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## Possible Ubication of the Fortress of Matsukion (Ματζούκιον) at Present Day Village of Mokrievo, near Strumitsa

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**Abstract:** *This paper is an attempt for the possible ubication of the fortress of Matsukion (Ματζούκιον), mentioned by John Skylitzes as one of the fortresses that were conquered by Basil II in his campaign against Samuel. He emphasizes that near Strumitsa there were two fortresses, Matsukion and Termitsa (Θερμιτζα), fortifications that were probably alongside the main road going from Serres to Strumitsa. The fortress of Matsukion was conquered in 1014 and then, probably, was completely destroyed.*

*The exact location of this fortress is not yet scientifically determined. According to my view, I stand on that, that the fortress of Matsukion should be logically at the archaeological site of Pirgo, at the present day village of Mokrievo, near Strumitsa. Although in this paper there will still be listed the opinions of a number of scholars, who in the past, more or less paid attention to this issue.*

*In 2011 – 2012 at the archaeological site Pirgo there were made couple of trenches which will help us to reveal the exact location of the fortress.*

**Key words:** *Strumitsa, Matsukion, Kleidion, Basil II, Samuel*

The good geostrategic position and the complex fortification of the medieval town of Strumitsa, as well as the most important roads that passed through it, were the main reasons Strumitsa became one of the most important civil and religious centers between the middle course of the rivers Vardar and Struma. Strumitsa was a town through which passed important road arteries, which among other things enabled a large and unavoidable rapid development in the Middle Ages.

As an important road node, the town of Strumitsa had three main exits: South to Thessaloniki; North to Shtip and Skopje; and East to Serres and Constantinople. All of the above can be explained in the historical events in the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, which will be implemented in this paper. Strumitsa did not stay away from the events that marked this period, but played a key role in the defense and the destruction of one of the two superior forces that lived in the Balkans in the transitional period of the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century, and among other things in this area there was a culmination that decided who will hold hegemony in this part of Europe. Some events of this period will have

great importance for world history, and the rise and fall of some of the most important European empires. The battle of Kleidion, (also known as the Battle of Belasitsa) that took place near Strumitsa on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1014, is undoubtedly one of them.

Information for this very important event of world history we get from the Byzantine chronicler John Skylitzes, who is a major source for the Kingdom of Samuel. From his chronicals we are learning that Strumitsa, during the reign of Samuel, was ruled by Dragomuzh (Δραγομούζος) and its castle had concentrated in it a large number of soldiers. From the same source we learn that he stood at the head of several fortresses near Strumitsa. Fortresses which in 1018 were given to be ruled by Basil II and for that he received the rank of patrician. Some of the fortresses that were ruled by Dragomuzh in the area of Strumitsa are mentioned by Skylitzes. Namely, he mentions that near Strumitsa there were the fortresses of Matsukion and Termitsa.<sup>1</sup> These two fortresses were probably next to the main road coming from Serres to Strumitsa. The first was conquered in 1014, and the second somewhere between 1015 and 1016 by the high-ranked Byzantine commander-patritian David Arianites (Δαυίδ Αριανίτης). Perhaps then the fortresses were destroyed, i.e. shared the same destiny as many Balkan fortresses that previously belonged to the Kingdom of Samuel.

Strumitsa with its surrounding areas was organized, as evidenced by the sources, as a particular military Administrative unit, ruled by Dragomuzh until 1018, when it was handed over to Basil II. The ruler of Strumitsa was a ruler of all surrounding fortresses. At the beginning of 11<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine Emperor Basil II took a great offensive against Samuel, who on his side paid special attention for the defense of the town of Strumitsa and its surrounding fortresses. Besides the defensive position of the town and its surrounding fortresses he also built many obstacles on the roads and brought a large number of soldiers. The main reason why Samuel gave great importance to Strumitsa and its surroundings was because Emperor Basil II “every year” entered Central Macedonia through the valley of the Struma River on the so called “Kings Road” which ran along the Strumitsa River.<sup>2</sup> Due to the weakness of Samuel in confronting Basil II in direct combat, he began to practise some kinds of guerilla attacks i.e. attacks on the Byzantine army in sieges which were made with barriers on the roads.

After Samuel’s death in 1014, his throne was succeeded by his son Gabriel Radomir. During his one-year reign, the town of Strumitsa and a major number of fortifications in its surroundings were part of his Kingdom. By the end of 1015, when the throne was taken by Ivan (John) Vladislav, Emperor Basil II tried to conquer this important military-strategic area. He sent his commander-patrician David Arianites to this area

<sup>1</sup> Б.Панов, *Средновековна Македонија том 3*, Скопје 1985, pp. 427-430.; В.Златарски, *История на българската държава през средните векове. Том I. История на Първото българско царство. Част II. От славянизацията на държавата до падането на Първото царство (852—1018)*, София 1927, pp. 698-717.

