

SPANISH LUSTERWARE FROM DRISHTI CASTLE (ALBANIA)**Archaeology**

Keywords: Albania, Drisht, castle, pottery glaze, Spanish, Hispano - Moresque shipwrecks, routes.

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This paper aims to present a general overview of the distribution of Medieval pottery finds (focusing on Spanish ware) in the southern Adriatic region. The focus will be on excavated ceramics from sites on Drishti in relation to published pottery finds from sites across the Adriatic Sea and southern Italy. The excavation in 2015, by the Albanian Archaeological Institute at ancient Drivastum in north-eastern Albania, on the sector A, revealed a pit which included a large assemblage of glass vases and ceramics dated to the 13th and 16th centuries. In this preliminary report a part of imported ceramic finds “Spanish Ware” (with lustre decoration), will be presented and discussed. The group of glazed wares recovered from So. 13 comprises open vessels used for food consumption. The vases are Valencian and were made in the fifteenth century, giving a very thorough picture of the stylistic development of majolica in Spain in its early phases, which had such wide-spread effects throughout Europe. This ceramic has been well identified and dated, on the basis of comparative material from Italy. The name “Maiolica” is probably a corruption of “Majorca”, first given in the 15th c. to the Spanish lusterware imported from Moorish Spain to Italy, through the island of Majorca, or the term may derive from the Spanish name for lusterware “obra de malaga”, i.e. Malaga work. Using ceramic evidence recovered during excavations, this article is intended to contribute to the typo-chronological and sociocultural study of medieval pottery in this medieval city.

Introduction

Drisht is a multi-period site, situated 13 km inland from the city of Shkodra, between the routes of Mes-Vilëz and Mes-Prekal, to the point where Kiri River ends his mountainous flow towards the flatlands [1].

There is evidence of human activity on the site from prehistory as is shown by the presentation of pottery finds and walls. The site is inhabited until our times. The site of Drisht rises on two rocky hills separated from the Drishti stream. The first hill, mostly known as the Drishti castle, stands at the height of 311 m, has almost conical shape with a length of about 1 km and width of about 900 m in the north-west side is bordered by Kiri river, while in the south by the stream of Drishti. Both the Kiri river, and the stream of Drishti, have created steep rocky slopes on the respective sides that they flow. In the east, the hill runs into the *Shën Pali* ridge, which joins with the adjacent hills, which are covered with bushes. In front of the castle hill, on the southeastern side, at the height of 165m, is situated the hill *Muzhilë*, which has rhombic shape, with a length of 850 m and the width of 350 m. It is bordered on the north by the stream Drishti and north-west with the Kiri river, on the south of it, is the national road Shkoder-Shllak, while in the east joins the *Qafa e Tyrbes* [2].

The selected natural position has all the conditions for the emerging and development of a city. It's very well established on the hills that dominate the surrounding area, with drawn towards the inner areas of the territory, not far from communication routes, with good natural protection from possible attacks, raw material for construction (stone and timber), plentiful water sources, pastures, valleys and fertile terraces favored by the favorable climate.

