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TWO PONTOS CASTLES IN VEZIRKÖPRÜ, REG. SAMSUN: BÜYÜKKALE (SAGYLION) AND KÜÇÜKKALE*

Vezirköprü, the district of Samsun, is an area of a continuous sedentism for millennia, from the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age until the present, due to its location at an important crossroads, with wide plains and numerous streams all around, and a landscape suitable for settled life. Being a village named Phazemon, in Strabo's words, the site gained the identity of a city with the Roman domination in the region and took the name Neoklaudiopolis (Neapolis). The city has witnessed many wars and showed that it had an important strategic position. Mithridates VI Eupator, King of Pontus, was the biggest enemy of Roman domination in Anatolia back then. In Pontus's coastal parts, castles have already been known, while those in the inner parts of the region have not been adequately researched. Büyükkale and Küçükale, which are the scope of the paper, are among the latter. Both castles display many things of traditional Mithridatic fortification, with castle walls, rock tunnels, stairs, and tombs. The one in Büyükkale is identified with Sagylion of old written accounts. The castles under study have not yet been published elsewhere, and the paper is expected to contribute to the illumination of the construction activity of the Pontic Kingdom and the Hellenistic Period in Vezirköprü.

Key words: Black Sea studies, Samsun, Vezirköprü, Neoklaudiopolis, Büyükkale, Sagylion, Küçükale, Pontic Kingdom, stepped tunnel, rock tomb.

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ДВЕ ПОНТИЙСКИЕ КРЕПОСТИ В ВЕЗИРКЁПРЮ, ОБЛАСТЬ САМСУН: БЮЮККАЛЕ (САГИЛИОН) И КЮЧЮККАЛЕ

Везиркёпрю, один из районов Самсуна, непрерывно занят оседлым населением на протяжении тысячелетий, от энеолита и ранней бронзы по сей день, благодаря расположению на важном перекрёстке, широким равнинам, многочисленным ручьям и подходящим для заселения ландшафтам. Когда-то здесь была деревня под названием Фаземон. По Страбону, она стала городом в период римского господства под названием Неоклаудиополис (Неаполис). Город имел важное стратегическое значение в период, когда самым опасным врагом римского господства в Анатолии был понтийский царь Митридат VI Евпатор. В прибрежных частях Понтийского региона крепости уже исследовались, тогда как укрепления в его внутренних частях не были должным образом изучены. Таковы Бююккале и Кючюккале с характерными чертами фортификации и градостроительства эпохи Митридатидов — мощными стенами, каменными туннелями и лестницами, а также гробницами. Бююккале идентифицируется с Сагилионом, упоминаемым письменными источниками. Нынешняя публикация крепостей, прежде не известных в археологической литературе, способствует освещению Понтийского градостроительства и эллинистического периода в Везиркёпрю.

Ключевые слова: Черноморские исследования, Самсун, Везиркёпрю, Неоклаудиополис, Бююккале, Сагилион, Кючюккале, Понтийское царство, ступенчатый туннель, скальная гробница.

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Introduction

Vezirköprü is a district in the Central Black Sea Region of Samsun Province, surrounded by Alaçam and Durağan in the north, Bafra in the northeast, Havza in the east, Osmancık in the southwest and Saraydüzü in the west. The region's rugged topography, on the one hand, and the plains suitable for settlement and agriculture, on the other hand, have created a different ecosystem, and as a result, the district has been home to various civilizations for hundreds of years. An analysis of the settlement history of Vezirköprü, in general, shows that it has continued uninterrupted from the Chalcolithic Age to the present day. The first publications on the district were made by the K. Kökten team, who conducted studies in the Samsun region in 1940—1941 (Kökten et al. 1945: 361). The surveys conducted by Dengate (Dengate 1978: 245—258) in 1970 and Alkım and his team between 1971 and 1977 constitute important milestones in illuminating the district's history (Alkım 1973: 435—438; 1974a: 5—16; 1974b: 553—556; 1975a: 23—28; 1975b: 5—12; 1976: 717—719; 1978: 542—547; Kızıltan 1992: 213—241). The stone tools (Bekker-Nielsen et al. 2015: 10) found at Adatepe Mound, 4 km north of Vezirköprü, during these surveys, allow us to date the settlement back to the Early Chalcolithic Period, while the excavations conducted by Rainer M. Czichon since 2007 at Oymağaç Mound (Czichon, Yılmaz 2014: 340), 7 km north of Vezirköprü, revealed that the mound was not only an important Bronze Age settlement, but was also used during the Iron Age and later during the Hellenistic and Roman Periods. The earliest data from the Hellenistic and Roman Periods in the district belongs to French (French 1988), Kahl and Olshausen (Kahl, Olshausen 1991: 612—613), who researched the inscriptions and coins of the ancient city of Neoklaudiopolis (see Bekker-Nielsen 2013b: 39—59) in the 80s and 90s. In 2010—2013, a team formed by T. Bekker-Nielsen (Bekker-Nielsen 2010: 87—91; Bekker-Nielsen, Högel 2012: 153—160; Bekker-Nielsen 2013c: 203—213; Bekker-Nielsen et al. 2015: 1—96) conducted a survey to identify the Roman roads in the region. The results of the surveys undertaken by A. Temür (Temür, Yiğitpaşa 2020a: 619—654; Temür, Yiğitpaşa 2020b: 2865—2894) since 2018 revealed that the district has witnessed an uninterrupted intensive settlement from the Bronze Age (see Öntaş 2020) to the present day.

During the Hellenistic and Roman Periods of the city, several kingdoms came to the fore in Northern Anatolia in the process that started with the death of Alexander and resulted in the dissolution of the empire he founded. The Kingdom of Pontos, founded in 281 BCE, is one of them (Bekker-Nielsen 2013b: 41). The kingdom's heyday was undoubtedly lived during the reign of Mithradates VI Eupator, characterized by an ambitious personality. The king, who ascended the throne in 120 BCE, embarked on great conquests and spent his life fighting against the expansionist policies of the Romans (see Arslan 2007). Mithradates, who defeated the Romans in many battles, confronted the Roman commander Pompeius in 66 BCE, and the Romans defeated his army. With the end of the Pontic Kingdom, Roman rule began in the region. While organizing the Roman conquests in northern Anatolia, Pompeius united the Kingdom of Pontos with the former Kingdom of Bithynia and established the Province of Pontus and Bithynia (Arslan 2007: 490). During this period, many cities were founded in the region by Pompeius, including Neapolitis (fig. 1). (Bekker-Nielsen 2013a: 3).