<sup>2</sup> Б.Панов, *Средновековна Македонија том 3*, Скопје 1985, pp. 484-487.

who only managed to conquer the fortress of Termitsa.<sup>3</sup> Only after the death of Ivan Vladislav (February 1018) did Strumitsa's ruler Dragomuzh accept the reign of Basil II and gave Strumitsa to his rule, for which he was honored with the title of patrician. Dragomuzh gave to Basil II to rule all of the unconquered fortifications which were under his rule. Then Archbishop David arrived here, carrying a letter from Mary, the wife of Ivan Vladislav, a letter proposing the conditions of capitulation.<sup>4</sup> With all of that in 1018 Strumitsa and its surrounding fortresses were included within the Byzantine Empire.

After the fall of Strumitsa, a long time did not pass when the Byzantines took over the whole of Macedonia and that is why many scholars believe that capitulation of Strumitsa led to the capitulation of the Kingdom of Samuel. Before Basil II left Macedonia he ordered all fortifications and towns that could become centers of resistance to the Byzantine rule to be destroyed. This decision affected a greater number of fortifications in Macedonia. In those that were left, as Yahya of Antioch reports, Basil II appointed governors from Byzantium. To these governors he granted a large military force that would help to establish permanent and stable government.<sup>5</sup>

All this shows us that a large number of fortifications that were all around the Kingdom of Samuel completely disappeared forever. Thus it is likely that the fortress of Matsukion (Ματζούκιον), which is the subject of this research, was destroyed and left unusable in the folowed period,<sup>6</sup> and what only remained to testify to its existance were the chronicels of Skylitzes and the traditions of the local population.

Strategically speaking, the Kingdom of Samuel represented a system of larger fortresses (Castrum) surrounded by a larger number of smaller fortreeses (Fruiriones) which helped for the defence of the castles. Greater fortresses (Castrum) in the following centuries would grow into "real" towns, which means that in addition to the military fort (acropolis, citadel, upper town) would also be formed a civilian settlement (suburb, lime, emporion) and centres for comerce. Besides the military and civil authorities, residences would also have religious clerks, bishops in big cities and their deputies (suffragans) in smaller towns.<sup>7</sup> Such is the example of Strumitsa and its

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<sup>3</sup> The location of this fortress cannot be confirmed with full confidence, although there have been many historians and archaeologists who were interested about this issue. The first historian who writes about the fortress of Termitsa was the Bulgarian historian Vasil Zlatarski, who, by the interpretation of the name, located the fort above the present-day village of Bansko, southeast of Strumitsa at the foothills of Mount Belasitsa where you can see the remains of a fortress. He noted that the place was called "Kaleri" and also in the vicinity of the fortress there was a thermal spa with hot springs. В.Златарски, *История на българската държава през средните векове. Том I. История на Първото българско царство. Част II*, София 1927, pp. 717.; И.Микулчиќ, *Средновековните градови и тврдини во Македонија*, Скопје 1996, pp. 313-315, fig.148.

<sup>4</sup> В.Златарски, *История на българската държава през средните векове. Том I*, София 1927, pp. 733.

<sup>5</sup> Б.Панов, *Средновековна Македонија том 3*, Скопје 1985, pp. 433-434.

<sup>6</sup> Б.Панов, *Струмичката област во времето на Самоил, Илјада години од востанието на Комитопулите и создавањето на Самоиловата држава*, Скопје 1971, pp. 154.

<sup>7</sup> И.Микулчиќ, *Средновековните градови и тврдини во Македонија*, Скопје 1996, pp. 39-40.

