

The walled town of Dyrrachium (Durrës): new light on the early defences

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with a contribution by P. Reynolds

Introduction

This paper presents the results of fieldwork carried out at Durrës (*Dyrrachium*¹) in September 2001 and April-May 2002, and addresses a number of issues which were raised in a previous paper.² That paper presented an analysis of the fortifications based solely on topographic analysis and the work of previous researchers. As the addendum to that paper noted, there has recently been opportunity to examine a portion of the upstanding late-antique defensive circuit through limited excavation. The excavations focussed on two distinct sites, which we shall refer to as the S site (the subject of our earlier addendum) and the N site. The former furnished the first direct evidence of at least one, if not two, phases of wall building underlying the well-preserved late-antique walls. The N site contained single-period remains, of late-antique date, which relate to an archaeologically unknown section of city wall. This new evidence has required not only a re-assessment of some of our earlier conclusions but a contextual analysis of the city's fortifications against the wider background of the Adriatic region.

The main points of our earlier argument that need correction or adjustment concern (i) the defensive sequence as a whole, and (ii) the existence of an outer defensive circuit (the 'third', or 'northern' circuit). It will be useful to summarise the changes before turning to the archaeological material in greater detail.

The defensive sequence

A major problem concerning the defensive system of Durrës has been that the earliest extant circuit appeared to be of late-antique date. Although the balance of probability favoured the existence of an earlier circuit, no clear archaeological evidence confirmed this hypothesis. Our excavations on the S side of the defensive circuit have now produced evidence for possible Hellenistic and definite Roman-period defensive building on the same line as the late-antique wall. We must also correct the addendum with regard to the narrowness of the stretch of late-antique wall exposed at the S site. We had noted that in places it had a width of only 0.7 m, substantially less than the well-preserved stretch on the W side of the circuit, and we speculated that this could have been explained by its use as an internal defensive structure, with further outlying walls (perhaps surrounding a harbour) beyond it to the south. Close examination has shown that the thinness is actually the result of a secondary vertical slicing that removed a third of its thickness on its outer face.

An outer (northern) circuit

Previously (*JRA* 14, 404-5) we made reference to an outlying northern circuit of possible late-antique date, the existence of which had been proposed in earlier literature. We commented negatively on the likelihood of its existence. During 2001, however, an investigation of a building site in the N part of the modern town revealed evidence of a brick tower-like structure, in a position close to what had been the projected line of this northern circuit.

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- 1 Clarification of terminology is necessary at the outset. *Epidamnos* is used in relation to material which most obviously relates to the Greek colony; *Dyrrachium* refers to the Roman and late-antique periods of the town; and *Durrës* refers both to the modern city and to the entire settlement in its historical and geographic setting. Other names that may be familiar are *Durazzo* (Italian) and *Dıraç* (Turkish).
 - 2 A. Gutteridge, A. Hoti and H. R. Hurst, "The walled town of Dyrrachium (Durrës): settlement and dynamics," *JRA* 14 (2001) 390-410.