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KILNS IN ALBANIA

An overview

The archaeological excavations undertaken in Albania since the Second World War have very often offered new evidence for the existence of kilns for pottery as well as for construction materials. The recorded evidence ranges from classical antiquity until the late medieval period. However, the majority of the published sources give evidence for wasters or indirect traces for the presence of kilns. There are only four cases where actual structures of kilns have been found and analyzed but only in two out of four cases is this analytical study accompanied by any illustration.

This contribution aims to give an overview of the direct and indirect information concerning the existence of kilns in the territory of Albania, producing a distribution map of their presence. The published evidence is further extended by information offered by recent discoveries in Durrës and Gramsh.

Secondary sources on the presence of kilns (fig. 1)

In 1949 was published the first information on the presence of a considerable amount of bricks and tiles in the southern part of the settlement of Gurëzeze, as well as the presence of bricks stamped HAIRENOS¹. The documentation of this find as well as the traces of red soils around the structures, made it possible for the Albanian archaeologists to identify a whole quarter with workshops, which remains still unexcavated.

A report on the Albanian-Soviet excavations in 1958 in the ancient site of *Apollonia* mentions the finding of a die used for stamping inscriptions, fragments of a kiln and iron waste, as well as the foundations of a kiln used for firing the pottery². Similarly, in 1976 in *Apollonia* was found a dump of a pottery kiln, which was subjected to chemical analyses³.

At the castle of Irmaj (dated 4th cent. BC–1st cent. AD) have been identified tile wasters of the 2nd cent. BC–1st cent. AD. Furthermore the author suggests the identification of a kiln presence. This site is identified with *Kodrion*, a city of the Illyrian tribe of *Dassareti*, mentioned by Polybius (5,108,2,8) and Livy (31,27,1–5)⁴.

In 1973 at the ancient settlement of Klos, identified with *Nikaia* were recorded waster remains and kiln-spacers. Concerning these remains, the author of the report suggests the presence of a Hellenistic kiln⁵.

In c. 1974, at the city of Berat, were found a number of wasters of pans and plates⁶. During the same period, at



Fig. 1. Map of Albania.

- ¹ ANAMALI 1949, 55.
- ² BILAVATSKI/ISLAMI 1960, 63–64; 86.
- ³ TOLE ET AL. 1984, 238.
- ⁴ PRENDI/BUDINA 1972, 31–32.
- ⁵ PAPAJANI 1974, 96.
- ⁶ SPAHIU 1975, 81.

