

Asarkale on the Upper Aisepos Valley

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ABSTRACT: *One of the important routes providing the transportation between the Hellespont and the Kapıdağ Peninsula in the Byzantine period followed the Scamander and Aisepos Valleys. These valleys constitute one of the areas we study to determine the military geography and defensive structures of the Hellespont and its vicinity in the Byzantine period. In this manuscript, it was aimed to evaluate the archaeological data we detected at Asarkale on the upper Aisepos Valley. It was predicted that the data to be obtained with this evaluation would first of all contribute to the settlement of the problems of dating the structure. Asartepi is approximately 310 m in length in the north-east - south-west direction. The highest altitude of the hill is measured as around 798 m. First of all, a plan of the castle was drawn up by following the walls of the castle in our study. The castle displays a long and narrow plan in the north-east - south-west direction, in agreement with the topography of the hill. The defensive wall covering the north-west of the hill approximately extends from the altitude of 783 m to the altitude of 795 m in the north-east - south-west direction.*

Keywords: *Asarkale, Byzantine, Castle, Çanakkale, Hamdibey*

I. Introduction

One of the important routes providing the transportation between the Hellespont and the Kapıdağ Peninsula (Cyzicus) in the Byzantine period followed the Scamander and Aisepos Valleys [1]. These valleys constitute one of the areas we study to determine the military geography and defensive structures of the Hellespont and its vicinity in the Byzantine period. In this manuscript, it was aimed to evaluate the archaeological data we detected at Asarkale on the upper Aisepos Valley [2] (Fig. 1). It was predicted that the data to be obtained with this evaluation would first of all contribute to the settlement of the problems of dating the structure.

II. Place and importance of asarkale in the aisepos valley

Aisepos originates by being nourished by more than one source in the Kaz Mountains. It is a valley which extends for about 55 km in the north-east - south-west direction between the Kapıdağ Peninsula and the Gulf of Edremit [3]. It has two different geographical characteristics. Its upper section has a connection with the Scamander Valley. Therefore, it constitutes a natural road which originates from Cyzicus [4] – the metropolis of Hellespontus – and provides access to the Aegean ports via the Hellespont. Given that the point this natural road reached also provided access to the Black Sea and Mediterranean markets at the long distance and to the Marmara and Aegean markets at the short distance, it is understood that such resources as the mines and wood in the Kaz Mountains and in their close vicinity gained an economic value through these valleys [5].

Asarkale is located at one of the points qualifying as an intersection on the upper Aisepos Valley. With its location at an altitude of 780 m, the castle controls the roads intersecting on the northern side of the Upper Aisepos Valley. Of these roads, the first one follows the northern bank of Scamander, arrives in upper Aisepos via Karaköy, and reaches around Asarkale [6]. The second road follows the north-eastern side of Mt. Katran in the southern part of Aisepos from Karaköy in the west and arrives in the Aşağı Çavuş Village, whence it progresses eastwards, passes to the northern side of Aisepos around Kalkım, and reaches around Asarkale. The third road comes from the Gulf of Edremit in the south, follows the mountain roads, and reaches around the Çamhisar Castle in Karaaydın, whence it crosses Aisepos in the north and arrives around Asarkale. The fourth road comes from Pazarköy and Balya in the south-east and reaches around Çırpılar Kaletepesi. Another road coming from the Gulf of Edremit also joins this point. Crossing Aisepos at this point and progressing to the north-west, the road reaches around Asarkale. The fifth road originates from the Kapıdağ Peninsula, passes to the northern side of Aisepos around Gönen, and reaches around Asarkale in the west.

Reaching around Asarkale, these roads follow the natural roads passing from the north-western margin of Asarkale in the north. After Asarkale, this road progresses northwards first and then north-eastwards and reaches Yenice. The middle and upper sections of the strait can easily be accessed through these byroads. The defensive structures and surface finds we detected in these areas indicate that these road routes were used throughout the Byzantine period. This road network, which we detected during our archaeological surveys in the region, is new for the Byzantine studies.

