

<b>VALSH FORTIFICATION</b>		<b>Archaeology</b> <b>Keywords:</b> Archeology, Fortification, Bronze age, Survey, Archaeological Excavation, Potery, Prehistory.
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**Ervin Kujtila**

**Abstract**

In this study I have made a presentation of the Valsh fortification, which together with other fortifications of the Shkumbini valley constitutes a very advanced fortification system. The idea of this study came as a result of the doctoral studies I am attending. This study provides new data on the Shkumbini valley fortification system as well as on the topographic survey and layout of the fortification walls. In this study the current state of fortification is clearly presented and the role it has played in relation to the surrounding area and beyond.

**Introduction**

In the framework of my doctoral studies, based also on previous authors, I visited this fortification. The first data were published in 1967, and no further studies have been conducted on this fortification since. So, I found it reasonable to look again at its current state, but also to bring in new data about fortification and topographic surveying. In this article I have tried to bring in new data which complement the fortification system in the Shkumbini valley.

**Valsh fortification**

The hill where the ruins of the fortification are located is known by the inhabitants as the "City of Kaur", a name that has also been preserved in cartography, whereas in archeological literature and naming of immovable heritage monuments it has been named "Valshi castle". Valshi Castle is a cultural heritage monument, declared by the Ministry of Education and Culture with decision no. 1886, of June 10, 1973.



Picture.1 Distance view of the peak where Valshi castle is located

### *Location*

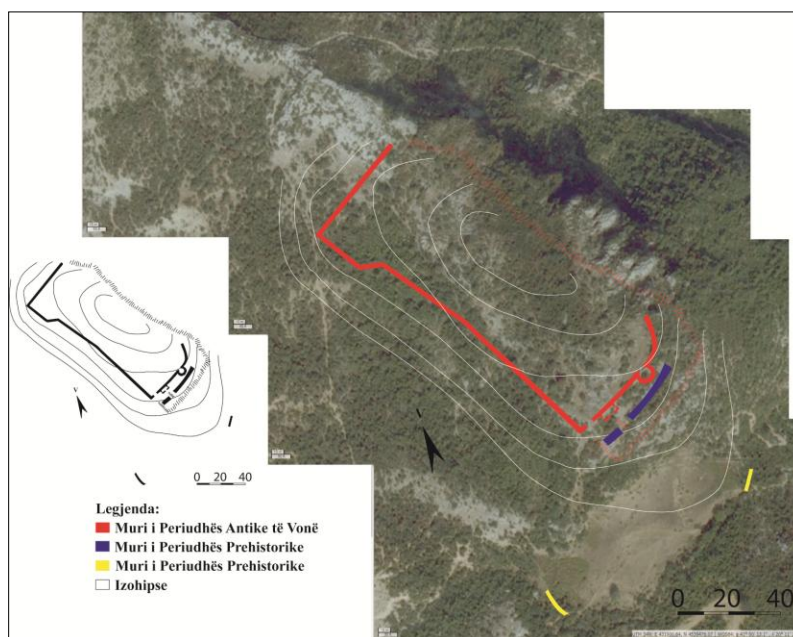
Valshi fortification is in the territory of Valsh village which is part of the Shpati province. The village of Valsh is now part of the administrative unit Gjinar of Elbasan Municipality.

Near the village of Valsh, the limestone ridge of Krasta rises, which is separated from the other hills of the “Upper Shpati” composed by pumice rocks. In the northernmost part of it, which is separated from “Qafa e Qytezës”, stands the castle called by the natives "City of Kaur". From this peak, the northern and western part of the province and part of the Devoll valley can be seen. The castle of Valshi is located near a branch of the road connecting the Shkumbini valley with the Middle Devolli valley. The castle is located at an altitude of 778 m.

**Coordinates: Albanian Geodetic Frame 2010 / TM  $\lambda=20^{\circ}$  515889.94 4541106.07**  
WGS84 20°11' 20" 41° 0' 17"

### *Historical sources and identification*

Fortification is not mentioned in historical sources, and the village of Valësh (Valjesh) is first mentioned in the Arvanid Sanjak Registry of 1431 with 18 houses and total incomes of 1270 akçe<sup>1</sup>. In 1554 it is mentioned in one of the inscriptions of the St. E Premte Church in Valesh “... added by the village of Valsha”<sup>2</sup>.