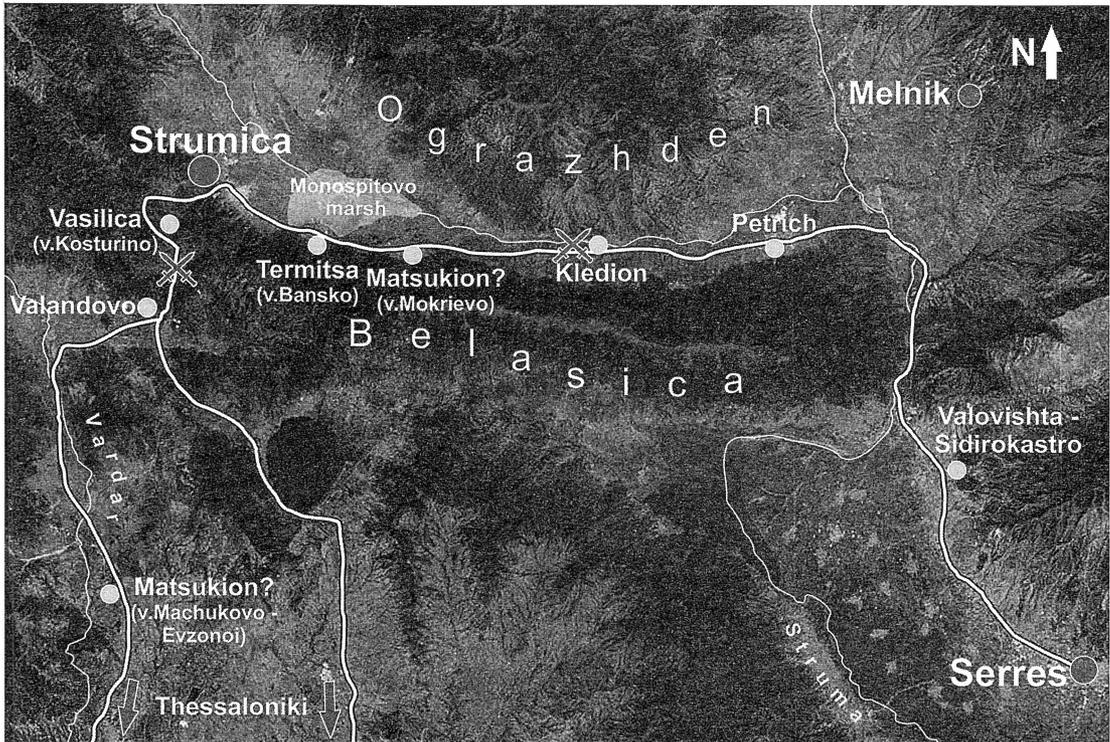
area, i.e. the fortress “Tzar’s Towers” and the fortifications that gravitate around it in the region of Strumitsa.

The region of Strumitsa since the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century began to attract individual researchers (historians, Slavic scholars, geographers, etc.). Among them there were those who were casually interested in the specific issues of the medieval history of the town of Strumitsa and its area, including the possible location of the fortress of Matsukion. Among those who contributed with their knowledge to solve this problem was A. Gilfering, who thought that the word “Ματζούκιον“ should be read as “Machuk” and that this fortress was located “on the road” which led from the gulch at Mount Belasitsa going to Strumitsa. F. Rachki also had similar thoughts and stated that Basil II passed the narrows of Mount Belasitsa after he had won the battle and headed to Strumitsa. After he had conquered the fortress of Matsukion, he continued his way to Strumitsa. G. Schlumberger also believed that the fortress of Matsukion was located between Petrich and Strumitsa and quite near to Strumitsa. Unlike Gilfering, Rachki and Schlumberger, K. Jireček quite differently understood the information from Skylitzes. He thought that “one squad of the Byzantine army reached to the fortress of Matsukion” which was located at the present day village of Evzonoi (Machukovo), where there were ruins.<sup>8</sup> Also, Bulgarian historian and archaeologist Y. Ivanov accepted this statement and he stands on his thesis to identify the fortress of Matsukion with the present day village of Evzonoi (Machukovo) and to overcome the disagreement of determining the place says that “the conquest of this fortress happened much earlier, by the Thessaloniki governor and military general Theophylactus Botaniates (Θεοφύλακτος Βοτανειάτης), who, after destroying the army of Nestoritsa near Thessaloniki, went to unite his army with the army of Basil II, who at the time was at the Kleidion palisade. Y. Ivanov stated that Matsukion is the same as Machukovo, which was far south of Strumitsa on the left riverbank of the river Vardar (Axius).<sup>9</sup> In this case we can consider the assumption that the entrance of Basil II in Strumitsa is in some way a coordinated action of the Byzantine army which had as a goal to enter Strumitsa through two main entrances, i.e. the campaign which was previously stated, from east of Strumitsa by Serres – Kleidion – Strumitsa and from south by Thessaloniki – Strumitsa, at which section some scholars considered to be the fortress of Matsukion.

Of such a view is Ivan Mikulchich who believes that on the south slope of the mountain ridge Nidze-Kozhuf, next to Meglen, there existed a whole chain of Slavic – Macedonian fortresses, representing the front border to the Thessaloniki basin. These

<sup>8</sup> Machukovo (Evzonoi) is a village in Greece near the Macedonian town of Gevgelia and the Macedonian-Greek border. The village is about 3km south from the border and from Strumitsa is almost 40km away. The present-day name of the village is “Εύζωνοί“(Evzonoi). Until 1927 the name was Ματσικόβον (Machukovo).

<sup>9</sup> В.Златарски, *История на българската държава през средните векове. Том I*, София 1927, pp. 698.; Б.Панов, *Струмичката област во времето на Самоил, Илјада години од востанието на Комитопулитите и создавањето на Самоиловата држава*, Скопје 1971, pp. 152-153.



