

RECOVERING AND IMPROVING ELBASAN FORTRESS

An Albanian Citadel from Via Egnatia
to n° 8 Trans-European Transport Network

by Roberto G. Pierini

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SCAMPIS/HISCAMPIS: CITY WALLS AND ANCIENT TOWN PLANNING. A FEW REMARKS

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SCAMPIS/HISCAMPIS: MURA URBANE E ASSETTO URBANO ANTICO. CONSIDERAZIONI

La città romana denominata dalle fonti Scampis/Scampa/MansioHiscampis, oggi Elbasan, fu un centro strategicamente rilevante ubicato nella valle del fiume Shkumbin, in prossimità dello sbocco della gola valliva e lungo un antichissimo tracciato che venne sostanzialmente ricalcato dalla via Egnatia, aperta nel 146 a.C.. I segmenti della via Egnatia da Durazzo e da Apollonia confluivano ad occidente della città in un unico tracciato, che costituì il principale asse Est-Ovest ("decumanus maximus") dell'impianto urbanistico romano pianificato a cavallo di esso.

L'abitato venne protetto da una cinta fortificata con perimetro rettangolare (m 308 E-W per 348 N-S), conservata per buona parte del circuito; essa ebbe un importante ruolo militare ma anche ideologico in quanto "paesaggio del potere" romano (III-IV sec. d.C.), bizantino (VI sec. d.C.) e ottomano (XV sec.).

Per la tecnica edilizia e l'articolazione strutturale (presenza di torrioni angolari "a ventaglio", di torri "ad U" e di porte urbane difese da torri), la cinta si può datare al III-IV sec. d.C.: tale tipologia difensiva è collegata all'evoluzione dell'artiglieria e in particolare all'introduzione, prima della metà del IV sec. d.C., di una catapulta per lanciare pietre, ad un braccio, di dimensioni molto più grandi rispetto alle ballistae tipiche dei secoli precedenti, che lanciavano frecce o pietre.

Questa tipologia di torrioni esterni "ad U" e varie forme di ventaglio, a forte proiezione, si riscontra soprattutto nelle regioni del Basso Danubio e in Oriente, aree nelle quali l'esercito romano aveva peculiari necessità di difesa.

La tessitura muraria (opus mixtum) di III-IV sec. d. C. è conservata nella parte inferiore della cinta per un'altezza massima di 3 metri e costituisce la base dell'intero circuito murario. Il paramento è caratterizzato dalla presenza di quattro filari di laterizi legati con malta (altezza totale 30 cm = circa 1 piede romano). I ricorsi in laterizio sono estesi all'intero spessore del muro. I laterizi misurano cm 36 x 24 x 4/5.

Della fase di età bizantina (VI sec. d.C.) sono conservate soltanto alcune tracce sui muri Sud ed Ovest. Si tratta di interventi di restauro caratterizzati da ricorsi di tre laterizi che si distinguono da quelli della cortina di IV sec. d.C. per le dimensioni e per la presenza di bolli con simboli cristologici e a forma di delfino.

La ricostruzione della cittadella fu realizzata nel 1466 per volontà del sultano Mehmet II: le mura dovevano essere adattate alle nuove esigenze sorte a seguito dell'introduzione delle armi da fuoco. La cortina fu realizzata utilizzando laterizi prelevati dai paramenti delle epoche precedenti e gettati confusamente nell'opera cementizia.

Nel 1832 Reshid Ahmed Pascià fece smantellare parte della fortezza; questa fu poi gravemente danneggiata da un terremoto nel 1920 e dal-

SCAMPIS/HISCAMPIS: PLANIMETRIA E QYTETIT ANTIK DHE TË MUREVE TË TIJ

Qyteti romak i quajtur nga burimet Skampis/Scampa/Mansio/Hiscampis, Elbasani i sotëm, ka qenë një qendër strategjikisht e dukshme e vendosur në luginën e lumit Shkumbin, në afërsi të daljes së Grykës të Shkumbinit dhe përgjatë një traseje të përshkruar nga epoka antike, që u shkelën kryesisht në rrugën Egnatia, e hapur në 146 p. e.s. Segmentet e rrugës Egnatia nga Durrësi dhe Apollonia kryqëzoheshin në perëndim të qytetit në një trase unike, që përbënte aksin kryesor Lindje - Perëndim ("decumanus maximus") të qytetit romak të planifikuar mbi të.

