

Chapter 6

Çuka e Aitoit/Monte Aetòs: Introduction

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Quando vidi per la 1^a volta M. Aetòs

Come lo scoprii:

vidi di lontano un colle isolato

Leggendo del vescovo

che voleva farvi degli scavi

Leggende riportate

nel Vol. Butrinto

Catena

Monte Sarakini

Monte Malesi

Valle o Gola Torrente Pirrota

M. Aetòs

vescovado nel IX sec

As with all his manuscripts Ugolini tended to work from a few brief notes to a full text, from handwritten to typed. The brief lines above are all that he penned of his planned introduction to the report on excavations at Çuka e Aitoit. It is possible, though, to reconstruct to a large degree what he intended to say. The mountain is one of the most visible natural features of the Butrint area, almost always visible, and on a clear day (especially immediately after rain) it seems almost touchable from the acropolis of Butrint. It was inevitable that Ugolini would be attracted towards it, and his accounts of his initial visit to Butrint (given in Chapter 1) include it as one of the three ancient cities that he 'discovered' during his initial days of exploration.

For his time Ugolini was a rather unusual archaeologist, and as an able publicist he concerned himself not only with archaeology but also with folklore and legend. His popular book, *Butrinto Il Mito D'Anea*, represented a masterly summation of his work linking the legendary and

factual in a single narrative. There he recorded the legend about Çuka e Aitoit that he was told, which is worth reproducing here in part:

La conduttura per il latte. — E credenza radi catissima e diffusa tra gli abitanti dei villaggi prossimi a Butrinto, quali Mursi, Conispoli e Zara, che, durante il periodo in cui a Butrinto avevano il potere le 'Monovise', (come si è detto, le Amazzoni), il latte fosse fornito da armenti pascolanti sul vicino monte Aetòs. Là c'erano novemila capi di bestiame appartenenti alla comunità di Butrinto, ove il latte giungeva mediante una lunga conduttura. A conferma di questi abitanti ciò un dato archeologica: i resti che ancora oggi appaiono di questa supposta condutti.

Che l'acquedoto sia esistito è un fatto positivo: io stesso ho visto i resti e ho seguito il percorso per alcune centinaia di metri nella pianura che va dalla fiumara di Butrinto a Zara: esso è di buona età romana imperiale'.

Evidentemente la leggenda è giunta a noi molto alterata, se addirittura noi non rappresentata altro che la fusione di due differenti racconti. Infatti vuol forse soltanto significare che gli armenti appartenenti agli abitanti di Butrinto pascolavano nelle urbetos e pianeggianti praterie della vallata di Monte Aetòs detta Kestrine dagli antichi; oppure attesta che l'acqua necessaria agli abitanti di Butrinto veniva da Monte Aetos.¹

While as a good fascist Ugolini understood and used the value of legend and myth, he based his own academic programme firmly in reality. The remainder of his introduction

intended to cover these aspects: the site's physical position, its historical position and some of his finds. It is clear that he identified the site with ancient Kestrine, and other surviving notes show that he was collecting sources for a full topographic discussion of this point. These notes were works in progress and hence Ugolini's historical interpretations are sometimes questionable. The Bishopric of Aetòs, for example, is that which existed at the site of Aetòs to the southeast of Vonitsa, now in Greek Epirus, rather than on the site of the same name near Butrint. However, the drafted chapters, as the following will show, are exemplary. Indeed, the overall site plan for Çuka e Aitoit illustrated in Figure 6.1 is that of the Italian Archaeological Mission, redrawn and annotated to indicate the features discussed.

Çuka e Aitoit and post-war archaeology

The task facing historians and archaeologists of Enver Hoxha's new Albania was to construct a systematic and well-documented Albanian past. Overriding importance was given to prove that the Albanians had inhabited the soil of the country from the most ancient of times in order to counter the territorial claims of surrounding powers. The principal vehicle was the study of the Illyrians, their ethnogenesis, and social patterns (especially in regard to a Marxist view of historical development), and how the ancient Illyrians were ethnically and culturally linked with modern Albanians.

With Soviet collaboration a number of major projects were begun to chart Albania's archaeological heritage. The most significant of these projects was the Harta Arkeologjike per Shqipëria (Archaeological Map of Albania), of which the most complete coverage was in the regions of Gjirokastra, Saranda, and Himara, all forming part of ancient Epirus.² Dhimosten Budina had used archaeological and historical data to prove the Illyrian ethnicity of Epirots and to reject a Hellenic origin.³ In the fortified sites of Chaonia – like Butrint, Çuka e Aitoit, Jerme and Kalivo – ceramics, metal objects and architectural monuments were found that showed common, and unique,

characteristics with other Illyrian centres. Consequently, the Hellenic population in Epirus could be viewed merely as a minority among an Illyrian majority. From the Vjosa River to northern Greece, Epirus was thus shown to be Illyrian.