**Fig. 1.** Map, Battle of Kleidion, 29<sup>th</sup> of July 1014 (Made by: D. Cvetanov / Graphical design: T. Garvanliev).

are: Moliscus (Deskati), Setina (Skopos), Kardia, Ostrovo (Arnissa), Voden (Edessa), St. Elijah, Subotsko (Aridaia), Enotia and Machukovo (Evzonoj). The last fortress was on the left riverbank of the Vardar River, next to the village which has preserved the same name (Greek: Madzhukion), 5 km Southeast of Gevgelia. The present-day name is Evzonoj and it is located on the border between the Republic of Macedonia and Greece. In 1016 David Arianites, heading from Thessaloniki to Strumitsa, conquered the fortress of Matsukion.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand M. Ristich misinterpreted the term “φρούριον“ (fortress) when he stated that Basil II, after the victory at Kleidion, “penetrated deeply in the area of Strumitsa and conquered the town of Matsukion”, because the term “φρούριον“ in this case does not refer to the town, but to the fortress that guarded the roads to Strumitsa.<sup>11</sup>

Skylitzes mentions that the so-called fortress of Matsukion was located near Strumitsa “φρούριον το καλούμενον Ματζούκιον, τῆ Στρουμπιτζῆ δέ προσεγγιζον...“.<sup>12</sup> Among other things he describes the route that Emperor Basil II took to attack Samuel: from Serres to Valovishta (Sidirokastru), Rupel Pass, the valley of the Strumitsa River until Kleidion (Fig.1). After Basil II finally destroyed the palisade

<sup>10</sup> И.Микулчиќ, *Средновековните градови и тврдини во Македонија*, Скопје 1996, pp. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Б.Панов, *Средновековна Македонија том 3*, Скопје 1985, pp. 153.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 433-434.; *Грџки извори за Българската историја VI*, София 1965, pp. 285.

at Kleidion, he followed the surviving soldiers who were running to escape towards Strumitsa. According to the local legends, near the village of Mokrievo (near Strumitsa) he clashed with two armies. In the clash one of the armies was led by Tzar Samuel along with his son Prince Gabriel Radomir after they arrived from Strumitsa to help the fleeing soldiers. Then Samuel was greatly defeated with many dead soldiers on his side and many more captured for slavery. After destroying Samuel's army, Basil II headed to Strumitsa and on his way he managed to conquer the fortress of Matsukion, which was probably located under the slopes of Mount Belasitsa, next to the town of Strumitsa.<sup>13</sup> From there he continued his way towards Strumitsa.

Where was the accurate route of this road? Almost certainly we can underline its route. The configuration of the terrain, the obstacles, the safety, and the distance from one point to another are quite good factors to try to more accurately determine the tracing of the road on which had passed the Emperor Basil II. In this case, after passing the narrow gorge of the Kleidion Pass and entering the basin of Strumitsa, the road continued along the slopes of Mount Belasitsa. Having in mind the great swamp of Monospitovo which occupies the central place of the valley of Strumitsa, it is almost meaningless for the road to continue through the middle of the same swamp.<sup>14</sup> Having the swamp of Monospitovo as a great natural barrier in the central part of the valley of Strumitsa, also having the Rivers Strumitsa, Vodochnitsa and Trakanya, which at certain times of the year often were overflowing and flooding large areas of the valley of Strumitsa, it is certain that the road had to be passing several terraces higher, through the mountains, in this case Mount Belasitsa.

The road that passed through Mount Belasitsa is quite limited. On the north from the swamp of Monospitovo and on the south from the high mountain ranges of Mount Belasitsa. This was the route that was used by the Byzantine army led by Basil II. Due to the limited space they came in direct contact with the fortresses built next to the road. On the road from Kleidion to Strumitsa today we can find many archaeological remains of a larger number of fortresses, some of which are represented in the archaeological map of the Republic of Macedonia. These are the sites of: Gradishte (v. Staro Konyarevo), Pirgo (v. Mokrievo), Gradishte – Termitsa? (v. Bansko), Gradishte (v. Svidovitsa) and Padarnitsa, next to Strumitsa. These fortresses are known to the archaeologists (Fig.2).<sup>15</sup> All of these fortresses were built in different periods, but probably some of them were used in the period that is subject of this research.

If we consider the primary goal of Basil II – the quick destruction of the Kingdom of Samuel, and also the possibility of capturing or in direct conflict killing Tzar Samuel, it is hard to believe that Basil II would waste time to conquer local fortresses, if they

<sup>13</sup> В.Златарски, *История на българската държава през средните векове. Том I*, София 1927, pp. 693-698.

