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FIELDWORK AT SCODRA 2011

Scodra (Alb. Shkodër¹) lies in northern Albania on the eastern shore of Lake Shkodër, in a place where three rivers converge: the Drin, the Buna and the Kiri. With 113 000 inhabitants it is one of the largest cities in the country.

Recently, no large scale excavations have been carried out at *Scodra*,² even though the likes of Theodor Ippen, Albanologist and Austro-Hungarian consul, Baron Franz Nopcsa, Hungarian palaeontologist and Arthur Evans, known for his discoveries at Knossos, undertook brief investigations here in the 19th and early 20th c. However, a new ambitious scientific project is bound to change the dissatisfying state of knowledge.³

It is known from written sources⁴ that in the 2nd c. BC the capital of the last Illyrian ruler Gentios was located at *Scodra*, and earlier during Illyria's prime in the 3rd c. BC Agron and his wife Teuta also ruled their lands from there. By 168 BC the entire territory was under the Roman control. *Scodra* became an important centre of trade and communication.

Scodra is situated near the bottleneck end of a spacious plain stretching from the Adriatic and Lake Shkodër, between the Tarabosh range in the west and the foothills of the Prokletije Mountains (the Albanian Alps) in the east. The lake is the largest one in the Balkans.⁵ The relief of the plain was shaped by the three rivers, the Buna carrying water from the lake, the Kiri with its source in the Albanian Alps and the Drin, flowing from the east.



Hydrology heavily influenced the settlement in the region, especially when the rivers gradually changed their course over time or suddenly due to an earthquake, as it was the case with the Drin⁶ (Fig. 1).

¹ For clarity, the Latin version *Scodra* of the town's name will be in use throughout the article. German and Italian sources will often employ the variations Scutari or Skutari, the Polish form is Szkodra.

² The last fieldwork being undertaken by G. Hoxna in 1988–1991. Cf. G. HOXNA, *Muri rrethues i priudhës së vonë Antike në qytetin e Shkodrës*, "Illyria" 1–2, 1994, 231–247.

³ Archaeological fieldwork in the former capital of Illyria is carried out on the basis of an agreement between the University of Warsaw, 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 side. During a five year scientific program we

intend to survey the topography of the antique town, establish its chronology, analyse 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.

⁴ POLYBIUS, *Histories*, 28.8; LIVY, *Ab Urbe condita*, 44.31.

⁵ E. SAMINI, *Albanien – zwischen Kreuz und Halbmond*, Innsbruck 1998, 40–64 (Geographie, Landschaft und Klima).

⁶ T. IPPEN, *Skutari und die nordalbanische Küstenebene*, Sarajevo 1907, 13–16; K. JIRIČEK, *Skutari und sein Gebiet im Mittelalter*, (in:) L. von Thallóczy (ed.), *Illyrisch-Albanische Forschungen*, vol. I, München – Leipzig 1916, 94–151, 102–103.