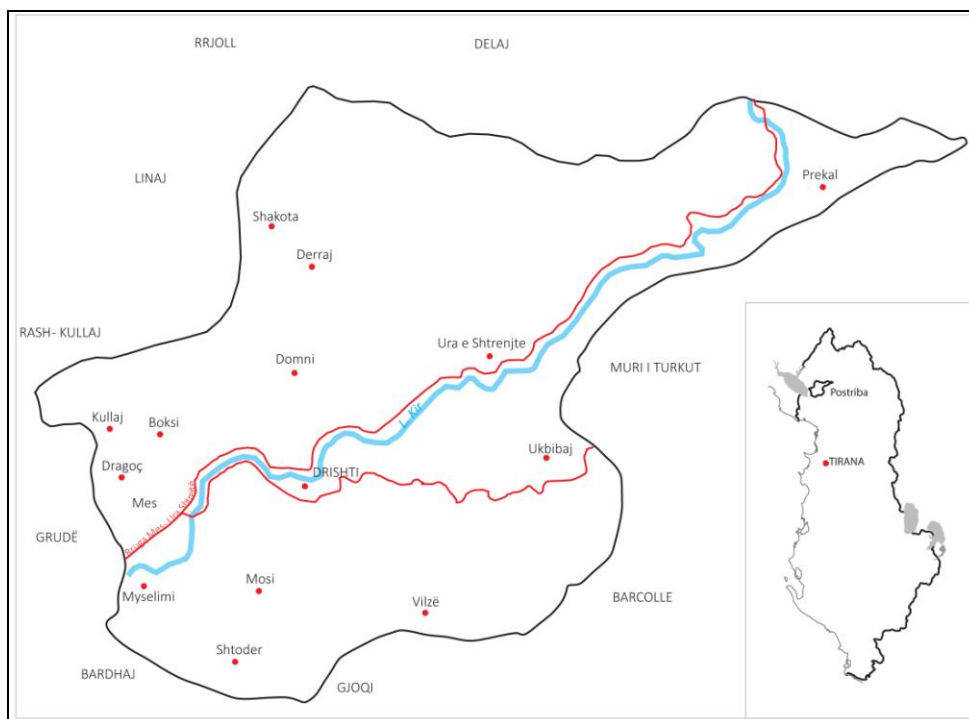


Figure 1. Drishti and the region of Postriba (P. Pushimaj 2018).

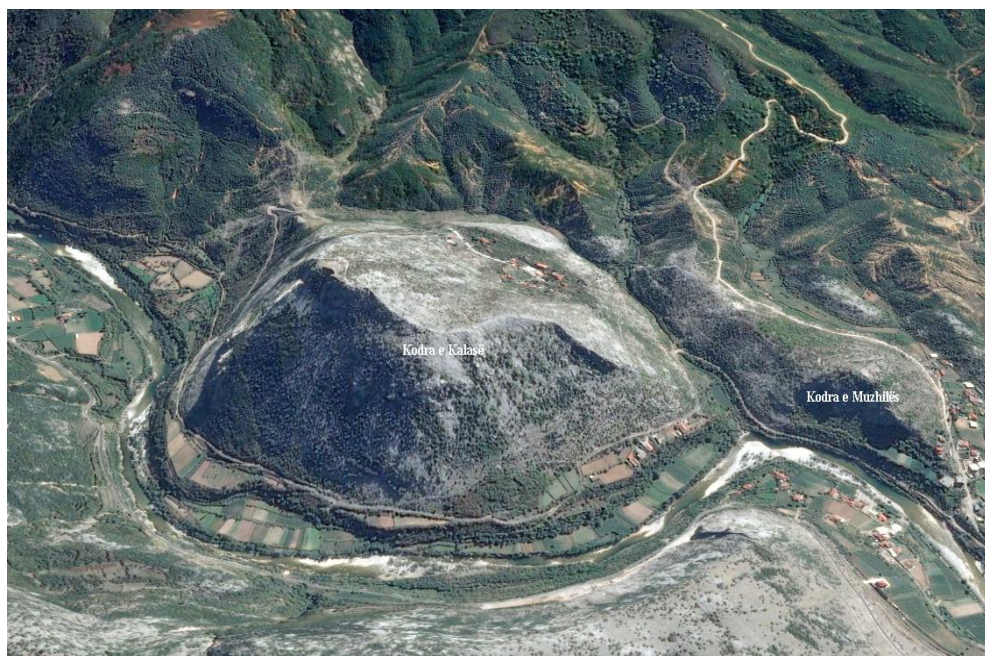


Fig. 2. Drishti castle, general view (Google 2019).

Since 2015, large-scale excavations have been carried out on Drishti castle and across it, on the *Citadel* (Sector A), *Varosh* (Sector B) and *old Varosh* (Sector D). Excavating during the years, thousands of Medieval and Post-Medieval ceramic findings were recorded from various parts of the site. As a case-study I shall focus in this paper on the medieval ceramic findings

(particularly Spanish ware) from one part of Drishti; that is to say, from one rectangular towers, in the so-called Citadela, located on the upper side of the site as part of the defensive wall [3]. The context 13, depth reached 2.30 m, concluded that cultural layers (five in total), follow the terrain with a slope of 15° [4].

