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# Early Medieval North Albania: New Discoveries, Remodeling Connections The Case of Medieval Komani

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**Abstract** The site of Komani (the so-called Dalmace), situated on the mountainous part of north-western Albania, was known since the end of the 19th century for its rich cemetery. After the excavations during the 1980s, it results to be the widest early medieval cemetery ever excavated in Albania, dated from 6th to 8th century. Komani became the eponymous of an early medieval civilization, relating to several furnished inhumations and cemeteries in the western Balkans. This question has been renewed during this last decade, by the ongoing French-Albanian archaeological project in Komani and its surroundings. The aim of the research is to understand the history of the site from its origins, and to recognize its late antique and medieval organization within the broader territorial context. From the 7th century, Komani and the Drini River valley make a perfect case study of the mechanisms distinguished in the creation of medieval regrouping settlements in western Balkans, occurring all along the Middle Ages.

**Summary** 1 History of Discovery. – 2 The Situation of Komani and the Local Road Network. – 3 The Context of the Settlement and Its Nearest Territory. – 4 Late Roman Period. – 5 Medieval Topography of Komani. – 5.1 Funerary Occupation. – 5.2 Cultic Buildings and their Relation to the Evolution of the Settlement. – 5.3 Churches in Relation with the Cemetery. – 5.4 The Evolution of the ‘fortress’. – 5.5 Ecclesiastical Buildings Related to the Evolution of the Fortified Area. – 5.6 Other Churches and Settlement Areas. – 5.7 Saint George’s Area. – 5.8 Gogshi Quarter. – 6 Conclusions.

**Keywords** Komani (Dalmace). Medieval archaeology. Byzantine and Latin Church. Hilltop settlement.

Komani (ancient Dalmace), lies in north Albania, 27 km north-west of Shkodra (fig. 1). The so-called fortress of Dalmace commands an elevated position (567 m high) above the left bank of Drini River<sup>1</sup> (fig. 1). This rare strategic situation perfectly controlled the entire lower Drini valley, on its left side, with a view on the medieval bishopric of Sarda, on Gajtan (a very large fortified Bronze Age site, but reoccupied during late antiquity) and Scodra fortress in front of Taraboshi Mountain (the border with nowadays Montenegro). To its right, from Dalmace, one can see the heights of the