Strabo (Strabo. XII, III, 38) stated the following in his work about the city; “*After the land of the Amisos people comes Phazemonitis, which extends to the Halys River. Pompeius declared the settlement in the Phazemon Village here as a city and named it Neapolitis*”. The Phazemonitis region takes its name from a village named Phazemon (Vezirköprü) and is surrounded by Gazelonitis (Bafra), Saramene and Amisos (Samsun) to the north, Amaseia (Amasya) to the south, rivers Iris (Kızılırmak) to the east and Halys (Yeşilirmak) to the west and Phanaroia (Taşova) (Arslan 2007: 18; Dalaison, Delrieux 2014: 163, C. 1). The city's name was later changed to Neoklaudiopolis (City of Claudius) in honour of the emperor Claudius (Anderson 1900: 151; Waddington, Babelon: 1904: 169; Bekker-Nielsen et al. 2015: 16). It is

possible to track this change in the coins minted in the city under the name of Neoklaudiopolis from the 2nd century CE to the early 3rd century CE (Waddington, Babelon 1904: 169—171, Pl. XXIII: 8—15; Dalaison, Delrieux 2014: 159—198). Neoklaudiopolis maintained its significance during this period as it was located on an important road junction leading to Thermai (Samsun/Havza) in the south, Pompeiopolis (Kastamonu/Taşköprü) in the west, Neokaisareia (Tokat/Niksar) and Amisos (Samsun) in the east (Temür, Yiğitpaşa 2018a: 623, fig. 6—8). After the division of the Roman Empire into two, the city became known as “Andrapa” (Ptolemaios. V, 4, 6; Magie 1950: 1067—1068; Arslan 2007: 18). The large number of Byzantine spolia found during the surveys revealed that the city remained important, albeit not as much as in the Roman Period (Temür, Yiğitpaşa 2018a: 619—654; Temür, Yiğitpaşa 2018b: 2865—2894). The Büyükkale and Küçükale Castles in question were identified and examined in detail during the 2019 surveys. This study is valuable as Büyükkale is localized to the Sagylion Castle mentioned in ancient sources. It is known that Mithridates VI built castles at many points dominating the Black Sea coast within the scope of his military and strategy (Şenyurt, Atakan 2016: 226). In this process, while detailed excavations and research have been carried out in castles such as Kurul (Şenyurt et al. 2017: 133—146; 2019: 691—712; 2020: 505—524; 2022: 461—474) and Cıngirt (Erol 2013b: 1069—1077; 2014: 383—400; 2018: 102—109), located in the coastal area, the castles in the interior of the Pontos Region have been investigated to a lesser extent. In this context, the study of the castles in question is very important in terms of shedding light on the Hellenistic Period of Vezirköprü, which constitutes one of the transition points of the Pontic Region, and, thus, the Black Sea archaeology.

Büyükkale (Sagylion)

Strabo says in his work, “Above the country of the Amaseians, there are the hot springs of Phazemonitis, which are very good for health. There is also the Sagylion Castle on a high and steep mountain, each extending in the shape of a beak”. The Sagylion Castle mentioned by Strabo is localized to Vezirköprü by researchers (Hamilton 1842: 332—334; Anderson 1903: 83; Waddington, Babelon 1904: 7, 27; Arslan 2007: 19—20; Højte 2009: 103; Şenyurt, Akçay 2017: 182; Bekker-Nielsen 2021: 252). In particular, Olshausen and Biller point out this castle as Büyükkale today, bearing the same name as the neighbourhood 15 km south of Vezirköprü (Olshausen, Biller 1984: 162).

The castle, approximately 1,400 m above sea level, is located on a steep rocky cliff running east-west (figs. 2—8). The north side of the castle facing the neighbourhood is relatively lower. Since the castle’s south side is composed of very steep and sheer rocks, the ascent to the castle is only possible via a narrow zigzagging path on the north side facing the neighbourhood, which is believed to have been used in antiquity. Although no findings related to the entrance gate have been unearthed, the flattened areas on the rocks suggest that the entrance to the castle may be on the continuation of the pathway that leads to the castle today.

The highest point of the castle, the western corner, called “Flag Hill” by the villagers, is reachable by steps carved into the rocks (figs. 9—10). A cistern with a depth of 6 m and a diameter of 4 m can be seen in the area terraced in places (figs. 11—12). The cistern’s interior, carved into the rock, was built with bricks, and its surface was plastered. Looking to the south from the top of the castle, remains of fortification walls can be seen on partially flat areas on the slope (figs. 13—16). While large—sized cut stone blocks from the Hellenistic Period are observed at the base of the fortification walls, of which a 70 m section has been preserved in some places, a wall structure of Roman and Byzantine periods (Højte 2009: 103) is observed on the upper parts, which is built of brick and rubble stone with khorasan mortar on the inside and irregular cut stone on the outside (figs. 17—19). The preserved height of the city walls is 4—5 m, and the thickness is 1.30 m. An examination of the walls reveals terracotta pipe pieces and amorphous ceramic pieces belonging to the Roman and Byzantine Periods (fig. 20) for Roman ceramics identified during the surveys, see Karadeniz 2021). These ruins evince that the castle was fortified and reused in the Roman and Byzantine Periods.

There is an opening at the southwest part of the castle considered to belong to the entrance of the stepped rock tunnel (figs. 21—22). No measurement could be taken since the entrance was destroyed and filled with stones. However, Strabo (Strabo. XII, III, 38) provides crucial information about the

tunnel: “*The cistern at Sagylian, now abandoned, was useful to kings in many ways. Arsaces, one of the sons of King Pharnaces, assumed the title of ruler and attempted to revolt but was captured and killed here. Although the castle was taken by kings Polemon and Lycomedes, Arsaces was captured not by force but by starvation and thirst. He fled away from the plains into the mountains without provisions and found the cisterns filled with large rocks; for Pompey had ordered them to be filled and the garrisons demolished, lest they should be of use to those who went up for banditry. This is how Pompey had organized the administration of Phazemonitis*”. Here must be the cistern mentioned by Strabo, which was destroyed by Pompey and filled with rocks, as the other cistern in the castle is intact and too small to meet the needs of an army with its diameter of 4 meters and depth of 6 meters.

Strabo’s statements about the stepped tunnel in the Sagylian Castle actually shed light on a debate. The Pontic region of Anatolia, including Samsun, is one of the places where stepped tunnels are most frequently seen (von Gall 1967: 511—517; Erol 2013a: 184; Şenyurt, Bulut 2020: 228). These tunnels are generally defined as stepped architectural structures formed by carving a castle or a natural rock elevation with a slope of 25°—45° (de Jerphanion 1928: 24; von Gall 1967: 504; Şenyurt, Bulut 2020: 228; Tekin et al. 2022: 405). 39 stepped tunnels are known to exist in 30 different locations in Samsun, Ordu, Amasya, Tokat, Sivas and Yozgat provinces (Şenyurt, Bulut 2020: 228; Bulut 2020: 47—48). Since very few of these tunnels have been excavated, their function and dating are still a matter of debate, and there are many opinions (Köroğlu, Danişmaz 2018: 120). It is commonly considered that these tunnels were used for three different purposes: water supply, military and cultic (Şenyurt, Bulut 2020: 229). At this point, some researchers, such as Osten (von der Osten 1929: 128—130) and Jerphanion (de Jerphanion 1928: 26—28), argue that the stepped tunnels are too large solely for access to water and that they may have been used for military purposes, such as escape or an unexpected attack on the enemy, while others, such as Şenyurt (Şenyurt, Bulut 2020: 233, pl. 8) and Leonhard (Leonhard 1915: 238—239), argue that they may have been used for cultic purposes. While Şenyurt (Similar niches are also found in the “Hisarkavak” stepped tunnel in Mecitözü, Çorum. Şenyurt, Bulut 2020: 233, pl. 6—7) bases their opinion on the niches at the entrance of the stepped tunnel in the Kurul Castle where a figurine may have been placed, Leonhard states that some of the tunnels are too large to meet the need for water and that these tunnels may have been built for a representative purpose and associates them with the cult of the mother goddess. In the case of Sagylian, Strabo’s statements indicate that the stepped tunnels with no exit were also used as cisterns for storing rainwater. The existence of stepped tunnels in the Pontos region leading nowhere, especially in Ordu Kurul (Şenyurt, Akçay 2016: 221—248; 2017: 182, fig. 3; Şenyurt et al. 2017: 133—146; 2019: 691—712; 2020: 505—524; 2022: 461—474) and Cıngırt Castles (Erol 2013b: 1069—1077), Amasya Harşena Castle (Belck 1901: 473; Doğanbaş 2008: 11—28; 2010: 65—78. see Dönmez 2014: 29—49), Giresun Kaledere (Kaymakçı 2020: 569—586) and Şebinkarahisar Castles (von Gall 1967: 507; Kaymakçı 2020: 574, fig. 10) and Tokat Castle (Belck 1901: 473; de Jerphanion 1928: 37—39), supports this view.