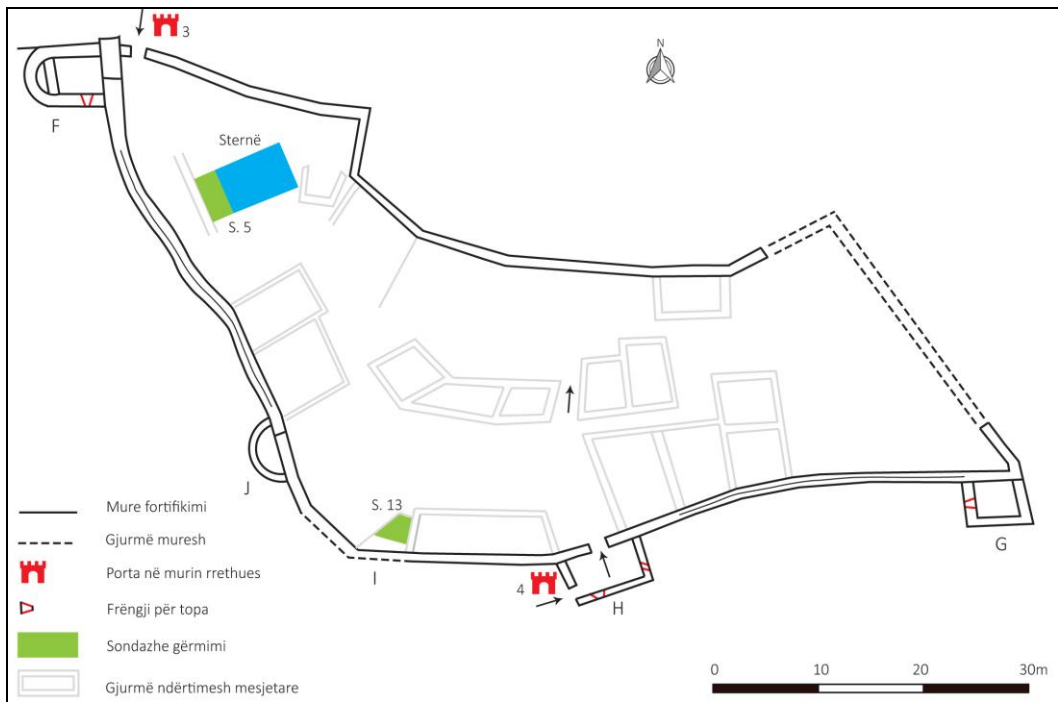


Fig. 3. General plan of Citadela (P. Pushimaj 2018).

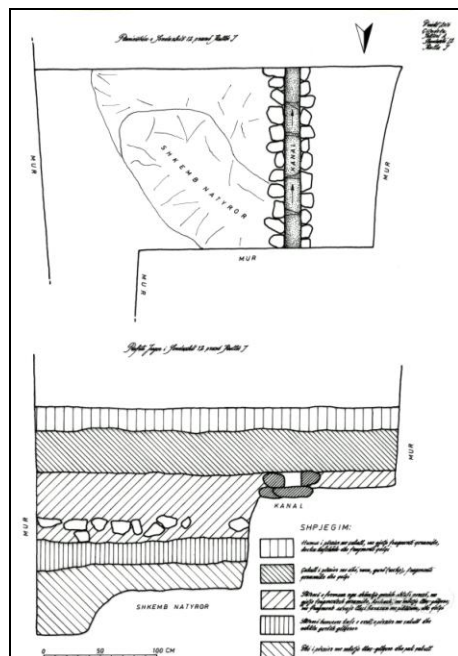
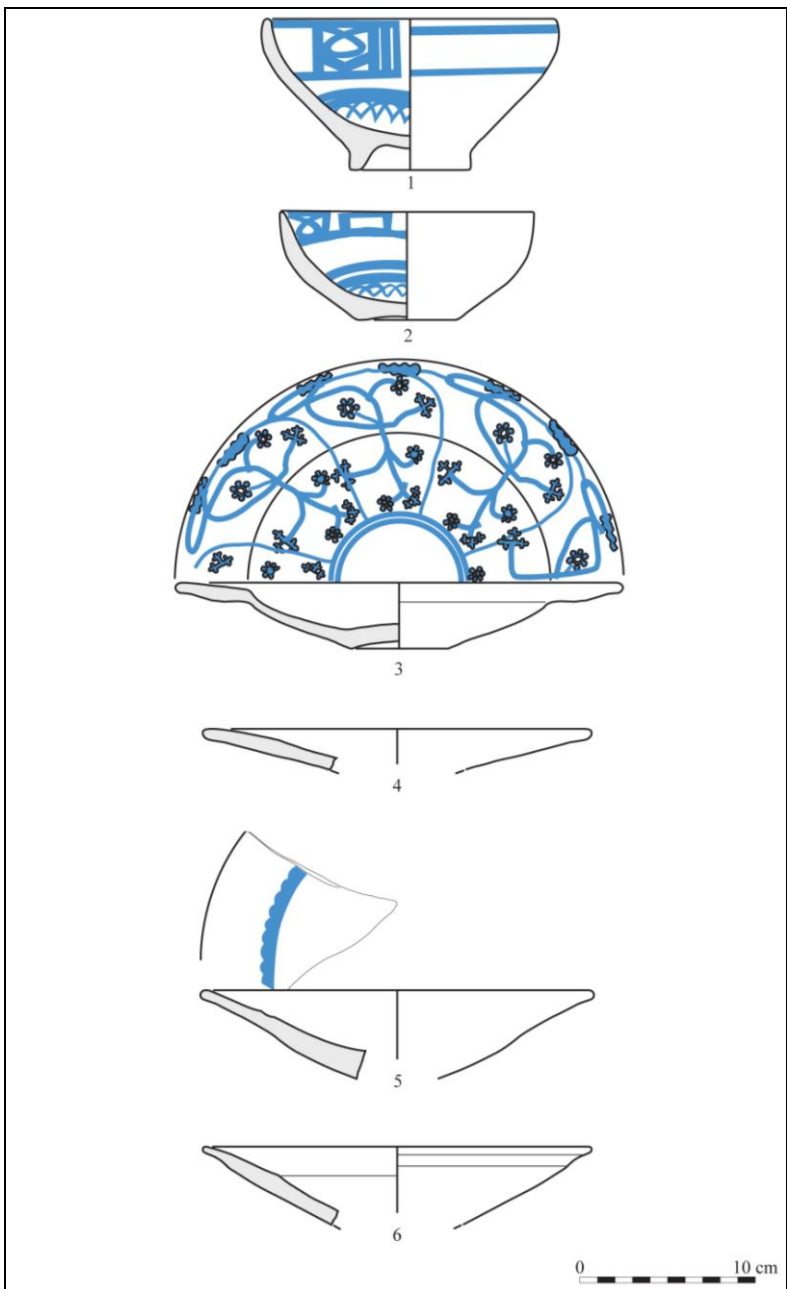