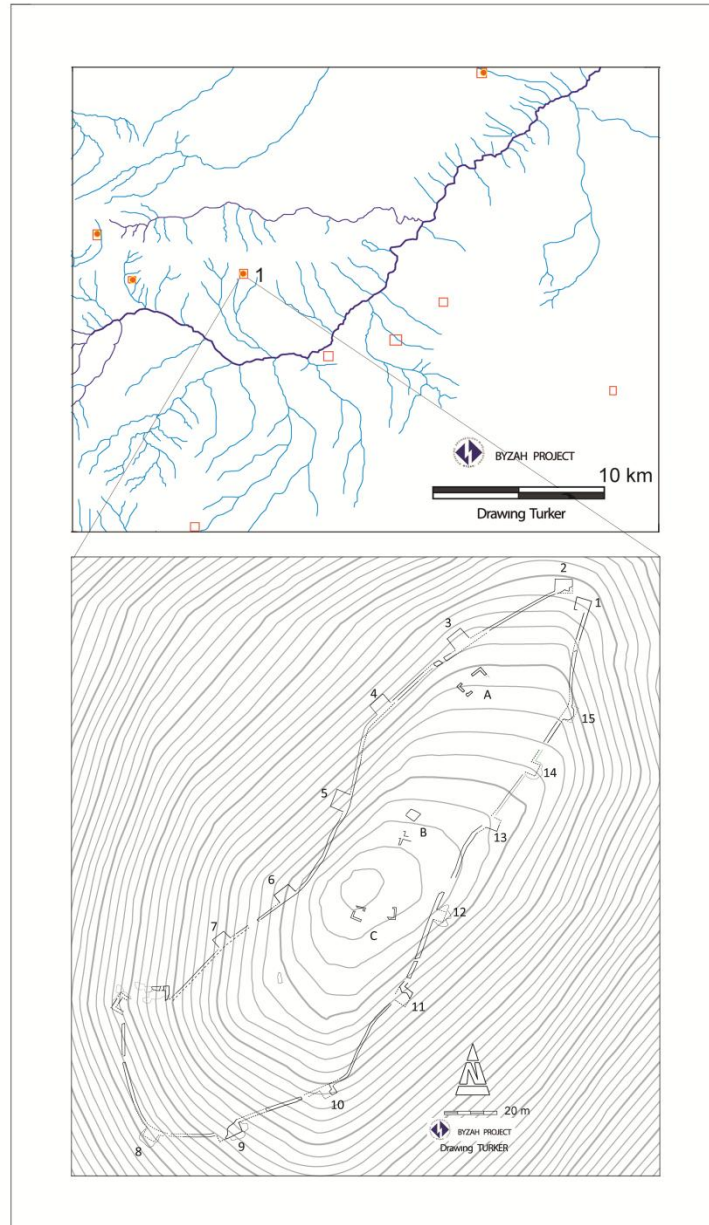


Figure 1 Location of Asarkale and plan of the castle (Drawing by Türker Türker)

III. History of research

The remains on Asartepé, where the castle was located, were localized as Palaiskepsis by Kiepert [7]. A plan of these remains was published by Mordtmann [8]. According to the description by Mordtmann, on the hill are remains of the walls, towers, aqueducts, and temple of the city of Palaiskepsis (Fig. 2). The walls were built with large blocks of stones. The walls of the acropolis are 6 feet in thickness and made of black porphyry marble. The towers were placed at irregular intervals, and there are four towers on the right-hand side of the entrance. He expressed that the temple had probably been located in the north, in the area somewhat outside the walls; however, he also stated that no trace had remained. He dated the visible building remains to the Classical period. It is understood that Kiepert also accepted these findings.

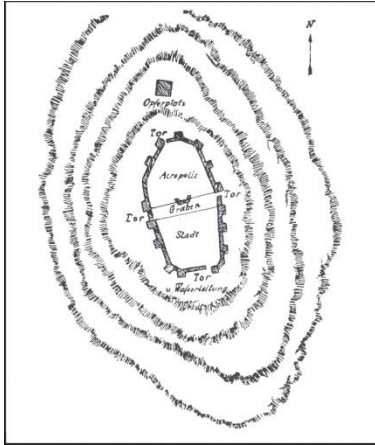


Figure 2 Plan of the Asarkale
(Mordtmann 1851)



Figure 3 Asartepe

Nevertheless, Wiegand dated the remains on Asartepe to the Byzantine period. He stated that the castle in this area measured about 150m by 50m and had walls which were approximately 1.5 m thick. He said that the castle had had two entrances and that the tower and cistern remains could be seen [9]. In his book, Hasluck mentioned the remains in this area when conveying the discussions on the localization of Skepsis and Palaiskepsis; however, he did not make any comment but stated that he had focused on Argiza in this region [10]. When discussing the problem of localization of Palaiskepsis in his study in the region, Leaf stated that the remains on Asartepe had belonged to the Byzantine period and that the ancient city must have been a little bit further in the west [11]. When discussing Palaiskepsis and the relevant place names, Kahrstedt made a reference to Asarkale but did not make any evaluation for the castle [12]. In the book entitled “the Byzantine Castles” and prepared by Foss and Winfield, Asarkale is present with a panoramic photograph of its and it is dated to the period of Byzantium which is called the dark ages [13].