1 See Nallbani et al. 2008, 427-38.

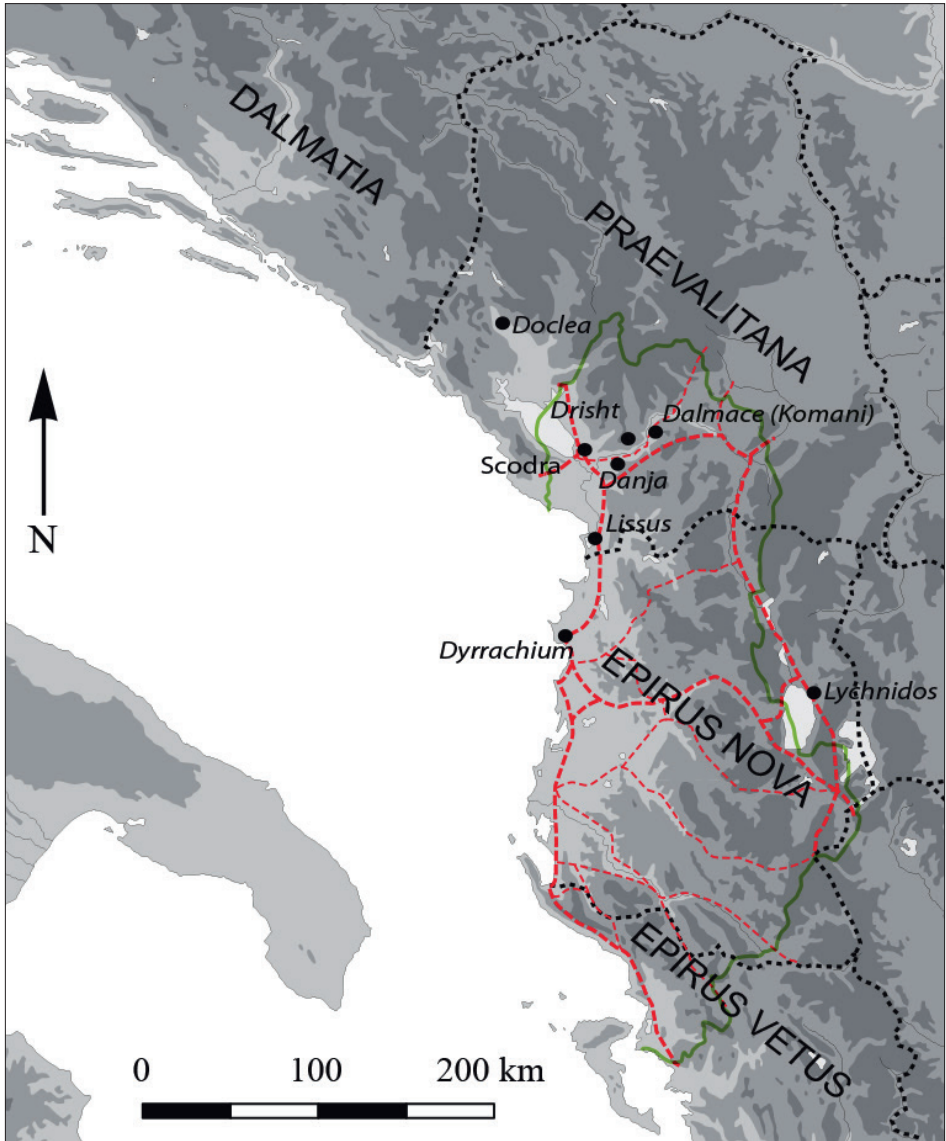


Figure 1. Map of south-west Balkans, with late antique roads in Albanian territory (mainly after J. Adami 1953) (E. Nallbani, Komani Archaeological Project - KAP)

