

## The Urban Planning of a Medieval Village, Case of Study Kamenicë (Albania)



### Archaeology

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### Abstract

The urban planning of the medieval village of Kamenica is the main subject of this paper. It is an abandoned village situated on the south of Albania (district of Delvinë), which conserves many of its original buildings in a good state. The surveys done in the last years permit to make some preliminary conclusions about its structure. In order to understand the guidelines of the urban planning, we have taken in exam some similar models, both in Albanian and Italian territory. Their study has been very useful to put Kamenica in rapport with the other settlements in a large context. The analysis passes through the concept of urban geography, which is very important for choosing the site location and the guarantee of the economic life of the village. In the paper are taken in exam the principal elements of the urban structure, such as the streets network and the open spaces.

The medieval village of Kamenica is situated in the district of Delvinë, on the west side of the mountain Mali Gjerë. The studies done so far, belong to the early '70 and were made by E. Riza and A. Meksi, based on preliminary investigations of the numerous ruins of houses and churches<sup>1</sup>. The investigation area was restricted to the village of Kamenica, studying the architecture of the main structures situated in three relevant areas: the top of the big hill (2 churches, 2 tower houses), the centre of the village called “*Qafa e Pazarit*” (4 churches, 9 houses) and the top of the smallest hill (1 church).

The aim of this paper is to make a preliminary analysis of the model of the urban planning of Kamenicë, based on the surveys done in the last 3 years. The data obtained so far, permit to extend the analyse starting from the geographical conditions of the village, to its urban elements. In order to full understand the urban structure of the village, we have identified some similar models to Kamenica in Albania and Italy. In Albania have been studied the villages of Qeparo (the old one), Borsh, the abandoned village of Tragjas (district of Vlora) and the castle neighbourhood in the city of Berat. While in Italy, the so-called *borghi* (villages and small towns), show similar topography and the same streets network to Kamenica.

The village covers the top area of the two hills, their slope and the “neck” created by their join. The slope leads into a broad plaza ending in a deep canyon, which continues to rise on the other side toward a high peak. Immediately on the slope near the canyon, the terraces have provided the necessary conditions to construct houses and churches in the areas called *Fiqt’ e Lape* and the church of *Jominai*. The surrounding area, appear quite favourable for economic development: down from the south-west lays a vast area of fertile land; in the north are good pastures for livestock, while mild climate favours the growth of olive. Kamenica was near the road that used to connect *Finiq* and *Delvinë* with the valley of *Kardhiq* and *Drino* further on the way<sup>2</sup>. The road leading into the village passed through the neck between the two hills. It ends in the centre of the village in an almost plain area, called *Qafa e Pazarit*, characterized by a high density of construction.

<sup>1</sup> Meksi A., Riza E., Ndërtimet në shatin rrënojëtë Kamenicës, *Monumentet* 7-8, Tiranë, 1974, pp. 139-165. In this settlement (in the early '70) has been made several surveys and the results has been published from A. Meksi and E. Riza. They studied the architecture of the ruins of the 9 houses, 3 oil mills and 7 churches situated in the main neighbourhood of the abandoned village. Kamenica has been out of the interest of the studios for numerous years, even its archaeological potentiality was well known. In the 2012, the study of the architecture and urbanism of the village has restarted as theme of the doctoral studies of the author. In the last years, there has been systematic surveys in the ruins of the village and the areas in its suburb.

<sup>2</sup> Even in a very good position, with clear urban structure, a great number of buildings, Kamenica could not altered into a civic centre as *Delvina* or *Gjirokastra*. The main reason seems to be its distance from the main road that connected *Janina* with *Gjirokastra* and the bay of *Saranda*. *Delvina* that was situated nearby this road realize the big transformation from a village into a city during the ottoman period.

