

ARCHITECTURAL AND URBAN CHARACTERISTICS OF SETTLEMENTS IN MEDIEVAL ALANIA

Julia Feliksovna Treyman*

The present research examines the architectural and space organization of settlements in medieval Alania. The latter are, at the present time, architectural and natural complexes that are an integral part of the landscape of mountain regions and foothills in Karachay-Cherkessia and Krasnodar region. The medieval Alan culture is one of the local varieties of popular cultures in the Caucasus, characterized by common and stable traditions best represented in the organisation of its architectural space. The traditional type of the settlement first appeared in the pre-Christian period. The contaminated settlement type appeared in the Christian period. A change in the ideology exerted a considerable influence on the typical characteristics of the settlements' architectural and spatial organization.

Key words: Medieval Alan architecture, settlement, patronymic site, Byzantine contaminations.

INTRODUCTION

The Alan topography is represented by a multitude of fortresses and fortified settlements, situated in the mountain gorges and foothills of the North Caucasus. The territory, settled by the Alans, was located in the upper Kuban River and along its tributaries, and presented the watershed spaces demarcated by the Alans themselves. These spaces were situated within the boundaries of the North Depression between the Rocky and the Side ridges as well as in the contiguous regions. As far as the Alans' settlement area is concerned, two zones are clearly visible: the foothill zone and the mountain zone. Numerous ravines and river gorges (Big Laba, Urup, Kyafar, Big Zelenchyuk, Small Zelenchyuk, Kuban, Teberda), along which most Alan settlements are concentrated, pass throughout the mountain and foothill territories. The formation of the spatial pattern of Alan settlements was influenced by a set of factors, among which are: specific natural and landscape features, strategic importance of the location, patronymic settlement system, sacral topography and traditional use of natural resources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The results of archaeological and ethnographical research studies conducted in the second half of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century and of similar studies in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods provided, together with historical documents, the scientific and factual foundation and a bibliographical basis for the current research focused on the architecture of medieval Alan settlements.

* Don State Technical University, 1, Gagarin Square Street, Rostov-on-Don, Russia, 344000

The importance of the research carried out before the Russian Revolution is that the scholars of this time period managed to collect and publish factual materials on the objects of Alania's cultural heritage, lost nowadays. The Naryshkin Brothers [1], P. S. Uvarova [2], V. F. Miller [3], D. M. Strukov [4], Y. D. Felitsyn [5], V. M. Sysoev [6] made invaluable contributions to the study of the cultural heritage of medieval Alania, leaving behind considerable graphic and written materials.

Numerous archeological research studies were conducted, throughout the twentieth century, by T. M. Minaeva [7], Y. P. Alekseeva [8], Y. I. Krupnov [9], Kh.Kh. Bidjiev [10], V. B. Kovalevskaya [11], U. Y. Elkanov [12] and I. A. Arzhantseva [13], among others.

V. A. Kuznetsov carried out basic research, focused on medieval Alan history. The results of his research were published in numerous studies, the most notable being two monographs, entitled "Alania in the 10th-13th centuries" (1971) [14] and "Essays on the History of the Alans" [15]. He published a number of works on the Nizhne-Arkhyz settlement research projects. "Nizhny Arkhyz in the 10th-12th centuries. On the History of Medieval Towns of the North Caucasus", published in 1993 [16], is his final work summarizing the results of his lifelong archeological investigations.

In the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, archeologists have conducted large-scale excavations of Alan settlements. The materials give a sufficiently complete archeological picture of the territorial and spatial Alan settlements and provide an accurate basis for the current study.

METHODOLOGY

Our research is mostly based on the comprehensive approach that encompasses several research methods: source analysis aimed at studying and classifying archival sources, visual and cartographic materials drawing on history, ethnography, cultural studies, area studies and Caucasian studies; physical examination of cultural monuments of Alania, including measurements and photo fixation; comparative analysis of the urban structure of medieval Alan settlements, directed at revealing common trends in the architectural and spatial organization of settlements related to spatial manifestations of Alan culture and at exploring the differences that had emerged as a result of intercultural contaminations.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Bidjiev was the first to attract scholarly attention to the urban structure of Alan settlements. The research undertaken produced the classification of the settlements, based on the fortification aspect that had exercised a major influence on the urban planning. Bidjiev defined three main types of defensive structures in the fortified settlements present in Alania, varying in terms of their complexity: one-part, two-part and tripartite settlements. [10]

The analysis of the urban structure of Alan settlements was conducted on the basis of a comparison between its specific features and those of mountain settlements of the 13th and 14th centuries, thoroughly examined by a number of authors. [17] Such comparison has been possible due to the strongly pronounced affinities between Alan culture and the traditional culture of mountain peoples of the North Caucasus, shaped upon the existence of strong patronymic structures and mythological mentality of its clan members.