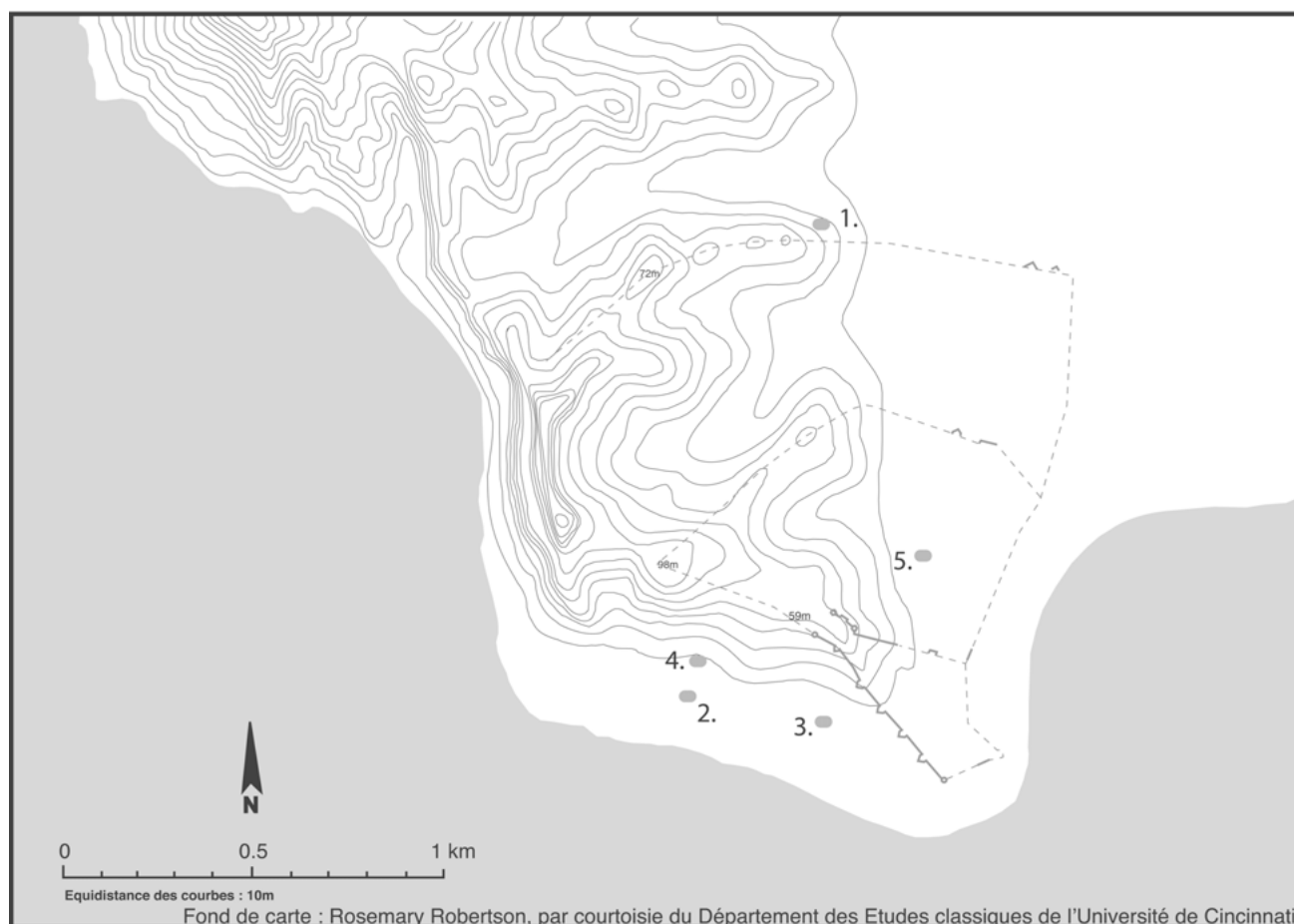


Fig. 2. Map of Durrës.

Gradishtë e Symizës, were also recovered several pottery wasters⁷.

The archaeological excavation at the Illyrian centre of *Dimal*, offers wasters of the Hellenistic period⁸. Furthermore, fragments of wasters have also been reported at Selcë e Poshtme⁹.

At Durrës (fig. 2,1) has been found the waste dump of a pottery workshop, obviously producing 'Megarian bowls' as a primary product. In addition to the considerable amount of wasters, several moulds used for the production of the bowls were also found. In the distribution map, published by the author, are indicated another two points where traces of pottery kilns were found, however any further explanation is missing¹⁰. In Durrës is also mentioned the presence of moulds used for producing lamps with appliqué decoration¹¹.

The kilns

The first published kiln was found in 1971 at Kuç i Zi. It measured 3m long and 2m wide. The firing chamber was separated from the combustion chamber by a platform constructed of bricks, placed over four double piers joined by arches (fig. 3, after KOMATA 1971). This substructure was also built of bricks, measuring 0.36/0.38 × 0.06/0.08m. The only bonding material was clay. The pavement separating both spaces is pierced by five lines of holes, parallel with

each other with N-S orientation. The combustion chamber has two stoke-holes, on the east and west sides, 0.60–0.80m in height. The author suggests that this kiln was used for firing construction material, possibly dated during the 4th–1st centuries BC.¹²

In an article on the survey of 1974 undertaken in the Gjirokastra district, village of Erind, are reported several objects dated in the 3rd–2nd centuries BC as well as the remains of two kilns of conical shape. The outer faces of the kilns were built out of small stones bonded with clay. One of them survived to a height of 1.5m with the diameter of the lower base being 0.60m and the top diameter 0.30m¹³. No finds are illustrated by the author.

In 1984 were published the results of the excavation at the medieval site of Mashkjezë where a pottery kiln was identified. This was semicircular with an inner diameter of 2m. The walls, with a width of 0.60–0.70m, were made out of small stones and tile fragments bonded with clay. The inner part had a gradual closure with vaults constructed of bricks bonded with clay. In total, the kiln was 2m high. The

⁷ LERA 1974, 90.

⁸ DAUTAJ 1976, 153.

⁹ CEKA 1972, 176.

¹⁰ HIDRI 1976 fig.1.

¹¹ MYRTO 1987, 251.

¹² KOMATA 1971, 264–266.

¹³ BUDINA 1974, 359.