In some cases, as in Tokat Castle, the spring water found at the end of the tunnel evinces that these cisterns can hold large amounts of water (Şenyurt, Bulut 2020: 231). Since the stepped tunnel in the Sagylian example has been destroyed, we do not have the chance to know whether there were niches at the entrance that could be associated with a cult, as in Ordu Kurul Castle. However, the structures defined as rock bowls or libation pits, frequently encountered on rocky areas in the surveys conducted in the region, are often associated with the fertility/rain cult (Çiğdem, Gönültaş 2004: 74). As in Göbeklitepe (Schmidt 1998: 50, abb. 20), open-air temples/altars, including these pits dating back to the Neolithic period, are common places of worship found in many cultures (Çevik 2003: 233—246; Şimşek, Sezgin 2011: 40). Rock steps are another structure observed in these open-air temples created by shaping rocky areas. Used as a means to reach the gods, Rock steps are found in a very wide area from the west to the east of Anatolia and are a characteristic structure found especially in Phrygian and Urartian castles. However, it is very difficult to distinguish between the steps used for real purposes and those used for cult purposes. Stairs built for cultic purposes often have deadends (Naumann, 1991: 43). Sometimes, these steps end with a statuette of Cybele carved in a niche or a portable figurine of Cybele as a reflection

of epiphanic thought (Tüfekçi-Sivas 2002: 337; Şenyurt, Atakan 2017: 179—199; Şenyurt, Durugönül 2018: 305—344), while in other cases, they end with an inscription or a niche in which it is believed that the god can be seen (Çevik 2003: 234). The steps symbolically represent the ascent to the presence of the god in these monuments and do not serve a practical purpose. During ceremonies, the steps were used to spiritually transport the person to the god's level with offerings placed, or libations poured on them (Tüfekçi-Sivas 2002: 339—340). Considering the niches in some of the stepped tunnels, we can conclude that they may have had cultic purposes in addition to their cistern functions.

The dating of the stepped tunnels is as controversial as their intended use because no inscriptions or reliefs to date them have been found in any of them. Von Gall (von Gall 1967: 517), who studied the stepped tunnels in Anatolia, underlined the difficulty in determining exactly when they were built but that the step tunnels in the regions of Paphlagonia, Phrygia and Pontos may have been built in a time starting from the Achaemenid Period and continuing until the Hellenistic Period, considering the rock tombs and engravings found in the region. However, finds recovered during the excavations at Ordu Kurul (Şenyurt, Akçay 2016: 239), Fatsa Cıngırt Castles, and Tokat Geyraz Castle (Erciyas, Sökmen 2010: 359) indicate that the stepped tunnels date back to the Hellenistic Period, especially to the reign of Mithradates VI Eupator (Şenyurt, Bulut 2020: 236). It would be appropriate to date the Sagylion Castle to the same period. However, the fortification walls and ceramics found during the surveys in the castle revealed that the castle was also intensively used during the Roman and Byzantine Periods.

Küçükkale

Küçükkale in question is located on the road to Büyükkale, 600 m east of the neighbourhood of the same name (fig. 23). Located 1 km southeast of Büyükkale, the castle is situated on a very steep rocky area at approximately 1.165 m above sea level (Map 6). Since the other sides of the castle are very steep, it has a natural defence. The ascent to the castle can only be achieved by climbing from the west side (figs. 24—25). The summit of the castle is a small watchtower measuring 11×7 m (figs. 26—27). The other sides of the cliff are not suitable for settlement. The terraced upper part houses two cisterns carved into the rock. The first cistern, built near the summit of the castle, has a diameter of 2.70 m and a height of 5 m (fig. 28). The second cistern is located just below the first cistern (fig. 29). It is 7 m deep and narrows from bottom to top, with a bottom diameter of 5 m and a top diameter of 2 m. The holes where the wooden beams entered are visible in both cisterns. Compared with the cistern at Büyükkale, they have more or less similar dimensions. Many cisterns with similar characteristics were recorded during the surveys conducted in Vezirköprü (Temür, Yiğitpaşa 2020a: 623—624; Temür, Yiğitpaşa 2020b: 2869—2870).

Three of these are located in the castle in the Özyörük Neighbourhood, 15 km northeast of Vezirköprü, one on a rocky area in the Zindankaya Site in the Esen Neighbourhood, 13 km south of the district, and the last one on a castle settlement in the Terekkaya Site in the Türkmen Neighbourhood, 18 km north of Vezirköprü. The common characteristics of these cisterns carved into the rocks are that they were fed by rainwater, have a diameter of 2—4 m and a depth of 5—6 m, expand downwards from the mouth and were plastered to ensure waterproofing. Since this type of cisterns was frequently used in both the Hellenistic and Roman periods, it is impossible to give a precise date.

A semi-circular rock tomb with an arched entrance and a vaulted ceiling was found at the top of the rocky area in Küçükkale on a levelled terrace (fig. 30). The rock tomb, which was severely damaged by illegal excavations, measures 1.45×1.10 m and has an inner depth of 90 cm. The benches of the rock tomb were damaged, and no finds have been unearthed to provide a date (The widespread use of vaulting and arches in the rock tombs in the region is interpreted as Roman influence. Durukan 2012: 76; Tekin 2020: 134—135). There is a second rock tomb on the south-facing side of the rocky area (fig. 31). According to the old photographs and remains of the tomb, which could not be entered because of its steep and inaccessible location, it seems to consist of a triangular pedimented, columned

entrance and a vaulted burial chamber. This type of tomb, defined as “Paphlagonia Rock Tombs”, appears as part of the rock tomb tradition of the Pontos Region during the Hellenistic Period.

This rock tomb form is found in many provinces such as Ordu (Kumandaş 2004: 36—37; Kumandaş 2018: 106—129), Sinop (Dökü 2008: 44) and Kastamonu (Dökü 2008: fig. 43), as well as Samsun (Ünan 2010: 45 et al.) and dates back to the 5th century BCE. They can be traced back to the Phrygian rock tomb monuments and are considered to reflect on the rock the local wooden residential architecture blended with the interaction of Achaemenid and Greek art (Forbes 1983: 93 et al.; Dökü 2008: 17; Vassileva 2012: 250; Tekin et al. 2022: 134). The most distinctive feature of these rock tombs with flat or triangular pediments, consisting of single or multiple burial chambers, is the presence of columns at the entrance, reminiscent of a temple facade. Only traces of the columns and the triangular pediment are visible in the Küçükkale example as they have been destroyed (The better-preserved example of this rock tomb in Küçükkale is the “Evkaya” tomb in the Esen neighbourhood. Dökü 2008: 36, 119, 123, fig. 23; Ünan 2010: 49, pl. LXXXVIII: 1, LXXXIX: 1; Temür et al. 2022: 152, fig. 12b-d).

