

THE CASTLE, THE TOWN OF RASHAN (TREPÇA)

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Abstract

During the long history of the Albanian people, an almost forgotten part, and without being sufficiently studied, is the cultural heritage with special emphasis on fortified buildings as is the town (alb. “Gjyteti”) of Rashan (Trepça).

The paper about Trepça castle is the first paper that addresses the current condition of the castle and brings historical data, oral legends that are still part of the memory of population, toponyms, microtoponyms, and also assumptions regarding the history of this castle with extraordinary historic values about the past of the Albanian people in this area.

The uniqueness of this castle is its role in protecting the mining and mineral wealth of Bajgora region, and the main roads that gravitated to this part of Kosova.

Another novelty is the drawing of the castle’s layout which is presented for the first time, and a number of photographs that reflect the current condition of the castle.

This paper will serve as a guide for knowing this castle, and also for eventual intervention to conserve and restore the castle in order to return its treasured historic values as a symbol of the past.

It is interesting the case of some holes found west to the castle’s surrounding wall, 0.9 cm deep, and with a diameter of 0.6 cm, that looked like they were there to drain the water, but their construction, I think, was an architectonic work that reinforced the wall in case of a tectonic quake (earthquake).

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The castle, the town of Rashan (Trepça)

The joining of Mazgiq River and Rashan river expose the hill of Rashan (Trepça). The castle of this small town (alb. “Gjytet”) is located somewhere 5 km flight distance from Mitrovica. It is a castle built by Illyrians, respectively Dardans in the IVth-Vth centuries AD during the late Antiquity, with a very favorable geografic position with an height above-sea level at 851 m. The castle of Trepça was a vanguard of the Trepça mining source and it controlled the main road that went from Municipium DD, Zveçan, Trepça, and Llap, and also controlled the road Trepça, Vicianum, Novobërda (Artana).

The ruins of this “Gjytet” castle are found on a steep hill, from where the view around was comprehensive.²²³ Without any hindrance, almost all the plain of Kosovo is seen from the castle, whereas the castle of Vushtrri communicated directly with the castle of Trepça. From north it defended the mining galleries, especially the Trepça mining and the town outside the castle. From the west it communicated with the hill of Cërrnusha and that of Kutllovc, which Castle Rashan probably should have had towers too. There was a communication from these hills with the castle of Zveçan, the hill of Sokolica and Mejdan, Vidishiq edifice (alb. “Gradina”) and with Kreshbardha (Ostrokoplen). On the hill of Kutllovc, the Yugoslav army had built a military base, while the hill of Cërrnusha was used for military shooting exercises. Thus, both these hills had a very favorable strategic position

²²³ Abdullah Mulaku, Disa të dhëna lidhur me lashtësinë e Vushtrris me rrethinë, Mitrovica, 2004, p. 14.

even for the Yugoslav army to control all the plain of Kosovo including that of the most Northern point to the most Southern, Western, and Eastern point. It was possible to communicate from the castle with Qyqavica Mountains, the central mountains of Kosovo that divide the plain of Kosovo from the plain of Dukagjin.



From the north side the castle of Rashan is surrounded by the hill called “*Bhiri i dhisë*” (the Goat Horn) whereas from the west it is surrounded by the hill of Moistir. The hill of Moistir is named by the monastery situated in the furthest part of this mountain. I claim this based on the ruins and the piles of stones found in that site and also based on the legend of the local people. From the hill of Moistir in the north-west side there are two tunnels that are known by the people as “*birat e kishës*” (The Church Holes).

Bajgora region is a region very rich in different kinds of ore but during the Middle Ages it was mostly known for gold and silver. In the nineteenth century Arthur Evans mentions the Municipium DD as well as a fortress called Monte del argenta – Montania argenta, whereas in the maps of Poitengen the city of Argjentania is presented near the above mentioned fortress, but there is a possibility that it is the Fortress of Trepça town the one that was mentioned because it was known as a very rich town. Local people say that the town possessed even golden tufting machines that prove the region’s mineral wealth where this fortress lies.²²⁴



Based on the construction material, the castle belongs to the late Antiquity, it is multi-layered, and it is surrounded by three pairs of walls. The first wall surrounds the city center about 300 m, the second wall surrounds it about 200-250 m, and the third (inner) wall is

²²⁴ Jahja Draqolli, Pajazit Hajzeri, Emisioni shkencor "Etnik" në televisionin publik të Kosovës, RTK më 06.11.2007, me temë “Gjyteti i Rashanit (Kështjella e Trepçës)”.

somewhat closer to the center. The walls are built with well-carved stones. The front wall is also associated with binding material. The inside of the wall possess also binding material but the stones are not carved well. The wall thickness is about 2 m while the height of the preserved walls is 2-3 m.

