations can be advanced and each single case must be evaluated within its actual archaeological context. In some cases (Ripësi, Selo) the irregular trapezoidal style resembles and blends with polygonal style and a clear line between the two cannot be drawn. In other cases (Duka, Malçani, Shën Gjini) the rush in building the structures seems to be the reason behind a rather inaccurate

53 It is hardly possible to distinguish between the last two aspects by considering only the fortification, and a deep knowledge of the site is required. This knowledge is largely still unavailable for most of the Chaonian sites.

working of the blocks. In other cases (Paleomanastiri) the poor state of conservation—also due to the low quality of the local stone—seems to have caused the current appearance. In any case, none of the above-mentioned sites makes exclusive use of irregular trapezoidal masonry, and other styles—polygonal in the case of Ripësi and regular trapezoidal in all examples—are widely employed. The regular trapezoidal style documented in Chaonia correspond to types no. 20, 21 and 22 of the previously mentioned Kephallenia typology<sup>54</sup>

54 RANDBORG 2002, pp. 233-245.



Fig. 14. Regular trapezoidal masonry: Selo (first two photographs), Butrint, Borshi, Hundësova and Malçani (last two photographs).

(fig. 14), and these types have been dated by scholars from the mid-4<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BCE. The rows are typically very regular, even if L-shaped blocks are sometimes used, breaking the straight horizontal lines. The fitting of the blocks is usually very accurate and the visible face is only roughly worked, forming the so-called quarry face. While the dating by external references remains highly problematic<sup>55</sup>, it is important to underline the north-eastern presence of this type, including Epirus and Aitolia in addition to examples from

Greece proper. Differences in the dressing of the blocks can be observed, but beyond these differences it can be stated that regular trapezoidal masonry was the canonical and established building technique in the Hellenistic period (fig. 15).

Larger evidence from other stone-built structures, not related to fortification walls, both defensive and utilitarian, further confirms this general conclusion. All Hellenistic terracing walls of Phoinike, as well as other utilitarian buildings of the ancient city, such as cisterns<sup>56</sup>, are built using the same regular trap-

55 Among others, the walls of Butrint are used as a dated comparison for type 22 (RANDBORG 2002, p. 244 and fig. IX. 50. in p. 241). The date of 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE up to present is not supported by stratigraphic evidence.

56 For the use of trapezoidal masonry in residential buildings in Phoinike cf. ÇONDI *et alii* 2002; GIORGI 2003; GORICA *et alii* 2015; for the cisterns cf. UGOLINI 1932, pp. 116-123 (Cisterna C, Cisterna B, La Scala).



Fig. 15. Regular trapezoidal masonry: Vagalati, Paleomanastriti, Shën Gjini and Çuka e Aitoit.

ezoidal masonry and it is impossible to distinguish between fortifying and other structures by the consideration of the masonry alone. This mixed use—military and civilian—is not a distinctive feature of trapezoidal masonry alone, since other styles have been used both in fortifications and in residential

buildings, with no significant stylistic variations. This is the case, for example, of Çuka e Aitoit where many complexes interpreted as residential units are built using the same accurate polygonal masonry employed in the city walls. The same can be said for the *stoà* of Antigonea, built in finely cut polygonal

masonry<sup>57</sup>. Generally speaking, the massive use of non-trapezoidal masonries is nevertheless quite exceptional and never exclusive, and the most noteworthy cases have already been pointed out.

Finally, regular trapezoidal is the masonry style exclusively used in a series of buildings that stand halfway between residential, defensive and economic functions. These are rural residential buildings, typically having one or more towers and an enclosure defended by stone walls, housing rooms or small buildings<sup>58</sup>. These structures, interpreted as private estates or farms often display a highly monumental appearance, making it very difficult to establish their function if other evidence is lacking<sup>59</sup>. These private structures speak the same pretentious language of the main cities and their fortified networks, a language entrusted mainly to the trapezoidal masonry (fig. 16). It is not clear to what extent trapezoidal masonry is used to symbolically create direct references to bigger sites and to what extent the presence of specialized masons, who in a rather limited timespan built a dense network of fortified centres controlled by the larger cities (mainly Phoinike), contributed in the creation and widespread adoption of a “standardized” albeit not exclusive masonry style, on a regional scale. Probably both aspects run parallel and produced the overall picture.