Picture 2. Layout and topographic survey of the Valshi fortification

<sup>1</sup>H. Inalçik, Arvanid Sanjak Register of 1431, Tirana, 2017, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup>Th. Popa, Inscriptions of churches in Albania, Tirana, 1998, p. 55.

### *History of archaeological research*

The first data on this fortification were referred by N. Ceka in 1967 in a paper on the researches he had conducted there in 1966. The paper gives information on location, topography, roads crossing the area, geographical scope, techniques of construction of the fortification wall and the archaeological material randomly found there. Given the construction techniques of wall tracts and archaeological material found at random, he lists several different periods of operation of this castle, beginning with the first Iron Age and continuing through the Illyrian civic period and finally closing with the late Roman period.

First there are some wall tracts built of large, uncut stones, placed in dry, which, based on the ceramics found, determines the construction time as the first Iron Age. These same Illyrian walls, without the new fortification technique, were also used during the Illyrian civic period.

A complete fortification system belongs to the technique built of small stones connected with lime mortar, also equipped with a round tower located near the entrance. Each fortification period corresponds to the respective ceramics or two coins, one of Apollonia and the other of Dyrrah dated to the 20th century. III-IV BC<sup>3</sup>. The fortification of this castle has been re-examined by the author in several other articles, some of which bring new data<sup>4</sup>.

Ceka-Papajani researchers notice the features of civic life also in Valësh, where the walls of the Illyrian type continue to be preserved, without considering the new fortification technique. In another article Ceka adds that this fortification has a mixed urban-rural character, which implies linking the function of agricultural production with the exchange with other centers. The castle of Valshi continued even after the Slavic invasions, but with a noted restriction of the living area and the intensity of life<sup>5</sup>.

An article dedicated to the fortifications of Late Antiquity near Egnatia Street, the most complete details of the fortification stages in this habitation are given, associated with the relevant layout of this castle<sup>6</sup>. In the article dedicated to the prehistoric Illyrian fortifications of the Middle Shkumbini valley, besides Bixellenja's twin fortifications, it is also Valshi's fortification, which are classified by simple layout from a wall arch caught on the edge of rocky ruins. By adapting the wall path to the shape of the terrain by following straight lines for as long as possible without angular curves<sup>7</sup>. In 2018 Valshi Castle was also visited by us<sup>8</sup> where we were able to obtain new data on the fortification system of the prehistoric period, and traces of a medieval church were

<sup>3</sup>N. Ceka, Archaeological researches in the province of Elbasan, Archaeological Session Materials (Tirana 2-3. 10. 1967), Tirana 1968, p. 108-109.

<sup>4</sup>N. Ceka, L. Papajani, Shkumbini valley road in antiquity, Monuments 1, 1971, p. 47; N. Ceka, Archaeological overview of Elbasan district, Monuments, 3, 1972, p. 10-11, 15; N. Ceka, Late antique fortifications near Egnatia Road, Monuments, 7-8, 1974, p. 76; N. Ceka, Illyrian prehistoric fortifications, Monuments 1985, 1 (29), p. 42.

<sup>5</sup>N. Ceka, Archaeological overview of Elbasan district, Monuments, 3, 1972, p. 11, 15.

<sup>6</sup>N. Ceka, Late antique fortifications near Egnatia Road, Monuments, 7-8, 1974, p. 75.

<sup>7</sup>N. Ceka, Illyrian prehistoric fortifications, Monuments 1985, 1 (29), p. 42.

<sup>8</sup>S. Mucaj participated in this introductory expedition.

identified. Material was collected on the surface mainly in the church ruins and near the path of the southeastern part of the fortification.

**Layout:** The fortification walls traverse the northwest, west and southeast sides of the hill, clinging to their two extremities at the precipice that borders the other sides of the hill. Traces of an uncut stone wall, used as a sub-construction of a mortar wall, show that the settlement existed during the prehistoric period and based on archaeological findings it belongs to the first Iron Age, but the complete layout of the walls comes from late antiquity. The shape of the latter is oblong quadrilateral, with a rib formed by rocky fall (Tab).