The castle is located on top of a cliff with an 80 – 100 m height from the ground (base). It is in the shape of the number eight 170-200 m long (north-south) and 30-45 m (east-west). The north side and the east side have natural protection whereas the west side and the south side are protected by walls. The entrance road begins from the north then goes round towards the west and enters in the castle from the south. The castle was protected by the watchtowers that included: a north tower, two west towers, and a south-east tower.

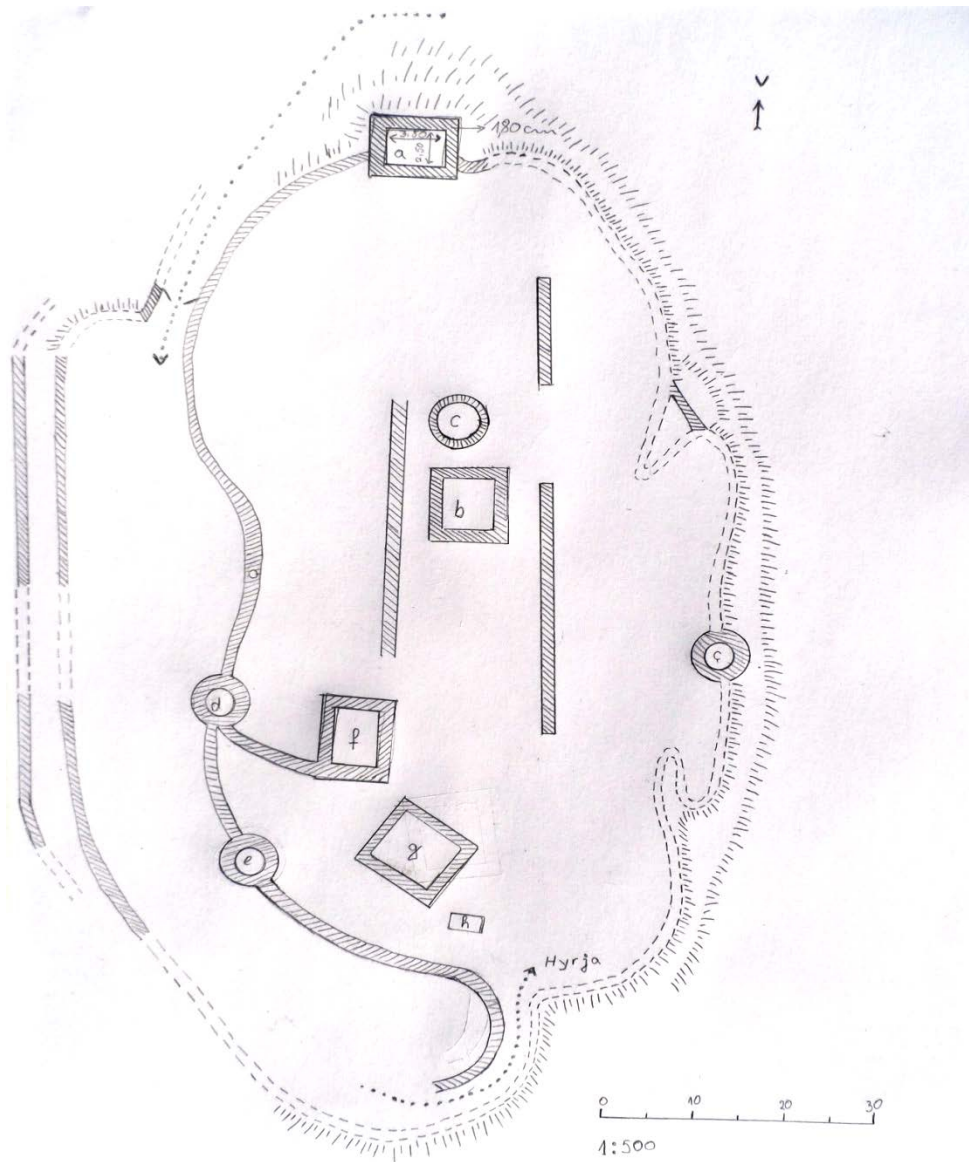
The Smrekovnica River that supplied the castle with drinking water is located west of the castle. South of the castle are the ruins of the city whereas the castle had a fortified position and construction in order to protect the city. Inside the castle fence, there are also a number of objects such as the watchtowers, Donjon (the main tower) which was located in the center of the castle, the water reservoir, as well as two other objects in the shape of rectangle where one of them is thought to have been a small chapel