When we look at the eastern side of the castle facing the stream, we see a 20 m — long horseshoe—shaped (see Bulut 2017: 166—167) rock tunnel with 41 steps (figs. 32—33). The entrance to the stepped tunnel, called by the locals “*Kırk Badal Mevkii*”, is 0.90 m wide and 1.15 m high (fig. 34). The tunnel height reaches 2 m in places inside. The steps are 0.25 m wide and 0.25 m high (fig. 35). At the end of the steps, facing east, there is an arched doorway measuring 1.30×0.52 m (figs. 36—37) and a window opening measuring 0.30×0.24 m to the left of the door.

Since the steps from the doorway have been destroyed, it is impossible to proceed (fig. 38). Therefore, its length cannot be measured exactly. The locals in the neighbourhood state that the side of the tunnel facing the stream was named “*At Böğerdî Mevkii*”, and the steps led down to the stream but were closed afterwards. This step tunnel is undoubtedly very different from the Büyükkale example. The greatest difference is that it is only high and wide enough for a few people and leads down to a water source (fig. 39). The earliest information about the use of these canals for water supply comes from Strabo. Speaking of Amasya in his work, Strabo (Strabo. XII, III, 39) says: “*My city is built in a wide and deep valley through which the Iris River flows. Human labour and nature have given it the character of both a city and a fortress in an extraordinary way... There are cisterns in these rocks, but the city has no access to them. Two tubular canals have been carved into the rocks, one towards the river and one towards the strait.*” Strabo’s statements are very important in terms of revealing that stepped tunnels were used as a means of access to water in the Hellenistic Period. In this context, the stepped tunnel at Küçükkale must have also been used to access water. Similar stepped tunnels are located in Samsun/Bafra Asarkale (Bilgi et al. 2002: 42; 2003: 88—89; Bulut 2017: 140—142, fig. 81—83), Tependeliği (Bilgi et al. 2003: 88; Bulut 2017: 143—145, fig. 84—86), Tokat/Pazar Dereköy (Tekin et al. 2022: 410—413) stepped tunnels. Both rock tunnels descend to a river source, as in the Küçükkale example. The Tependeliği and Dereköy examples, which are slightly larger than Küçükkale, show similar characteristics to the Küçükkale stepped tunnel with their horseshoe shape.

No fortification wall or building remains were found in Küçükkale. However, there are partially traceable remains of a 1 m thick wall made of rubble stones in the lower part of the rocky area (figs. 40—41). These wall remains probably belong to a later period. The examination around the wall remains yielded sherds from the Roman and Byzantine Periods (fig. 42).

Compared to Büyükkale, Küçükkale is a rather small—scale fort. Especially considering that it is located on the same line, with no fortification walls and no suitable areas for settlement, it gives the impression of a fort/tower built for surveillance purposes. The cistern inside must have been used for the daily needs of the soldiers on guard here. During the surveys, many similar small—scale fort structures were identified in Vezirköprü. The common characteristics of these forts are being located on the passageways at a point dominating the terrain and having terraced areas with rock steps and small cisterns carved into the rock to meet the water needs of the people living there. Since these types of forts are not suitable for dense settlement and are mostly located on a rocky area in the middle or at the top of a hillside settlement, mostly built as watchtowers, as in the cases of Zindankaya (Temür, Yiğitpaşa 2020b: 2869)

and Kocakarıpınarı (Temür, Yiğitpaşa 2020a: 622, 624, fig. 9), they did not have stepped tunnels for water storage, as in Büyükkale. Although it is impossible to say anything definite about the periods in which the castles were used, the ceramics found in the surrounding settlements revealed that their beginnings date back to the Hellenistic Period, but they were also used during the Roman and Byzantine Periods.

Conclusion

The castles evaluated within the scope of the study were identified during the surveys conducted in the Vezirköprü district of Samsun. It is known that Mithridates VI built castles at many points dominating the Black Sea coast within the framework of his military strategy. Some of these castles have been researched in detail, and excavations are still ongoing in some of them. However, in contrast to these studies conducted on the coastal region, the castles in the interior of the Pontic Region have been investigated to a lesser extent. In this context, studying these castles is very important in terms of shedding light on the Hellenistic Period of Vezirköprü, which constitutes one of the transition points of the Pontic Region, and thus on the Black Sea archaeology. In addition, the fact that Büyükkale, one of the castles studied, is localized to the Sagylion Castle mentioned in Strabo's work further increases the importance of the study. Because it is known that with the defeat of Mithradates VI by Pompeius and the subsequent Roman domination in the region, all the castles belonging to the Kingdom of Pontos were destroyed so as not to be used again. As a result of the Roman destruction, the Hellenistic Period data in the region is limited and very few of them have survived to the present day. In this context, the research of these castles, which contain many of the traditional features of the Hellenistic Period Mithridates castles with their fortification walls, rock tunnels, rock steps and rock tombs, and bringing them to the literature will contribute to illuminate the construction activities of the Pontic Kingdom in the region and the Hellenistic Period of Vezirköprü.

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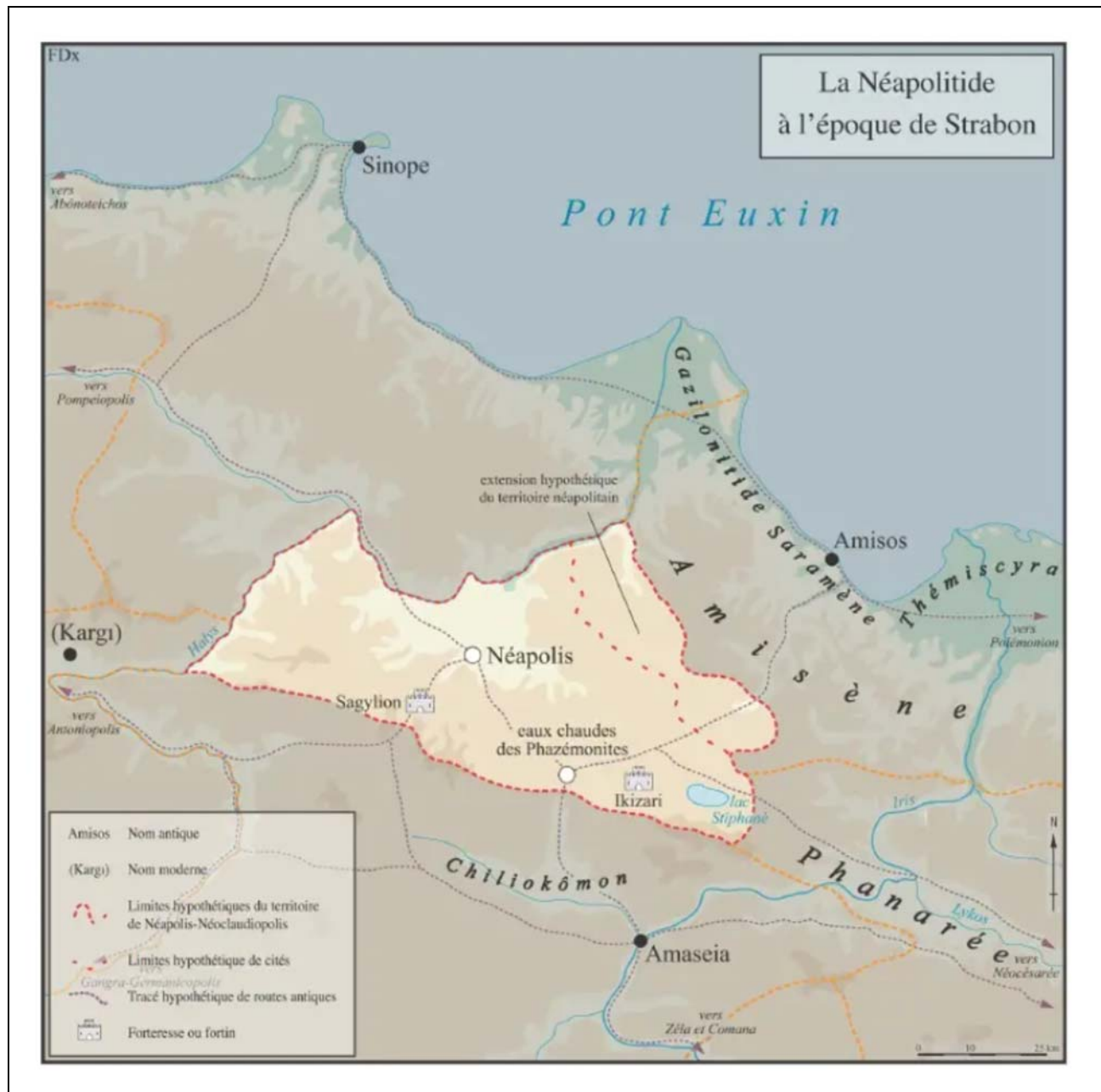


