

Helidon SOKOLI*

EXCAVATION AND RESEARCH ON THE LAND OF LABEATEA

ABSTRACT: The paper presents discoveries made during excavations in Shkodra and its vicinity. There are artifacts starting from the Paleolithic period to the Ottoman Empire. Most recent excavations are done in collaboration with University of Warsaw, particularly the Antiquity of South-eastern Europe Research Centre.

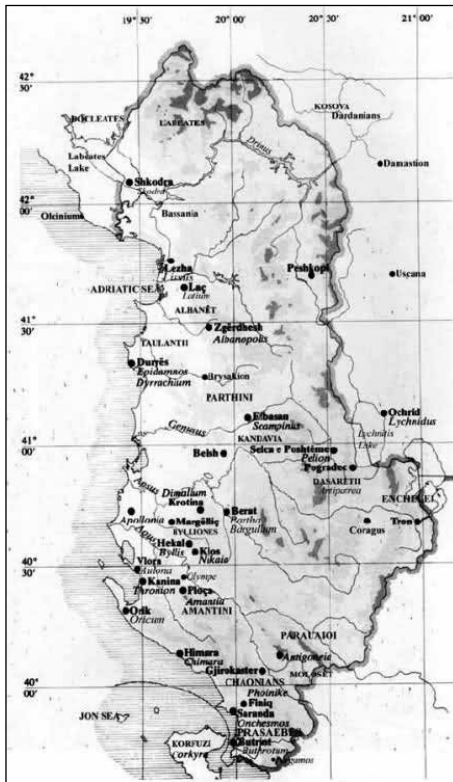
KEY WORDS: *Shkodra, Illyrians, antiquity, excavation, castle*

The two major Illyrian tribes inhabited the parts around Lacus Labeate (now Lake of Shkodra). Docleate had settled west of the Morača river and the other major Illyrian tribe, the Labeates, inhabited the entire area between Lake Skadar and modern Podgorica.

Following the decision of the Council of Ministers no. 396 date 31.10.2005. the foundation of Archaeological Park of Shkodra was accepted. The Archaeological Park of Shkodra implements the obligations made by the National Board of Archaeological Parks and coordinates working with experts of other institutions, collaborates with the local Government, trying to reach the presentation, publication and financial gathering, administrates manages financial incomings that acquires, in order to provide the improvement of the condition for the visitors.

The office of administration and coordination of Archaeological Park in Shkoder has under its administration a surface of 80 hectares, divided into Archaeological zone where the main part is occupied by Rozafa castle with a surface of 3.6 hectares. In this area, there is also the environmental wall of the castle so-called Pseudoillyrian. At the same time, B area (Protected area) is situated on the territory that is still being studied. According to scholars

* Archaeological Park of Shkodra.



Pic. 1 Extension of Illyrians Tribu

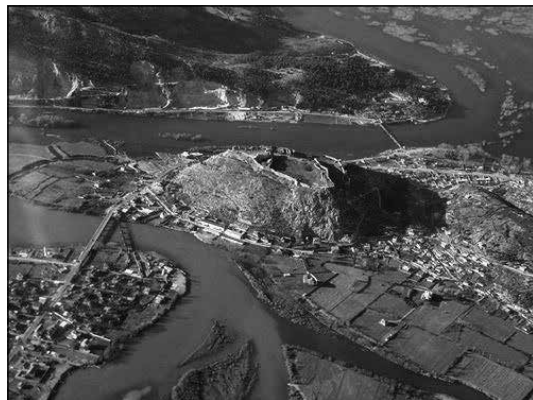
seum in Tirana, as well as several European museums. The archaeological finds and materials excavated at the slope edge of the Tepe Hills date back to Early Bronze Age (2000 B.C.).

