

# AN ILLYRIAN TOWN IN THE 4<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY BC. ALBANIAN–POLISH ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT BUSHAT (NORTHERN ALBANIA)



**Saimir SHPUZA**

Academy of Sciences of Albania  
Institute of Archaeology, Tirana  
saimirshpuza@gmail.com

**Bartosz WOJCIECHOWSKI**

University of Warsaw  
Antiquity of Southeastern Europe Research Centre  
bw.wojciechows@uw.edu.pl

*Abstract.* – A previously unknown Illyrian town, situated between the historically-attested localities of Scodra and Lissos, in present-day northern Albania, has been excavated since 2018 by a team of archaeologists from the Institute of Archaeology in Tirana (Albania) and the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe Research Centre of the University of Warsaw (Poland). This paper aims to present the latest insights on the topography of the site, its fortifications, and several monuments discovered *intra* and *extra muros*. The new archaeological findings from Bushat prompt a comprehensive reconsideration of the urbanisation process in the tribal territory of the Labeates, as well as of the chronology of the Illyrian town in general. At the same time, determining the original ancient name of Bushat remains an open challenge, inspiring a range of competing hypotheses. These are discussed in this paper and contextualised within an existing historical framework.

*Key words.* – Illyria, Labeates, Bushat, Ancient urbanism, Hestiaiterion, Hellenistic fortifications.

## Introduction

A previously unknown Illyrian town, situated at present-day Bushat, northern Albania (Fig. 1), has been excavated since 2018 by a team of archaeologists from the Institute of Archaeology, Tirana (Albania), and the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe Research Centre of the University of

Warsaw (Poland). Archaeological traces of its existence, mostly sporadic and casual finds within the area of the site, had been scarce prior to the beginning of the fieldwork.<sup>1</sup> The presence of an important site in the area was first evidenced by an *extra muros* structure, initially identified as a fountain, which will be discussed later below.<sup>2</sup> Very few structures were visible on the surface and, so, all crucial finds had to be unearthed. The majority of the site is covered by thick vegetation, especially in its lower part, while the upper section was additionally affected by erosion. The site was also damaged by extensive modern farming and military activity. The sectors excavated so far have been selected based on fieldwalking and small-scale geophysical surveys conducted in the upper part of the town.



Fig. 1. Regional map with indication of Bushat (S. Shpuza)

Bushat is situated on one of several hills scattered across a flatland dominated by the Plain of Zadrima (Fig. 2). This alluvial plain, spanning approx. 4000 hectares, was historically flooded by the Drin. The landscape has very few hills, mainly low, reaching from 20 to 100 m a.s.l. The only

<sup>1</sup> For a summary on these sporadic finds, see Shpuza, Dyczek 2018, 100.

<sup>2</sup> Lahi 1995.

exception is the site of Bushat, which lies at 195 m a.s.l., and Zefjana, situated 2 km westwards of Bushat at approx. 300 m a.s.l. Ancient cartography of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as well as recent geomorphological studies indicate that in the past the plain used to feature many marshes (Fig. 3).<sup>3</sup> A hill as large as Bushat must have been a natural choice for a settlement in such a landscape.



Fig. 2. View of the Zadrima Plain with indication of Bushat and Shkodra (photo by M. Lemke)

The region has been densely occupied since the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age, as evidenced by numerous fortified sites and tumular necropoleis of these periods.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the archaeological record at the site of Bushat includes the Late Bronze Age, represented by several pottery fragments discovered in the lower part of the Hellenistic town.<sup>5</sup> In the Hellenistic Period, which is the chronological focus of this paper, the site at Bushat was situated between the ancient towns of Scodra (8 km northwards) and Lissos (23 km southwards). It is also surrounded by a significant number of smaller fortified sites, with which it forms a hierarchical settlement system that developed in the region starting from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Uncu 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Shpuza 2014 with bibliography; Kurti, Ruka 2020 with bibliography; Galaty, Bejko (eds.) 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Shpuza, Dyczek 2018, 110.

<sup>6</sup> Shpuza 2020.

The main Illyrian tribe that inhabited this area were the Labeates, well known from the ancient sources to have occupied the territory around Lake Shkodra (*Lacus Labeatis*).<sup>7</sup> During the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, they became one of the most important Illyrian tribes and the main support for the last Illyrian king, Genthios, in the wars against the Romans. The large size of the area attributed by the ancient sources to the Labeates and their frequent mention by ancient historians may potentially obscure actual fragmentation of the territory into smaller local communities. Pliny,<sup>8</sup> mentioning the disappearing memory of the populations of this region – Enderini, Sasaei, and Grabaei – vaguely hints at the fragmentation in terms of regional communities.<sup>9</sup>