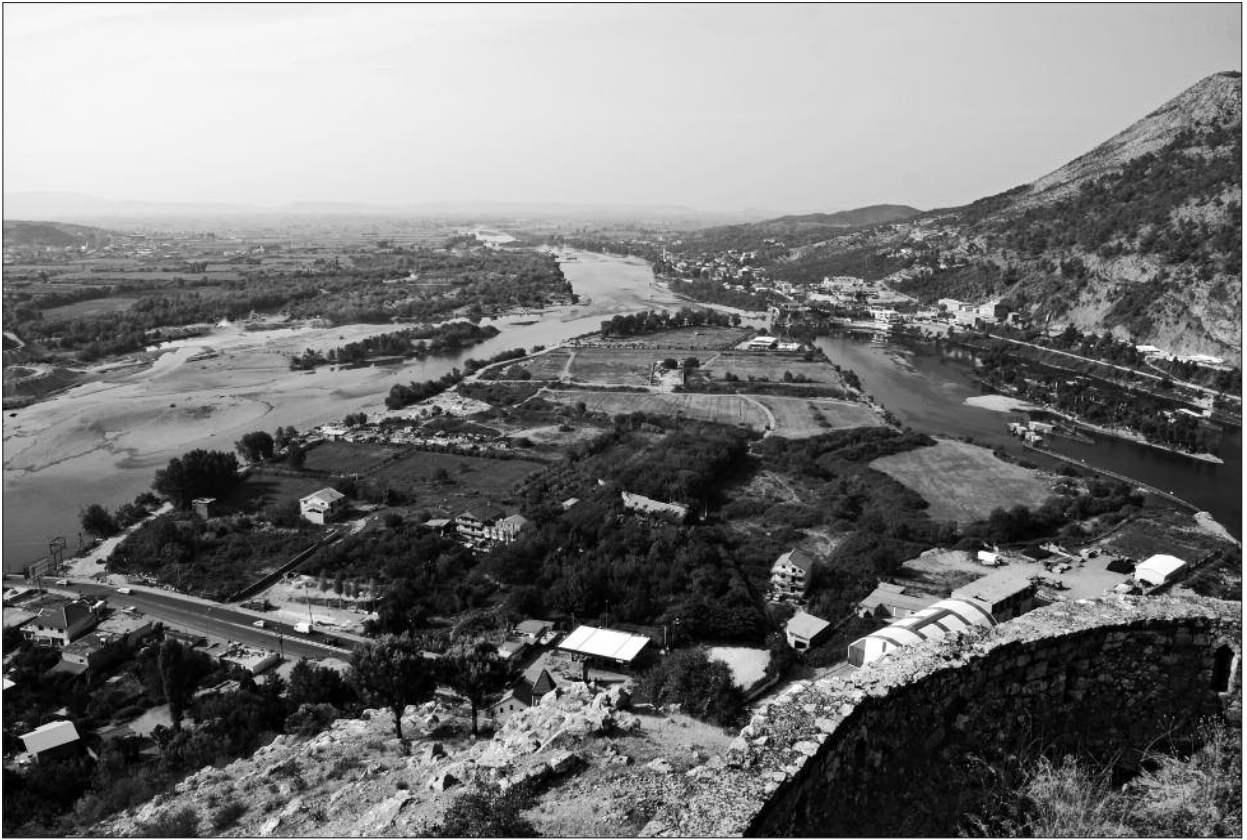


Fig. 1. The peninsula between the Drin and the Buna as seen from the castle of Rozafa (Photo M. Lemke).

Ryc. 1. Półwysep między rzekami Drin i Buna, widok z twierdzy Rozafa.

During the first campaign (12 September – 7 October 2011), a geodetic grid was established on a surface of more than 50 ha.⁷ In collaboration with the Römisch-Germanische Kommission from Frankfurt a geomagnetic survey was undertaken.⁸

The castle hill of Rozafa is towering 130 m above the plain. The fortress was erected in Venetian times, but fragments built by the Ottomans are also visible. The origins of the castle are mystified in an old legend, while modern research points at a Near Eastern provenience of its name.⁹ The singular topography of the castle hill was

already described by Livy, who wrote that it was the strongest (*munitissima*) of the Illyrian castles and difficult to reach (*difficilis aditu*).¹⁰ The surface on top was large enough (3.5 ha) for the entire first settlement, and only later the town at the foot of the hill developed. Consequently, the castle hill holds the key to the entire region. The earliest remains date back to Illyrian times and are built in the characteristic “Cyclopean” masonry (Fig. 2). Throughout the centuries and under different leaders, the fortress was besieged many times but was never conquered.¹¹

⁷ With the help of Mr. Stanisław Rzeźnik.

⁸ Dr. Gerda von Bülow and Dr. Christoph Rummel. Cf. C. RUMMEL, *Geomagnetic Research at Risan (CNG) and Shkodër (AL), 2011 Season*, “Novensia” 23, forthcoming.

⁹ Rozafa stemming from Resafa or Rusafa, a town in the Near East. Cf. G. HOXNA, *Scodra dhe Praevalis në antikitetin e vonë. (Scodra and Praevalis in Late Antiquity)*, Shkodër 2003, 179–181.

¹⁰ LIVY, *Ab Urbe condita*, 44.31.

¹¹ For an overview see: M. LEMKE, *Szkodra – legenda wielu epok*, “Archeologia Żywa” 58, 2011, 14–19; T. IPPEN, *Skutari und die nordalbanische Küstenebene*, Sarajevo 1907, 16–24; S. LUZATI, *Bauten und Architektur in Shkodra: Niedergang einer nordalbanischen Metropole*, (in:) E. SAMINI, *Albanien...*, 242–256. Specifically on the castle: C. PRASCHNIKER, A. SCHÖBER, *Archäologische Forschungen in Albanien und Montenegro*, Schriften der Balkankommission. Antiquarische Abteilung VIII, Wien 1919, 8–10.



