

Qendra e Studimeve Albanologjike
Instituti i Arkeologjisë



RECENT
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
DISCOVERIES
IN ALBANIA

Antiquity

119.

Face of a goddess at the
moment of discovery,
terracotta, 4th century BC,
Roman Forum, Alos Butrint





Butrint: the Roman forum

The Excavation of the Roman Forum is an archaeological project of the Albanian Institute of Archaeology carried out in collaboration with the University of East Anglia, UK, in the period between 2004 and 2007, and in collaboration with the University of Notre Dame, USA, in the period between 2011 and 2013. It is co-directed by Dh. Çondi and D. R. Hernandez.

These excavations have revealed a wealth of archaeological material that documents the cultural change and urban character of the Epirote port, which was directly in contact with the Mediterranean world. The earliest phase of activity documented at the ancient urban centre of Butrint relates to the sanctuary of Asclepius. The latter, along with the long stoa and the sacred spring defined the temenos area. Although some ceramic fragments found during excavation date to the 5th century BC, no further evidence of this date was recovered at this site. The excavation showed that the enlargement of the sanctuary area followed by the expansion of the city toward the east occurred in the late 4th-early 3rd century BC. In this period, a theatre was constructed as an integral part of the sanctuary complex, a project that at the same time involved

the construction of the shrine of Asclepius and of the temple above the theatre. The area aligned by the theatre, the long stoa, and Building 3 A, led to the sacred spring which was probably furnished with necessary utensils that served in the curing rituals associated with Asclepius. Two stoaes situated opposite each other, one in the north and the other in the south, were built to the east of this complex, thus defining an area that was identified as the agora.

The economic development and the wide scale building plan of the Hellenistic city could have been a direct result of the changing dynamics of commerce in this region. The defeat of the Molossian Koinon by Aemilius Paulus in 167 BC resulted in the shift of maritime trade to the north coast of Epirus, which was directly beneficial to Butrint. The quick enrichment of Butrint in the 2nd century BC followed by the increase in the number of slaves, as attested by inscriptions, could have been a consequence of the Third Macedonian War.

The construction of the forum of the Roman colony in 44 BC, and the re-foundation of the city by Augustus brought fundamental change in

the topography of the city's urban centre. These two events are associated with a building programme that was clearly evidenced by the excavation, and dates to the late 2nd century BC and the Augustan rule. Buildings that were part of the Hellenistic agora were either demolished or reconfigured in the construction of the Roman forum. At the theatre a new floor was put in. It was paved with limestone slabs and aligned by a drain, above which there are two marble steps. This feature finds parallels with the Roman market at Corinth and the Roman agora of Caesar and Augustus at Athens.

Like the actus system on the Vrina Plain which was defined by the position of the aqueduct line, the topographic extent of the forum appears

to have been affected by the course of the aqueduct within the urban centre. By reconstructing the trajectory of the aqueduct here, it was possible to locate the south end of the forum. Aligned in an E-W axis and measuring 20 m x 52 m, the forum became the new heart of the Roman city. A new system of drains, streets, and steps changed the existing structure, space, and fabric of the city. Along the forum, the north stoa was demolished to make way for the construction of a tripartite building and its portico. This structure seems to have served as the capitolium of the Roman colony. The south stoa was probably demolished only in part and was converted into the portico of a new Roman building to the south of the forum.

120.



120
Butrint, aerial view. ©Butrint Foundation

121
Stylobate of the south stoa with lifting bosses (Area XV)

122
Forum pavement and steps (westward view, Area VI)

121.



122.



An extensive building programme was undertaken during the rule of Hadrian, giving the city a new height of monumentality. The north area of the forum was raised by five steps starting from its floor level. Next to the tripartite building circa 22 steps led up to a two-storey building which could have served as a temple dedicated to the imperial cult. While maritime trade, agriculture, and finishing continued to contribute in advancing the development of the town, new additions were made to the forum in the 2nd century AD. Around the mid 3rd century AD the tripartite building was demolished. This event was accompanied by systematic efforts to destroy statues and inscriptions. Then, the construction of Building 4 intended as the north terminus of the north forum street followed. The deposit that covered the forum floor suggests that the forum fell in disuse in the mid/late 4th century AD, when the public space was filled up with the intent of raising the ground level at the urban centre. It is probable that at this time Butrint was struck by an earthquake which caused a tectonic shift that led to the flooding and abandonment of the forum. This could explain the reason for which the urban centre shifted to the east of Butrint, near the Great Basilica in the late antique period. However, it seems that some attempts were made to re-inhabit the forum in the 5th century, but seasonal flooding of the area led to its ultimate abandonment in the 7th century. The area was re-occupied only with the medieval revival of Butrint in the late 10th century.