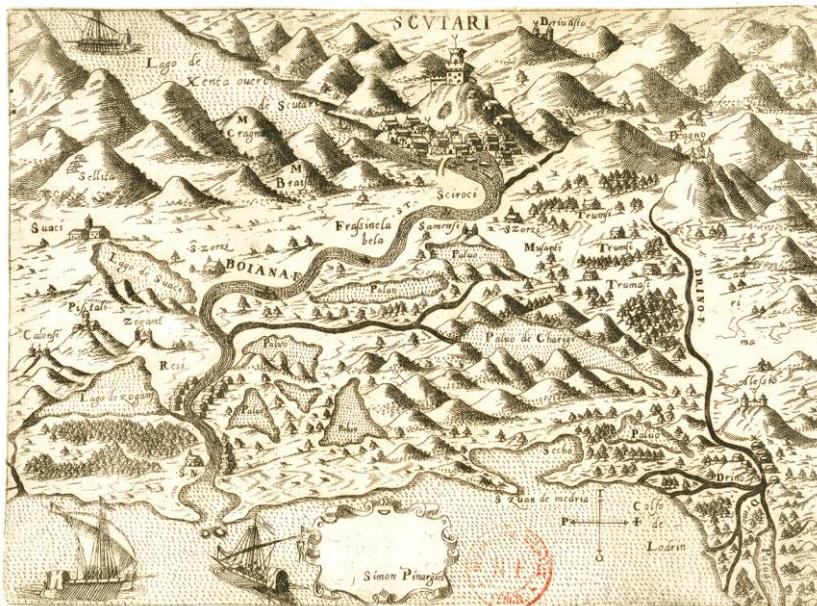


Fig. 3. Map of Simon Pinargent from 1573, showing the many marshy places in the area around Bushat (source: [gallica.bnf.fr](http://gallica.bnf.fr))

## Topography

The place which the Illyrians picked for the new settlement was chosen wisely and with caution because of its favourable strategic features, making the future town well guarded, and, at the same time, having a great perspective on the entire surrounding plain, including two main

<sup>7</sup> Shpuza 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Plin. *NH* 3,144.

<sup>9</sup> Shpuza 2025 (forthcoming).

urban centres of the region, i.e. ancient Lissos and Scodra (it is also worth mentioning that to this day it lies right next to the main road connecting both cities). Bushat, named after the modern town which lies near its foot, is actually a large, elongated hill with three peaks, the highest of which rises almost 150 m above the Zadrima fields. According to the current state of research, the remaining two summits, slightly lower and situated to the north-west, were located outside the town walls.

Below the highest peak, the terrain slopes down to the south-east, and the hill divides into two roughly parallel ranges of gentler, eroded mounds (Figs. 4 and 5). This rather peculiar topography is reflected in the local name of the place, “Buzëgjarpen” in Albanian, which can be translated as “Snake’s Lips”. It was inside those “lips”, in a natural valley between the hills, that the ancient town was founded. Taking advantage of the favourable terrain, defensive walls were built on the ridges of the hills, with massive fortifications securing the entrance to the valley in the south-eastern section as well, where archaeologists have discovered the only two town gates known so far (see below).

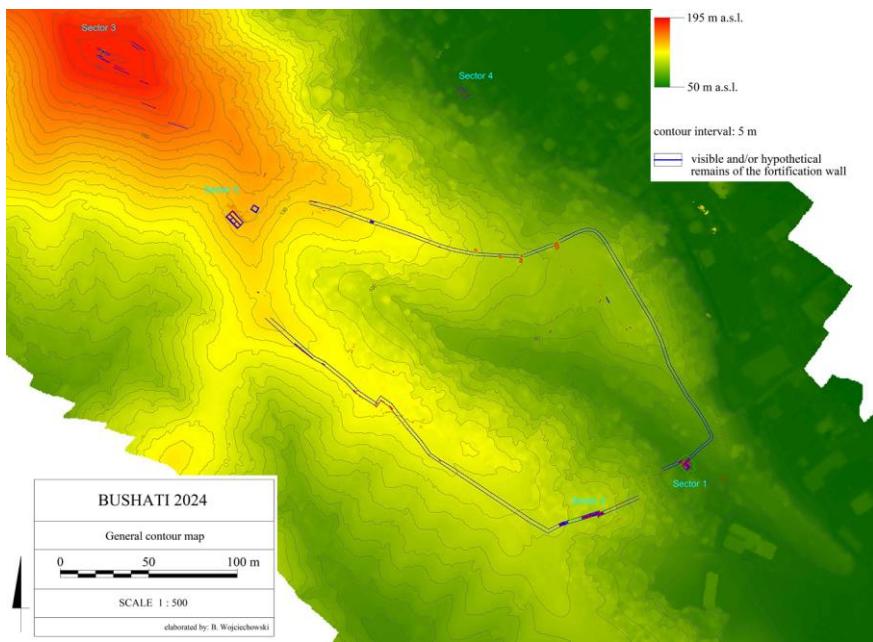


Fig. 4. Plan of the site (B. Wojciechowski)

As can be seen on the general plan (Figs. 4 and 5), the mounds closing the site from the west have relatively steep slopes (in some places the incline reaches 30°), cut quite regularly by shallow valleys of seasonal wtercourses. Significantly gentler and flatter is the terrain located on the

opposite side – to the east and north-east. It is there, as well as on the valley floor itself, that the main residential sectors of the town were likely situated (although we should not rule out the possibility that some of the houses were built on artificial terraces on the slopes). On the high ground in the north-western end of the supposed line of fortifications, on a terrace approx. 60–70 m above the valley floor, the so-called upper town was located, comprising mainly public buildings. All of the above urban sectors were, in turn, dominated by the hilltop with the remains of the *acropolis*.