Fig. 1. Neoklaudiopolis in the time of Strabo (Neapolis) (after Dalaison, Delrieux 2014: 163, Carte 1).

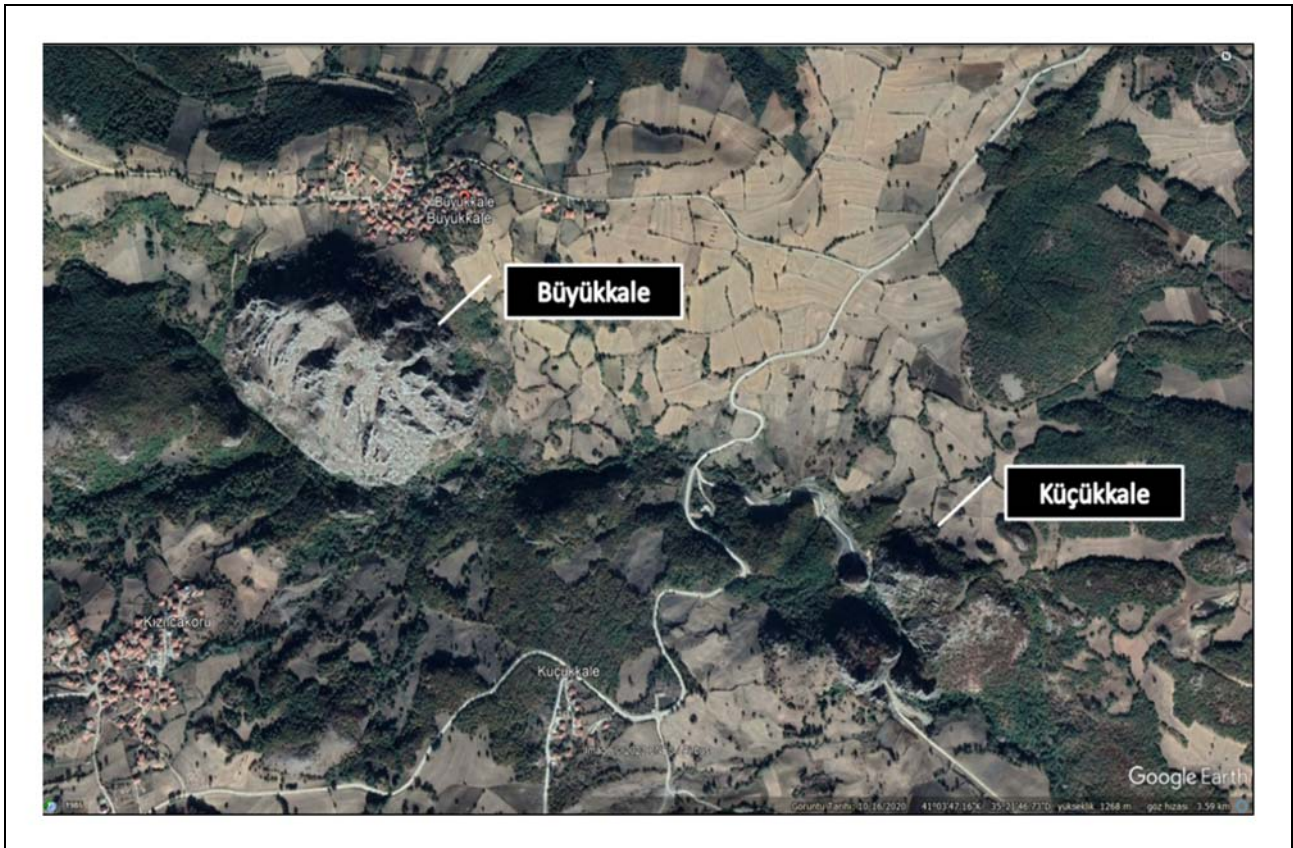


Fig. 2. Satellite photo of Büyükkale and Küçükkale.

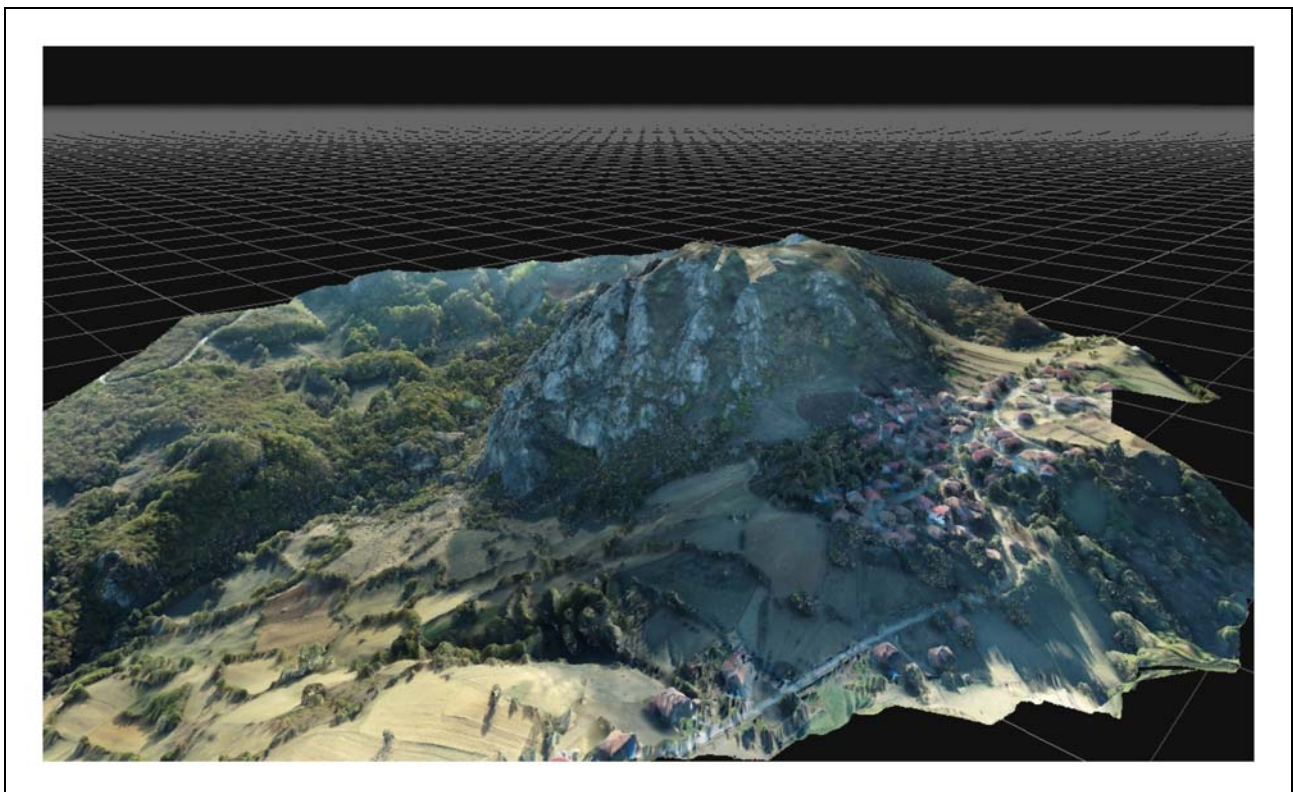


Fig. 3. Orthophoto view of Büyükkale from the North.