In the Ossetian Nart epic, there is a story about the settlement known as Zanartsky Khustzagat, where lived the nart Atsa and his clan. When analyzing the epic narration about this Ossetian settlement, S. D. Sulimenko arrived at the conclusion that the spatial organization reflected the mythological representation of creation, in which the patriarch's town symbolized the centre of the world and the place where life first appeared. Sulimenko points out that the town's tripartite vertical structure is similar to the mythological perception of the universe as being tripartite and vertical. [19] The scholar illustrates his point by citing J. Dumézil's description of a Nart settlement: "... the Narts live on the slope of a mountain, in a settlement consisting of three neighbourhoods located on three levels, each of which is inhabited by one of the main clans: the Akhsartaggata live on top, the Borata at the very bottom, and the Alagata in between". [18] The examination of the urban structure of Alan settlements, revealed by Bidjiev, suggests that it is a spatial reproduction of the mythological model of creation, the representations of which were shared by the Alans and other Caucasian peoples.

We shall now examine the common patterns of the spatial representation of the traditional Alan culture, using the example of the best preserved town of Kyafar, since it features the traditional urban structure, common to most Alan settlements. On its territory, researchers documented over 200 stone buildings that give a sufficiently good idea of the settlement's structure. Besides, it is one of medieval Alania's largest settlements, where researchers localised the residence of Durgulel the Great, an Alan ruler who lived in the 10th century. [20] This medieval settlement has three distinct parts: the Upper settlement, the Lower settlement and the unfortified settlement on the shore.

The urban structure of the town of Kyafar features a tripartite division typical of most Alan settlements: the citadel, where were located different buildings of the ruler's residence; the fortress where the ruler hosted his army, and the fortified settlement where lived the civilians. Stone barriers of natural or artificial origin, located at different heights, physically separate the three parts one from another.

Let's assume that the tripartite structure of a settlement is a spatial representation of the mythological model of creation. In this case, the settlement's ideological and symbolical centre, represented as a citadel, towards which leads the main street crossing all of the settlement site, was perceived as the centre of the universe. According to the cosmogonical representations of the Caucasian peoples, the world

tree, located at the world's end, was the centre of the universe. [21] It follows that the symbolic centre of the universe did not coincide with the geometrical centre. The same situation can be observed in the spatial organisation of the town of Kyafar, where the symbolic centre in the form of the citadel and the ruler's residence is located on the mountain edge. According to Caucasian mythology, the world tree connects all the worlds and coincides with the vertical axis of the universe. It is possible that the mountain, where the settlement is found, is a natural and spatial representation of the mythological world tree. Its foot lying on the ground and its top supporting the heavens connect the three vertical parts of the mythological model of the world (the underground, the terrestrial world and the heavens). Taking into consideration that the three parts of the settlement, located at different heights and separated by barriers, symbolize the mythological model of creation, the main street running through them could have represented the axis of the universe. Ideas about the horizontal structure of the world, featuring the front world (bright and bountiful) and the back world (dark and dangerous), are also reflected in the urban structure of the settlement. In front of the citadel, which is the symbolic centre of the town, is found the territory of the fortress and the fortified settlement, associated with the bright front world; behind it, the precipice, symbolizing the dangerous and unknown back world. The structure of the town of Kyafar embodies the universal scheme of the architectural and spatial organization of a fortified settlement, traditional for most Alan settlements.

By mid-10th century, Alania saw the emergence, in addition to the traditional type of settlements, of the contaminated type of settlements that appeared as a result of Alan-Byzantine intercultural connections and contaminations. It united, in its structure, traditional features and characteristics borrowed from the Byzantine culture. By way of example, let us mention the Nizhne-Arkhyz settlement that the scholars believe to have been the capital of Alania. The settlement is located in the mountain valley, on the right bank of the Big Zelenchyuk River.

The town planification can be divided into the territory of the town itself and the territory of the Alan archdiocese, located beyond the town and separated from it by a field. The urban composition of the town consists of several architectural objects representing symbolic and figurative keynotes that determine the common urban development and the arrangement of main routes. Among these keynotes are the rounded sanctuary, the South temple, the Middle temple. The above-mentioned objects constitute one and the same architectural and spatial ensemble that shape the town's ideological and social centre, where the three main routes meet. One of them occupies the central position in relation to the other two and is stone-paved. This street runs throughout the town leading to the Middle Zelenchyuk temple. Open spaces reminding of squares are situated on its way. Two other streets go round the town along the mountain ridge and the river and merge with the central street into one road leading toward the buildings

of the Alan archdiocese. A similar street system can be observed in the planification of Constantinople.