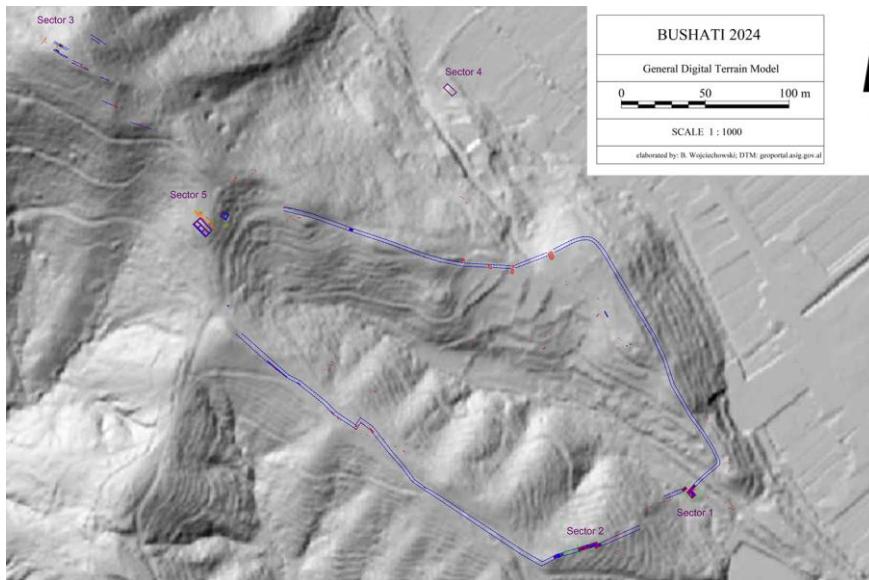


Fig. 5. Plan of the site on a LiDAR image background (B. Wojciechowski)

Due to erosion, outcrops of bedrock can be observed in many places on the hills of Bushat, along with small and medium-sized rock remnants (discussed in detail below), some of which were certainly used by the builders to reinforce the fortifications and their foundations. Examples of such activity were found by archaeologists on the south-eastern section of the defensive wall; it can be assumed that the same was true for the rock remnants visible on the surface in the north-eastern part of the site, on the edge of the slope.

To sum up, based on remains traceable in the field and conservative reconstruction of the missing sections, the line of walls enclosed an area of up to 20 hectares. A settlement of this size would have needed a constant water supply, possibly provided by the same stream that still flows at the north-eastern end of the valley, at the foot of the steep slope and several dozen meters below the so-called upper town. Its bed runs along the

western line of the hills and emerges from the "Snake's Lips" near the town gate (Figs. 4 and 5, Sector 1). It must be noted, however, that today it is a seasonal stream, just like the small watercourses flowing into it from the slopes on the western side. In the spring months, it can cause local flooding, while in the height of summer it tends to be dry. The only permanent water source which can be found within the site is a wellspring near the ancient threshing floor, in earlier publications mistakenly called "Nymphaeum" (Figs. 4 and 5, Sector 4; for more details, see below), but it is located definitely *extra muros*. It is plausible that in the past Bushat had more such springs within the walls (it is worth remembering, as was mentioned previously, that the Drin Valley was a marshland region at the time). On the other hand, it cannot be ruled out that periodic shortages of drinking water were one of the reasons that ultimately led to the town's depopulation.

### Fortifications

The data obtained from the topographic survey revealed the general layout of the site. The fortifications are better attested in the lower part of the town, whereas in the upper part no such traces have been found so far. The *intra muros* area seems to have spanned approx. 15–20 ha.<sup>10</sup> The fortifications have been excavated in two sectors, both of which showed the same technical outlines and the same construction date, around the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The whole fortification system at Bushat is of the same age and design, without later additions found to date. Two town gates have been identified on both excavated areas, providing key information on the town's accessibility and internal circulation (Fig. 6). Considering the particular topography of the site, as well as the layout of the defensive wall, it seems reasonable to suggest that multiple gates provided access to different parts of the lower, middle, and upper town. The defensive wall of nearby Lissos, which shows topographical patterns analogous to Bushat, is equipped with 12 gates of different dimensions and monumentality. Eight of the gates serve the upper town, two allow passage through the *diateichisma* wall, and two are situated in the lower town.<sup>11</sup> The situation in Bushat could be very similar.

