

SHORT REPORT ON *ON THE EDGE OF THE WAVES 2: EXCAVATION IN ALINURA BAY*

Introduction

This project of excavation in Alinura Bay (Butrint National Park) took place from the 30th June to the 11th July of 2014. The excavation was funded by the Butrint Foundation (UK) (data) and was supported by the University College of London in Qatar (UK-Qatar), the Institute of Archaeology (Albania), the Butrint National Park (Butrint), the Centre of Albanological Studies (Albania), the Butrint Heritage Centre (Albania), the University of Sheffield (UK) and the University of Granada (Spain)¹. It was codirected by Dr Jose C. Carvajal Lopez (UCL Qatar) and Prof Dhimiter Çondi (Institute of Archaeology), and the archaeologists Ms Erjona Qilla (Butrint National Park), Ms Samantha E. Garnwood (University of Sheffield) and Mr Javier Gomez Marin (University of York) took part in it.

Aim and preparation

The aim of the excavation was to enhance our knowledge of the site of Alinura Bay. The site was discovered in a survey (funded by the Butrint Foundation) by a team led by Dr Carvajal Lopez in 2010 (Carvajal Lopez et al. 2011). Some walls near the shore and abundant ceramic remains were located in one of the inlets of the Alinura Bay (Fig 1). The site, mostly underwater nowadays (due to the rising sea levels at Butrint), was clearly some kind of port that had been altered by recent transformations, like the digging of a trench near the shore. Its extent and its significance for Butrint was not understood; it was tentatively identified as a villa, but lack of more evidence has made researchers to be wary of this term. In 2012 Dr Carvajal Lopez and Dr Colin Merrony (University of Sheffield) undertook a geophysical survey of the area of the remains. The technique used was resistivity and the results showed two main anomalies in the area: one to the east was supposed to be related to subterranean water circulation, whereas the other, in the west, was tentatively interpreted as the remains of a building (Fig 2). Both anomalies were detected at a very shallow depth, at around 50 cm. (Carvajal Lopez and Merrony 2013). This information, combined with the emergence of limestone bedrock outcrops in the north-east part of the site, made the researchers think that

¹ The authors wish to thank the support of all these institutions.

the bedrock would be found at a shallow depth, and thus the potential of the remains was not beyond that of half a metre. This was an important element in the preparation of the campaign presented here.

The planning of the excavation designed two trenches, I and II, to cover respectively the east and the west anomalies. The concrete aims of this excavation were to investigate the layers immediately above the bedrock and their anthropisation, that is, how much they were affected by the archaeological site. Since most of the site is considered to be underwater nowadays, the possible remains were not supposed to be more than a small fraction of the total site, and the expectations about the conservation of these remains were small. As the bedrock was expected to be found very near the surface, the archaeologists decided to open wide trenches (5 x 5 m) and to reduce the area of the dig if the development of the excavations proved them to be too large for the capacity of the team. In fact, the remains reached deeper than what was initially sought, and both trenches eventually became reduced.

Trench I

The findings of Trench I (Figs 3, 8, 10) are very interesting, and yet they only show a small fraction of the site. With a depth of around 2 m, the archaeological remains of this trench contained a total of seven stratigraphic phases (Table 1), and amongst them two phases of the Roman period have been identified (with a possible hiatus in between which would count for a third Roman phase).

The earlier Roman phase (II) is marked by the presence of Walls 1028 and 1036, both arranged east to west and going inside the south and east profiles (Figs 8, 9, 10). These walls surround the Floor 1021, made of mortar and beaten earth. There were abundant chips of stone over the floor. The layer sealing Floor 1021 (Context 1020) contained 21 small finds, mostly iron nails, including a coin with the name of Nerva written over (Figs 4, 5; Nerva was emperor in CE 96-98 CE, but his name kept on appearing sporadically in coins at least until CE 115). Over Context 1020 another beaten earth-mad floor was documented: Context 1009, which marks the second Roman phase (IV). The floor contained another large number of small finds, again dominated by iron nails. Wall 1028 had to be rearranged before the construction of this floor, possibly because a sizeable part of it collapsed. A new wall (1027)

was abutted to Wall 1028 Bis (the new phase of the former wall; Figs 8, 10) towards the west, closing the space that was to be occupied by Floor 1009. The new construction very likely had a wooden cover, for the layer immediately over Floor 1009, Context 1008, was dark due to its abundant organic content and contained numerous iron nails once again (most of the 24 small finds were of this kind). In all the layers a total of 72 small finds were retrieved; besides the iron nails (Fig 6), there were several lead rolls (used to make fishing nets; Fig 7) and a minor number of fragments of bronze nails and fibulae. In general, the excavation has revealed two phases of a Roman space dedicated probably to the fabrication and repair of fishermen's utilities. This however does not tell very much about the size and significance of the site in the framework of Butrint, and the dates of the Roman phases still need to be studied and clarified.