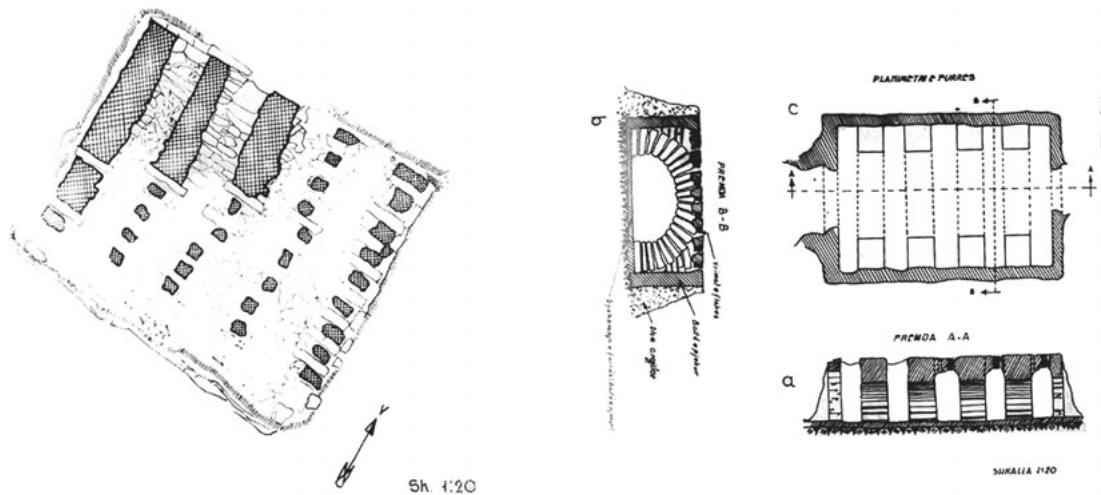


Fig. 3. Kiln in Kuç i Zi (after KOMATA 1971).

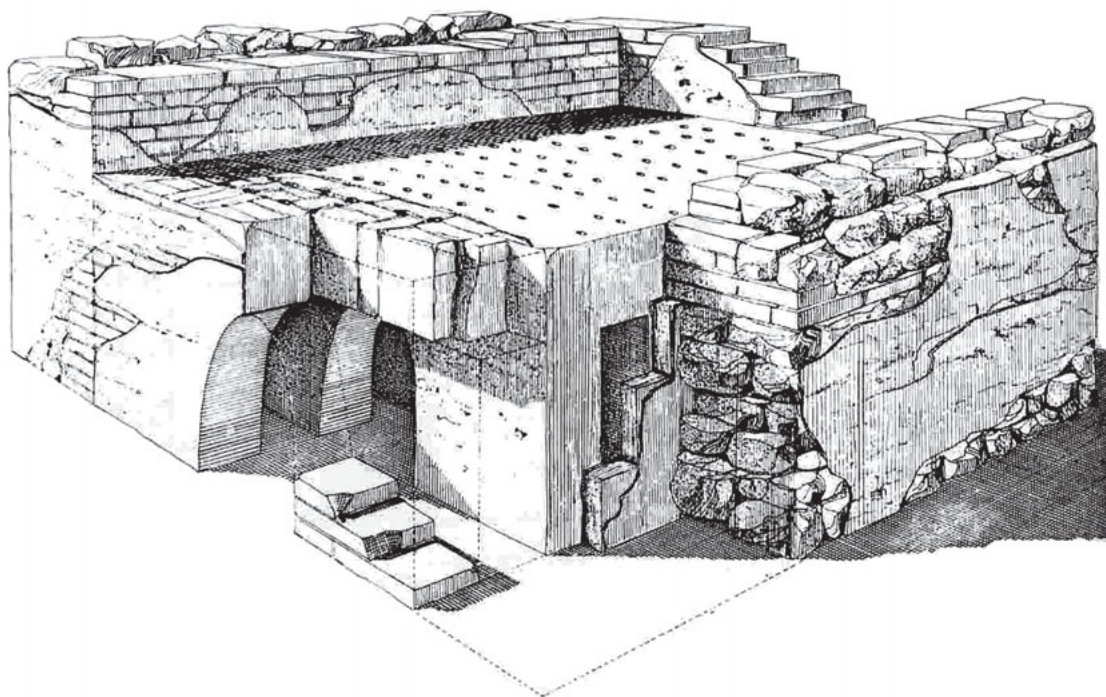


Fig. 4. Kiln in Durrës (after PANI/PAPAJANI 1986).

kiln pavement was flattened with clay placed over a layer of stones and bricks. It was constructed prior to the construction of the medieval city wall of the 13th century.¹⁴