Qyteti mbrohej nga një mur rrethues fortifikues me perimetër drejtkëndor (m 308 L-P 348 V-J), ku një pjesë e mirë e perimetrit ruhet akoma sot; ajo pati një rol të rëndësishëm ushtarak por dhe ideologjik si "pasazh i fuqisë" romake (shek III-IV e.s.), bizantine (shek VI e.s.) dhe osmane (shek XV).

Për nga teknika ndërtuese dhe lidhja strukturore (prania e kullave anësore në trajtë freskoreje, me kulla në forme U-je dhe me porta të mbrojtura me kulla), muri rrethues mund të datohet në shek III-IV e.s.: kjo mënyrë mbrojtëse është e lidhur me evoluimin e armëve e në veçanti me futjen, përpara gjysmës së parë të shek IV e.s., të një katapulte për të hedhur gurë, me përmasa shumë më të mëdha se sa me ballistae tipike të shekujve të mëparshëm, që gjuanin shigjeta ose gurë. Këto tipe kullash të jashtme në forme U-je dhe me forma të ndryshme freskoreje, me një mbrojtje të fortë, ndeshenin kryesisht në rajonet e Danubit të poshtëm dhe në Lindje, zona në të cilat ushtria romake kishte në veçanti nevojë për mbrojtje.

Përbërja e mureve (opus mixtum) e shek III-IV e.s. ruhet në pjesën e poshtme të murit rrethues me një gjatësi maksimale prej 3m dhe përbën bazën e të gjithë murit rrethues. Veshja e mureve karakterizohet nga prania e 4 rreshtave me tulla të lidhura me llaç (gjatësi totale 30 cm=1 këmbë romake). Përdorimi i tullave është i shtrirë në të gjithë trashësinë e murit. Tullat janë 36x24x4/5.

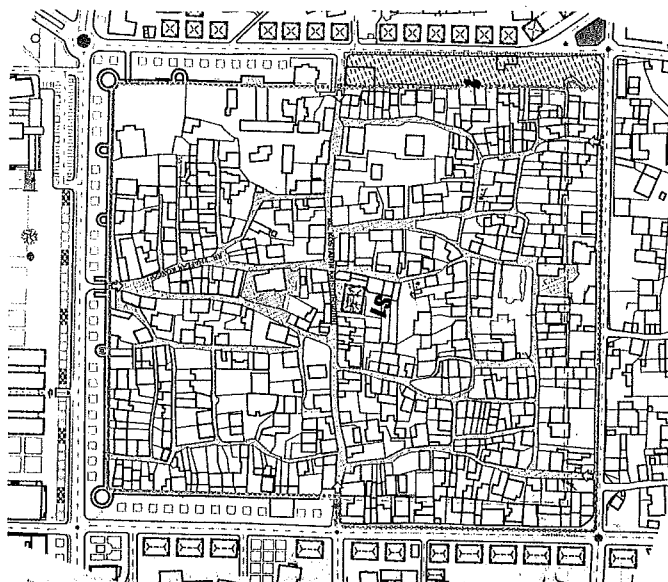
Nga faza e periudhës së kohës Bizantine (shek IV p.e.s) janë ruajtur disa gjurmë në muret jugore dhe perëndimore. Bëhet fjalë për ndërhyrje restauruese të karakterizuara nga 3 rreshta me tulla të cilat dallohen nga ato të kortina të shek IV p.e.s, nga përmasat dhe nga prania e stemave me simbole kristiane, në forme delfini.

Rindërtimi i Çitadelës u realizua në 1466 nga sulltan Mehmeti II : muret duhet të përshtrateshin me kërkesat e reja të lindura nga futja e armëve të zjarrit. Kortina u realizua duke përdorur tulla sipas parametrave të epokave të mëparshme të hedhura në mënyrë të çrregullt në veprën çimentuese. Në 1832 Reshit Ahmet Pasha shkatërroi një pjesë të ndërtesës; e cila u dëmtua shumë nga tërmeti i 1920 dhe nga grabitjet e vazhdueshme nga banoret e Çitadeles, kryesisht gurë dhe tulla. Në vitet 70-80 muret e Elbasanit qenë objekt restaurimesh të vazhdueshme, falë të cilave muret rrethuese mundën të rikuperonin, të paktën, pjesërisht format e tyre madhështore.