During the V-IV centuries B.C. construction work on the castle with cyclop stone pieces started, without using any mortar. The Castle is situated on top of the hill at the city entrance, 130 meters above sea level. The castle's story is the city's one too. This was the

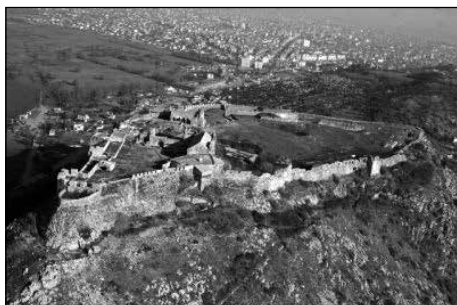
there are still some undiscovered archaeological traces that belong to Illyrian periods. (Pic. 2)

The origins of the city - name remain shrouded in mystery. Some scholars believe that the name derives from "Shko-Drin" which means "where Drin goes". Others believe the name has a Latin root. Another reference claims that the name 'Shkodra' was used even before the area was occupied by the Romans.

The surrounding area, in the vicinity of the present location of the city, used to be habituated even during pre-history age. Artifacts of mid-Paleolithic period have been found whereas other excavations have found out sustainable habitation and life ranging from the Neolithic period, due to the fact that the area possesses a rare combination of physical factors for habitation. The artifacts have been housed in the city museum, the National Mu-



Pic. 2 Archaeological area of Shkodra



Pic 3. Shkodra Castel

place of the Ardiian state reigned by Teuta, their base where they fought against Rome in 168 BC. The proof of this battle was given by Tit Livy, a Roman historian. (Pic. 3)

Classical (or Graeco-Roman) period starts from the environmental wall that created a gap with the late walls of the castle. Traces of classical antiquity have been found in the small yard of Barbacan. Bar-

bacan was partially covered to the western side of the yard by the Illyrian walls. These walls were built with big blocks made very well, in polygonal form, fitted very well in regular form but without mortar. These blocks were at the internal side of the small yard up to 2 meters. Traces of the blocks of bigger size can be seen at the turn next to the second gate of the castle. This wall belongs to IVth century BC. This wall shows that the castle is built over the walls of Illyrian Acropolis. (Pic. 4)

During V-IV century B.C. the region was inhabited by the Illyrian tribe of Labeates. By that time the town underwent considerable economic development clearly attested by the coin mints in the town as early as 230 B.C. The evidence provided by these coins suggests that, at that time, the town was called Scodrinon. In year 181 B.C. it became the capital of the Kingdom of Illyria, whose ruler was Gentius, and was also considerably extending to the northern regions. During the second century B.C, wars against Rome were waged in the city castle, therefore in year 168 B.C. the city was captured by the Romans and it became one of the centers of the administrative units and entities of the Roman Empire. Thanks to the Diocletian reforms it became a regional centre. Important commercial routes leading to the Dalmatian coast from the North, and leading to Kosovo, through the Drin valley, from the eastern region, used to pass through Shkoder.

In the medieval period the castle was invaded by Byzantium and by Slavs till 1395, when this castle was



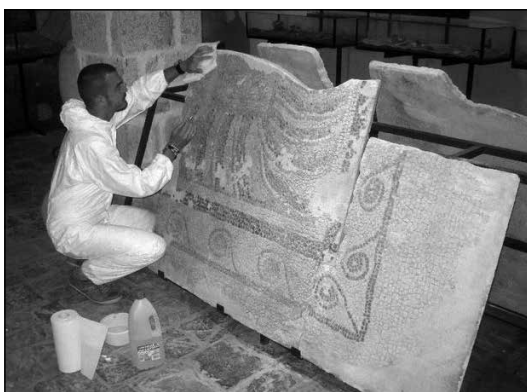
Pic.4 Trace from Ilirian acropol

possessed by Balsa a local feudal principedom. In 1399 the castle was given to Venice. The Shkodra rebellions against Venice in 1405-1410 are very well known. The castle withstood two powerful sieges of the Ottoman army, in 1474 and 1478-79. This siege was monumentalized by the humanistic writer from Shkodra Marin Barleti in the book 'Siege of Shkodra' and by the mural paintings of Paolo Veronese in the Ducal Palace of Venice.