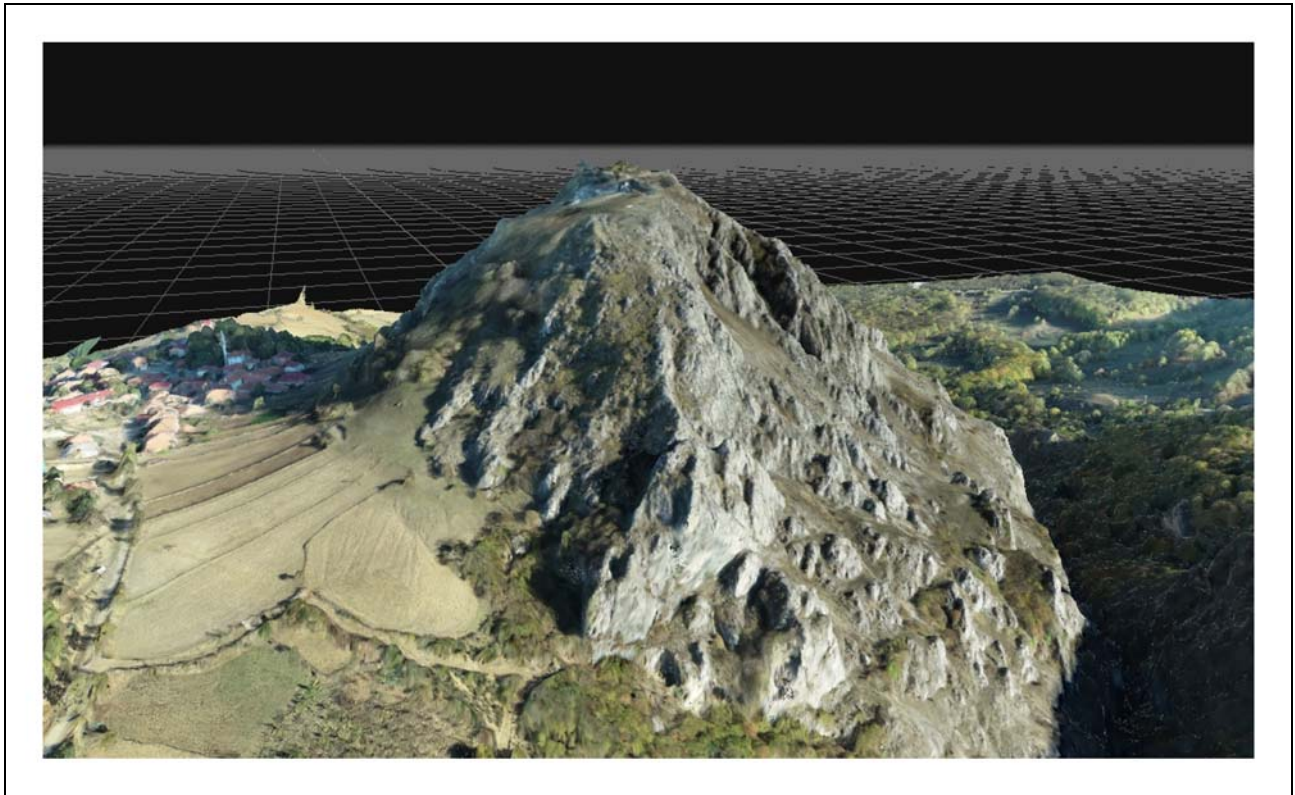


Fig. 4. Orthophoto view of Büyükkale from the west.

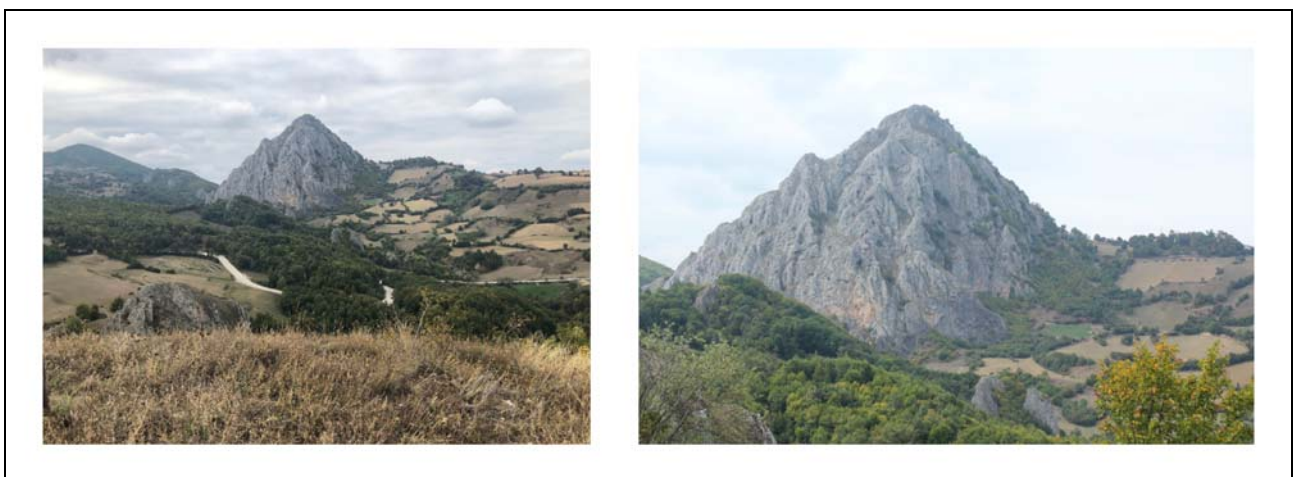


Fig. 5—6. View of Büyükkale from the north.



Fig. 7—8. View of Büyükkale from the south.



Fig. 9—10. The summit of the castle and rock steps.

