

Urban Greek or Illyrian? Cognitive dissonance or archaeological issue?¹

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One of the important issues discussed in relation to Illyria is the problem of the origins of the Illyrian cities. The prevailing view is that their beginnings should be sought in fortified settlements dating back to the beginning of the Iron Age. In fact, from the 4th century BC onwards, the first urban structures were created, a good example of which is the antique Rhizon – one of the capitals of Illyria, which is today located in Montenegro. Urban and architectural analysis shows that it was created under the clear influence of Greek urban planning and architecture. In Rhizon itself, archaeologists from the University of Warsaw unveiled buildings lying on an acropolis, fragments of six insulae and probably a palace complex.

Key word: *Illyrian towns, origins, Rhizon*

One of the most important issues in Illyrian archaeology is the origin of Illyrian urban sites and it has been addressed by many researchers, Albanians and not only. N. Ceka (Ceka 1986: 48–84), F. Fistani, G. Hoxha (Hoxha 1987: 71–81; 2004: 25–250), S. Islami, Gj. Karajskaj, F. Prendi, B. Lahi, (Lahi 1988: 69–92; 1993: 201–218), S. Shpuza, K. Zhegu (Zhegu 1977–1978: 113–123) also A. Dumond, (Dumond 1872: 1–3), P. Cabanes, W. Pająkowski and J. Wilkes (Wilkes 1992) and others. Archaeological sites from modern Albania and Montenegro have been analyzed, the consensus being that practically all the relevant architectural structures were constructed on hilltops. This suggests their defensive character, although the picture derived from archaeological investigations, coupled with an analysis of written sources, is far from conclusive.

One should note Diodorus's use of the term *ethnè* (XVI, 4, 7) for describing the organization of Illyrian settlement apparently as small tribal centers. He also probably used the term *polismata*, small fortified town, as a synonym (Cabanes 1988: 214). Other ancient authors, like Frontinus (Stratagèmes III, 6, 3), juggle the following terms: *polis*, *civitas* and *urbs*, evidently unsure as to the precise terms that should be used in reference to Illyrian settlement. Seemingly none of the existing terms reflected the actual urban and social/political specificity of Illyrian centers, hence the alternative leaning of the authors to either the urban or the social contexts. (Suić 2003: 44–50). The one certain thing is that fortified settlements were at the core of Illyrian tribal communities in rural territories. The question that arises is whether a tribal community could build a city that by definition consisted of a seat of governance and a place for trade and artisan craftsmanship? (Suić 2003: 26–28). It is expected that the local populace would have resided in villages lying in the fertile plains at the foot of the mountains.

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The emergence of these proto-urban sites is dated to the end of the 5th and the early 4th century BC (Rendić-Miočević 1989: 441–447). The second stage in this process occurred in the second half of the 4th and early 3rd century BC (Cabanes 1988: 217–219). There are two elements distinguishing the two stages. In the older stage, city walls encircled smaller territories and were executed in a technique known from Gajtani. These walls would run along the edges of the highest parts of the hills. In the second stage, the fortified area was enlarged (retaining the old fortifications) and the new walls demonstrated different variants of a polygonal bond. Klos is a good example with two settlements being constructed on the hills there (Papajani 1976: 411–419). A study of the stratigraphy and of wall bonding allows the different stages of development to be distinguished. The rule was to develop old settlements, hence the highly characteristic plans: territories or urban districts distinctly separated from one another by the defenses, from two (e.g. Amantia) to four (e.g. Lissos, Zgërdhesh) (Shpuza 2014: 118–199; Islami 1972: tab. 3; Prendi & Zhegu 1972: 223) Apollonia.

Urban and architectural observations do not resolve the issue of function of these structures (cf. Korkuti *et al.* 2008: 47–59). A refugial function has been suggested, noting the absence of permanent features, like streets, houses, squares etc., within the areas surrounded by these fortifications. Researchers have also considered these walled enclosures as symbols of prestige of an emergent local power system for a resident population. The fortifications demanded substantial effort and technical know-how, not to mention the economic resources or rather surpluses of resources necessary for raising jointly such extensive defensive structures. A third theory is that these were centers of craftsmanship as suggested by the results from Gajtani, where remains of artisan production have been dated to the 8th–7th century BC.