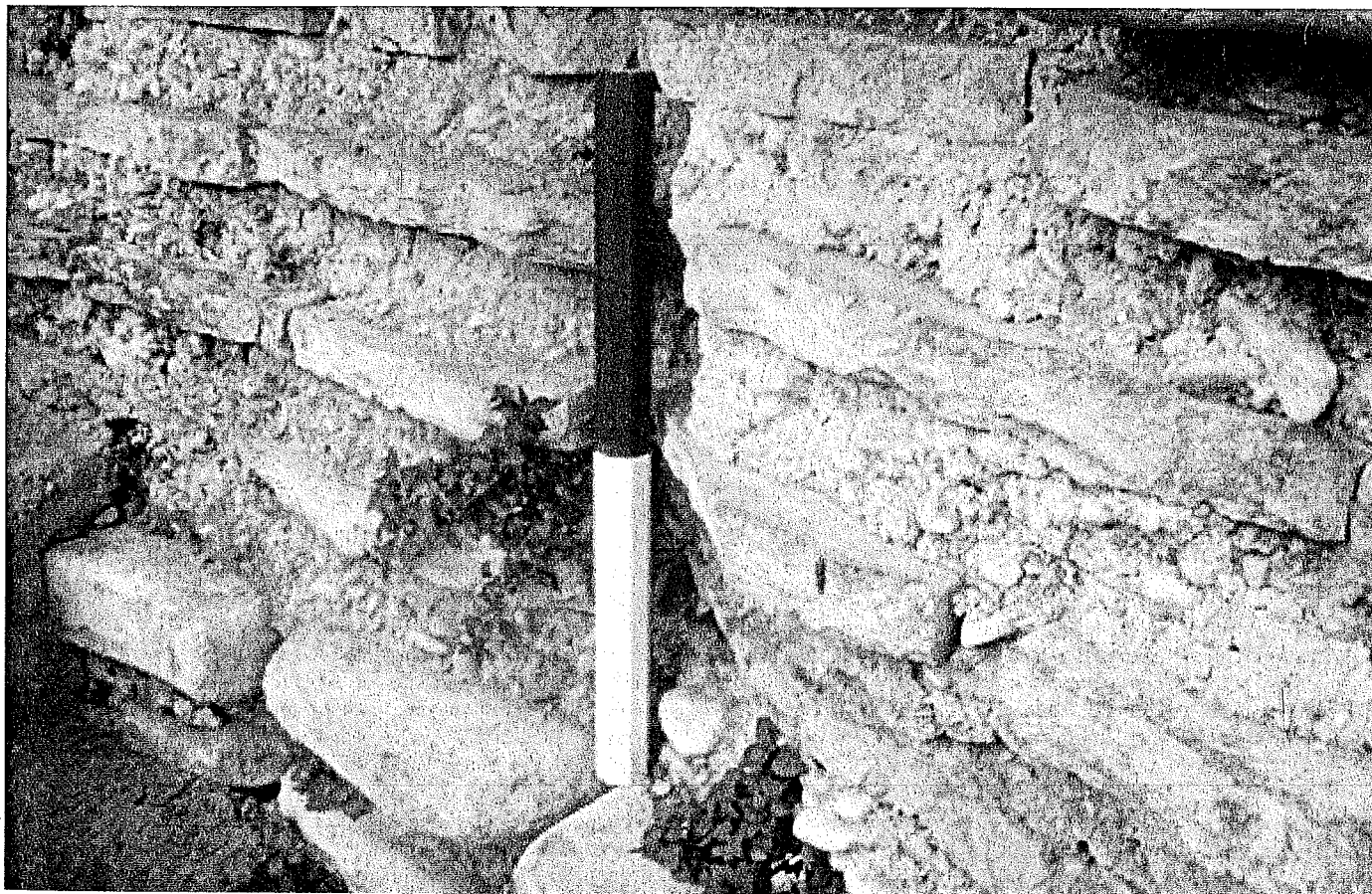
la continua spoliazione da parte degli abitanti della cittadella, che ne prelevavano pietre e mattoni.