The fortifications were constructed in the emplekton masonry technique. It consists of two outer faces filled in the middle with rubble and earth. In most cases, only the faces of the blocks of the façade were dressed, while their inner, and, thus, hidden part, remained in the natural or quarry state. Compartment walls are visible at irregular intervals (the distance between them ranges from 1.50 to 3.00 m, approximately), reinfor-

<sup>10</sup> For the first analysis of the fortifications, see Shpuza, Dyczek 2018, 105–114; Lemke, Shpuza, Wojciechowski 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Prendi, Zheku 1972.

cing the wall and structuring the rubble core fill. The width of the wall varies between 3.30 and 3.50 m, while the foundations are approx. 4.00 m wide (Fig. 7).



Fig. 6. Aerial photo of the south gate (photo by M. Lemke)



Fig. 7. Orthophoto of wall at Sector 2 (M. Lemke, B. Wojciechowski)

The few preserved parts of the façade attest the use of pseudo-isodomic masonry. This building technique is quite common in other urban sites of the region, such as Lissos (Fig. 8), but also in the majority of Illyrian towns of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC. Its similarity and contemporaneity

with Lissos (and with Scodra, for which we have only limited data on the building technique of the defensive wall) suggests that these towns were founded within the same horizon of urbanisation. This represents a radical change in the way of life for the local population, who abandoned the previous small-village life to concentrate, through synoecism, in large towns, each spanning almost 20 ha.



Fig. 8 View of the emplekton masonry wall at Lissos (photo by S. Shpuza)

It is important to emphasise that the use of the emplekton masonry technique in fortifications appeared among the Illyrians at the same time and in parallel with Greece and the majority of sites in Macedonia.<sup>12</sup> The application of the emplekton technique and the pseudo-isodomic masonry also constitutes a great improvement as compared to earlier fortifications in the region. Most of the older defensive walls built in the region of the Labeates lack many of the poliorcetic and aesthetic elements. Even in the Hellenistic Period, this new technique had limited impact on the rural fortifications – only Ganjolla, Beltoja, Spathar, Kratul and Mokset employed building patterns resembling urban fortifications. The rest of the rural fortifications show little to no concern for aesthetics.<sup>13</sup>

Although Bushat and Lissos share the same building technique and masonry, the well-preserved rampart at Lissos contrasts sharply with the ruined fortifications at Bushat. This difference may be explained in two ways, one related to the quick abandonment of Bushat, probably already during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC (see below), and the other to the quality of the

<sup>12</sup> Karlsson 1992, 83. According to Karlsson, this technique originates from Sicily and Magna Graecia.

<sup>13</sup> Shpuza 2020, 10.

building material. As regards the latter, it must be noted that the fortifications of Lissos were built of very high-quality limestone, unlike those at Bushat, where limestone was significantly worse and used sparingly, with conglomerate and flysch employed instead in many parts. Flysch, the most common rock at Bushat, is poorly petrified and not very resistant to weathering, which could be the reason why the majority of constructions are no longer visible in the landscape.

### *Hestiaterion*

The main building discovered at Bushat is situated on a terrace located at the base of the upper town and, at the same time, overlooking the entire lower town. It is a rectangular building,  $20.50 \times 10.70$  m in size (Fig. 9), with walls preserved at the foundation level. Despite sections of the walls being lost, the tripartite plan of the building is clearly recognisable, with a corridor preceding three units of equal size.

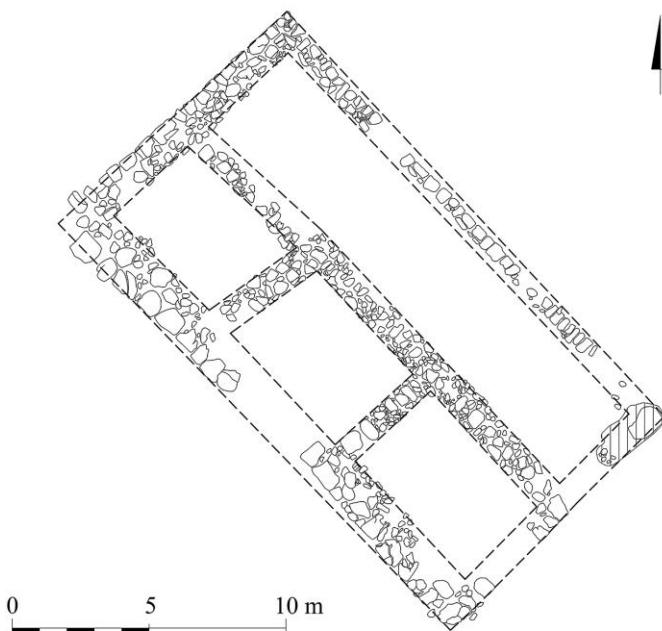


Fig. 9. Plan of the *hestiaterion* (B. Wojciechowski)

The foundation walls are not all of the same thickness for structural reasons. The western wall is built of bigger blocks, making it thicker than the rest (1.60–1.75 m). Its position on the slope indicates that it probably functioned as a retaining wall. It stood almost 2 m below the foundation level of the opposite eastern wall, which was the actual façade of the buil-

ding (Fig. 10). Its thickness ranges from 0.50 to 0.80 m. All of the other walls, including the inner partitions, are 1.00–1.10 m thick. A foundation of this size can easily hold walls at least 0.80 m thick, but there is no information on whether they were built of stone masonry, bricks, or perishable material. The large number of tiles and cover-tiles indicates that the roof was constructed in the Corinthian order.