Researchers have repeatedly pointed out that the Nizhne-Arkhyz settlement was one of the outposts of Byzantine influence in Alania, and its town structure was developing during the spreading of Christianity and of Byzantine culture in the western part of the Alan kingdom in the 10th-12th centuries. [22] The Christian temples of the settlement, built on the Byzantine model and arranged according to Byzantine Christian canons, were symbolic and figurative keynotes and exercised a major influence on the shaping of the settlement's planification, distinct from the traditional one. The residential area of the patronymic neighbourhoods has been shaped depending on the temple territory, situated within its boundaries.

The contaminated settlement type had the following traditional features: the configuration of the settlement plan, determined by the natural shape of the territory (mountainous plateau, river valley, etc.); the settlement's tripartite planification; a significant shift of the symbolic centre of the settlement as related to the geometrical centre of this architectural and urban composition; the linear development of the settlement's planification; the patronymic settlement system in the spatial organization of the residential territory.

The features of the contaminated type of the settlement planification, distinguishing it from the traditional type, are: the appearance, in the architectural and urban composition of settlement, of symbolic and figurative keynotes in the form of Christian temples, the location of which corresponded to the Byzantine Christian topography; the appearance, in the town planification, of a social centre in the form of a square featuring a temple, to which lead the main street; the presence, in a settlement's planification, of three main streets merging into one main road that led to the social centre.

CONCLUSION

Among the premises that had influenced the formation of the territorial, architectural and spatial organization of Alan settlements in the 10th-12th centuries, are the following:

- The influence of the North Caucasian routes of the Great Silk Road on the Alans' territorial and spatial settlements;
- The influence of the traditional culture on the territorial and spatial settlement system and the formation of the Alan settlement planning. The sacral topography and the patronymic settlement system are the spatial representations of the Alans' traditional culture;
- The influence of the Byzantine Christian topography on the planning of Alan settlements.

The sacral topography, i.e. a spatial manifestation of the traditional culture of the Alans, had been the initial cause of the territorial, architectural and spatial

organization of the settlements. It can be represented in the form of a framed structure consisting of sacred subjects of natural origin as well as in the form of main routes leading towards them. The sacred natural objects (sacred mountains, trees, groves, springs, lakes, isolated rocks, caves, etc.), worshipped by the Alans, were symbolic and figurative keynotes, traceable in nature and shaping the living space. An emotional and sensual perception of the sacred object in the process of movement was of great importance, that is why it considerably influenced the shaping of the main route leading towards that object.

We have also highlighted the Alans' patronymic settlement system as one of the forms of the territorial and spatial organization of the patriarchal society, the fundamental requirement for which was an isolated location of the patronymic development in the surrounding space. The patronymic settlement system had been implemented at all levels of the settlements' territorial and spatial organization and can be characterized as a complex of monopatronymic and polypatronymic settlements that had been shaped in the context of the traditional use of nature and of the sacral symbolization of the natural landscape. A monopatronymic settlement is a form of the territorial and spatial organisation of one patronymic group. The estate of the oldest patronymic family acts as the organizing centre, around which emerge the estates of other families. A polypatronymic settlement is a form of the territorial and spatial organization of several patronymic groups, neighbouring on the shared territory. This being said, the estates of the families belonging to one patronymic group represented an isolated territorial community in the form of a patronymic neighbourhood: their number in the settlement corresponded to the number of neighbouring patronymic groups.

On the basis of planification, it is possible to point out two types of settlements: the traditional and the contaminated ones. The traditional type of settlement appeared in the pre-Christian period. Its tripartite planification represented, from the spatial perspective, the mythological model of creation. The specific features of the architectural and spatial organization of this type of settlement are related to the sacral topography of the natural landscape and the patronymic settlement system. The estate of the oldest patronymic family, around which emerged the estates of other families, is the composition keynote of the planned structure of a traditional settlement. Its location was marked by a clan sanctuary or a church, found in the centre of the inner court.

The contaminated settlement type emerged in the Christian period. The specific features of the architectural and spatial organization of this type of settlement are related to the fact that its urban structure developed along the lines of a typical Byzantine Christian town borrowing some features from traditional Alan culture. The composition keynotes of the urban structure of the contaminated type of settlement are temple, the location of which corresponded to the Byzantine Christian topography. The urban structure of the residential area, i.e. patronymic

neighbourhoods, depended on the location of the temples, found on the territory of the living area.

Acknowledgements

Research is executed with assistance of RNF, the agreement No. 14-18-00595 of May "20", 2014.