123.

123
Forum pavement northwest corner (Area XI)

124
Forum pavement (Area VI)

125
Forum pavement and steps leading to the two-storey building -
(eastward view, Area VI)

126
Southwest corner of the forum with pavement and steps
(Area XV)

124.



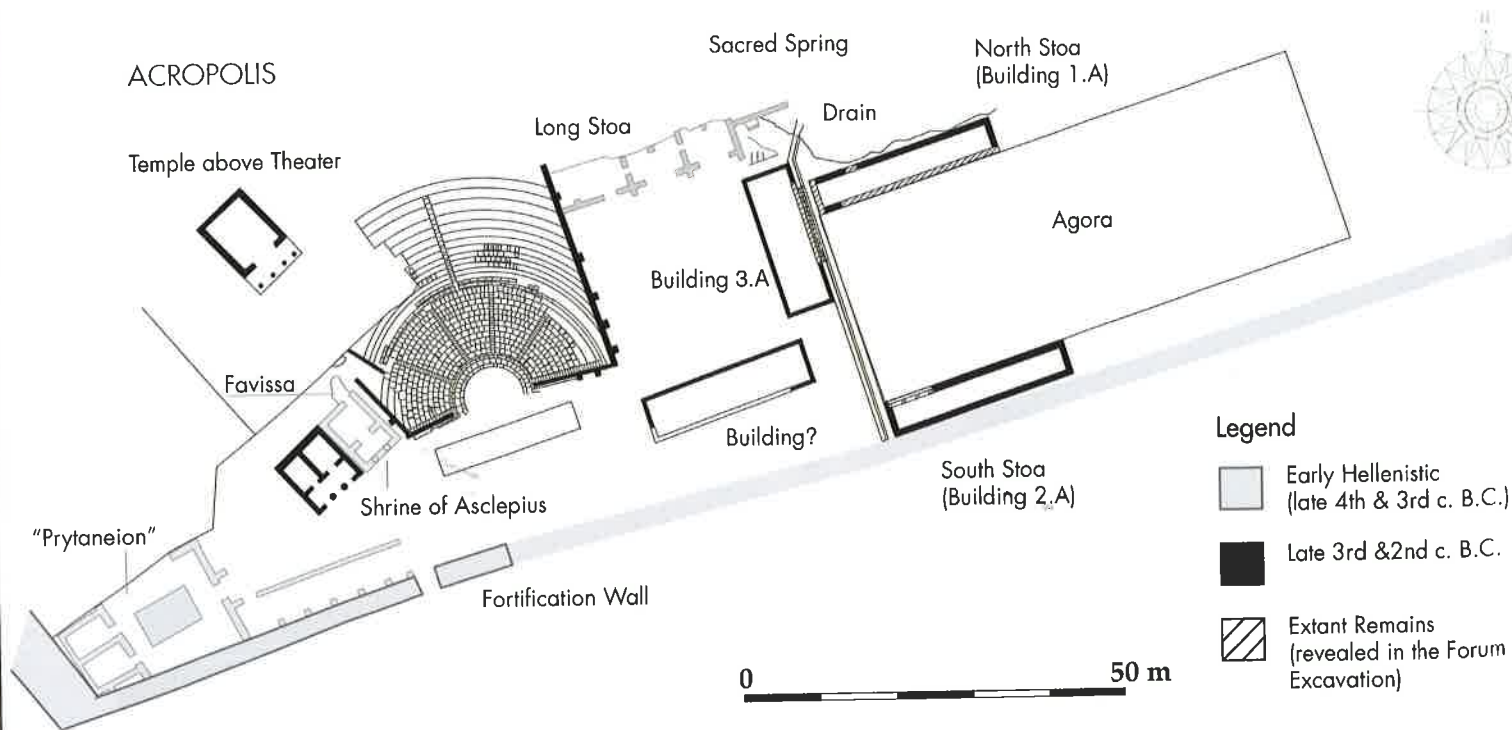
125.



126.



127.



128.



129.



130.

127
Tripartite building

128
Reconstruction of the urban
centre of Butrint in the 2nd
century AD

129
Head of Dionysus,
terracotta, h. 12 cm,
w. 7 cm, AloA Butrint

130
Head of goddess,
terracotta, h. 10 cm, w. 8
cm, Roman Forum, AloA
Butrint.

131
Coin, silver, AloA Butrint



131.



132.

132
Fragment of Roman fresco
from the tripartite building,
Roman Forum, AlaA Butrint



133.