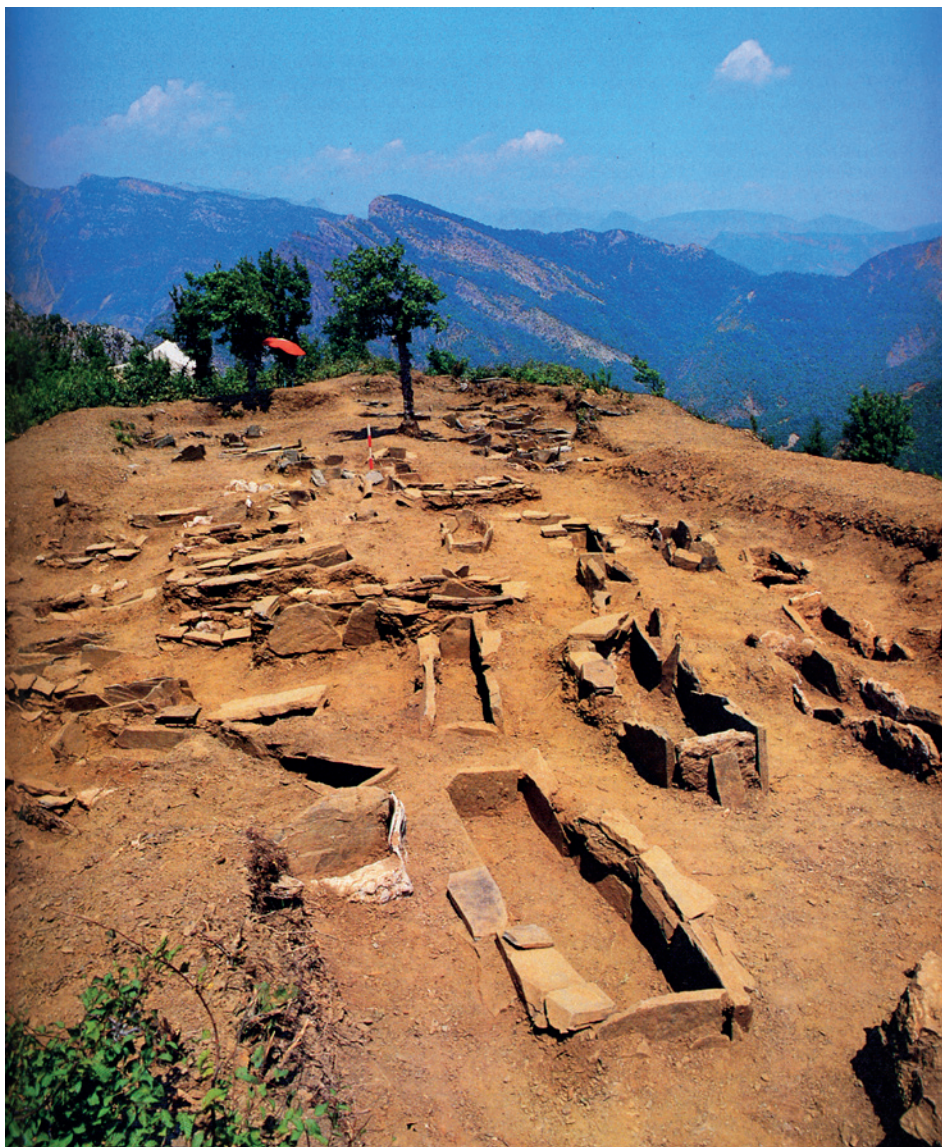


Figure 2. The main cemetery, 1984 (*Albanien* 1988, fig. 108)

Albanian Alps. In a way, the position of the site is like a 'mountainous gate' to the entire middle Drini valley.

## 1 History of Discovery

Dalmace, the most significant site of the North Albanian medieval archaeology, was known from the middle of the 19th century, only for its wide and very rich early medieval cemetery. Identified originally in 1867 by Johan Geog Hahn,<sup>2</sup> the archaeological importance of Komani was recognized thanks to the first excavation in 1898 by Alexandre Degrand, former French consul in Shkodra. Degrand exhumed several graves, containing reburials with items, which he deposited in the French museum of Saint Germain-en-Laye, and published a detailed description of them in his account of his travels in North Albania (Degrand 1901). The information on the vast extension of the main cemetery with the high density of burials was due to him, as well as the identification of late antique and early medieval phases.

Afterwards, hundreds of Komani graves were plundered, from the mid-19th century to the Second World War. All researchers, travelers and archaeologists who visited the north Albania, were very intrigued by Dalmace cemetery.<sup>3</sup> The extreme density and richness of the grave assemblages provoked a mass of theories among scholars, on the ethnic or identity membership of the Komani community. The name of the nowadays village of Komani indicates a 'mysterious' but very rich cultural identity community, associated to different populations of an extended chronology.<sup>4</sup>

After the Second World War, Albanian archaeological politics considered the site as fundamental for the reconstruction of the medieval history of Albania, thanks to the post-Roman custom of inhumations with grave gifts including jewelry, dress objects, everyday life objects, weapons, tools. Graves contained single burials or reburials. Two main excavations (from 1961 to 1984) under the direction of Hëna Spahiu of the Institute of Archaeology were focused on the extended cemetery, aiming for the discov-

2 Hahn 1867.

3 For these authors (Träeger, Nopsca, Degrand, Rey and Ugolini) see, Nallbani 2002, 481, n. 1. Ugolini after visiting and publishing a series of grave goods and rests of a skull dated them to the 4th-5th centuries. Among 24 sites that he visited in Albania presumed to be Illyrian settlements, he considered as such only two of them. One of these two was Dalmace (Ugolini 1927, 39-41). The richest collection of the grave goods were gathered afterwards by Jesuit and Franciscan priests of Shkodra, confiscated after 1945 to constitute the main deposits from Komani, in the Archaeological Museum in Tirana.