References

- Naryshkiny. Otchet gospod Naryshkinykh, sovershivshikh puteshestvie na Kavkaz (Svanetiya) s arkhelogicheskoy tselyu v 1867 g. (The Account by the Naryshkin who Traveled to the Caucasus for Archeological Purposes in 1867). Izvestiya Russkogo arkhelogicheskogo obschestva, Vol. 8., Saint-Petersburg, 1877, pp. 325-368.
- P. S. Uvarova, Khristianskiye pamyatniki (Christian Monuments). Materialy po arkhelogii Kavkaza. Vol. IV, Moscow, 1894, p. 96.
- V. F. Miller. Drevneossetinskiy pamyatnik iz Kubanskoy oblasti (An Ancient Ossetian Monument from Kuban Oblast). Materialy po arkhelogii Kavkaza. Vol. III, Moscow, 1893, p. 118.
- D. M. Strukov. Albom risunkov Zelenchyukskikh drevnostey. Tavricheskaya guberniya (The Album with Drawing of Zelenchuyuk Antiquities. The Tauric Province). Risunki khudozhnika D. M. Strukova, Arkhiv Sankt-Peterburgskogo otdelenia Instituta arkhelogii Rossiyskoy akademii nauk, Delo # 39, 20.
- E. D. Felitsyn, Arkhelogicheskaya karta Kubanskoy oblasti (The Archeological Map of Kuban Oblast), M., 1882.
- V. M. Sysoev. Arkhelogicheskaya ekskursiya po Zakubanyu (An Archeological Excursion beyond Kuban Oblast). Materialy po arkhelogii Kavkaza. Vol. IX, M. 1904, pp. 89-169.
- T. M. Minaeva, K istorii alan Verkhnego Prikubanya po arkhelogicheskim dannym (On the History of the Upper Prikuban Alans According to Archeological Data). Stavropol, 1971, 248 p.
- E. P. Alekseeva, Ocherki istorii Karachaevo-Cherkessii (Essays on the History of Karachay-Cherkessia). Vol. 1, M: Nauka, 1967, 212 p.
- E. I. Krupnov. Drevnyaya istoriya Severnogo Kavkaza (Ancient History of the North Caucasus). M. 1960, 520 p.
- Kh. Kh. Bidjiev, Turki Severnogo Kavkaza (The Turks of the North Caucasus), Cherkessk, 1993, 374 p.
- V. B. Kovalevskaya, Kavkaz i alany. Veka i narody (Caucasus and the Alans. Ages and Peoples). M.: Nauka, 1984, 290 p.
- U. Y. Elkanov. Raskopki drevnego "Krug" na Nizhne-Arkhyzskom gorodische (Excavations of the Ancient "Circle" in the Nizhne-Arkhyz Settlement). Voprosy srednevekovoy arkhelogii Severnogo Kavkaza. Cherkessk, 1998, pp. 142-150.
- I. A. Arjantseva. Kamennye kreposti alan (Stone Fortresses of the Alans). Rossiyskaya arkhelogiya, # 2, 2007, pp. 75-88.
- V. A. Kuznetsov, Alaniya v X-XIII vekakh (Alania in the 10th-12th Centuries). Ordjonikidze, 1971, 247 p.
- V. A. Kuznetsov. Ocherki istorii alan (Essays on the History of the Alans). Vladikavkaz: Iriston, 1992, 390 p.

- V. A. Kuznetsov. Nizhniy Arkhyz v X-XII vv. (The Lower Arkhyz in the 10th-12th Centuries). K istorii srednevekovykh gorodov Severogo Kavkaza. Stavropol: Kavkazskaya biblioteka, 1993, 464 p.
- A. I. Robakidze, G. G. Gegechkori, Formy zhilischa i struktura poseleniy Gornoy Osetii (Types of Houses and Settlement Structure in the Mountain Ossetia). Kavkazskiy etnograficheskiy sbornik. Vol. V, Tbilisi, 1975, 83 p.
- J. Dumesil. Osetinskiy epos i mifologiya (Ossetian Epics and Mythology). M. 1976, pp. 10-11.
- S. D. Sulimenko, Bashni Severnogo Kavkaza (simvolizatsiya prostranstva v domostroitelnom tvorchestve gortsev) (The Towers of the North Caucasus: The Symbolism of Space in the Urban Creative Work of the Mountaineers). Vladikavkaz, 1997, 29 p.
- V. A. Kuznetsov. Durgulel Velikiy i Nizhny Arkhyz (Durgulel the Great and the Lower Arkhyz). Metodika issledovaniya i interpretatsiya arkhologicheskikh materialov Severnogo Kavkaza. Ordjonikidze, 1988, 80 p. B.B.
- Mify narodov mira (Myths of the World). Vol. 1. M.: Rossiyskaya entsiklopediya, 1992, 604 p.
- V. V. Pishtchulina. Khristianskoe khramovoe zodchestvo Severnogo Kavkaza perioda srednekovyaya (Christian Temple Architecture in the Medieval North Caucasus), Rostov-na-Donu, 2006, 320 p.

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.