Evaluations on Asarkale are also available in the reports on the surveys carried out in the region recently. In the first one, a building described as Hadrian’s hunting lodge and located on one of the summits of the mountains in the south of the district center of Yenice is mentioned without providing any information on the location [14]. However, the photograph provided is from Asarkale. The second study contains a plan of Asarkale, which is evaluated with the Alacaoluk Castle in Gönen, and both castles are dated to the 5th century by making a reference to the political atmosphere experienced in this period by the empire [15]. As understood from these data, there are different views about the quality and period of the building remains on Asartepe.

IV. Architecture Of Asarkale

Asartepe is approximately 310 m in length in the north-east - south-west direction (Fig. 3). The highest altitude of the hill is measured as around 798 m [16]. First of all, a plan of the castle was drawn up by following the walls of the castle in our study. The castle displays a long and narrow plan in the north-east - south-west direction, in agreement with the topography of the hill (Fig. 1). The defensive wall covering the north-west of the hill approximately extends from the altitude of 783 m to the altitude of 795 m in the north-east - south-west direction. On the northern margin of this wall is the north-eastern entrance of the castle. A quadrilateral tower was placed on both sides of the entrance. The covering of the walls belonging to Tower No. 1 in the south of the entrance has been shed substantially (Fig. 4). The masonry built with irregular-sized unhewn stones is seen on the preserved sections. The core is composed of white lime mortar and large unhewn stones. It is understood that reused blocks were used as binders between the core and the masonry. One of the reused materials is a double colonette at the eastern corner of the tower (Fig. 5). The wall covering of Tower No. 2 in the north of the entrance has been shed substantially (Fig. 6). The rubble core is composed of white lime mortar and large unhewn stones.



Figure 4 Asarkale, tower 1



Figure 5 Asarkale, east corner of the tower 1

Five towers can be detected on the defensive wall which covers the north of the castle. On the western margin of this wall is the second entrance of the castle. It is understood that a quadrilateral tower was present on both sides of this entrance. However, the walls of the tower were placed on the rocks, and it is hard to determine the type and measurements of the towers due to the walls which are collapsed today. The wall covering of Tower No. 3 on the northern defensive wall of the castle has been preserved, and large blocks of stones with smoothly-shaped front faces were used on the masonry (Fig. 7). The stones were stacked in thin and thick rows.



Figure 6 Asarkale tower 2



Figure 7 Asarkale, tower 3

The mortared rubble core of Towers No. 4 and 5 has been preserved. The core is composed of large unhewn stones and white lime mortar. On the upper section of Tower No. 4 is a lintel fragment which was horizontally placed in the rubble core (Fig. 8). The covering of the wall between Towers No. 5 and 6 has been preserved. The surface of the wall made of smoothly-shaped stones is covered with moss. The masonry of Tower No. 6 has been preserved partially (Fig.9).

Smoothly-shaped large blocks of stones were stacked to form thin and thick rows on the preserved section. The wall between Towers No. 6 and 7 can be followed in fragments. The covering of this wall has been shed too; however, the mortared rubble core is in good condition. It can be discovered that bricks were also used in the wall core which was made of large unhewn stones and white lime mortar. The stones used as binders between the core and the surface covering have been preserved in this wall as well. Tower No. 7 has also survived up to the present time together with its mortared rubble core. (Fig. 10).

The core composed of large unhewn stones and white lime mortar contains large blocks of stones which were used as binders. This area is rocky; the walls sit on these rocks; and the rock surfaces were sometimes used as part of the wall. The same material and the same building technique are also followed on the walls extending from this tower to the south-western entrance of the castle. The dense vegetation in the south-west of this area does not allow making an examination. Nevertheless, according to the traces on the surface, it may be predicted that there used to be architectural units connected with the castle in this area.



Figure 8 Asarkale, tower 4



Figure 9 Asarkale, tower 6

The wall extending in the north-west - south-east direction and covering the south-west of the hill extends at an altitude of about 788 m. On this defensive wall is Tower No. 8, whose mortared rubble core has been preserved (Fig. 11).

The wall which covers the south-east of the hill extends between the altitudes of 784 and 794 m in the south-west - north-east direction. Traces of seven towers are detected on this defensive wall. The eastern and southern walls of Tower No. 9 have been preserved (Fig. 12). Having survived up to the present time together with their mortared rubble core, these walls sit on the local rocks. The south-eastern corner of Tower No. 10 has been preserved (Fig. 13).