4 Bulle 1934; Korosec 1953; Spahiu 1969; Anamali 1976; Popovic 1984; Wilkes 1992, 278; Curta 2006, 100-4.



ery of the late antique Illyrians and the early medieval Albanians (Spahiu 1979-80). Spahiu excavated in almost all 270 graves (fig. 2) of two major sectors in the upper platform of the main cemetery, thus making it the largest early medieval cemetery ever excavated<sup>5</sup> in Albania. Spahiu also carried out soundings on the remains of the church of Saint George and to the platform at the top of the citadel (Spahiu 1984). The results increased the late antique and early medieval levels of the site, yet coming only from the cemetery. The Komani excavation became part of a national archaeological program carried out between the 1960s and 1980s, when more than thirty cemeteries mostly in North Albania were partly excavated, in order to investigate the Illyrian-Albanian continuity. Settlements, as living spaces with their defensive walls, houses, churches and productive dwellings were relatively ignored by the official archaeological agenda.<sup>6</sup>

From 2009, the site of Komani with its surroundings is part of a large binational multidisciplinary research program headed by archaeology, conducted on the French side by the Ecole française de Rome and the CNRS, in collaboration with the Albanian Institute of Archaeology in Tirana. The results produced by this French-Albanian research program aims to understand the history of the site from its origins, and to reconstruct its late antique and medieval organization within the broader territorial context. In a larger regional framework, the research program relates to an important question: the modalities of transition from late antiquity to the Middle Ages in the western Balkans. The preliminary results of this program have been very promising (Nallbani et al. 2008),<sup>7</sup> recognizing the significant complexity of the site during the early Middle Ages. Komani appears to participate in a larger network of communications, still very little known to scholars (Nallbani 2014). This short paper will provide an introduction to the complexity of the site, on the basis of new archaeological evidence coming from the current stage of the research project. It will provide some general considerations on the early medieval connections and networks in which were Komani could be integrated.

Komani lies near the middle course of Drini River (the most important river of the region), situated in the south-west of the late Roman province of Praevalitana, not far from Epirus Nova in the south and Dardania in the east. Praevalitana and Epirus Nova, made the western shore of the

5 Items from 40 graves excavated in 1961 have been published; see Spahiu 1979-80, 9-10. Three other excavation seasons from 1981-84, discovering almost 230 graves are still unpublished; see Spahiu 1983, 1984.

6 See Nallbani 2004, Bowden 2003.

7 See the annual research activities from 2008 to 2011, Nallbani et al. [*Dalmace*] (Komani), MEFRM 120/2, 427-38; 121/2, 453-61; 122/2, 471-84; from 2011 onwards see online: <http://cefr.revues.org> (2016-10-10).

*praetorian prefecture* of Illyricum.<sup>8</sup> This was the administrative context till at the beginning of the 7th century. Little is known about the 6th century and Justinian's reconquest, of this province. 'The Buildings' of Procopius does not mention at all Praevalitana among Justinian securing provinces.<sup>9</sup> In the 9th-century Byzantine thematic reorganization, the area marks the border between the theme of Dyrrachium (created at the beginning of the 9th) and that of Dalmacia, established around 870 under the reign of Basilus I the Macedonian. However, the known seal of Peter, archon of Doclea, has recently been proposed to date starting from the 8th century (Prigent 2008, 411). Until the restoration of the Byzantine influence under the Manuel I Komnenos, the beginning of the 12th century, the region was very unstable, passing from the Byzantines on the coast, to the Avars and Slavs in the hinterland from the 7th century, after having reached the coastal town of Lezha at the end of the 6th century (Popovic 1975, 449). In the 9th century the region became a battlefield between the Bulgarians and the Franks. Of major importance was the ecclesiastical organization under the Roman church of Antivarum at the level of archdioceses at the beginning of the 11th century. In all of this, Komani (Dalmace), does not appear in the written sources, even in those fundamental ecclesiastical texts that enumerate several local episcopal centers.