The Roman period was not the only one represented in Trench I, however. In the deposits between the first Roman floor (1021) and the bedrock pieces of Hellenistic pottery were documented (Phase I). This pottery was found in secondary position, but it is clear that it came from somewhere nearby. As for the occupation of periods after the Roman era, the ground offers promising venues as well. In the excavated area to the southwest of the trench several remains of Venetian-Ottoman pottery were found (Phase VI). What is more relevant, a human skeleton was located in the limit with the south profile of the trench (Fig 11); since this discovery occurred in the last day of the excavation, only the first emerging remains of the skeleton were documented and then covered again to protect it until another research season is undertaken. Although there is no clear evidence, the skeleton seems to be buried according to the Christian ritual, that is, with laying in her/his back and with her/his hands over her/his chest. Its stratigraphic position is not totally clear, but it is probably related to a spectacular glazed bowl of the Venetian period (Fig 12).

Trench II

Trench II (Fig 13) offered results more in the line of those expected by the planning of the excavation (Table 2). The bedrock was documented at a depth of 70-80 cm. The deposit immediately over the bedrock (Context 1011) seemed to have been prepared to be used (Fig 14). A shallow pit (Context 1014, some 50 cm deep) had been carved in the northwest of the trench and surrounded with small walls (1016, 1017 and 1018; Fig 15). It is unclear if the pit

was ever used, as it seems to have been filled in with the debris of its own excavation. Towards the south, what seems to be the remains of a wall (1019) were documented. The use of the area during the Venetian-Ottoman period is attested by the scarce ceramic findings of that period. It is interesting to observe that the preparation of the area included the filling up of sizeable natural cavities in the rock with fragments of ancient tiles (from the Hellenistic or the Roman periods; Fig 16). This allows to ask the question whether there was an earlier preparation of the area for an occupation that has not been conserved.

Conclusions

1. The initial idea about the configuration of the site in relation to the shore of the lake and the proximity of the bedrock is only partially right. The archaeological potential of the western part of the site as defined is shallow, as the bedrock is very close to the surface. However, in the eastern part of the site the potential of the archaeological remains is notably higher, since the bedrock is located at much more depth (very close to the sea level). Therefore, the fraction of the site that is outside the water is larger than expected, and it seems to be easily reachable.
2. The site, which had been initially dated to the Roman period without evidence for more specific dates, shows that there are at least two Roman Phases, the earliest of which can be dated in the period of the very late first century CE or, more likely, early second century CE. Besides the Roman periods, there is evidence enough to suggest the existence of a Venetian-Ottoman Phase of which nothing is known yet.
3. The existence of this site in the Roman and Venetian-Ottoman periods adds up to other existing evidence on the occupation of the Ksamili Peninsula (Carvajal et al 2011, Crowson 2004), which is clearly an understudied topic in the Butrint National Park. In particular, the evidence uncovered sheds light on a crucial yet little known aspect of the economic life of the area: the exploitation of the sea and its relation to the spectacular growth of Butrint during the first and second centuries CE.

Final recommendations

In the interest of the aims of the Butrint Foundation, the Ksamili Peninsula should be protected as an archaeological area of interest and its research should be fostered. Particularly, the archaeological remains of Alinura are accessible and interesting enough to deserve the continuation of archaeological excavations. On the one hand, that would increase the knowledge on the relation of Butrint and its hinterland. On the other hand, it would also encourage the interest of the relevant authorities in the protection and conservation of the Ksamili Peninsula and in its inclusion in the circuit of the National Park as an integral part of the historic landscape of Butrint.

References

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Phase	Dating
I	Hellenistic?
II	Roman, late first to early second centuries CE
III	Roman (hiatus?)
IV	Roman
V	Collapse and hiatus?
VI	Venetian-Ottoman
VII	Modern (Communist-Postcommunist?)

Table 1. Phasing of Trench 1 with preliminary dating

Phase	Dating
I	Hellenistic? Venetian-Ottoman?

II	Venetian-Ottoman
III	Modern (Communist-Postcommunist?)