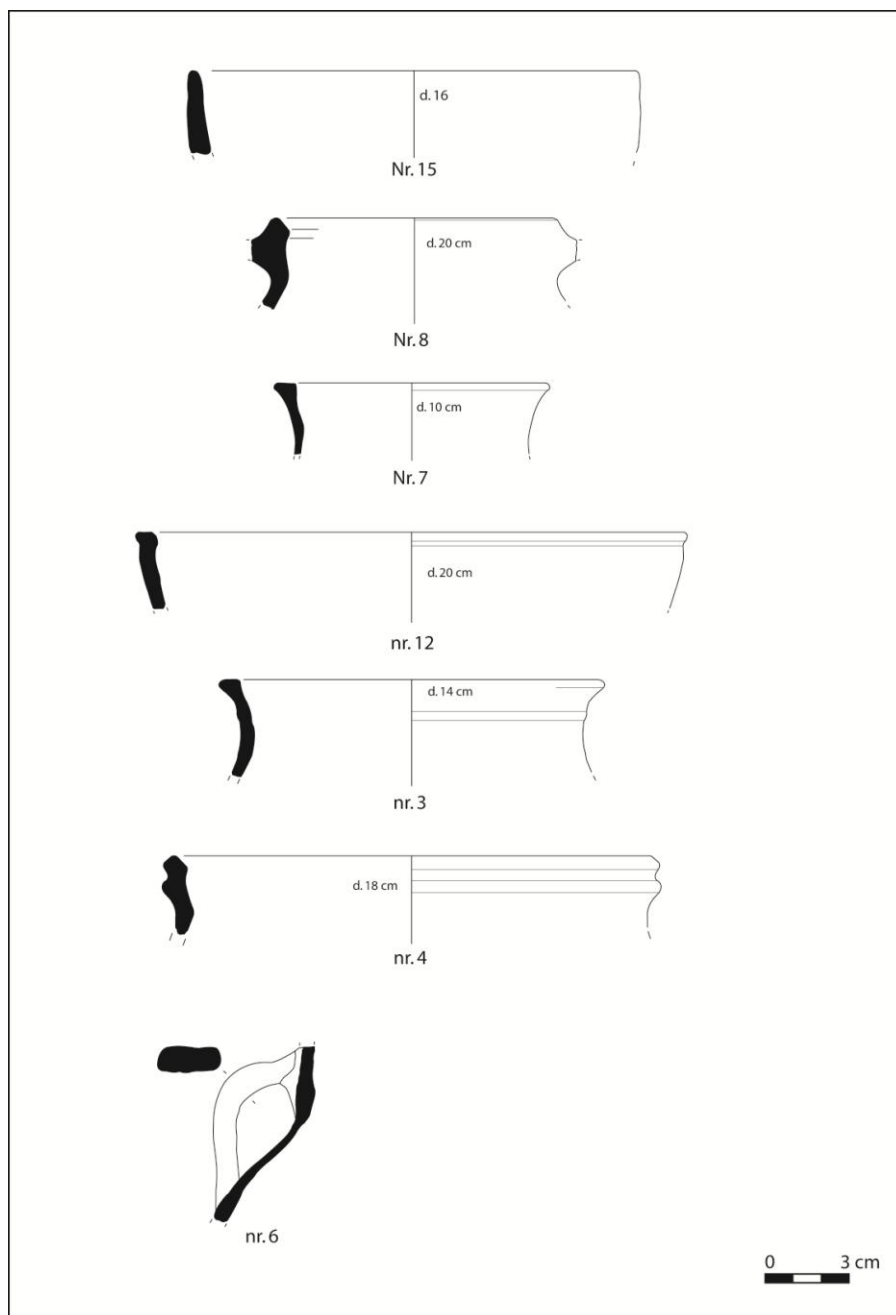
Wall lines are straight for long distances, while curves are made at right angles. Two wide-angle curves on the west side are related to the direction the earlier wall had. Only to the northeast side the wall is arched to meet the edge of the precipice. To the southeast, parallel to the Late Antiquity wall, at a distance of 10 m outside it are the ruins of a wall built of medium-sized stone placed in dry.

The only distinguished entrance is in the corner of the town located near the bend of the wall, reminiscent of the entrance to the Gracen tower. Due to the demolition of the wall, the width of the entrance and the shape of a tower on the right side could not be determined. The south-east wall of the town, which protects the most approachable side, was reinforced in a later period by a 7.50 m diameter round tower.

The walls include an area of 0.6 ha, but only the southern and northern parts are suitable for habitation. Signs of about 100 buildings, mostly unicameral, removed from the surrounding wall can be distinguished.

Among them are the traces of a building where chimney stones were used, a material used for church arches. The size and orientation of this ruin indicate that it is identified with a single-nave church and that the material found there dates to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. (Tab.).