Negli anni 1970-80 le mura di Elbasan furono oggetto di sistematici lavori di restauro, grazie ai quali la cinta muraria ha potuto recuperare almeno in parte le sue imponenti forme.

Per quanto concerne l'impianto urbano romano, alcune modularità individuabili nell'attuale tessuto viario potrebbero conservarne traccia. Analogamente, qualche asse stradale e confine di proprietà potrebbero evocare una via pomeriale e un segmento del "cardo maximus" (quest'ultimo nella porzione meridionale dell'abitato e sull'asse della porta "del Mercato"). Ma, ovviamente, per studiare la topografia urbana del sito antico è indispensabile poter disporre di una carta archeologica di Elbasan sulla quale siano georeferenziati tutti i rinvenimenti archeologici noti.



Plain of the walls of Elbasan.



Roman walls characterized by four rows 30 cm high of bricks embedded in mortar.

The Roman town Scampa / Scampis / Hiscampis (present Elbasan) and its territory (ancient settlements, roads, infrastructures) are documented by literary, epigraphic and archaeological sources. The hypothesis identifying Elbasan with Albanopolis, supported in the past by a few relevant scholars (Fasolo 2003, p.146, nr 29), is now abandoned.

The town was located in the river Shkumbin (ancient Genysos) valley. The present river name derives from the ancient city name Skampa/Skampis (Babinger 1931, p.1). The territory was and is rich in agricultural resources. The site controlled a very relevant segment of the via Egnatia (opened in 146 B.C.). Its two branches respectively from Epidamnos/Dyrrhachium (Durazzo) and Apollonia joined up in the Shkumbin valley West of Elbasan, most probably where the statio/mansio Clodiana/Coladiana (see below) was located.

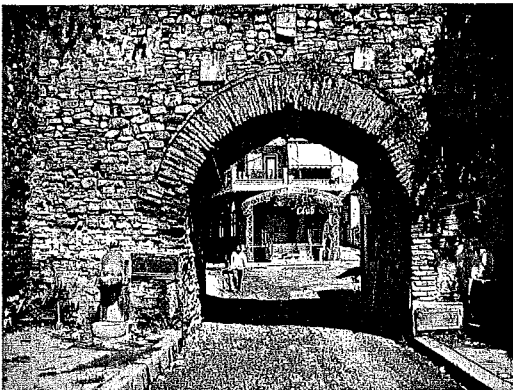
The via Egnatia itself crossed Skampa and constituted the main E-W urban axis ("decumanus maximus"). A short distance eastwards, the Egnatia entered the Shkumbin Gorges, in the Candavian Mountains.

Because of its location, Scampis/Scampa was an halting place with an important strategic role. The preroman site must have had a strategic role too, as it was located along the very ancient track (Candavia road) that, since 146 B.C., was retraced by the Roman via Egnatia connecting the two above mentioned busy ports of the Eastern Adriatic coast earlier with Cipsela and later with Byzantium (Fasolo 2003).

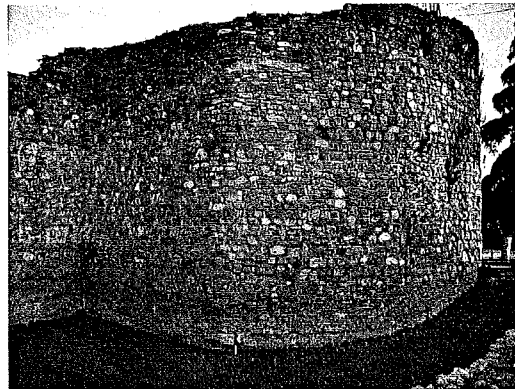
The evidence of preroman settlements in the area is rather scanty. The earliest artefacts from the town are dated back to the late 1st cent. B.C.- early 1st cent. A.D. (Fasolo 2003, p. 146).