The issue, however, appears to be even more complex. It is held currently that there were three tribal groups living in Illyria in the 5th century BC: the Illyrians, the Phrygians and a Hellenized group. From a social standpoint, these tribes represented nomads and farmers on one hand and Greek settlers on the other. The former emerged as chiefdoms based on blood ties, positioned intermediately between a tribe and a state (Czekalski *et al.* 2009: 24). Such structures are attested in the sources in reference to the Enchelai and Taulanti in the 5th century BC. It is not to be excluded that similar processes were taking place on a lesser scale in the territory of “*Illyrii proprie dicti*”.

A second important issue to be considered is the impact of Greek urban thought and building techniques on the shaping of Illyrian cities. The answer seems simple enough: the impact is evident. Mutual influences and transfer of ideas are often observed in the archaeological record, but for that to happen there must be a cultural “core” around which such ideas can coalesce. So what is truly “Illyrian” in the Illyrian urban tradition?

Looking at plans of Illyrian urban centers starting from the 4th century BC we see copies of Greek colonies and cities. Comparing them with evidently local structures from the Early Bronze Age, we do not see any local transformation, no traceable evolutionary process. Is it then an illusion that we labor under and the issue of Illyrian is merely a cognitive dissonance with the Illyrian cities having nothing to do with the earlier proto-tribal defensive features and being instead a more or less precise copy of the Greek urban model?

There is no clear answer to this question, yet the following remarks can be considered as a contribution to the discussion, based on the results of archaeological excavations carried out by the Research Centre for the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe of the University of Warsaw, for the past 16 years in Risan, ancient Rhizon, the capital of King Ballaios and Queen Teuta and for the past 5 years in Scoder, the capital of King Genthios. The first of these two sites in particular has yielded many interesting archaeological data relevant to the issue at hand.

The first thing that comes to mind is the actual timeframe of the emergence of Illyrian towns. It does not seem to be accidental. Neither is it without importance that these structures comprising strong fortifications were built on hilltops. To my mind, these two elements indicate that we are dealing with a material reflection on the social situation of the times. The 5th century BC was to all appearances a very important period for the territory of the later Illyria. The wanderings of different tribes were at an end with the tribes settling in their later territories, presumably generating changes in the power structure and organization. At the same time the Greek colonization was introducing new pressures on the population

(Ceka 2008: 66–67) – agricultural hinterland and raw resources for the cities, communication routes etc., as well as cultural models, which comprised organizational models, building techniques, transfer of ideas etc. The general ambience of purely physical as well as cultural menace must have pervaded the life of the different communities (similarly as observed today). Imagining all kinds of tribal conflicts, which could have taken place in this situation, it is possible to envisage a number of small villages coming together to build a defensive system, an undertaking of a size that would have demanded a joint effort. These defenses are generally small, suggesting that these communities were small as well, cf. Marshej, Kratul (Shpuza 2014: 108, 113; Karajskaj 1977: 264; Fistani 1983: 109–117). Initially, they would have served most likely as refuges and only later, in the second stage, they would have been adapted to other, “urban”, purposes. Archaeological excavations have yielded evidence of a process of this kind. The original “settlements” were small and did not comprise any permanent structures. Later settlements were bigger and more like cities although without a clear urban structure. In the third stage, once the structures of the kingdom had taken shape, the proportions changed. The villages, which had once been central to the settlement and economic pattern, started to serve an auxiliary function to the cities, which were seats of authority and economic and crafts centers. Thus, it was a situation of menace that originally led to the building of the defenses and to the social changes that changed these places into urban centers.

This process of joining and mutual influences can be traced also in the macroscale. Researchers have proposed an architectural Illyrian–Epirian *koinè* existing already from the 6th century BC. But the question cannot be easily resolved at the present stage of research as it is difficult to discern between the cause and the effect. Too little is known still of society in this period and the intercultural relations. However, it is possible to trace similar features and architectural solutions emerging at the same time over a rather large territory (Ceka 2008: 123–133).