The best published documentation followed by a detailed description is offered in a report of 1986, concerning a pottery kiln found in Durrës. It was located in the north-western part of the city, near the hill side of Currila. The kiln had a quadrangular shape (fig. 2,2; 4), measuring 4 × 3m and 1.2m in height. It was composed of two parts, the combustion chamber and the firing chamber, divided by a horizontal floor made out of unfired bricks (for this reason the authors suggest the kiln was never used), placed over a group of seven parallel lines of wall. The upper closure of the spaces was constructed out of unfired bricks ($0.37 \times 0.23 \times 0.07\text{m}$,

$0.47 \times 0.26 \times 0.05\text{m}$, $0.44 \times 0.21 \times 0.08\text{m}$) bonded with clay. There are no details given, concerning the small finds recovered from the area of the kiln.¹⁵

Current information

During an abusive excavation in c. 2000, in the city of Durrës, remains of a kiln structure for producing tiles and table ware was demolished (fig. 2.3). It was possible to document only parts of its structure: parts of the combustion chamber, parts

¹⁴ MUÇAJ 1984.

¹⁵ PANI/PAPAJANI 1986.



Fig. 5. Kiln in Hostenth (photo A. S. Ballolli).



Fig. 6. Kiln in Hostenth (photo A. S. Ballolli).

of two unidentified spaces, a pile of tiles, some bearing stamps. The surviving part of the combustion chamber consisted of a brick wall 0.07–0.09m high, bonded and plastered with clay, vitrified as a result of firing. The upper part of this wall was arched. The remaining spaces, partly preserved, were made out of bricks $0.44 \times 0.08/0.09$ m, bonded with clay. The recorded pottery fragments dated this workshop in the 1st century BC, however the stamped tiles offer a date not later than c. 30 B.C, corresponding to the period when *Dyrrachium* became a Roman colony¹⁶.

Furthermore, as a result of abusive excavation within the city of Durrës the structure of another workshop, also located in the hillside area of Currila, was demolished (fig. 2,4).

During the rescue excavations in the city centre, there were found terracotta moulds and terracotta dumps (dated in the 3rd–2nd century BC) as well as related structures suggested to have been used for producing pottery during the 2nd–3rd centuries AD. (fig. 2,5)

At Lezha, further northwards along the coast, have been found tripods, used as spacers between the objects within the kiln, as well as wasters.

At Phoinike in the extreme south of the country, recent excavation have yielded a mould for producing “Megarian” bowls¹⁷.

In 2006, at the village of Hostenth (Gramsh), near the castle of Irmaj, was recorded the presence of four kilns, differing in shape and size. The first kiln (fig. 5–6) was found casually by a villager named Abedin Sabri Ballolli. Based on his photos as well as on a preliminary evaluation of the site, its measurements should have been $1.9/2.0 \text{ m} \times 2.0/2.1 \text{ m}$. The upper part of the combustion chamber was clearly distinguished, having an arched shape, with a perforated floor above as well as an oval opening for the stoke-hole.

The second (unexcavated) kiln is easily distinguished in an eroded part of the terrain. The floor over the combustion chamber is circular, 70% preserved, 1.8m wide and 1.1m high.

From the third kiln we were able to identify only the holes in the floor of the firing chamber, with a diameter of 0.08–0.10m, set 0.12–0.17m apart. The lines of holes stand 0.20m from each other (fig. 7).

The fourth kiln could not be located; however the same persons who discovered the first kiln confirmed its presence.

The impossibility of finding any pottery fragments made it difficult to suggest any possible date concerning these kilns. Finally, it is worth remembering that at the castle of Irmaj (dated in the 4th century BC–1st century AD), there has been found evidence for the presence of kilns.¹⁸

Except for the city of Durrës, where the finds are abundant, the overall information for the rest of the sites, is not really sufficient to allow any conclusive suggestion concerning dating evidence for the presence of kilns, chronological evolution or their products.

The finds from Durrës demonstrate that the production of pottery vases was primarily concentrated outside the city wall, in the clay hill area of Currila. It is only one documented case for the production of pottery within the city. Regarding the chronology of these finds, it seems that the majority of them relate to the 3rd – 1st centuries BC, documenting a notable absence during the Roman period.

However, this is a preliminary effort to try and suggest ideas for the distribution of kilns as well as to attract attention for any further archaeological project.

Addendum:

During a survey in June 2009 in the settlement of Gurëzezë it was possible to discover four more pottery kilns, partially preserved.

¹⁶ E. SHEHI 2007.

¹⁷ GAMBERINI/VECCHIETTI 2008.

¹⁸ PRENDI/BUDINA 1972, 31–32.



Fig. 7. Kiln in Hostenth.

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