In Roman times Scampa was a vicus in the territory of Dyrrhachium. Evidence is provided by the text of two inscriptions. One of them was found in the surroundings of Elbasan. It mentions a person belonging to the tribus Aemilia (the Dyrrhachium one) honoured by convicani Scampenses (Papazoglou 1979). The second text is inscribed on an ara dedicated by a signifer and preserved in the local Museum. It mentions a vicus skampinus. The literary sources mentioning Scampa/Scampis/Skampia/Hiscampis are dated between the 2nd and the 10th cent. A.D.:

- Claudius Ptolemaeus (fl. c. 140 A.D.), Geographia 3, 12, 23 (Scampis, in the territory inhabited by the Eordei, plus latitude and longitude).
- Itinerarium Antonini, 318, 2; 329 (Scampis).
- Itinerarium Burdigalense sive Hierosolymitanum, 608 (Mansio Hiscampis, located between the mutatio Treiecto and the mutatio ad quintum/ most probably present Bradashesh).
- Tabula Peutingeriana 6, 3 (Scampis, 20 milia from Clodiana/ possibly Peqin), 9 to Genesis flumen/ River Shkumbin).
- Notitia Dignitatum, Or. IX (pseudocomitatenses Scampenses)
- The town is mentioned in a Legati Pontifici letter dated in 519 (Fasolo 2003, p.150 nr. 46).
- Synecdemus 653, 2 (Scampa). This work is attributed to Hierocles and dated before 535 A.D. It is an important source for Byzantine geography. It provides a list of cities of the Eastern Roman Empire. Normally the cities in each province are listed in geographical order, in the case of Lydia in hierarchic order.
- Constantinus Porphirogenitus, de thematibus 9.16 (Scampta); de legationibus 159, 17 (Skampia).



View of the southern door.



View of the corner keep.

The Roman city walls are in large part preserved (Eastern, Western, Southern sides) and in part assumed (North side). They had a relevant military and ideological role as "land-mark" and "landscape of power" through the centuries, in the Roman (3rd-4th cent. A.D.), Byzantine (6th cent. A.D.) and Ottoman (15th cent.) period.

The enceinte is rectangular in plan (m 327 E-W x 362 N-S) and m 2.62 thick.

Monumental gates with projecting towers controlled the urban segment of the via Egnatia. They were respectively located in the middle of the West and of the East side of the rectangular enceinte. The Western gate (present Jenicereve) is less preserved than the Eastern one (present Amedajt), recognizable in plan although highly damaged. Outside the Eastern gate the road ran across a necropolis.

As for the main North-South urban road, the gate (present "Market gate") opening in the middle of the South side of the enceinte is of the inner-court type, a typical feature of Roman fortifications. According to Ylli Cerova, a fourth gate was in the middle of the North side of the city walls.

A massive "fan shaped" tower (Lander 1984, p. 246 ss., type B) stood at each corner of the city walls. The SW and SE corner towers are better preserved than the NW and NE ones. The last one can be identified in a private garden. Four U shaped towers stood on each side of the enceinte, between the "fan shaped" corner towers and the gates.

The presence of "fan shaped" corner towers, U shaped towers and city gates guarded by towers is typical of the defence system program started by emperor Diocletian and continued by Constantine. The program was directed towards reinforcing the defence systems of several settlements, in particular of those located along important roads.

The diffusion of such typologies of towers is to be connected with the evolution of the Roman artillery, in particular with the introduction, before the mid 4th century A.D., of a stone-throwing ballista. These engines were much larger than the arrow- or stone-throwing ballistae in use in the previous centuries.

Defensive walls reinforced by strongly projecting "U" and "fan" shaped towers, are mainly observed in the lower Danube and Eastern provinces (e.g. at Dumer), where the Roman army was used to face peculiar defensive strategies.

Moreover, the strongly projecting towers allowed the defenders to throw arrows, spears and/or stones against the attackers coming close to the walls. For this reason, since the 2nd century A.D. the towers were more projecting in correspondance of the gates and the dead corners (e.g. at Lejjun).

The Roman walls of Elabasan are characterized by the construction technique called opus mixtum, dated in the 3rd - 4th century A.D. It is preserved in the lower portion of the enceinte up to 3 m maximum height and is visible in the lower portion of almost the entire enceinte.

The facing is characterized by four rows 30 cm high (about 1 Roman foot) of bricks (cm 36 x 24 x 4/5) embedded in mortar. The brick layers are as thick as the wall.

The mortar is of good quality. The lime is mixed with coarse sand and shows a low percentage of very small pebbles.

Staircases and pilasters on both sides of the tower gates can be attributed to the same 3rd.-4th.cent. construction phase.