There was apparently an awareness in antiquity of the distinctness of Greek and Illyrian towns, which disappeared over time as the Illyrian power system borrowed from the Hellenistic model. In effect, cities of Illyrian origin increasingly resembled the urban structure of their Greek counterparts. The picture is not clear because of the spotty sources, coming from different chronological periods and describing different parts of Illyria; the archaeological sources are no better owing to the state of research.

The oldest written source, which is the work of Pseudo-Skylax, dated most probably to the mid-4th century BC (Gołębiowski 1977: 15–36), distinguishes clearly enough between cities that were evidently Greek and two centers, Rhizon (Fig. 1) and Amantia, which are referred to as Illyrian. Moreover, especially with regard to Amantia, it suggests a link between the city and a tribal structure, the Bylliones in this case. The same was probably true of Rhizon. According to Pseudo-Skylax there was an *emporion* here and this automatically suggests security ensured by a strong power structure which drew material benefits from the trade exchange.



Fig. 1. Orthophoto and plan of ancient Rhizon (P. Dyczek, K. Rzeźnik).

Rhizon is an interesting case. Ancient sources speaking of this town and the tribal territory of the Enchelai connected the spot with Kadmos and Harmonia (Pająkowski 1981: 19–20; Šašel Kos 1993: 113–136; 2004: 500–501) calling them the founders and thus *de facto* the originators of the Illyrian kingdoms. The myth is interesting in the context of the apparent archaeological and historical fact that the Enchelai formed the first Illyrian proto-state (cf. Pająkowski 1981: 16–17; 87–90; Proeva 1995: 195–199). Models from the sphere of Greek culture, Mycenaean culture to be more precise, seem to have supplied a direct impulse and not surprisingly considering that these models had spread over a very large territory (Hoxha 1987: 71–81). More importantly, however, there had to be a “core” of a developed local culture ready to accept new models.

In the 4th century BC, the proto-state of the Enchelai dissolved, replaced apparently by a new entity, a kingdom. Memory of Rhizon’s beginnings endured, finding reflection in a late source issuing from the army camp of the III Augusta legion in Lambaesis in North Africa. An inscription from the mid-2nd century AD, found at the camp, mentions a local Illyrian divinity, Medaurus, and describes the defense walls as “*moenia Aecia*”, (Garašanin 1966: 27–37; Dyczek 2008: 155–163; Dyczek *et al.* 2010: 79–133; Dyczek *et al.* 2014: 73–84) referring by the same to the Trojan tradition and simultaneously to Mycenaean/Greek roots. This example is entirely unique with regard to the territory of Illyria.

Rhizon’s exceptionality was reinforced by archaeological discoveries. Starting from the 4th century BC Illyria’s make-up seems clear enough: the Illyrian kingdoms were established on Hellenistic models, meaning that they had compact and defined territories, power structure, settlement patterns and economical foundations.

Excavations have yielded a unique group of finds: coins of King Ballaios, first found in Rhizon by Arthur Evans in the late 19th century. Evans (Evans 1883: 47 ff) came to think that this king, unnamed in the historical record, reigned after 168 BC, but current excavations have brought a considerable series of coins of this ruler coming from earlier archaeological contexts. In 2010, a hoard counting 4656 pieces was discovered hidden in a large vase under a house floor (Ciołek 2010: 7–12; Dyczek 2010: 55–50) (Fig. 2). An archaeological and numismatic study of this hoard and another smaller hoard of 120 coins discovered a year later leave no doubt that Ballaios ruled in the mid-3rd century BC (Dyczek 2015: 107–11), a hundred years earlier than Evans had assumed (Ciołek 2011: 1–30).