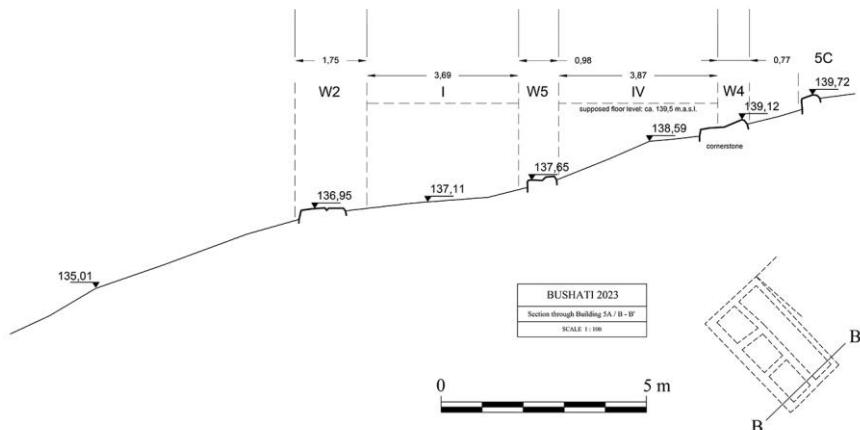


Fig. 10. Section of the *hestiaterion* (B. Wojciechowski)

The plan of the building reproduces many well-known Greco-Roman *hestiatoria*, mainly from Greece and Magna Graecia,<sup>14</sup> which do not follow any standard plan, but still show some common features. The most remarkable of these is a combination of a corridor or porch, and a multiplicity of rooms of similar dimensions.<sup>15</sup> Each room is large enough for seven people (standard dimensions of the *klinai* are 1.80 × 0.88 m). This suggests that the symposium at Bushat was meant for a small number of participants, thus indicating its exclusive character.<sup>16</sup>

An important axis approaches the dining hall. It consists of a series of steps (average step height 7–12 cm) running NW–SE, and then redirecting slightly to align itself fully with the building's façade (Fig. 11). The western edge of this road is well preserved, the eastern one apparently lost. At the present stage of investigation, it is not clear where the road went. It may have led to a related building or to one of the town gates, since it is possible that the defensive wall was not very far away on the western terrace slope.

<sup>14</sup> For a large corpus of these banquet halls, see Leypold 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Bergquist 1990, 41–43.

<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed account on the building and similar examples from other towns in Illyria and Epirus, see Shpuza, Dyczek 2025 (forthcoming).



Fig. 11. Steps leading to the *hestiaterion* (photo by K. Narloch)

In the same terrace, there is also a square building whose role is difficult to determine. It is possible that it was part of the same complex as the *hestiaterion*. The building, 6.95 m wide and 8 m long, is similarly positioned on the terrace slope (Fig. 12). The wall integrates the natural bedrock as a foundation, which could explain the difference of orientation with regard to the *hestiaterion*.

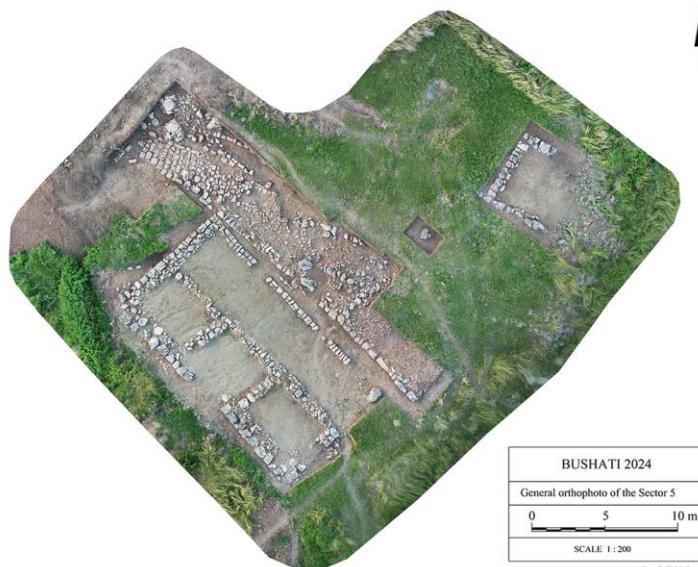


Fig. 12. Orthophoto of Sector 5 (B. Wojciechowski)

The pottery from this building forms a homogeneous assemblage that can be dated from the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century to the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. The pottery also supports its interpretation as a *hestiaterion*. The vessels are related exclusively to wine consumption, represented mostly by sherds of amphorae – Corinthian B for the most part, and MGS V – as well as black glaze fine wares.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, one can assume that the main activity in this building would have been the *symposion*, that is, the drinking of wine. In light of currently-known data, however, a more probable assumption is that it was a public space dedicated to collective banqueting, a place for members of the elite to celebrate with their clients or discuss their political and economic affairs.