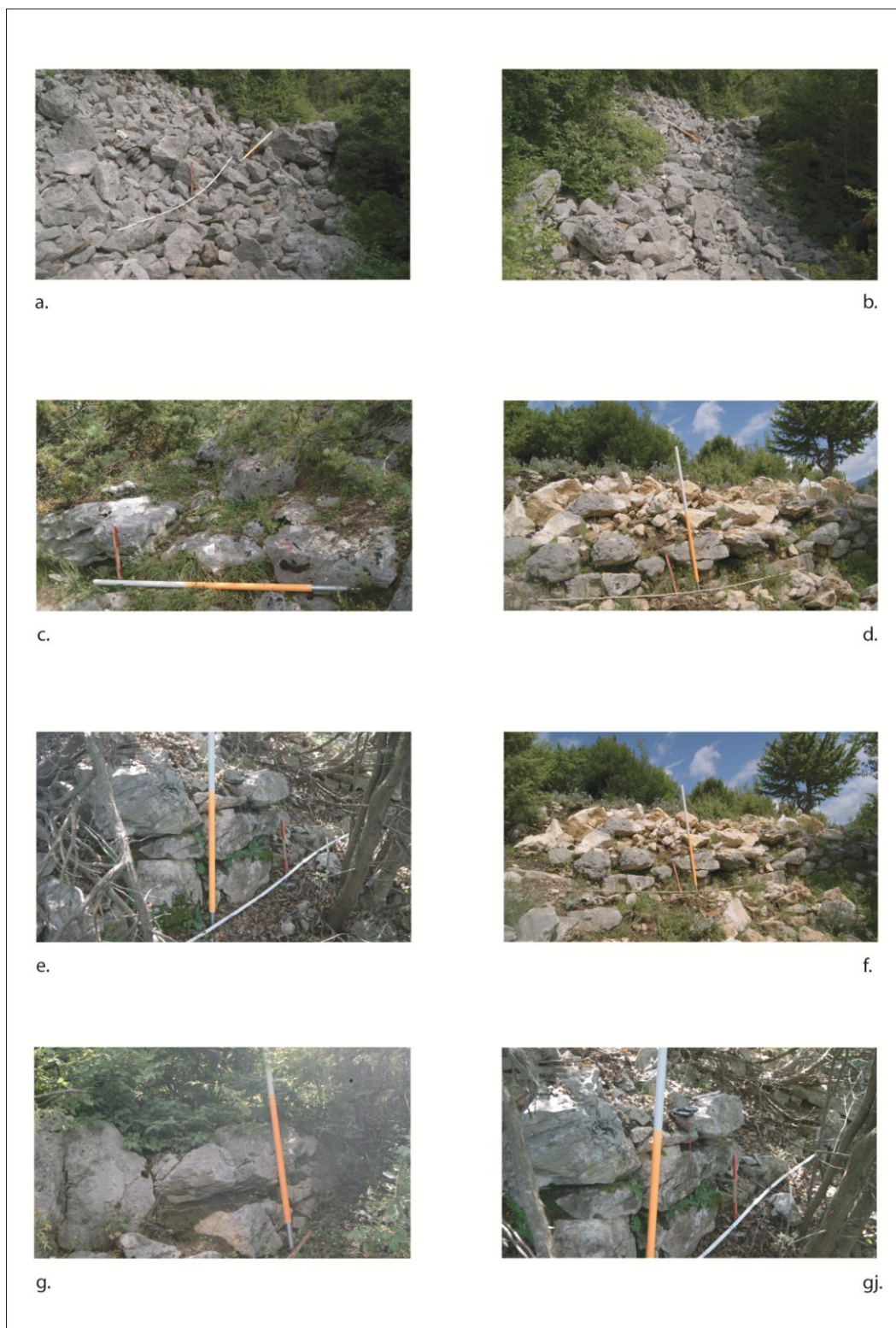
At “Qafa e Qytezës”, in addition to the field’s terrace wall, we were able to observe on the surface the exterior of a wall built mainly of large stones similar to the sub construction of the wall on which the late antiquity wall stands. Straight line layouts, non-strengthened angular curves and entrance location near one of the corners and walls with poor mortar are reminiscent of Gracen's Tower.



Picture 3. Shape of vessels found on the surface

### *Construction technique*

In the fortification, there are some techniques of wall construction made of medium-size stone placed in dry, similar to the technique used on the walls of Lleshan, Bodin, King Rock, Qukës Skanderbeg, etc.