Fig. 2. Illyrian wall as a foundation for Venetian architecture (Photo M. Lemke).

Ryc. 2. Mury iliryjskie nadbudowane w czasach weneckich.



Fig. 3. Inscription in the cistern pillar (Photo M. Lemke).

Ryc. 3. Inskrypcja w filarze cysterny.



Fig. 4. Trial trench on the town wall
(Photo M. Lemke).

Ryc. 4. Sondaż nad murem miasta.

The first archaeological task included draining and cleaning a cistern on the castle hill which was built in 1397, when the Venetian Republic decided to strengthen its fortresses in their Dalmatian lands (*Albania Veneta*).¹² It turned out that one of the supporting pillars held three inscriptions. The biggest and best preserved was written in Latin and revealed new information on the Roman military administration (Fig. 3). It concerns a *cornicularius* within the staff of a *primus pilus*. Towards the end of the text, *Scodra* is explicitly mentioned as a Roman *colonia*. This is only the second known inscription holding this valuable information and the first found at *Scodra* itself.¹³

The two other inscriptions in the pillar are of funerary character and are partially destroyed.

A complex prospection of the castle hill was undertaken, along with an inventory of the walls, including those earlier detected by Arthur Evans.¹⁴ Various new walls from the Illyrian phase of the fortress were discovered. This allows us to work on establishing the plan of the ancient fort and make plans for future trenches.

Fieldwork took place at two locations at the foot of the castle hill. 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

¹² O.J. SCHMITT, *Das venezianische Albanien (1392–1479)*, München 2001, 533.

¹³ The other being CIL III, no. 12695; cf. III: 2253 = ILS 7159,

from Doclea.

¹⁴ A. EVANS, *Antiquarian Researches in Illyricum*, Westminster 1883, 83.

Fig. 5. Decorative stuccos (Photo M. Lemke).

Ryc. 5. Zdobione stiuki.

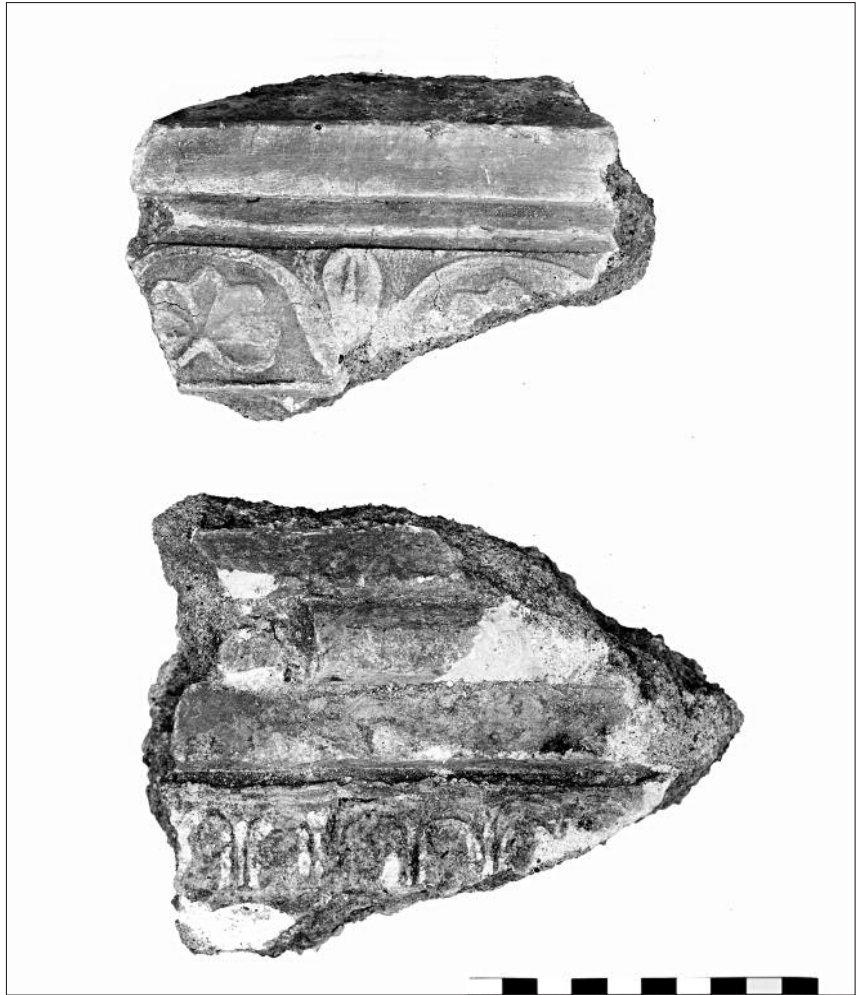


Fig. 6. Iron knife (Photo M. Lemke).