Fig. 4. The plan of the cesspit at the internal environment of the tower n. 8 (I. Zaloshnja 2016).

In excavation trenches 13, we can distinguish a large collection of glass vases⁴ and a range of very broken medieval ceramics. A pile of 19 fragments was recovered (which formed two bowls with simple upright rim and low foot and four dishes with concave bases), and identified as tin-glazed Spanish lusterware with blue painted geometric or floral decoration on the inside, which is usually combined with luster⁵[Pl. I, fig. 5].



Pl. I. Pottery finds from trench 13 (P. Pushimaj 2018).

⁴ Pushimaj 2018.

⁵ Vroom 2004, 286.



Fig. 5. Pottery finds from trench 13 and restored by the author.

Results and Discussion

This report is probably the first publication on Spanish ware ceramic finds from a stratigraphical excavation in Albania. The finds includes pottery of the 15th century (from Valencia), and Sgraffito pottery of area of Venice. It seems that the Spanish Ware together with Italian ceramics probably reached the Albanian coast in large quantities, but because of lack of publications we do not have insight into their distribution.

The Spanish lusterware derives from the glazed pottery of the Islamic East, where the lustre technique had been evolved at first. The large-scale distribution of Spanish pottery began in the mid-13th c., with the production of tinglazed lustred pottery, when Malaga in Andalucía had become famous both in Spain and abroad as a centre of gold-lustered ware⁶. Other important pottery centres developed at Valencia and its area - Manises and Paterna - where potters from Malaga migrated in the 14th century⁷.

During the 14th-15th centuries, the workshops of Valencia and its area produced wares decorated with a variety of geometric, heraldic and stylized floral motifs, painted in cobalt blue

⁶ Carnegy 1993, 19.

⁷ Hurst et al. 1986, 40-44.

and/or lustre, on a white tin glaze. In the thirties and forties of the fifteenth century, some patterns, such as vine leaves, bryony, marguerites, and mixtures of these with acacia sprigs, had appeared on the scene. Among the Italian customers for Spanish lusterware, the pattern of interlaced bryony stems and flowers was outstandingly popular⁸. The wares decorated solely in cobalt blue, are dated to the late 14th-early 15th century, and are particularly associated with Paterna⁹. The luster reflects a variety of metallic tones from bright gold yellow to hues of purple and red, giving great richness to the vessels and a continual variety in the play of light. Most of the forms of the Spanish vessels were derived from Islamic prototypes. Some of them imitated shapes in metal, rather than pottery, and include the deep dishes with straight sides, which were very popular throughout the fifteenth century.