<sup>14</sup> Ѓ.Иванов, *Моноспитовско Блато-последното мочуриште во Македонија*, Струмица 2008, pp.7.

<sup>15</sup> *Археолошка карта на Република Македонија II*, Музеј на Македонија - археолошки оддел, Скопје 1996, pp. 400 -416.; И.Микулчиќ, *Средновековните градови и тврдини во Македонија*, Скопје 1996, pp. 313-315, fig. 148.

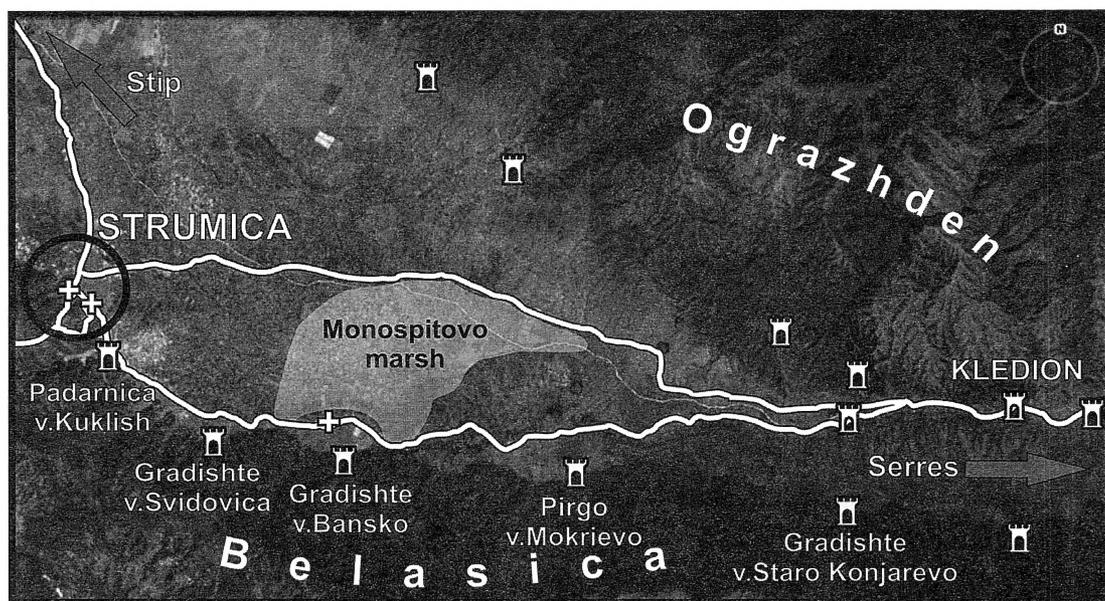


Fig. 2, Map, Battle of Kleidion, 29<sup>th</sup> of July 1014 (*Made by: D. Cvetanov / Graphical design: T. Garvanliev*).

were not a direct obstacle on his path. Basil II knew that Samuel was not powerful enough to confront him directly and that he was forced to undertake guerilla attacks, setting up roadblocks and conducting raids.

The location we consider to be the fortress of Matsukion will be presented in the following part of this article. On his way to Strumitsa Emperor Basil II succeeded in conquering the “so called” fortress of Matsukion which was located near Strumitsa. So, do we have to look for this fortress near the present-day village of Machukovo (Eveznoi)? No matter how similar the name of the fortress is to the name of the village, the village itself is located too far away and it was not on the road that Basil II was passing that leads to Strumitsa, but far to the south, on the left bank of the Vardar River, southwest of Doyran. With such wrong interpretations of the text of Skylitzes, Vasil Zlatarski also disagrees, indicating that the text of Skylitzes is quite clear and does not allow even the slightest opportunity to assume that the fortress of Matsukion was located near the present-day village of Machukovo. To avoid this impossibility, it can be made an assumption that: by the opinion of V. Zlatarski perhaps in the Middle Ages there was a fortress of Matsukion near the town of Strumitsa, whose population for one or the other reason, during the Ottoman conquests was forced to abandon the fortress and to move to the present-day village of Machukovo which was named by the name of the old fortress of Matsukion or maybe Skylitzes misinterpreted the name of the fortress and wrongly named another fortress as the fortress that is next to the present-day village of Mokrievo,<sup>16</sup> which is really located near Strumitsa and is on the

<sup>16</sup> В.Златарски, *История на българската държава през средните векове. Том I, София 1927*, pp. 698.; Mokrievo (Makrievo) is the “underhill” village in the Strumitsa region (at the foothills of

road that Basil II passed from Kleidion to Strumitsa.<sup>17</sup> It makes sense that the fortress of Matsukion should be located on the road from Kleidion to the fortress of Termitsa, approximately 23 km distance by air. (Fig.2)

The fortress was probably located on the so-called “Underhill road” which connected Strumitsa with the underhill villages, i.e. those villages settled at the foothills of Mount Belasitsa.<sup>18</sup> It seems that Matsukion was located between the present-day villages of Staro Konyarevo and Bansko, because it fell under Byzantine rule right after the Battle of Kleidion in 1014, while the fortress of Termitsa (village of Bansko) remained unconquered according to the available sources until the end of 1015.