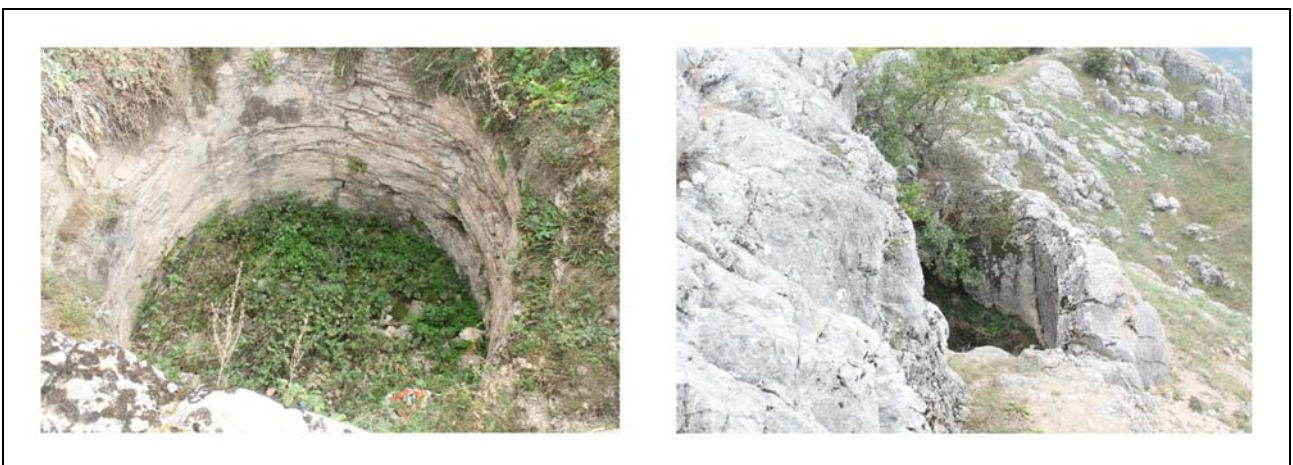


Fig. 11—12. Cistern carved into the rock.



Fig. 13—16. Late-period fortification walls.



Fig. 17—19. Late-period fortifications built on the Hellenistic Period fortification walls.



Fig. 20. Ceramic sherds found around the walls.



Fig. 21—22. Entrance to the damaged step tunnel.

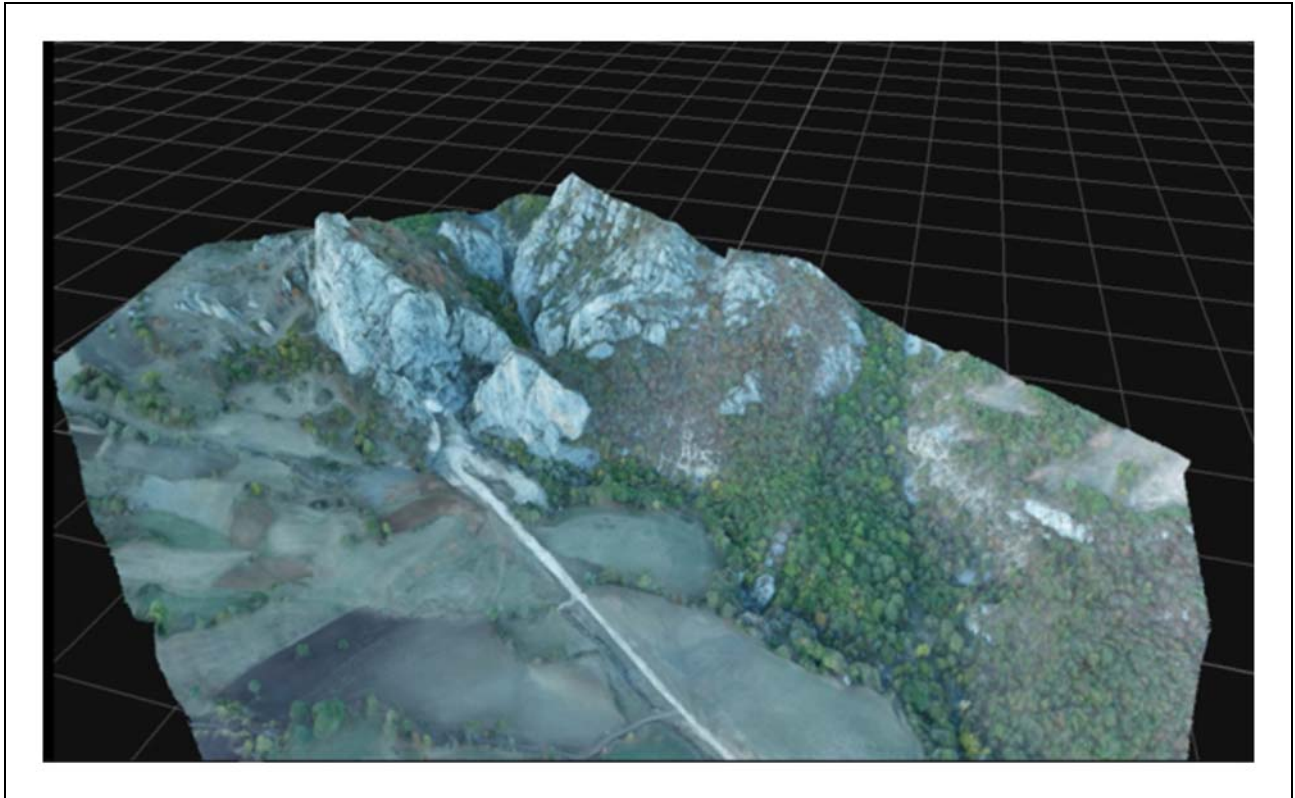


Fig. 23. Orthophoto view of Küçükkale from the southeast.



Fig. 24—25. Southwest view of the castle.

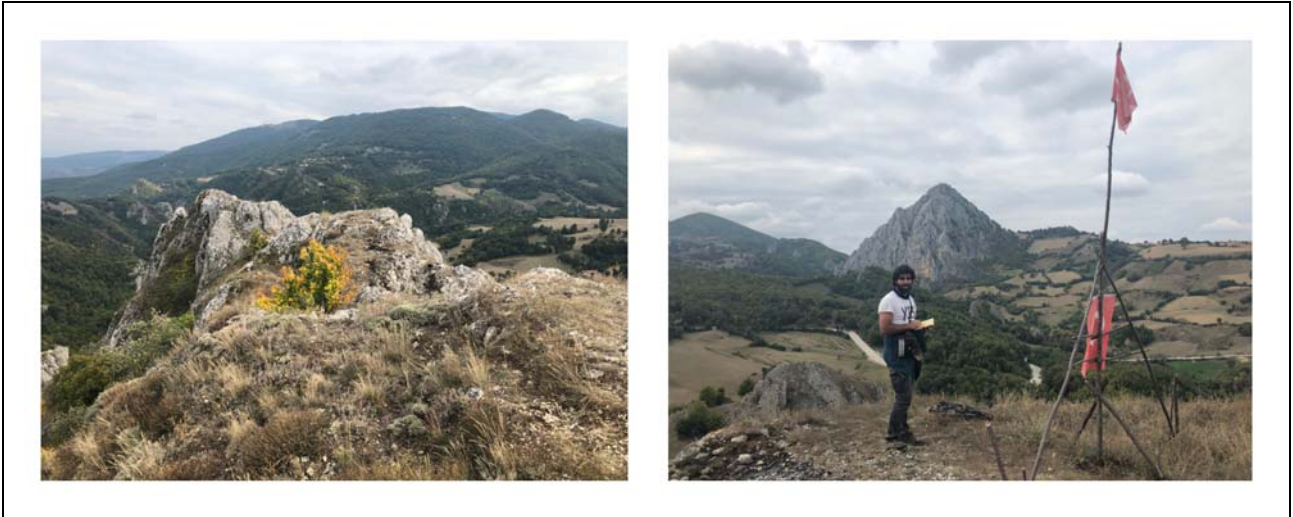


Fig. 26—27. The summit of the castle and Büyükkale.



Fig. 28—29. Cisterns carved into the rock.



Fig. 30. First rock tomb on the terrace.