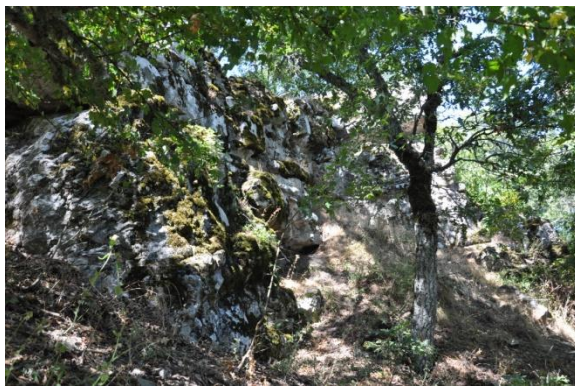


Figure 10 Asarkale, tower 7



Figure 11 Asarkale tower 8

Large horizontal blocks used as binders can be detected in the core that was composed of large unhewn stones and white lime mortar. The wall covering of Tower No. 11 has been preserved partially (Fig. 14). Smoothly-shaped thin and thick blocks were used on the two preserved rows of stones. The mortared rubble core contains few broken bricks. The wall covering of Tower No. 12 has been preserved partially. The preserved sections indicate that different-sized and smoothly-shaped stones were used in the wall covering. Besides large unhewn stones, few broken brick fragments can be detected in the mortared rubble core (Fig. 15). Towers No. 13, 14 and 15 have also been preserved with their rubble core (Fig. 16-17). The core contains few broken brick fragments. Large blocks of stones used as binders between the core and the wall surface can be detected at these towers too.

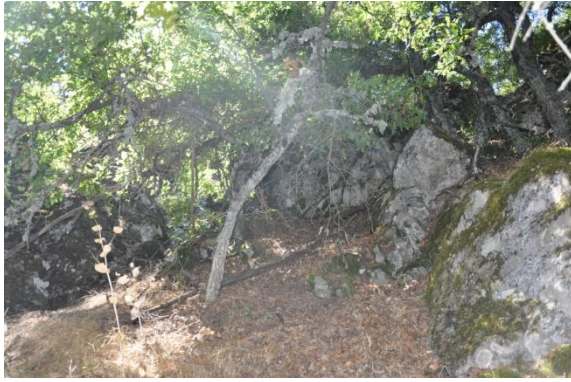


Figure 12 Asarkale, tower 9



Figure 13 Asarkale, tower 10



Figure 14 Asarkale, tower 11



Figure 15 Asarkale tower 12

The archaeological traces of building inside the castle are concentrated in three sections. They have been marked with Letters A, B, and C in the plan. There is a cistern in the area corresponding to the south of Tower No. 3 and marked with A (Fig. 18). Bricks were used in the masonry of the cistern. The bricks are 31 cm in length and 3.5 to 4 cm in thickness on average. The mortar between the bricks is the white lime mortar with dense and large broken bricks. On the other hand, the plaster covering the wall surface has only been preserved in the lower section of the walls. Wall fragments are found in the rocky areas marked with B and C; however, no plan can be followed. Fragments of ground stones (Fig. 19), pottery and terracotta construction materials are available in dispersed condition on the surface inside the castle. The terracotta roof covering materials include a fragment of the late Roman period as well as edge and body fragments of cover and flat tiles dated to the Byzantine period.



Figure 16 Asarkale, tower 13



Figure 17 Asarkale, tower 15



Figure 18 Cistern



Figure 19 Fragments of ground stones

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the castle displays a long and narrow plan in the north-east - south-west direction, in agreement with the topography of the hill. It has two entrances in the north-east and south-west. Both entrances are understood to have been fortified with quadrilateral towers. Even though it is hard to determine the types and measurements of the towers owing to the collapsed wall sections and the shed wall coverings, it is understood that the walls of the castle were fortified with a total of 17 towers. The towers have a quadrilateral plan. The majority of the walls belonging to the castle, which carries the overall character of the Byzantine defensive structures with these qualities, have survived up to the present time together with their mortared rubble core. The core is composed of dense lime mortar, large unhewn stones, and broken brick fragments. The reused fragments preserved in the rubble core are understood to have been used to function as a binder between the core and the masonry. Besides reused stones, regularly-shaped large stones were used on the wall covering on the front and back sides of the core. These stones were placed to form a thin row and a thick row in the masonry each. The fragment with the latest date that can be detected among the reused materials is a coupled column which is dated to the 5th-6th century. The use of reused fragments to function as a binder between the core and the masonry was a common application particularly in the Byzantine defensive structures constructed during the Arab raids in the 7th and 8th centuries [17]. Similar applications were also documented at Hala Hisar [18], Bolu, in Asarlık, Yırca [19], at Fındıklı Kale, Kuşadası [20], and in Altıntaş, Kütahya [21] that were dated to the same period. With these qualities of its, Asarkale may be evaluated among the defensive structures of the 7th & 8th centuries.

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