The eastern side of the Kamenica hill descends creating the opportunity to connect with each other the valleys of Vrizi and Gjovraka. On the way, the hill rises toward the peak of mountain Mali Gjerë, while the valley of Vrizi leads to the village of Varfë. Otherwise, the north side of the hill is characterized by a very steep terrain, making impossible a walking path to the village. In the west (as in the south side), the hill descends into a plain plaza, rising further on the way into a soft hill where was build the village of Palavli. From the top hill of the village is possible to look at the broad field of Vurgu toward the lake of Butrint, Ionian Sea and the island of Corfu, while on the west and north direction the landscape is dominated by the hill ranges. The whole area around Kamenica had a sustainable economic development and a high prosperity in the years<sup>3</sup>. The construction of the village on a hilly area, with wide fertile terrains and numerous water resources, appears to have been one of the basic criteria of the urban planning, as we see in the examples of the Italian *borghi*<sup>4</sup>. Kamenica seem to fulfil all this criteria in a satisfactory way.

Useful data about the demographic evolution and the urban organization of Kamenica are provided from the Ottoman cadastral registers<sup>5</sup>. In the register of the year 1431-1432, the village of Kamenica was included in the district of Vajoneta, had 267 houses (208 families, 37 widows and 22 singles), 400 olive trees, a vineyard and the tax revenues were 19.740 *akçe*<sup>6</sup>. In the year 1519-1520 Kamenica had 3 quarters: Kakori, Gajdaç and Dolodos<sup>7</sup>. The village in the year 1582 had 606 families and four quarters outside the main area: (Kamenica 222 families), Vulur (92 families), Vragoj (89 families), Makuri (119 families), Gandaç (84 families)<sup>8</sup>.

Starting from this data, the first surveys have been made in the south and southeast territory of the stream Qafëdardha, in the north-west side of the mountain Kataliat. Most of the ruins are situated in the first terrace of the area called Fiqt' e Lape<sup>9</sup>, while the others in the second terrace toward the mountainside. In the first terrace, immediately upon the source of Vrizi, there has been found the ruins of a church and several houses<sup>10</sup> (Fig. 1). The walls of the church are conserved in a good highness and the surveys brought at light a small basilica, which has been constructed in two main phases<sup>11</sup>. Nearby the church, there are the ruins of a building with an unidentified function, but based on the proximity with the church, probably it was functionally related to it. Toward on the north side of the church, on the first and second terrace, there are many ruins, with walls conserved on the level of the terrain.

<sup>3</sup> In the south, the road that passes nearby the hills brings to the monastery of Mesopotam and Delvina. The numerous little streams that fall down from Mali i Gjerë ends in the Kalasa River, where the mills of Kamenica was build. The optimal climate conditions and the good relief favoured the growth of the cereals, fruit trees and farming. These good conditions and the proximity to the sea helped the development of ancient city of Foinike, while the development in the prehistoric era is shown by the cemetery of Bajkaj. In the middle ages the testimony of this development are the monastery of Mesopotam, the church of S. Jani and Nivica (Muçaj S., Lako K., Hobdari E., Vitaliotis Y., Rezultatat e gërmimeve në bazilikën e Shën Janit, Delvinë (2001-2003), *Candavia* 1, Tiranë, 2004, pp. 93-123; Muçaj S., Lako K., Hobdari E., Vitaliotis Y., Kishamesjetare e Peshkëpisë në Nivicë-Bubar (Sarandë), *Candavia* 2, Tiranë, 2005, pp. 273-309).

<sup>4</sup> For more about this argument see: Piccinato L., *Urbanistica medievale*, Bari, 1993 (reprint); Piccinato L., Per la tipologia delle città italiane nel medioevo, *Atti del II Convegno Nazionale di Storia dell'Architettura*, Roma, 1939; Guidoni E., L'architettura delle città medievali, *Mélanges de l'Ecole Française de Rome* 2, Roma, 1974.

<sup>5</sup> A summary of all these registers has been published by the Turkish researcher Ö. Bayir (Bayir Ö., Gjendja administrative e zonës së Shqipërisë së Jugut në periudhën klasike dhe mënyra e drejtimit të perandorisë Osmane në Shqipëri, në *Toleranca në aktet administrative osmane, Aktet e Simpoziumit*, Tiranë, 2005, f. 163-212). Very useful information for the demographic structure are provided by these registers: (BOA; TD 99; Tahrir Defteri complete, detailed of the year 926 H. (1519 - 1520). BOA; TD 237 Tahrir Defteri complete, detailed of the year 958 H. District of Delvinë (1551). BOA; TD 608 Tahrir Defteri detailed of the year 991 H district of Delvinë (1583).