Ryc. 6. Nóż żelazny.



Buna, where the centre of the ancient town presumably lay. In both spots, fieldwork is difficult because of thick alluvial layers and emerging ground water. On the peninsula, parts of the town wall with a bastion (Fig. 4) and various stray finds were discovered. One of the trenches revealed strata from the 6th c. BC up to modern times. From the Hellenistic layers sherds of Gnathia pottery and amphorae were retrieved. Among more interesting finds, a number of sophisticated pieces of stucco, probably from a Hellenistic bath (Fig. 5) and a well preserved late antique iron knife (Fig. 6) are worth mentioning.

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 time. These objects allow an estimate of alluvial sediment stacked up during the last 250 years, since the Drin's course changed: more than 2 m.

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BADANIA TERENOWE W *SCODRA* W 2011 R.

Wykopaliska Ośrodka Badań nad Antykiem Europy Południowo-Wschodniej Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego w *Scodra* (pol. Szkodra) odbyły się po raz pierwszy. W ramach pięcioletniego programu naukowego planujemy rozpoznanie topografii antycznego miasta i jego chronologii, aby prześledzić główne etapy osadnictwa od najstarszych jego pozostałości po późny antyk.

Scodra leży w północnej Albanii, w niewielkim zwężeniu szerokiej równiny rozciągającej się wzdłuż wybrzeża Adriatyku i Jeziora Szkoderskiego, pomiędzy pasmem górskim Tarabosh od strony morza oraz pogórzem Alp Albańskich na wschodzie. Topografię całej równiny między jeziorem a górami kształtują trzy meandrujące rzeki. Obok płynącej z północy Kiri są to: Buna, odprowadzająca wodę z jeziora, płynąca przez zwężenie między pasmami górkami w kierunku Adriatyku na południe, oraz Drin, łączący się z Buną na wysokości wzgórza, na którym stoi potężna forteca Rozafa (**Ryc. 1**).

W czasie tegorocznej kampanii przede wszystkim wytyczono siatki geodezyjne na obszarze ponad 50 hektarów. Pierwsza praca stricte archeologiczna polegała na oczyszczeniu i przebadaniu cysterny wybudowanej w twier-

dzy Rozafa w czasach, gdy Republika Wenecka umacniała swoje posiadłości w *Albania Veneta*. Okazało się, że w jeden z filarów podtrzymujących strop cysterny wmurowano trzy inskrypcje. Większa i lepiej zachowana dotyczy *cornicularius* pracującego w sztabie *primus pilus* (**Ryc. 3**). Bardzo ważny fragment tekstu znajduje się na końcu napisu, gdzie wspomniano *Scodra* jako kolonię rzymską – jest to dopiero druga inskrypcja potwierdzająca taki stan rzeczy, a pierwsza znaleziona w samym mieście. Przeprowadzono też prospekcję całego stoku Rozafa oraz inwentaryzację murów (**Ryc. 2**). Badania wykopaliskowe przeprowadzono w dwóch miejscach. Jednym był płaski obszar leżący nad Drinem obok tzw. Meczetu Ołowianego, drugi to miejsce, w którym miał przebiegać późnoantyczny mur obronny *Scodra*, na półwyspie między Drinem a Buną. Odsłonięto drogę z czasów tureckich, która jest dla nas ważnym elementem orientacyjnym zabudowy, uchwycono także dwie nekropole szkieletowe. Odsłonięto fragment późnoantycznego muru obronnego z półokrągłymi basztami (**Ryc. 4**). Z hellenistycznych warstw archeologicznych wydobyto m.in. fragmenty ceramiki, w tym naczyń Gnathia, oraz ozdobne stiuki (**Ryc. 5**) i żelazny nóż (**Ryc. 6**).