Table 2. Phasing of Trench 2 with preliminary dating

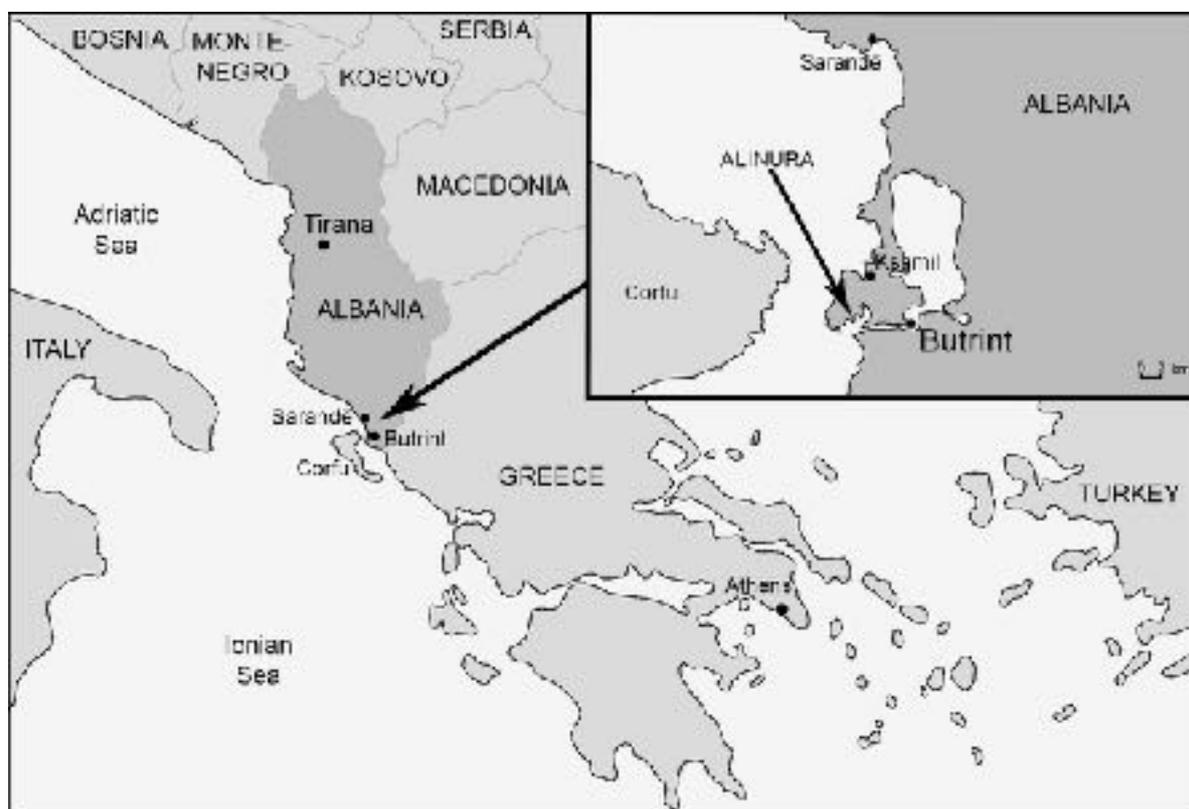


Fig 1. Map showing the location of Alinura (prepared by Colin Merrony, extracted from Carvajal and Merrony 2013)