Picture 4. View of the wall line and its facade

The wall tract that follows the tower and which belongs to the first period is relatively well preserved at a length of about 20 m. The construction is made of small and medium stones, with a clear distinction of exterior and interior (Tab). The mortar, prepared with lime and rough sand from streams, is used in small quantities and is easily scrubbed.

The facade features the leveling done during construction. The wall of the tower is steep, which is explained by the higher altitude it had against vertical courtine/curtain walls.

The wall width at this location is 1.50 m, while on the west side it reaches up to 1.70 m. Occasional findings and traces of an uncut stone wall, used as a sub construction of a mortar wall, indicate that the habitation existed during the Illyrian period.

**Archaeological findings:** Among the findings predominated solenoid and calypter tiles, corrugated striped pithos and fragments of culinary utensils. The latest find is a bronze coin, by Emperor Jan Zimica.

1. Massive container spatula (Valshi Castle, El, Nj. S. Gj. Rasti, inventory no. 5). Color in cores 2.5YR 5/3 (reddish brown) and the surface 10R 5/6 (red); clay mixed with mica and with white and gray quartz grains; rough surface.

Date: 5 – 6th century

2. A water vessel neck decorated on the shoulder joint, wavy lines overlapping with straight lines(Valshi Castle, El, Nj. S. Gj. Rasti, inventory no. 13). Color in cores 2.5YR 5/3 (reddish brown) and the surface 10R 5/6 (red); clay mixed with mica and with white and gray quartz grains; smooth surface.

Date: 5 – 6th century

3. The bottom of flat pot (Valshi Castle, El, Nj. S. Gj. Rasti, inventory no.2) Color in cores 2.5YR 5/3 (reddish brown) and the surface 10R 5/6 (red); clay mixed with mica and with white and gray quartz grains; rough surface.

Date: 5 – 6th century

4. The bottom of flat pot((Valshi Castle, El, Nj. S. Gj. Rasti, inventory no.). Color in cores 2.5YR 5/3 (reddish brown) and the surface 10R 5/6 (red); clay mixed with mica and with white and gray quartz grains; rough surface.

Date: 5 – 6th century

5. The bottom of flat pot ((Valshi Castle, El, Nj. S. Gj. Rasti, inventory no.). Color in cores 2.5YR 5/3 (reddish brown) and the surface 10R 5/6 (red); clay mixed with mica and with white and gray quartz grains; rough surface.

Date: 5 – 6th century

6. The bottom of flat pot ((Valshi Castle, El, Nj. S. Gj. Rasti, inventory no.). Color in cores 2.5YR 5/3 (reddish brown) and the surface 10R 5/6 (red); clay mixed with mica and with white and gray quartz grains; rough surface.

Date: 5 – 6th century

7. The bottom of flat pot ((Valshi Castle, El, Nj. S. Gj. Rasti, inventory no.). Color in cores 2.5YR 5/3 (reddish brown) and the surface 10R 5/6 (red); clay mixed with mica and with white and gray quartz grains; rough surface.

Date: 5 – 6th century

8. The bottom of flat pot (Valshi Castle, El, Nj. S. Gj. Rasti, inventory no.). Color in cores 2.5YR 5/3 (reddish brown) and the surface 10R 5/6 (red); clay mixed with mica and with white and gray quartz grains; rough surface.

Date: 5 – 6th century

9. The bottom of flat pot (Valshi Castle, El, Nj. S. Gj. Rasti, inventory no.). Color in cores 2.5YR 5/3 (reddish brown) and the surface 10R 5/6 (red); clay mixed with mica and with white and gray quartz grains; rough surface.

Date: 5 – 6th century

10. The bottom of flat pot (Valshi Castle, El, Nj. S. Gj. Rasti, inventory no.). Color in cores 2.5YR 5/3 (reddish brown) and the surface 10R 5/6 (red); clay mixed with mica and with white and gray quartz grains; rough surface.

Date: 5 – 6th century

11. The bottom of flat pot (Valshi Castle, El, Nj. S. Gj. Rasti, inventory no.). Color in cores 2.5YR 5/3 (reddish brown) and the surface 10R 5/6 (red); clay mixed with mica and with white and gray quartz grains; rough surface.

Date: 5 – 6th century

## **Conclusions**

According to Mr. N.Ceka, this fortification has a mixed urban-rural character, which implies linking the function of agricultural production with the exchange with other centers. The castle of Valshi continued even after the Slavic invasions, but with a noted restriction of the living area and the intensity of life.

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