The Spanish pottery, often called Hispano Moresque, was widely distributed in Western Europe and throughout the Mediterranean, as far as Egypt¹⁰. The Venetians favoured it so much that they allowed Valencian pottery special import privileges. In both northern and southern Europe Spanish lusterware was readily available in large quantities and that all and sundry were pleased by its lustered designs and high standards of quality. In Albania, Spanish pottery has been reported from Butrint¹¹, while outside Albania, this ceramic finds comparisons with the finds of Tarquinia¹².

In the present group, there are two bowls, two bryony plates and two other plates, one with a line of flower and the other without decoration. One of the bowls and one of the dishes are more preserved and decorated very beautiful.

1. Small hemispherical bowl (Pl. I, 1, fig. 5, 1).

Seven mended pieces. Complete profile. H: 8.5; Diam. Rim 16.8; Diam. Base: 7; Th: 0.5. Long ring foot with concave underside: convex divergent wall with knick on upper part; straight rim with rounded lip.

Fabric: soft, fine and whitish in colour (core: 10 YR 8/4) with some fine limestone and a few medium white quartz inclusions.

Decoration: white slip and a pitted, irregular tin glaze (7.5 YR 8/2) on interior and exterior upper part; parts of blue painted geometric decoration under rim on the interior combined with lustre. On the margin runs a frieze where the word *alafia*, interspersed with empty squares, is reduced to the letter (X) between two horizontal lines and two vertical lines¹³. The background is composed of two overlapping stars.

⁸ Randall 1957, 214.

⁹ Hurst et al. 1986, 40.

¹⁰ Patterson and Whitehouse 1992, 176-177.

¹¹ Vroom 2004, 286; Vroom 2005, 134-135.

¹² Camardo – Casocavallo 2005.

¹³ Daoulatli 1980, 351, 35.

Date: late 14th-early 15th c.

Common shape: (Daoulatli 1980, 349, 351, fig. 25, 35, 40; Vroom 2004, 286, fig. 15.23; Vroom 2005, 134).

2. Large serving dish, rim and body fragment (Pl. I, 3, fig. 5, 3).

Five mended pieces. Complete profile. H: 4; Diam. Rim 26; Diam. Base: 5.5; Th: 0.5.

Large dish with a horizontal rim and concave base.

Fabric: soft, fine and whitish in colour (core: 7.5 YR 8/4) with some small white and occasional small brown inclusions.

Decoration: interior and exterior are covered with a white slip and a pitted, irregular tin glaze (7.5 YR 8/2). Parts of blue painted floral decoration under rim on the interior combined with lustre. The decoration is composed of the "evolved" bryonia vine which consists of a luster disc surrounded by five or six petals in blue and a stylized three-pointed leaf. The evolved bryonia is arranged in tendrils that radiate from the central round twisted on a background of stylized tendrils and with acacia spread on the outside.

Date: late 14th-early 15th c.

Common shape: (Blake 1973, 95, fig. 4, 40; Gelichi 1986, 166, tav. XXII, 1-2; Vroom 2005, 135, fig. 14.1; Camardo-Casocavallo 2005, 317, fig. 8, 12).

Conclusions

Drishti was an important economic centre during the period that the city was occupied by the Venetians (1396-1478). The presence of the Spanish ware at Drisht can be considered as a consequence of the activity of Spanish traders, since the Catalans showed commercial interests in the Eastern Mediterranean already in the late 13th centuries and they acquired an important role in the trade of the Aegean after the conquest of Central Greece in the 14th century, or the Spanish pottery was included in the Italian commerce with the Eastern Mediterranean. It seems that the Venetian elite once settled in Drisht introduced the vessels that were in use in their homes. The pottery finds in Drisht excavations are dated to the 14th to 15th centuries. It is not surprising that we find these imported wares on the site, because Drisht belonged to an important trade system, which connected various regions. A wide variety of wares seem to have travelled towards the town from all directions, directly or indirectly through other centres such as Shkodra, Durrës, as well as from Ragusa. Apparently, Drisht benefited also from its topographical position on the route Shkodra- Prizrend. The ceramic finds from context 13 in the Drisht's Citadela seem to confirm the city's pivotal role.

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