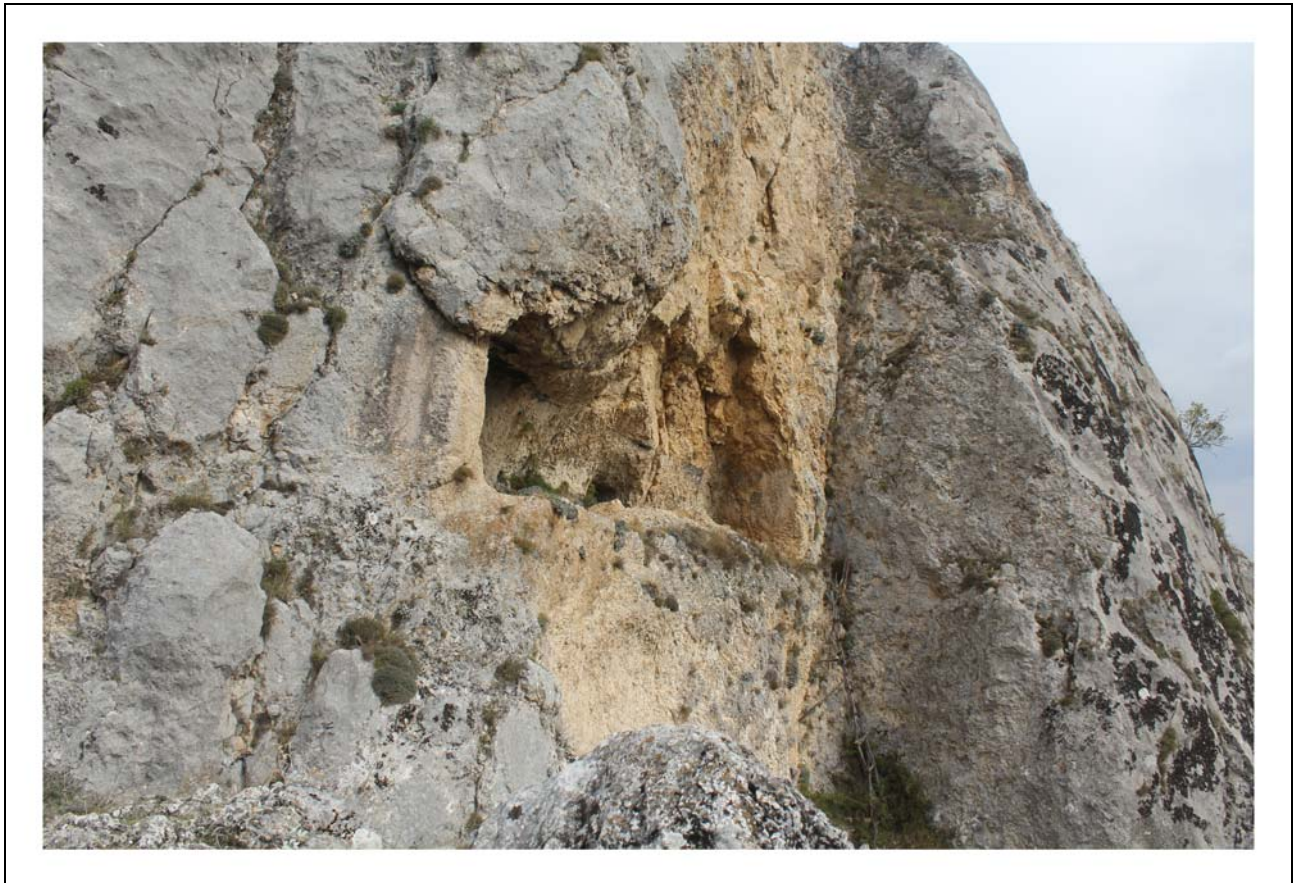


Fig. 31. The second rock tomb on the south-facing part of the rocky area.



Fig. 32—33. The entrance and corridor of the stepped tunnel on the east side of the castle.



Fig. 34—35. Steps and ceiling at the entrance of the stepped tunnel.



Fig. 36—37. Steps and arched doorway.

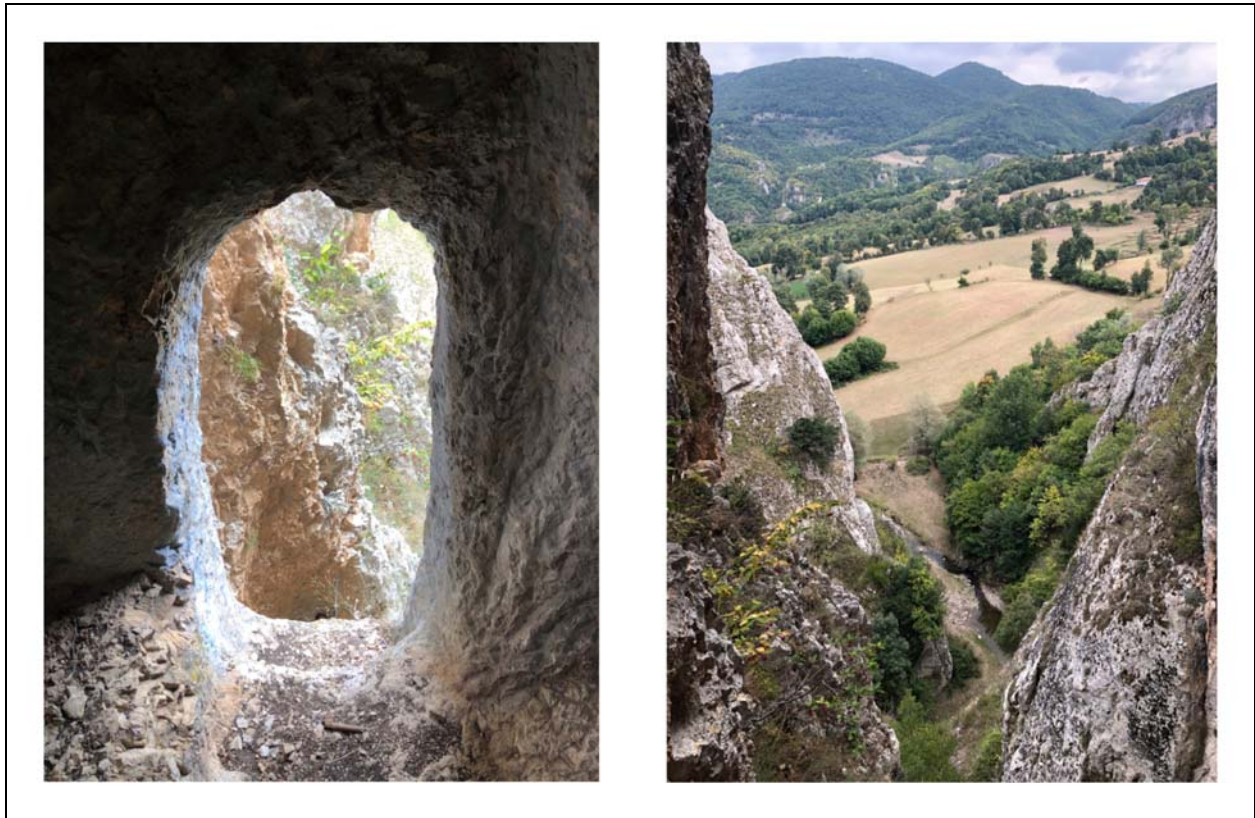


Fig. 38—39. End point of the stepped tunnel and water source.



Fig. 40. Remains of the wall at the foot of the castle.



Fig. 41. Remains of the wall at the foot of the castle.



Fig. 42. Pottery sherds seen on the slope around the castle.