### Conclusions

Stylistic considerations of masonry styles, typological classifications and chronological seriation have a very long and debated history in the studies of Greek architecture and Greek cities. The initial enthusiasm and positivistic faith that typology could unveil chronology has been broken repeatedly by context-related considerations. Historical considerations tend to flatten and oversimplify archaeological evidence, which is sometimes too rich and diverse to be modelled according to only

a few parameters. This is the case of pre-Hellenistic Chaonia, where the actual presence of Corcyra on the eastern shore of the Channel of Corfu was used as an explanation for a typologically varied series of fortifications. The lack of accurate archaeological evidence contributed to this simplistic reconstruction, and further investigation is required to better contextualise these differences.

On the other hand, when considering the Hellenistic period, the stylistic homogeneity of fortifications, and more in general stone built structures, is quite impressive. This is not a monochrome picture, but to a certain extent differences can be explained by local conditions. It is thus tempting to add stylistic considerations about fortifications to the more general topographic and historic analysis and to consider trapezoidal masonry as a further clue of the fact that a unified leadership lies behind the decision to put in place a complex network of fortifications<sup>60</sup>. This was a very significant economic investment, as the great attention in the finishing and fitting of the blocks shows, and it caused an overall standardization of building techniques, making of the trapezoidal masonry a distinctive feature of the region.

A thorough typological study of the masonry styles of stone-built walls in Chaonia (and in general in Epirus) is not yet available, and undoubtedly an attentive analysis might contribute to identifying subgroups and variations. Moreover, a deep knowledge of the archaeological context of each site considered is more than fundamental for a correct understanding of local variations and an informed comparison with other regional or extra-regional examples. Only the concurrence of multiple factors, such as style, topography, geomorphological and sedimentologic context, functional interpretation, stratigraphic evidence, archaeometric analysis and historical background, can lead to precise chronologies. Extra-regional stylistic comparisons, detached from any single context, provide interesting insights, yet must be considered as a weak and not decisive criterion. A desirable regional study should be able to weave together these different aspects in order to investigate general patterns of diffusion and highlight local peculiarities.

57 ÇONDI 2018, pp. 534-536.

58 At present about fourteen sites have been identified in western Chaonia and only one has been stratigraphically investigated in recent years, providing important diachronic evidence from the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE to the Roman period. For an overview cf. BOGDANI 2011.

59 YOUNG 1956a; YOUNG 1956b; NOWICKA 1975; MUNN 1982; MORRIS 2001; MORRIS, PAPADOPOULOS 2005; FREDERIKSON 2011, pp. 12-16.

60 CALIÒ 2017.



Fig. 16. Regular trapezoidal masonry from private rural estates: Malathrea, Metoqi e Çuka.

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**SUMMARY:** This paper is focused on providing a general overview of the Hellenistic fortified sites of ancient Chaonia, Epirus. It provides both an overview of the building techniques and formal aesthetics and a more general consideration of their role and function in the context of the historical landscape, which is conditioned to a considerable extent by their monumentality. While the lack of archaeological field-research is a strong bias for the definition of their chronology and function, some considerations can nonetheless be put forward, with the awareness that further research will hopefully reshape the overall picture.

**RIASSUNTO:** Il contributo mira a offrire una panoramica generale dei siti fortificati dell'antica Caonia d'Epiro. L'argomento è affrontato sia dal punto di vista delle tecniche costruttive sia da una più generale considerazione della loro funzione e ruolo all'interno di un paesaggio storico fortemente condizionato dalla loro monumentalità. Benché la mancanza di dati stratigrafici costituisca un forte limite per la definizione della loro cronologia e interpretazione, è comunque possibile avanzare qualche considerazione, con la consapevolezza e speranza che le ricerche future sul terreno potranno modificare il quadro tracciato.

**Keywords:** Epirus, Chaonia, fortifications, trapezoidal masonry, defensive strategy, Hellenistic architecture.

**Parole chiave:** Epiro, Caonia, fortificazioni, stile trapezoidale, strategie difensive, architettura ellenistica.