First excavations in Shkodra started during 1978-79 and were undertaken by the national Institute of archaeology in Tirana. (Pic. 5, 6) Archaeological fieldwork in the former capital of Illyria is now carried out on the basis of an agreement between the University of Warsaw,



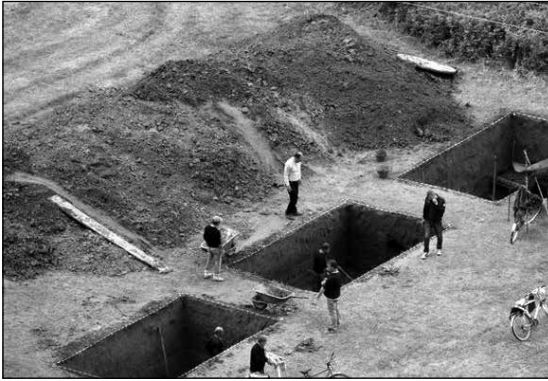
Pic.5, 6



Pic. 7 Mosaic unearthed on Villa Rustica Romana. II-III c AD in cleaning and conservation proces

particularly the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe Research Centre on one side, and the Albanian Ministry of Culture and the University and Institute of Archaeology in Tirana on the other. During a five year scientific program, we intend to survey the topography of the antique town, establish its chronology, and analyze the principal phases of settlement from the oldest remains through Illyrian constructions up to the Late Antique Period. The research is directed by Prof. Piotr Dyczek and kindly supported by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education

Fieldwork took place at two locations at the foot of the castle hill. (Pic. 8) A flat zone close to the famous Lead Mosque near the River Drin in the old town quarter of Tabaki and on the peninsula between the Rivers Drin and at Tabaki, an Ottoman paved road was unearthed, an important chronological marker, as it dates to a time before the Drin began regularly flooding the quarter, as well as a necropolis from the same period. These objects allow an estimate of alluvial sediment stacked up during the last 250 years, since the



Pic. 8



Pic. 9

Drin's course changed: more than 2 m. One of the trenches revealed strata from the 6th c. BC up to modern times.

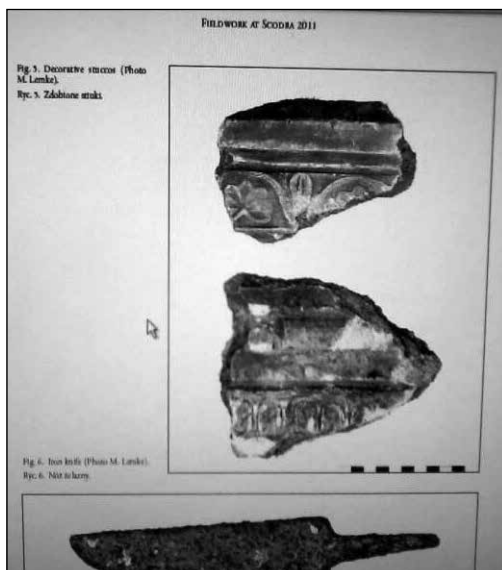
From the Hellenistic layers shreds of Gnathia pottery and amphorae were retrieved. Among more interesting finds, a number of sophisticated pieces of stucco, probably from a Hellenistic bath and a well preserved late antique iron knife are worth mentioning. (Pic. 9) Another project was draining and cleaning a cistern on the castle hill which was built in 1397, when the Venetian Republic decided to strengthen its fortresses. It turned out that one of the supporting pillars held two inscriptions. (Pic. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14)



Pic. 10



Pic. 11



Pic. 12



Pic. 13



Pic. 14 Excavation and archaeological sondage on Envorienment walls of the Castel. Late antiquity

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Summary

The paper presents discoveries made during excavations in Shkodra and its vicinity. The two major Illyrian tribes inhabited these parts around Lacus Labeate (now Lake of Shkodra). Docleate had settled west of the Morača river and the other major Illyrian tribe, the Labeates, inhabited the entire area between Lake Skadar and modern Podgorica. The Archaeological Park of Shkodra was founded in 2005 and coordinates working with experts from other institutions, collaborates with the local Government, trying to reach the presentation, publication and financial gathering, administrates and manages financial incomings that acquire, in order to provide the improvement of the condition for the visitors. There are artifacts from this area starting from the Paleolithic period to the Ottoman Empire. The most recent excavations are done in collaboration with University of Warsaw, particularly the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe Research Centre.