A building of this kind, identified as a *hestiaterion*, should be perceived as a form of self-representation of the local civic aristocracy in the urban framework, as well as within the broader context of the royal Ardiorean/Labeatian dynasty. The shape of the building suggests that the Illyrians borrowed and custom-tailored models from Greece and Magna Graecia to fit their public dining practices.

### Threshing floor

The present research also focuses on an *extra muros* structure situated at the foot of the Bushat hill, identified in the early 1990s and interpreted as a fountain from the Hellenistic Period.<sup>18</sup> The hypothesis was supported by the architectural form of the monument and the presence of a water source located approx. 30 m to the west. New documentation prepared on site during the latest investigation allowed further observations on the monument, as well as a reconsideration of its function (Fig. 13). In effect, its former identification as a fountain has been rejected on the grounds that no hydraulic installations could be found in the building (sewers, channels, cisterns, etc.). Currently, the main hypothesis is that the structure used to be a threshing floor.<sup>19</sup>

The structure is rectangular and measures 6.30 × 13.35 m. Four walls of different height, constructed with Hellenistic dressed blocks, enclose a floor paved with stone slabs. The western and southern walls are the highest, with the maximal height of 1.70 m at the south-western corner of the structure (Fig. 14). The structure was constructed on a specially-prepared platform made of levelled soil previously excavated for this purpose. As a result, the western and southern walls served as a terracing, which explains their greater height as compared to the other two. The northern wall is preserved only as a row of blocks, while the eastern wall

<sup>17</sup> The pottery from Bushat is under study by Carlo De Mitri from the University of Molise, whom we thank for the preliminary data he has provided.

<sup>18</sup> Lahi 1995.

<sup>19</sup> Shpuza 2019.

is mostly just a line of stones without any specific arrangement. It seems that some care was taken in arranging the four blocks vertically in the south-eastern corner of the structure.

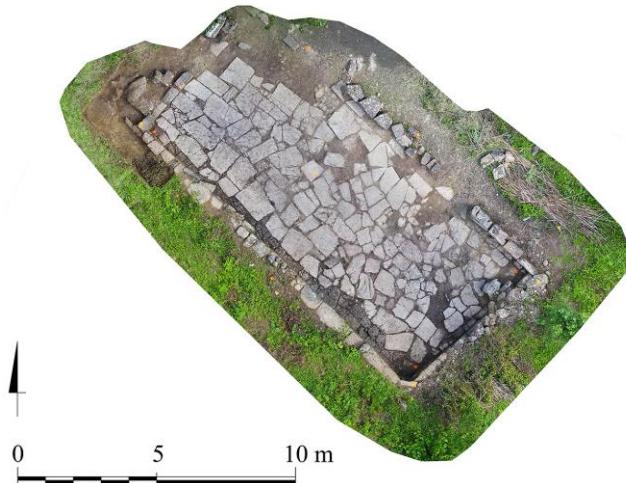


Fig. 13. Orthophoto of the threshing floor (M. Lemke, B. Wojciechowski)



Fig. 14. View of the floor of the threshing floor (photo by M. Lemke)

Except the northern wall, the other walls stand directly on the paved floor. On the western wall, the Hellenistic blocks were placed horizontally, while on the other three walls they lie vertically, thus marking the edge of the floor. The widths of the walls vary depending on whether the blocks were arranged vertically or horizontally. The western wall of the

structure appears to have two niches (Fig. 15). The northern niche is 56 cm wide, 60 cm high, and 70 cm deep. The slab covering it measures 76 × 84 × 5 cm. The total depth is 83 cm. The width of the niche is greater than the width of the wall itself. Also, the southern niche has a maximum depth of 83 cm. Its width is 62 cm and its height is 55 cm. The floor of the southern niche is 8 cm below the floor of the structure.



Fig. 15. Photogrammetry of the wall with niches (B. Wojciechowski)

The exact construction date could not be established for the structure since the archaeological trenches immediately reached the natural substrate. However, excavations carried out by Bashkim Lahi, who explored deposits covering the pavement, showed that the structure had been abandoned during the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.<sup>20</sup> Thus, it must have been in use during the Hellenistic Period.