We cannot fully agree with the opinion of V. Zlatarski that it is possible that Skylitzes incorrectly marked the fortress of Matsukion near the present-day village of Mokrievio. Also, not acceptable are the opinions of Jireček and Ivanov that the fortress of Matsukion is located at the present-day village of Machukovo (Evzonoj). This fortress must be searched among the many fortresses that, according to Skylitzes, were in the Strumitsa region. We may guess that it might be one of the fortresses whose remains still can be seen at the present-day villages of Borisovo, Mokrievio and Staro Konyarevo.<sup>19</sup> Archimandrite Gerasim at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century visited some quite old places in the Strumitsa region and he writes that over the village of Borisovo there are remains from one of “Samuel’s fortresses”. Also, for the neighboring village of Mokrievio there is a written legend that the ruins located above the village are from “Samuel’s period”. To this day it remains in the common memory of the villagers.<sup>20</sup>

For the precise location of the fortress of Matsukion we have to enter in some other segments that will contribute to resolving this issue, and actually we need to know which were the fortresses that were used by Tzar Samuel: did he build them or did he restore those that already existed?

Durring the early Middle Ages (7<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century) in the territory of Republic of Macedonia, without exception, were used the fortresses from the Late Antique period. Among them the best preserved were those from the 6<sup>th</sup> century. In cases when any of these fortresses were re-used, first they were cleared of rubble and vegetation and also wooden gates were restored. Damaged walls were restored with the simple technique

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Mount Belasitsa), about 17 km east from the town. Today it belongs to the authority of Novo Selo Municipality

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 697.

<sup>18</sup> For some of the “underhill” villages we can confirm that they existed in this period. Namely, for all of that, we know from the information from some Serbian charters from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. They have named the villages of Bansko, Gabrovo, Borisovo, Makrievio, Mokreni, etc. which does not exclude the possibility that they existed in the previous period: Б.Панов, *Средновековна Македонија том 3*, Скопје 1985, pp. 149-168.

<sup>19</sup> The archaeological site Markovo Kale (Marco’s Fortress) is a fortress from the Late Antique period. 2km south from the village, at the foothills of Mount Belasitsa, and on a high hill can be seen the remains of a defensive wall, built with large rubble stones and mortar: *Археолошка карта на Република Македонија II*, Музеј на Македонија-археолошки оддел, Скопје 1996, pp. 410.

<sup>20</sup> Б.Панов, *Средновековна Македонија том 3*, Скопје 1985, pp. 433-434.



**Fig. 3,** External look of the tower – archaeological site Pirgo, village of Mokrievo – Strumitsa region (*photography: Z. Rujak*).

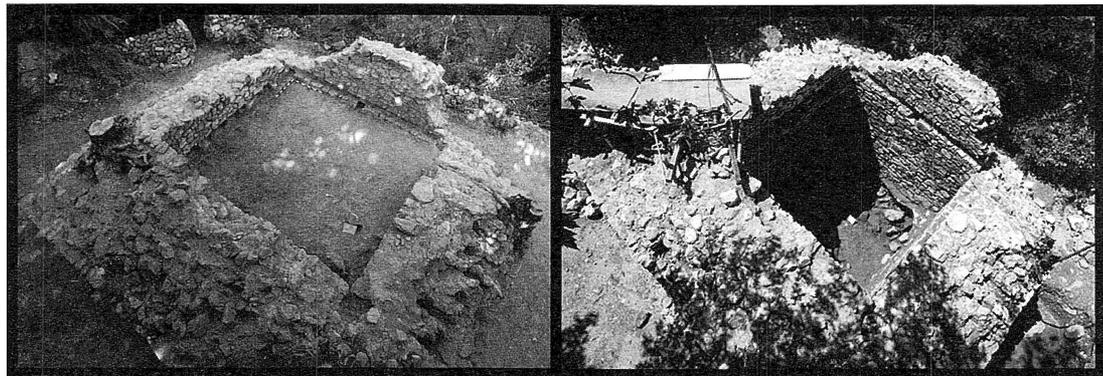
of making dry-stone wall with minimal effort.<sup>21</sup> Such is the case with the Late Antique fortresses in the region of Strumitsa, and we have a lot of them in this area, according to the data that we have in the Archaeological Map of the Republic of Macedonia, as well as my personal visit to some of them, i.e. sites that until the present day have retained the name “Gradishte” (Old fortress). Based on this we can conclude that there are more than 20 fortresses,<sup>22</sup> located in the surrounding hills. Many of these forts were used with partial repairs at the end of 10<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of 11<sup>th</sup> century by Tzar Samuel. Besides the use of Late Antique fortresses or their reconstruction or partial repair, in the Middle Ages there was a building of new forts, but not with that intensity and quality. For the quantity of building there were numerous reasons as determining factors.