Scanty evidence the Byzantine construction phase are preserved in the Southern and Western sides of the enceinte. They consist of restorations characterized by rows of three bricks different in size (cm 30 x 40 x 5) from the 4th.cent. ones and stamped with dolphin shaped christological symbols. The mortar layers are 7 to 8 cm thick. The lime is of high quality and rich in brick fragments.

The town was probably destroyed during the Avarian invasion of the Bizantine territories (Fasolo 2203, p.150). As well known, the enceinte was reconstructed by Mehmet II in 1466. The walls were to be fitted to the new defence necessities due to the introduction of fire-arms. Bricks from the previous fortifications were mixed with mortar in the masonry. An example of this construction technique, 5 m high, is well preserved close to the Museum.

The inner stone revetment of the walls between the towers 1 and 2 and the reconstruction of the towers 3 and 5 are dated after 1466 (all on the South side: Karauskaj tav.2). The towers 3 and 5 were provided with large openings for cannons, in order to have a wide shooting range against the current threats, i.e. Skanderbeg and the Venetians.

In 1832 Reshid Ahmed Pascia had part of the enceinte dismantled. The walls were further heavily damaged by an earthquake in 1920 and by the inhabitants, who ploughed bricks and stones continuously.

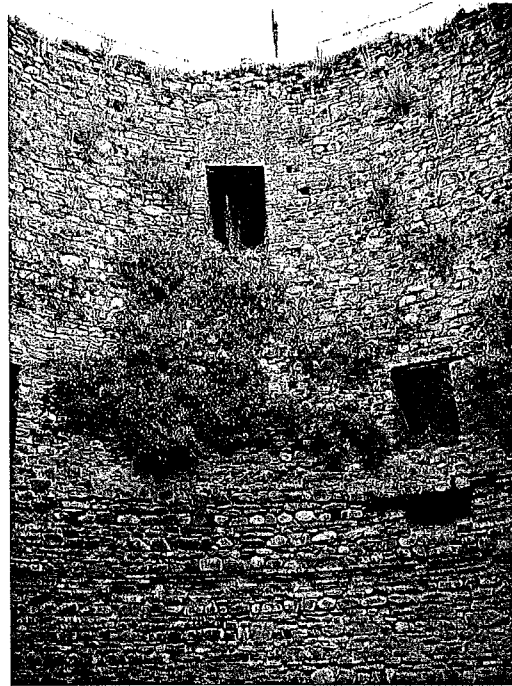
Up to 1970 substantial remains of the ancient fortress were preserved only in the South side. In the following decades the facing was systematically restored using small stones, mortar and bricks as wedges. Thanks to these restorations the enceinte regained at least part of its imposing aspect.

The extant documentation of the mentioned restorations has to be studied in order to provide an accurate history of the walls and to reconstruct their various structural and functional details, in particular the inner partition and functionality of the towers.

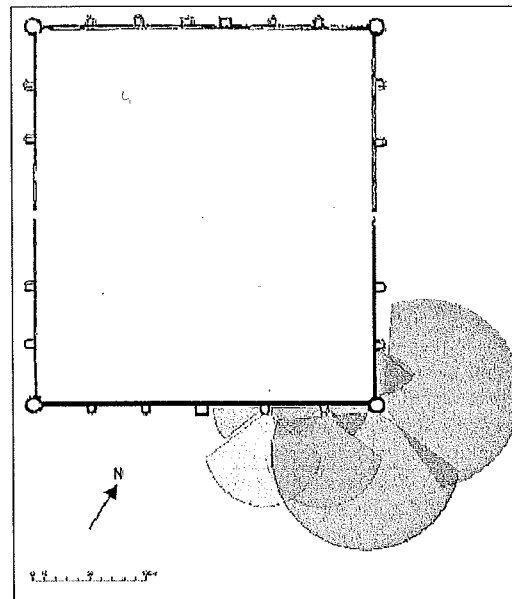
As for the Roman town planning, the present urban roads pattern preserves the Roman via Egnatia (main East-West urban street, "decumanus maximus") and scanty evidence of orthogonal recurrences that might be traced back to the ancient settlement. Narrow streets and property boundaries seem to preserve slight evidence of a pomerial strip and of the "cardo maximus" in the South of the town. For further discussion, an archaeological map of Elbasan documenting the location of all the ancient buildings is definitely necessary.

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The inside of the corner keep.



Defensive coverage area of archery.

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