Such a structure, consisting only of a flat pavement of flagstones and surrounded by low terrace walls to prevent loose earth, is most similar to threshing floors used for threshing and winnowing wheat and barley. Its rectangular shape is somewhat uncommon in Antiquity, since Varro suggests that they should be circular,<sup>21</sup> but, on the other hand, Columella's description of bean threshing floor refers mostly to rectangular or oblong structures.<sup>22</sup> Few other examples of rectangular threshing floors are known from the archaeological record.<sup>23</sup>

The proximity between the discussed structure and the defensive walls suggests that it served the town in some way. It is probable that the *extra muros* space where the threshing floor is situated corresponds to an area dedicated to the processing of crops. Complementary data on this hypothesis come from a deposit of working tools found at Melgusha, situated on a hill just 400 m from the acropolis of Bushat.<sup>24</sup> The existence of the threshing floor, as well as the presence of a wide range of agricultural working tools at Bushat, confirms that agriculture was the most important economic domain for the town.

<sup>20</sup> Lahi 1995, 232–236, Pls. I–II.

<sup>21</sup> Varro, *Rust.* 1.51.1.

<sup>22</sup> Columella, *Rust.* 2.10.13.

<sup>23</sup> White 1970, 422–423; Whittaker 2003, 383; Nagorsky 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Dibra 1981; Shpuza 2019, 177–179.

## Chronology of the site

Putting aside the Late Bronze Age traces of human presence, the founding of the Illyrian town at Bushat can be confidently dated to the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, based on the data from both excavated sectors of the fortifications and the *hestiaterion*. In contrast, the decline of the site is represented more ambiguously in the archaeological record, with different dating indicators coming from different sectors. In the upper part of the town, within the *hestiaterion*, pottery finds later than the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC are completely missing. It must be remembered, however, that the area had been damaged by farming, military activity, and erosion, which entirely obscured layers of abandonment or destruction. At the same time, the investigation of the southern gate yielded some pottery finds from the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. However, their quantity is much inferior as compared to the earlier period. In this case, the presence of later ceramics could just as well be explained by the topography of the sector, which accumulated alluvial layers and material coming from the upper part of the town. A completely different situation is observed in the threshing floor situated *extra muros*, where neither a foundation layer nor any other stratigraphy dating the construction could be identified. However, the layers covering the pavement of the monument contain pottery of the 2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC, confirming that the site had been occupied during this period. All things considered, pottery finds from all the sectors excavated so far show that the site had been at its peak of prosperity between 350–250 BC. Pottery from the later periods is less significant in quantity, suggesting a certain decline in civic life.

The data obtained from Bushat are important for the general understanding of the chronology of towns in Illyria during the Hellenistic Period, roughly considered as all belonging to the 4<sup>th</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> centuries. The case of Bushat shows that they underwent important changes before the onset of Roman colonisation, which has been considered as the fundamental factor that rearranged the municipal hierarchy in Illyria.<sup>25</sup>

The reasons behind the abandonment of Bushat remain unclear. Few important political and military events took place in the last decades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, with the only exceptions being: the First and Second Illyrian-Roman wars in 229 and 219 BC; and the capture of Lissos by Philip V of Macedon in 214 BC. However, historical sources for these events do not mention important battles and battlefields. In the First and Second war, military operations seem to have been minimal, and the conflicts are generally perceived as having been very brief.<sup>26</sup> Regarding the latter event, Polybius explicitly reports that after the fall of Lissos, the other settlements

<sup>25</sup> Shpuza 2024, 94 with bibliography.

<sup>26</sup> Derow 2005, 52–54.

in the area opened their gates and accepted Macedonian power.<sup>27</sup> Assuming this to be the case, there was no more fighting that could involve other towns in the vicinity of Lissos, such as Bushat.

Nonetheless, the political and demographic history of the region was still quite tormented even in the years that followed. Most importantly, the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC was marked by the arrival of the Ardi-aei in the region, who had been pushed out from their original homeland on the Narenta River by the arrival of the Celts.<sup>28</sup> It cannot be excluded that these newcomers disrupted the regional urban hierarchy. Unfortunately, up to now archaeology has not provided solid data on the matter, such as layers of destruction or abandonment, thus leaving this question open.

### **Problems of identification**

Because of its brief existence, the Illyrian town at Bushat did not make it to history books, unlike Scodra, Lissos, and Medun, which were all mentioned in ancient sources, especially during the reign of King Genthios. Considering the chronology discussed earlier, the site should be assumed to have been abandoned during the events of the Third Illyrian war – a circumstance which would also explain why it was not mentioned by ancient authors.

Early in our investigation, it seemed promising to identify Bushat with Bassania, a town mentioned passingly by Livy.<sup>29</sup> In his description of the wars between the Romans and King Genthios, Livy mentioned two Illyrian towns of the Cavii tribe with unknown locations – Durnium and Caravantis – and the town of Bassania, situated reportedly 5 miles in an unspecified direction from Lissos.<sup>30</sup> The location of this town has been hypothesised in the past, based on linguistic rather than archaeological arguments, with the majority placing it to the south of Lissos, in the contemporary village of Pllana. However, currently no monuments dating from Antiquity are known from the locality. Others place Bassania northwards of Lissos based on the analysis of historical sources.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, the latest chronology obtained for Bushat does not seem to fit the historical context of the Third Illyrian-Roman war.