The archives of Ragusa (Dubrovnik) and Venice give us a lot of information about this city because in the fifteenth century we encounter in Trepça many Ragusans, Venetians, Montenegrins, Saxons, etc. and together with Novobërda (Artana) they are considered as the largest cities in Kosova.²²⁵

According to people's oral data, under the castle, south of the castle, there is a tunnel that is already closed. Its inner part was walled and served as a warehouse for cereals. Cereals such as millet, barley, etc., are found in that tunnel.

The presented layout of Trepça castle from the north side consists of the north tower marked with the letter a, the width of this defensive tower is 2.50 x 3.80 m, and the wall thickness is 1.8 m. The material used is stone together with the binding material. In the inner part of the tower, popularly known as "*dhoma e mbretit*" (the King's Room), in the south The King's Room side about a meter high, is derived a stair in the form of a guardrail to put things on it. From the north tower was controlled the road coming from Trepça and the road coming exactly from Rashan north-east of the castle. Those roads joined at the castle entrance. The two other west towers marked with d and e communicated with Cernusha and Koder villages located in front of the castle and at the same time they protected the road that led to the inner part of the fortress. The East of the castle had only one watchtower marked with ç which communicated with the Moistir hill while the entire east side starting from the most northern point to the most southern was protected by the nature itself. The object marked with the letter c is the water well whereas the object marked with b is thought to be "*donjon*" or the main tower. The objects f and g are associated facilities within the castle. Regarding the f object, it was protected by a wall from the watchtower side d to an object that I think was a cult object. The site marked with h from the clandestine excavations has turned out to be a grave that according to the location, I think it has been the grave of a cleric or superior killed and buried during a conflict (war).

²²⁵ J. Drançolli, P. Hajzeri, op cit.



The castle was also surrounded by two walls on the west side where the castle was less protected from nature, whereas even if the part where the wall is marked by broken lines today does not exist, we can see the edge of the cliff that should have been surrounded with a wall for the inhabitants' own safety so that they would not fall into the 100-meters deep chasm.

The very favorable geographic position of this castle gives the impression, and I suppose that it has been a branch of a Dardan royal dynasty. I state this based on some toponyms and microtoponyms found around this castle

We know very well that the goat's horns were a royal symbol from the Illyrian period to the late Middle Ages. Pyrrhus kept the goat's horns on his helmet. Scanderbeg kept the goat's horns on his helmet too.

The northern tower of the castle is known as the king's room. From that room it is observed the nearest mountain called "*Briri i dhisë*" (The Goat's Horn). North-east, not far from this castle, it is situated Gumnishta village, where the mountain called "*Mali Kurora*" (The Crown Mountain) is located. Also in this village there is another microtoponym called "*Prroi i hyjneshës*" (The Goddess Creek). There is also found an altar corresponding to the Antiquity which has a much damaged inscription that has not been deciphered yet. This altar is called "*altari i hyjneshës*" (The Goddess Altar).

We also have the two church holes mentioned earlier which are located on the right side of the "Reka e keqe" in front of the Trepça castle. Local people say that the Dardan king has attended religious ceremonies and different kind of games²²⁶ that took place during the holidays outside the castle walls.

Given these toponyms, and microtoponyms, and the legends and knowing the values of this region's ore, I assume that this castle has been a royal Dardan residence.

Conclusion

The great values of this castle are vital for an intervention as soon as possible for its conservation and restoration. As an emergency action for the castle, is considered getting rid of the vegetation, which gradually is destroying this ancient wealth with extraordinary values, also starting the archaeological excavations in the castle to point out the monuments located there and to study the aging layers of this cultural monument.

We propose the international mechanisms of UNESCO to interfere as soon as possible in order to avoid the castle destruction and the disappearance of a very rich culture with incalculable values.

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²²⁶ Abdullah Mulaku, Disa të dhëna lidhur me lashtësinë e Vushtrrisë me rrethinë, Mitrovicë, 2004, p. 24