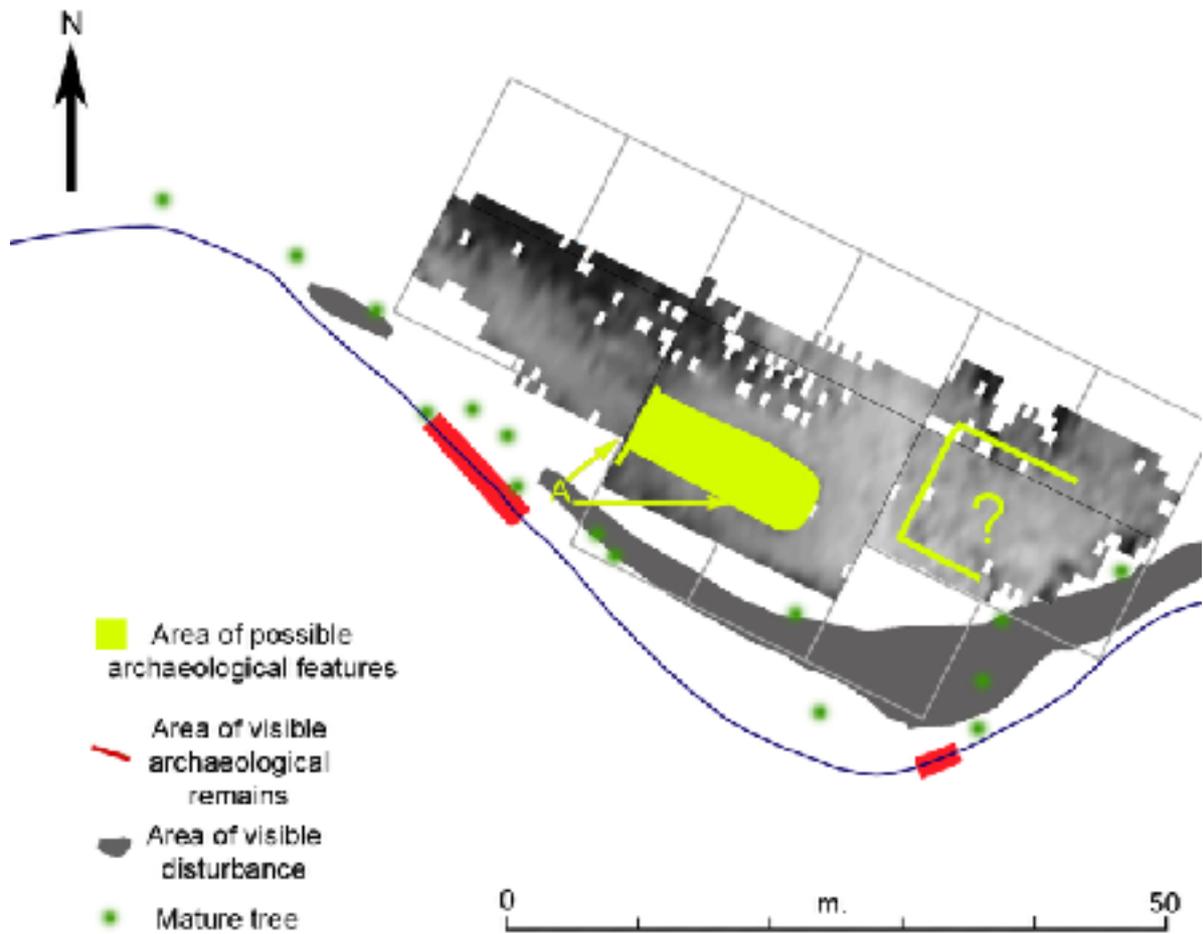


Fig 2. Greyscale plot of the results of the resistivity survey overlaid on to the topographic plane with the two areas of possible archaeological features (high resistance) indicated (Fig: Colin Merrony and Jose C. Carvajal Lopez, extracted from Carvajal and Merrony 2013). Trench I was placed over the SW corner of the eastern feature and Trench II was opened over the SW corner of the western feature, the possible building.



Fig 3. Beginning of the excavation of Trench I. A nicely cloudy day.



Figs 4 and 5. Coin found in Context 1020. The name of Nerva can be easily read on the coin (left).



Figs 6 and 7: Example of iron nail and of lead rolls, abundant small finds in the excavation.



Fig 8. Final aspect of Trench 1 in its SE corner. The wall on top of the corner is 1028. It has its top part arranged in a very different way than in the lower part (the stones on top have a different bonding and they form a line that is over the edge of that of the lower stones). This shows that the wall was remade at a later moment.



Fig 9. Final aspect of Trench I, corner NE. The bedrock can be seen covered in mud, because its marks the beginning of the water table (equivalent to that of the sea level).



Fig 10. Final aspect of the excavation of Trench I in the SW corner. The two walls 1029 and 1027 are perpendicularly abutted to Wall 1028, which disappears towards the west. In the bottom right corner of the image the arm of the skeleton (Context 1033) can be seen.



Fig 11: Detail of the skeleton (Context 1033) found in the S profile of Trench I. The two long bones form belong to an arm that is bent over the ribs, which are visible near in the top centre of the image. The elbow is buried to the left, while the shoulder bone emerges to the right.



Fig 12. Fragment of Sgraffito Ware, a distinctly Venetian type of pottery, found in Trench I (Context 1008), very near the skeleton of Context 1033.



Fig 13. Work in progress in Trench II surrounded by unexpected public.



Fig 14. Level of preparation (Context 1011) of Trench II.



Fig 15. Detail of the pit found in the NW corner of Trench II.



Fig 16. Detail of the fill-in of ancient tiled of the natural cavities of the bedrock in Trench II.