Knowing that until recently there was not a single excavation on the fortress at the foothills of Mount Belasitsa, and some of them already pointed to in this paper, for a long time we couldn't claim with complete confidence which one of them could be the fortress of Matsukion. In 2011-2012 archaeological excavations were performed with a couple of ditches at the site of “Pirgo”,<sup>23</sup> a site located to the Southeast of the village

<sup>21</sup> И.Микулчиќ, *Средновековните градови и тврдини во Македонија*, Скопје 1996, pp. 68.

<sup>22</sup> *Археолошка карта на Република Македонија II*, Музеј на Македонија-археолошки оддел, Скопје 1996, pp. 400-416.

<sup>23</sup> Etimologically speaking, the word “Pirgo” on Greek: Πύργος is translated as tower. This word is first mentioned in Homer's “Iliad” 7.206. Very often “Pirgo” represented fortification construction with



**Fig. 4,** Internal looks of the tower – archaeological site Pirgo, village of Mokrievio – Strumitsa region (*photography: Z. Rujak*).

of Mokrievio. The excavations were led by the archaeologist Zoran Rujak. Although the excavations were quite short, a central tower was discovered and excavated with striking dimensions (Fig.3). Most likely along with the tower there were no other supporting facilities because it has not been evident by the heavy vegetation and the ageless trees that span this area.

The Tower has a square base with dimensions of 10.65m by 10.65m. The walls were built with massive emplecton with large stones that form the faces of the wall and the space between the two walls is filled with broken stones and mortar. The wall thickness is approximately 3 meters wide. Part of the foundations of the tower were placed on the rock and the biggest preserved heighth is about 6m. (Fig.4). Until recently the tower was more preserved from the condition that we have today, if we take into consideration the information from the villagers who claim that the tower was like a quarry for stones, from which they took the stones as material to build their houses and barns. According to the length of the base of the tower, and with great confidence, we can conclude that it was at least twice as high as the size of the base, somewhere over 20m, and the entrance of the tower was located 5-6m from the floor level. The reason for the striking dimensions of the tower is, as we said earlier, easy accessible terrain. This tower had a primarily offensive function, i.e. to act quickly to the needs of the so-called “foothill road”, which is about 400m away from the tower, and among other things, to resist the attacks, but not in the case when Basil II attacked with a huge army.

According to the way this tower was built, it was probably built in the Late Antique period, a small fortress (*frurion*) i.e. a kind of watchtower to secure the road. Knowing already that the fortresses used by Samuel were actually fortresses from the Late Antique period which were partially restored, I stand on the opinion that this tower

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great height and with a small base on the terrain. Often these towers were cylindrical and it could be one building or part of a larger fortress. Also the towers which in the Middle Ages were built next to monasteries were called “Pirg”

was used by Samuel himself and probably it is the fortress of Matsukion, which was conquered in 1014 and immediately destroyed by Basil II.

From the primary source we learn that in this campaign of Basil II in the region of Strumitsa, the only conquered fortress was the fortress of Matsukion, while the fortress of Termitsa and the town of Strumitsa skillfully resisted the attacks of the Byzantines. We assume that the archaeological site of “Pirgo” at the village of Mokrievo is actually the fortress that we seek. The fact that this tower is lonely, without any supporting defensive elements, as well as its position on very mild terrain; all of that contributed to a very easy fall in an offensive attack while other fortresses that were in the way of Basil II to Strumitsa resisted his attacks. Those were, as we mentioned, the fortress of Termitsa and the town of Strumitsa, which occupy quite inaccessible positions and they also represent very complex fortifications.

The area around the fortress, according to the meanings of the archaeologist Zoran Rujak, was active and continued to exist in the periods after. This is indicated by the presence of finds from the Medieval period. Its activity continued until the Ottoman conquests of these regions, when, probably the tower was again destroyed.