133
Lamp with relief decoration, d.
9 cm, Roman Forum, Butrint,
AloA Butrint

134
Gem stone with the
representation of a nymph from
the tripartite building,
Roman Forum, h. 1,65 cm,
w 0,94 cm, AloA Butrint

135
Roman inscription, limestone, BM



134.



135.

136.



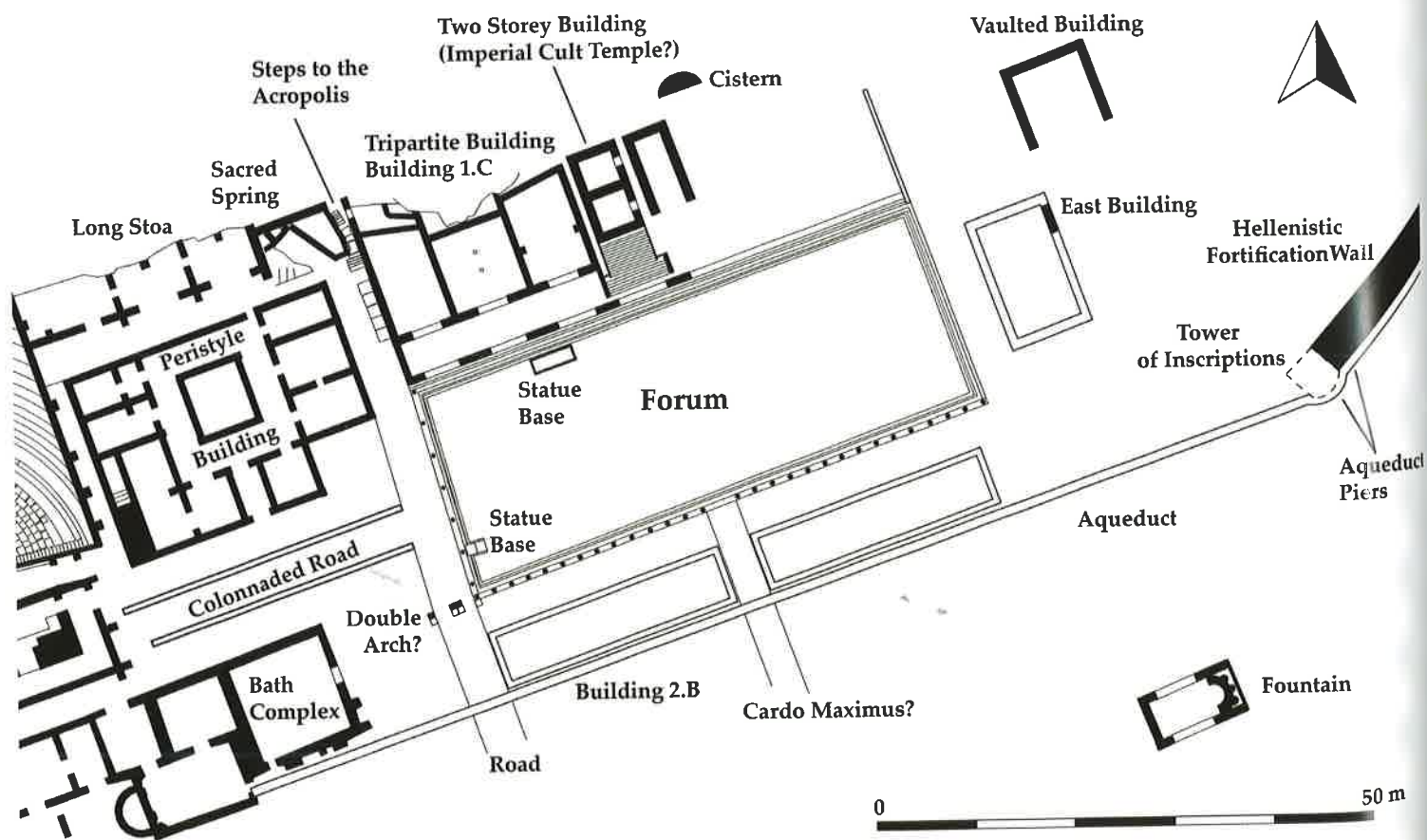
136
Sacred spring adjacent to the long stoa (Area VII)

137.



137
Roman togate from the tripartite building, mid 2nd c. AD, Roman Forum, BM

138
Reconstruction of Hellenistic Butrint in the 2nd century BC



138.



139.

139
Bronze buckle,
l. 5.3 cm, Roman
Forum, Butrint,
AloA Butrint



140.

140
Bronze hook, h. 2.4 cm, w. 8 cm,
Roman Forum, Butrint, BM

141
Fibula, bronze, h. 6 cm, w. 3.5 cm,
Roman Forum, Butrint, BM



141.