The original social organisation of the cities in this Illyrian sea was represented as an ancient form of communist society, with a highly developed urban level. Basically egalitarian, Illyrian society was seen to have developed a class structure only as a result of influences that came through the relationships with the two Greek colonial cities on the Albanian coast, Apollonia and Orikum.⁴ The study of antiquity was marked by the use of Marxist terminology to describe social relations, and the essential contradictions of classes. It was this class struggle that propelled society forward. Following Marxist theory, the State was seen as a form of social dominance arising out of internal economic and social development.⁵ Albanian archaeologists thus concluded that a State existed in the 5th-4th centuries BC in Epirus and southern Illyria, a period of marked economic and social change. On a political level, this process was illustrated by the change from a military democracy into the domination of society by a class system. The most ancient State organisation of the Illyrians that is known was the political league of territorial tribes (*koinon*). The Albanian-Soviet Archaeological Mission, and the choice of its selected spheres of operations, was formed against this background. The ambitious archaeological programme would focus on the catalysts of change, the classical cities of Apollonia and Orikum, and on the indigenous sites where these changes could be observed, Ripes and Çuka e Aitoit. The latter, in particular, was an ideal choice for the site-focused archaeology of the time. It lay within the frontiers of Illyrian Epirus, within the *koinon* of the Praesebes, and it was clearly a significant walled settlement, though apparently unaffected by the Hippodamean organisation and public architecture that characterised the great Hellenic cities of Albania.⁶

Post-communist archaeology has been pre-occupied with more practical matters since 1992 and, while many of these traditional archaeological questions continue to be asked, research emphasis has moved into other areas.⁷ Çuka e Aitoit has been effectively ignored since then, the work of the 1950s remains unpublished and the inaccessibility of the site has taken it out of public view. As with virtually all Albanian sites of this nature this has had the effect of effectively removing it from any wider discussion. Recently the publication of a Danish survey on Cephallonia, in particular the detailed analytical study of the masonry types of fortified settlements, has pointed to the need to reintegrate sites like Çuka e Aitoit into international discussion, and, indeed, to re-assess them in the light of new work of this type.⁸ Other recent interest has centred around the later refortification, a phase largely ignored by Ugolini (except for his documentation of the circuit wall, see Chapter 9), and one that is still not satisfactorily dated or explained, though normally attributed to defensive measures undertaken in late antiquity.⁹ The very recent construction of a new road linking the site with the rest of Albania and a nearby border crossing to Greece may, perhaps, stimulate renewed interest in this significant archaeological site.

Notes

¹ Ugolini 1937: 84-85.

² Budina 1971a, 1972.

³ Budina 1971b: 112.

⁴ Buda 1976: 47.

⁵ Ceka and Ceka 1971: 140.

⁶ The region is also a modern area of minority Greek settlement, which would have added to the nationalist message of the programme.

⁷ Bejko 1998; Miraj and Zeqo 1993; Korkuti 2003.

⁸ Randsborg 2002.

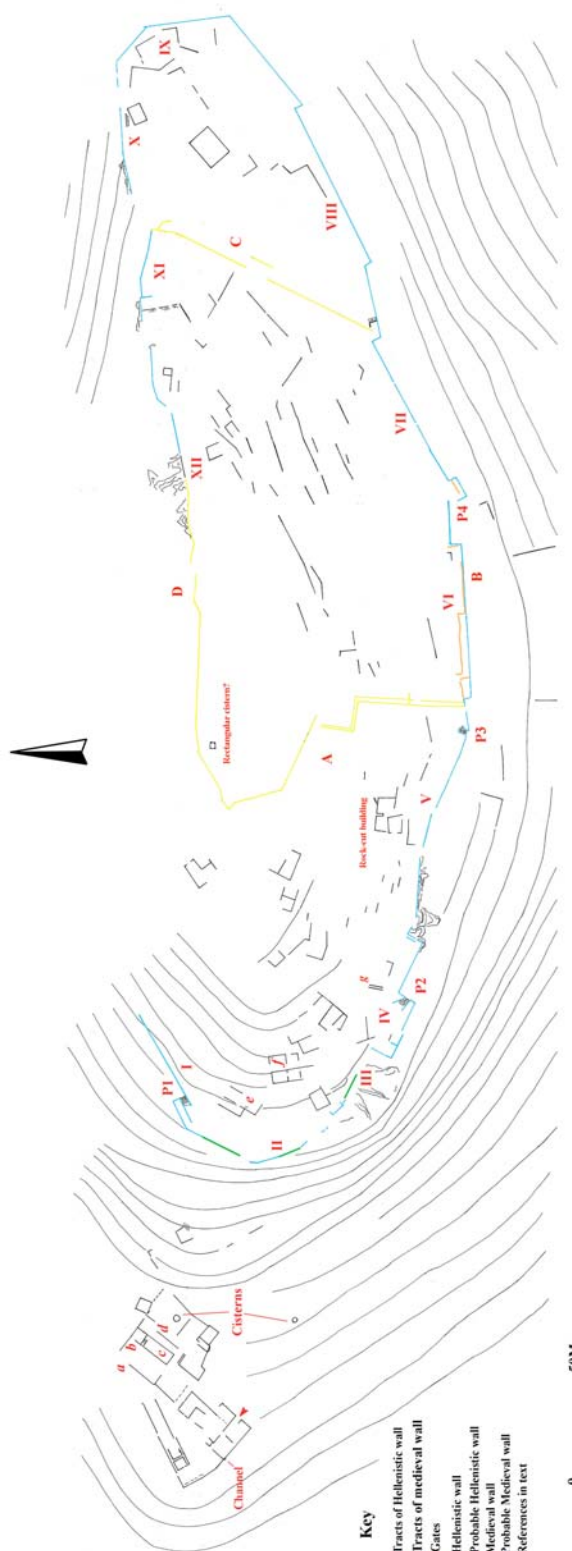
⁹ Bowden 2003: 180-185.

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Fig. 6.1 Plan of Çuka e Aitoit. Modern annotations on plan by the Italian Archaeological Mission 1929 (Roversi Monaco, MCR, BF)



- Key**
- III Tracts of Hellenistic wall
 - A Tracts of medieval wall
 - P2 Gates
 - Hellenistic wall
 - Probable Hellenistic wall
 - Medieval wall
 - Probable Medieval wall
 - e References in text

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