<sup>6</sup> Burimetëzgjedhurangahistoria e Shqipërisë II, shekujt VII-XV, Tiranë, 1962, pp. 241 (Inalçik, H., *835 Suret-i defter-isancaq-I Arvanid*, Ankara, (1954).

<sup>7</sup> According to Tahrir Defter the settlements of district of Vlora, BOA, TD 99, pp. 36-38.

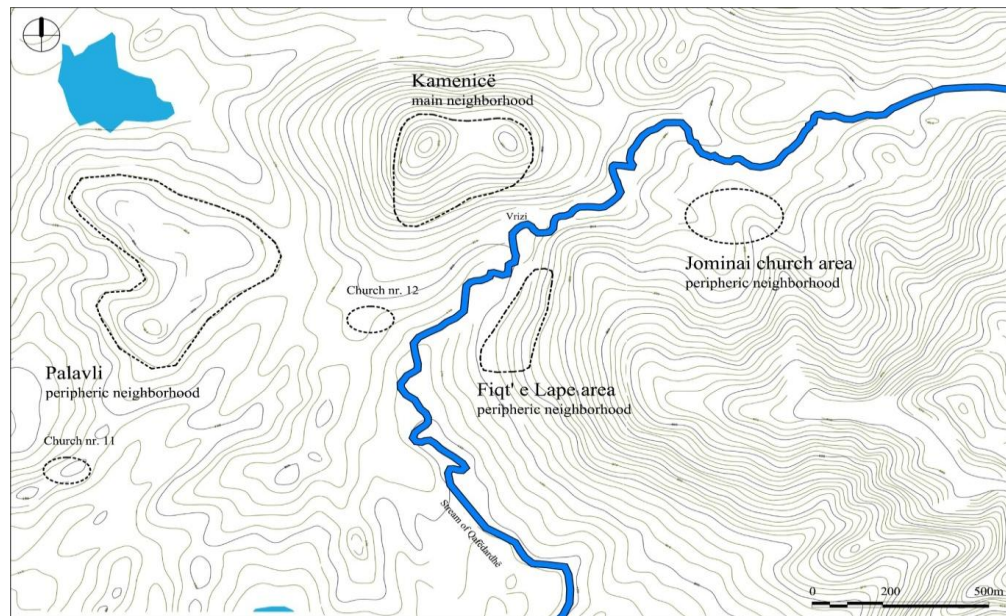
<sup>8</sup> It has been used the traduced text of the register of district of Delvina (990 H) gently offered by P. Thëngjilli.

<sup>9</sup> This is a micro toponym used from the habitants of Palavli.

<sup>10</sup> Based on the archaeological material collected during the survey, the church in Fiqt' e Lape can be dated from the beginning of the XII century.

<sup>11</sup> Ristani I., Muçaj S., Xhyheri S., Tëdhënatë e raportit të shprehur për shatin mesjetar të Kamenicës (Raportishkurtuar 2012), *Candavia*, 4, Tiranë, 2014, pp. 215-265.

The church and these numerous ruins are a clear evidence of the fact, that it has been a populated and well-structured area. The future excavation will help on the understanding of the functions of the ruins and clarify the site plan of Fiqt' e Lape.



**Fig. 1 General plan of the village with the survey areas**

The second survey has been made in the left side of the source of Vriza, on the east of Kamenica, at the Mira's gorge. There has been found the ruins of many houses and a church called by the habitant's church of Jominai<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 2). The church with a very interesting plan, is surrounded by continued wall lines on the east and north. It is situated in the southeast of a small valley. The ruins of the houses are similar to the ones in Kamenica by the structure and position. On the west of the village of Palavli<sup>13</sup> there has been found the ruins of a church. It is positioned on the top of a small and soft hill immediately outside Palavli (Fig. 1). The survey made possible to sketch down the plan of the church. The individuation of the extents of the plan of this neighbourhood was made impossible by the construction of the village of Palavli, which has ruined the stratigraphy of the area.