On the other hand, Pliny's text mentioning the disappearing memory of many Greek (Greek here probably meaning Hellenised) towns in the area around Scodra, seems to fit the discussed case very well.<sup>32</sup> Undoubted-

<sup>27</sup> Polyb. 8.13.1, 3, 4, 8; 14.8.9.

<sup>28</sup> Greenwalt 2010, 300.

<sup>29</sup> Shpuza, Dyczek 2018, 122–123.

<sup>30</sup> Livy 44.30.7; 44.30.9.

<sup>31</sup> For the bibliography on the subject, see Shpuza, Nallbani 2022, 111.

<sup>32</sup> Plin. *HN* 3.144.

ly, by Pliny's time, that is, the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, Bushat, and probably other similar towns, had already declined. In fact, Pliny, just as other ancient authors, failed to provide names of ancient towns in this region. The sources mostly relate to the names of the tribes, with the likely exception of Phylarchus, whose information is transmitted by Athenaeus<sup>33</sup> mentioning a town called Kylikes: *To many persons, also, the place in Illyria is well known which is called Cups (Kylikes), and near which is the tomb of Cadmus and Harmonia, as Phylarchus records in the twenty-second book of his "Histories".* While discussing the possible localisation of this unknown town, M. Šašel Kos considered the territory around Lake Shkodra and along the Drin as one possibility.<sup>34</sup> An argument in favour of her proposition is that Kylikes mentioned by Phylarchus could be identical with the Kilikai mentioned and described by Procopius as a fortification rebuilt by Justinian, which can be situated in the vicinity of Scodra.<sup>35</sup>

It, thus, becomes quite clear that the Illyrian site at Bushat belongs among the great number of ancient towns whose memory disappeared, or whose location cannot be reliably determined today. Hopefully, the future will bring new numismatic or epigraphic evidence reclaiming this town for the contemporary historiography.

### Future perspectives – political status and urban plan

The political status of the Illyrian town at Bushat is unknown. The question is difficult to solve, since the epigraphic evidence is almost completely missing for this area. Even the general political situation for this part of Illyria during the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC is not clear. What can be inferred through analogy with neighbouring territories, such as Epirus and Macedonia, is that the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC saw an emergence of greater polities, as compared to the previous period, complemented with the increase in the number of towns.<sup>36</sup> For the region and time-period discussed here, no significant kings appear in the historical record that could be related to them with any certainty. Grabos, Kleitus, and Glaukia, following the fall of Bardylis in 359 BC, are mainly related to the Dardanian and Taulantian tribal territories, possibly forming a frontier zone with the Macedonians.<sup>37</sup> However, even with such limited knowledge, it is evident that three towns (Scodra, Bushat, and Lissos) were established simultaneously in the Lower Drin valley, showing that processes similar to those known from Epirus and Macedonia were also taking place among the Illy-

<sup>33</sup> Ath. 11.462b

<sup>34</sup> Šašel Kos 1993, 251.

<sup>35</sup> Procop. Aed. 4.4. The current fieldwork has not yet proved the existence of a Late Antique phase in Bushat.

<sup>36</sup> Cabanes 1996.

<sup>37</sup> Greenwalt 2010, 294.

rian Labeates, likely motivated by the need to oppose the neighbouring states.

Another unresolved question about the Illyrian town at Bushat, and in general in the northern regions, is the internal urban organisation. Hence, an aim for future investigation is to understand whether the town had clearly differentiated public, religious, and residential areas, or whether important public buildings, such as the *hestiaterion*, compensated for the absence of a main public space, such as an agora, and served as the central focal points. Judging from the topography of the site, Bushat can hardly be expected to have implemented the Hippodamian urban system. The street discovered so far show that the circulation axes were modelled according to the steep topography, and their orientation is not linear. This is another feature making Bushat very similar to Lissos, where the topography presumably afforded the application of a regular urban plan only in a small part of the lower town.<sup>38</sup> Further to the south, in Zgërdhesh, the natural bedrock has been carved in order to create steps and facilitate communication between different sections of the town, but this does not seem to have resulted in a regular urban grid – only two irregular streets seem to have played a major role in connecting the lower town to the upper one.<sup>39</sup>

Future fieldwork at Bushat will reveal more about both the political status and the urban organisation of the towns in the region, where urban, tribal, and royal authorities were tightly interrelated. The brief but early chronology of the site may become very important for understanding the earliest phase of the Illyrian towns, unknown elsewhere due to later monumental developments. The limited data from *intra* and *extra muros* areas suggest that behind the previously-unknown town at Bushat there was a well-defined concept and implementation program whose future discovery may change the general understanding of the Illyrian urbanisation of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC.

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<sup>38</sup> Prendi, Zheku 1986, 59.

<sup>39</sup> Islami 1972, 199; completed by Maurer, Metalla 2020, 342–343.

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