This new dating has numerous historical and chronological repercussions for all of Illyria. History has recorded a king Agron ruling Illyria in the mid-3rd century BC, but he did not strike coins of his own. He was followed by Queen Teuta who is connected with the events of the First Illyrian War with Rome. There is no room in the chronology for Ballaios and yet the distribution of his coins demonstrates a coincidence of the territory over which he ruled with that known to have been Agron’s kingdom. Historical facts quite



Fig. 2. So-called Great Hoard of coins of the king Ballaios (J. Reclaw).

obviously do not fit archaeological data, raising many questions, including ones concerning the real nature of the Illyrian kingdoms, especially as Ballaios is identified on his coins by the Greek term “basileus” and he is depicted in the Hellenistic manner. Working theories are being developed to resolve this issue and, if proved, they will change current views on the history of Illyria. In any case, the historical and mythological coincidence turns Rhizon into a missing link that will help to explain the development of Illyrian cities.

How much “Illyrian” and how much “Greek” can be observed in Rhizon (Dyczek 2017: 375–392)? The data available to date, to my mind, confirms in full the theory on the origin of Illyrian cities and the sequence of their stages of development. Rhizon appears to go back to the 7th century BC, when it seems to have been made up of three elements, similarly as Lissos (and also apparently Scoder): a fortified acropolis, a lower city and a harbor. A small ellipsoid structure on a hilltop may come from the end of the Bronze Age or the early Iron Age (Fig. 3). Its extent may have been bigger, but was damaged by later structures; regardless of how extensive the damage was, it did not exceed just a little over 0.1 ha. It may have been connected with the site of Lipci near Risan (Dyczek 2008a: 189–197), where some interesting rock paintings have been preserved, dated by the team to the 10th or early 9th century BC. It cannot be excluded that a natural harbor may have existed in Risan at this time—the topographic conditions are entirely suitable for that. The location of a port (Dyczek 2016: 79–88) in a secure bay next to a small plateau and river, and on the crossing of two



Fig. 3. Ortophoto acropolis of ancient Rhizon (M. Lemke).



Fig. 4. So-called cyclopeic wall of Rhizon (P. Dyczek).

important trails, one leading along the Adriatic coast and the other branching off inland, would have rapidly turned ancient Risan into an important trade post, important enough to be called an emporium by Pseudo-Skylax in the mid-4th century BC. Artifacts from the early Iron Age indicate potential trading activity in the 6th century BC and perhaps even earlier, in the 7th century BC. From the 6th century we have a small hilltop fortified area and an apparent harbor with paved square at its foot (Mijović & Kovačević 1977: 40 ff). The geological situation today with the waterlogging of layers from this period does not permit determination of the presence of any related architecture.

A significant change occurred in the 6th and early 5th century BC. Fortifications erected in a bond recognizable as Illyrian were raised around a much larger area on the acropolis (Fig. 4) (cf. Zhegu 1980: 131–160). In the lower town, an area of about 3 ha was surrounded by these new walls (Fig. 11). It also seems that at least some of the main city roads were traced at this time, including one leading across the river (over a bridge) to the *suburbium* and another winding its way to the top of the acropolis. (Drobnjaković 2001: 41–44; Faber 1992: 25–40; 1995: 101–115).

Another rebuilding of the city took place in the end of the 5th or at the beginning of the 4th century BC. A more detailed dating of the polygonal walls that were constructed in this stage still demands further study. A platform was built on the hilltop—the foundation of a temple of Medaurus perhaps?—while in the lower town the fortified area was extended to more than 6 ha. The defenses ran along the river edge, the seacoast and a small stream at the foot of the hills. There were at least four gates with inside towers and one secret postern. A Hippodamian street network was traced at this stage, forming insulae of different orientation and size. A large square (agora), serving as a forum in the Roman period, was also traced near the sea. The road connecting the lower and upper towns was renovated, being actually turned into a ceremonial street.

In the mid-3rd century BC, the city was thoroughly rebuilt most probably after a destructive event of some kind. New houses were constructed, partly of stone and partly of brick, and roofed with tiles. The walls were executed of thick limestone slabs bonded in an earth mortar, dressed on the outer face which gives the impression of rectangular limestone blocks.