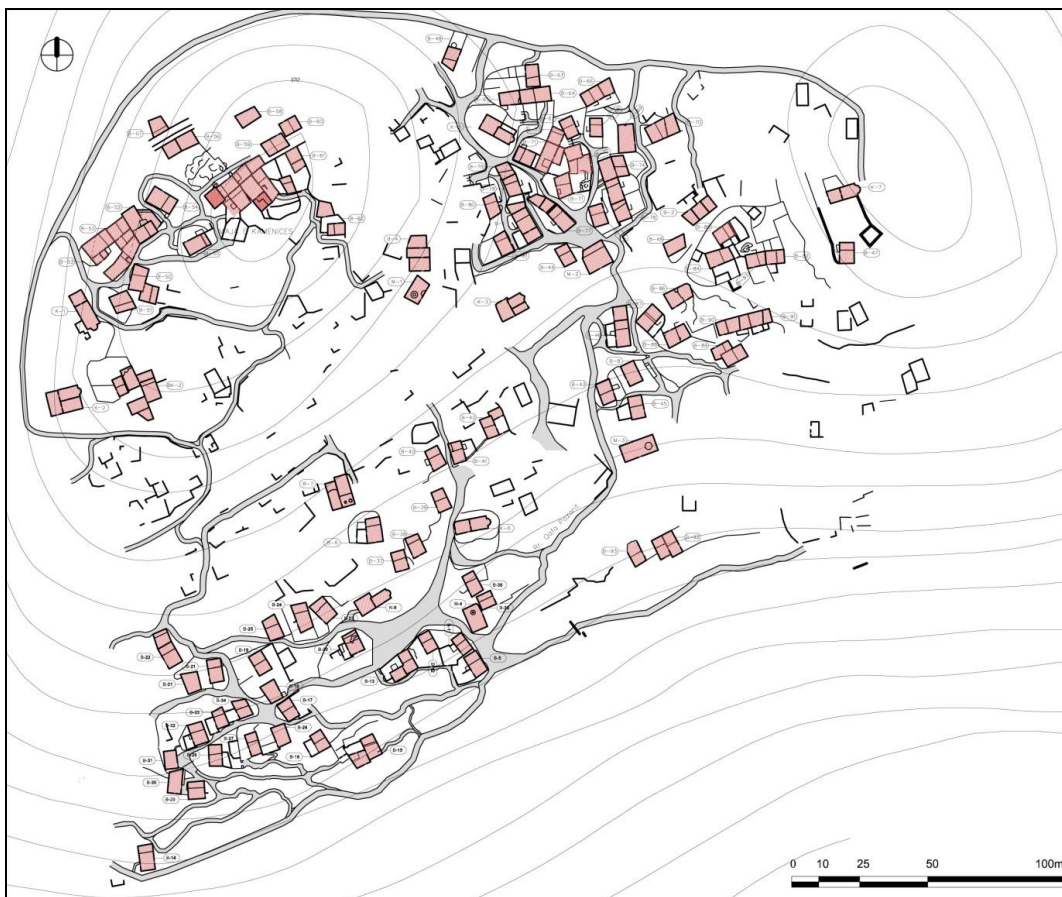


**Fig. 2 Church of Jominai, view of the apse from the outside**

<sup>12</sup> The church even in an advanced state of deterioration (only the central part of the walls of the apse is conserved the rest of the walls has fallen down) is considered by the habitants of the area both Muslims and Christians a "holy place". All the nearby area is called with the micro toponym "church of Jominai".

<sup>13</sup> The today village of Palavli is situated on the top of a soft hill on the west of Kamenica and there are not made surveys until now in its territory. Probably a neighbourhood of Kamenica has been there in the XVI century.

The final surveys were made in the main neighbourhood of the village of Kamenica in all its extents. Here it was possible to draw the general plan with the ruins taken in exam (fig. 3). In total in this area, we studied 94 houses, 4 mills, 2 residences, 9 churches and a very good part of the streets network. The natural conditions of the terrain have influenced the structure of the streets and the orientation of the buildings. There can be identified two categories of streets: the principal and the secondary. The principal street is extended in the direction south north and starts from the valley down the hills. It leads to the main plaza Qafa e Pazarit, where seem to end. In fact, the buildings on the north of the plaza are connected by secondary streets and the last one pass near the house nr. 48. In a well conserved segment of the main street it was possible to measure the width 2-2.2m and to clarify the structure of the borders. The steep terrain has made necessary to construct perimeter walls, in order to sustain the street. The secondary ones seem to begin from the gorge between the two hills and were extended in two main direction toward west and east. The path of the streets follow the topographic lines of the terrain creating a very irregular urban structure and principally they are extended in the direction east west. They are situated in different quotes creating terraces between them, which are used to construct the buildings.