After the conquest of the Ottomans, a large number of fortresses in the Central Balkans, as well as the town of Strumitsa, lost their defensive functions because they remained in the middle of the Balkan part of the Empire.<sup>24</sup> In this case the role of the watchtowers that secured the roads were replaced by villages that were settled by “dervenji” (providers of security on the important military and trade roads).<sup>25</sup>

Adding to the facts that go in favor of that, the archaeological site of “Pirgo” is actually the fortress of Matsukion, and we point out the significance of the name. Etymologically speaking, the term *ματζούκιον* can be found in historical documents and its meaning is synonymous with blunt weapons, more exactly with the mace (club), together with the term *βαρδούκιον* (mace) which can be thrown. The same thing should apply to *ματζούκιον*, showing extremely strong similarities with the so-called *βαρδούκιον*.<sup>26</sup>

The mace, except as used as a blunt weapon, was also used as a throwing weapon.

The so-called “martioarbuli” (plumbata) and later “bardukia” and “matsukia” were thrown by the infantry to the enemy from a distance; and they also could be thrown

<sup>24</sup> З. Рујак, *Цареви кули, На патот на предците*, Струмица 2004, pp. 20.

<sup>25</sup> In 1519 as Dervenji villages in the Census from the region of Strumitsa are registered the following villages: Kosturino, Lipovik, Furka, Prevalets, Tonotartsi, while in 1519 as such are registered the following villages: Tonotartsi, Prevalets and Novo Selo. The previous dervenji villages were included in the newly formed: Kosturino, and Furka in Voimia, and Lipovik in the Nahiyah Konche: М. Соколовски, *Струмичката нахија во XIV век – дervenциството во Струмичката нахија*, во *Акта Велјуса-ООЗТ Филозофски факултет*, (1984), pp. 181-182.;

А. Стојановски, *Дervenциството во Македонија*, Скопје 1974, pp. 214-216, 234-235, 250-251, 261-262, 283-284, 292-293.

<sup>26</sup> The name *βαρδούκιον* is shown in *Sylloge Tacticorum*, во *Vita Basilii*, fifth book of *Scriptores post Theophanem*: Т. Г. Колиас, *Византийски оръжия, принос към византийското оръжейно изкуство*, во *Studia Militaria Balcanica I* (2012), pp. 200-203.



**Fig. 5,** Possible reconstruction of the tower – archaeological site Pirgo, village of Mokrievo – Strumitsa region (*Made by:* D. Cvetanov / *Graphical design:* T. Garvanliev).

by the cavalry. The greatest use of the mace in the Byzantine army was from the 10<sup>th</sup> until the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> The widespread use of the mace in 10<sup>th</sup> century is evidenced from written sources we can find from the Imperial Chrysobulls (Royal Decrees), from which can be seen that there was a military corps called “matzukatoi”, whose main weapon was the mace, the so-called “matzukion”.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, because of the exceptional dimensions of the tower Pirgo, which can be seen at the eponymous site, that we claim to be the fortress of Matsukion, we can assume that for the people in that period the tower looked like a “big mace”. By my opinion, the tower had a wider upper part from the base and side balconies that overlooked the walls and the roof to cover them. Most likely, according to its look, as well as its popularity, that the mace had in the period of the 10<sup>th</sup> until the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the fortress was named as Matsukion (Ματζουόκιον) (Fig.5), and we cannot exclude the fact that here might have been located a military corps *matzukatoi*.

Today the local people of the village of Mokrievo, where the Pirgo tower is located, and thanks to their common memory, firmly believe that this is the place where some of the events from the 29<sup>th</sup> of July 1014 happened. The village feast in this village is dedicated to St. Panteleimon (from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> of August), and is a witness to the common memory of the villagers, and the people also commemorate the Great battle of Kleidion.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 208, T. XXVI.; В. Йотов, *Въоръжението и снаряжението од българското средновековие (VII-XI век)*, Варна 2004, pp. 107-109, T.LIII 644-658.

<sup>28</sup> Т. Г. Колиас, *Византийски оръжия, принос към византийското оръжейно изкуство*, во *Studia Militaria Balcanica I* (2012), pp. 210.

## Можната убикација на тврдината Мацукион (Ματζούκιον) кај денешното село Мокриево – Струмичко

### *Резимé*

По повод 1000 години од битката кај Беласица, прилогов претставува еден мал придонес во одгатнувањето на една проблематика поврзана со ова збиднување од светски размери. Точната локација на тврдина Мацукион (Ματζούκιον) во науката сè уште не е утврдена. Дали се наоѓала во Струмичката котлина или не? Според моите истражувања во изминатите неколку години, анализата на достапните историски извори, рекогносцирањата во југосточниот дел на Република Македонија, етимолошката поврзаност, како и моето лично учество на археолошките истражувања на локалитетот Пирго, с. Мокриево, верувам дека локалитетот Пирго, с. Мокриево е, всушност, тврдината Мацукион. Фактите одат, несомнено, во полза на ова решение. Дали со целосна сигурност ќе биде потврдена оваа убикација, ќе покажат идните археолошки истражувања во овој регион.