Six urban insulae have been excavated at least in part (Dyczek 2014: 91–109). They were all different in character and function. Those which lay close to the sea were economic in character, comprising storehouses of amphorae, economic units and shops. One of the complexes contained a bathroom with a ceramic bathtub and a mosaic floor. Moving away from the sea, the insulae changed in character: houses became bigger and were furnished with paved courtyards surrounded by a series of rooms. Passages inside the complexes were narrow and there was an elaborate sewage system in place. Large quantities of Hellenistic tableware and imported wine amphorae were found in these houses, which seem to have belonged to rich craftsmen, including cabinetmakers. The House of Aglaon (Kowal & Łajtar 2014: 93) is a good example, the designation coming from a name scratched as a graffito on the bottom of one of the



Fig. 5. Gold ring with representation of Artemis (J. Reclaw).

vessels. The house had a bathroom and a room with a pebble mosaic floor. A fine golden ring with a gemma depicting Artemis was found here (Fig. 5). The image is in all likelihood the sole surviving copy of *Artemis Brauronia*, a sculptured work by the Greek sculptor Praxiteles. A figure of Sylenus/Dionysus was found in another complex in this part of the city. And a plaque with a depiction of a Maenad, a copy of a work by Kallimachos, came from a house which also yielded a coin hoard; the same house was a source of a glass gemma with a depiction of Theseus and the Minotaur (Dyczek 2014: 99–110, Fig. 20).

In 2015, excavations (Dyczek 2018: 259–265) revealed what may have been a *basileion* (Nielsen 1999: 11). It was an official structure with walls made of large limestone blocks, applying *anathyrosis* as a building technique. A large wooden door led to this structure, the wings each furnished with a knocker in the shape of a Satyr's head. Coming from this structure and one opposite it is a small altar, a gemma depicting Zeus, a unique *aes grave*, vessels of bronze. Was this perhaps a ruler's residence? It lay on the main street, in the highest-lying part of the city, close to a small postern gate.

These still fragmentary results of excavations in Risan permit a preliminary reconstruction of the evolution of the Illyrian city, determining the key characteristics that differentiated it from the Greek city.

Proto-urban fortifications on hilltops seem to have been the first stage in this process. They may have served initially as places of refuge, later taking on also economic functions, for instance, places for storing in wooden structures the harvest or grain surpluses. They could also have been used for religious and social gatherings. In the end, they became official seats of authority and religious cult places. However, the “acropolis” was always separated from the settlement at the bottom of the hill—as at Risan.

Another rule was the division into three parts: the hilltop fort, the settlement and the port and trade post (Risan, Scoder). There is a regularity in the size of the areas surrounded by fortifications being increased to encompass not only the hilltop, but also the other two parts of the system, that is, the lower town and the harbor with market place. An effort to manage the inner architecture, by introducing a street network for instance, invariably follows the restriction of space by defense walls. It has been noted in several cases from the Bronze and seems to be a creation independent of Greek models. Had it not been so, then one would have to assume that the Illyrians applied this urban model almost simultaneously with its invention by the Hellenes. Imperfections of the system division into three component parts can also be observed at Risan with defense walls buttressed with architecture on the inside and inner towers at the terminations of streets. In my opinion, these are independent Illyrian inventions.

Building technique is also important. The manner of construction in Risan, and apparently also in Scoder, was local and traditional. "Illyrian" building experience stood behind the way buildings were constructed, the wall bondwork, materials, technical designs, like the system of channels. The achievements of Greek builders do not seem to have been used as models here.

There are features, like the *acropolis* and the *agora*, that might be assigned a Greek origin but were not in my opinion. Fortified hilltops are fully characteristic of the proto-urban structures. These are not seats of the Bronze Age rulers. The form is similar, but the origins and function are different. The same can be said of the market place: its form is due to needs, not imitation. A market and place for assemblies would have been prerequisite in a tribal society with economic needs. There is nothing to suggest that the agora in Risan also served any kind of cultic or administrative purposes.

The Greek influence that is to be discerned in the Illyrian cities is the building of polygonal fortifications and a distinct separation of the official quarter, which was built along Greek lines.

Regarding the issue at hand, current research on Illyrian sites indicates that Illyrian cities were independent urban forms that drew on Greek models only in the case of a few better and more effective designs. Hence their separateness is not the result of a cognitive dissonance, but an archaeological fact in need of further examination. The Illyrians should be allowed to preserve their identity!

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