**Fig. 3 General plan of main neighbourhood Kamenica with the documented ruins.**

The open spaces are very limited; Qafa e Pazarit is the main and central public plaza (fig. 4). Around it are situated the buildings of public interest, as the church 3 and the mill 2. The other public spaces of certain relevance are the courtyards of the church. Sometimes they are situated in two levels, sustained by walls as in the case of the church 6. The churches are distributed in the village and most of them (church 1, 2, 3, 7) occupied relevant areas.



The rest of the plan is occupied by the residential function, except the top of the hill on the west where are constructed two tower houses. They were built on a dominant position and their plan<sup>14</sup> suggest a mixed function: observation and residential<sup>15</sup>.



**Fig. 4 View of the plaza Qafa e Pazarit**

The private open space belong to the houses and are strictly related to it's functionally. The courtyards of the houses are surrounded by very high walls (from 2-3m), that seem has been built in the same phase. The natural conditions have made obligatory building in a very rational way. The houses are generally oriented toward south; less toward southeast and southwest. They were built very close to each other, have two floors according to the steep terrain and belong to a well-known type called "half-floor"<sup>16</sup>. The access to the house was made by the secondary streets, directly in the courtyard.

The surveys done in Kamenica and its neighbourhoods permit to make a preliminary concept of its urban structure. The data obtained in the areas Fiqt' e Lape, church of Jominai, Palavli are not sufficient to make a clear idea of their urban structure. These evidences may confirm the localization of the mentioned district of Kamenica, but to clarify their urban organization, it is necessary to make excavation. However, the small areas that have been object of the surveys, show similar organization to the main neighbourhood Kamenica.

The same terrain has influenced the development of the same type of street network and buildings. The open spaces are limited and principally related to the public function (courtyards of church, the broad plaza with the public buildings) and the private one (the courtyards of the houses).

<sup>14</sup> The plan of the tower house is not limited to the description of Meksi and Riza. There are more structures connected to the tower of three plans and they make the impression of a small-fortified complex.

<sup>15</sup> Riza, Kamberi has studied the similar structures in the near village of Goranxi (Riza E., Kamberi Th., *Kullat në fshatin Goranxi, Monumentet 3*, Tiranë, 1972, pp. 179-188).

<sup>16</sup> Riza E., Thoma P., *Vendbanimet dhe banesat fshatare (Shek. XV – XX)*, Shqipëria Jugperëndimore, *Historia e arkitekturës shqiptare (Nga fillimet deri në v. 1912)*, Tiranë, 1970, pp. 613, fig. 94; Kamberi Th., *Vendbanimet dhe banesat fshatare në Dropullin e Poshtëm, Monumentet 12*, Tiranë, 1976, pp. 173-181.

The village is organised in a radio-centric scheme, the main neighbourhood is positioned in the centre, while the peripheral one are all around it. These forms the outside line of the settlement offering a protection to the main one. This surface consist in the “living” area of the village, while the “production” area is spread toward the fertile terrains on the south and the wide pastures on the north. In addition, there is a zoning of areas in the main neighbourhood based in their function: in the southwest slope of the hills is the residential area (high density and small houses). Qafa e Pazarit is a mixed function area: production, trade and residential. Here are situated the main houses of the village, with a large number of rooms, that seems to belong to the high class of the local society. The top of the two hills are occupied by the two authorities that regulate the social-economic life in the village: the feudal authority (residence 1) and the cleric one (church 7). The residence 1 is a small complex made of one three floor tower and five houses, all surrounded by high walls. On the west slope of the big hill, there are two of the greatest churches of Kamenica (churches 1 and 2). Near them was build the residence 2 with a tower house and three buildings that surround it. This residence has one of the largest courtyards of the village extended in two different levels.

The village of Kamenica according to its geographical conditions (area dominated by hills and fertile lands crossed by many waterways) and the urban structure, reflects the principals of the medieval urban planning, characteristic of the XII century in the Mediterranean area.

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