## 2 The Situation of Komani and the Local Road Network

The region inherited a dense network of Roman roads, intensified and consolidated because of the major economic importance of the inland regions and their significant mining sites, such as Ulpiana and Municipum Dardanorum (Socanica) in west Dardania (Dusanic 1977, 52-94; Bavant 2004, 331-2). Of military origin, these roads quickly became important for the economy, from the 2nd-4th centuries. Mining in west Dardania, in Upper Moesia and certainly in the south-west of Praevalitana, in the land of Pirustae, provided important income. Roads developed with the increase of the transport of ores and other raw materials, imposing thus contingents, probably as a local militia supported by fortified posts, to protect roads from brigands, and to secure convoys and traders (Mócsy 1968, 351-4). Recent surveys in north-eastern Albania and western Kosovo have identified a series of narrow, but very dense local roads originating in the Roman period (Perzhita, Hoxha 2003), which were specially maintained until the late Roman period. Many sites in Epirus Nova and Dardania, identified as *castella* during the 4th-5th centuries, are related to those roads, as a

8 According to the *Notitia Dignitatum*, see Jones 1964, 381-91.

9 Procopius, *Buildings*, English ed. H.B. Dewing, VII, London 1971.

reaction of the 5th century Visigothic pass and who's the future has to be considered in the framework of Justinian's policy of protecting the Balkans (Bavant 2004, 328-9). Such a long-lasting phenomenon certainly remodeled the way of life in the post-Roman Balkans and could explain the growing of previously protected modest sites.

Komani is not far from the secondary Roman road, which linked *Lissus* and *Naissus* through a series of cities, stations and customs, such as *Creveni* (Vau Spas) *Gabuleum* (Kukës), *Ulpiana* (near Prishtina), *Theranda* (Prizren) and *Hammeum* (Prokuplje).<sup>10</sup> The nearest Roman station *Pakuë* (modern town of Puka), of the same axis is only 8 km to the south-east.

Portions of stone paths on the left bank of the Drini reveal that a number of rural sites, stations and towns were connected by another axis, passing through *Dagnum*, *Sarda*, *Karma*, then *Komani*, up to *Bytyçi*, through *Iballë*, *Shëmri*, *Përbreq* and *Bardhoc*, to *Gjakovo* in Kosovo. Remains of two formerly Roman stone bridges, one near *Sarda* (Spahiu, Komata 1975) and the other at *Karma*, have been formerly noticed (unfortunately nowadays both of them are under the artificial *Komani* lake). Another stone bridge, apparently medieval, crossing *Gogshi* at the northern foothill of *Dalmace*, is now smashed by the *Komani* dam constructed in 1980. This bridge could have served to connect the other side of the *Drini* valley with the lower quarter of *Komani*, *Gogësh* to rich medieval *Bytyç*, then the abbey of *Kabash*, *Qafë Mali*, leading to *Vau-Spas-Qafë Prushit* and *Gjakovo*. All those communications were difficult, passing through mountains and mountains gorges. *Drini* may have really been a vector of fluvial transport of equal importance to the terrestrial axis for the regional trade and economy, since *Strabo* mentions the *Drini* as navigable from its mouth upstream in *Dardania*.<sup>11</sup>

### 3 The Context of the Settlement and Its Nearest Territory

Till 2009, we did not know the real nature of the *Komani* settlement, except the existence of its main cemetery,<sup>12</sup> albeit without any topographical plan of the excavated burials. Ongoing research conducted by the French-Albanian

10 Table de Peutinger, seg. VI.

11 Strab. VII, 5, 7.

12 Necropolis excavation of 1961 is devoid of the topographic plan (see Spahiu 1979-80, 23-46). While field reports of three campaigns (1981-84) have not given any plan of the whole excavation, to permit to situate burials on the general topography of the site. Only a picture of the main grave yard has been published in the catalogue: *Albanien* 1988, fig. 108, 148. Our first visit to *Dalmace* was realized in July 2002 together with Paul Reynolds. During our daily short visit we were able to recognize fabrics of late antique local and imported ceramics, which made us confident to initiate the research program focused on the living structures.

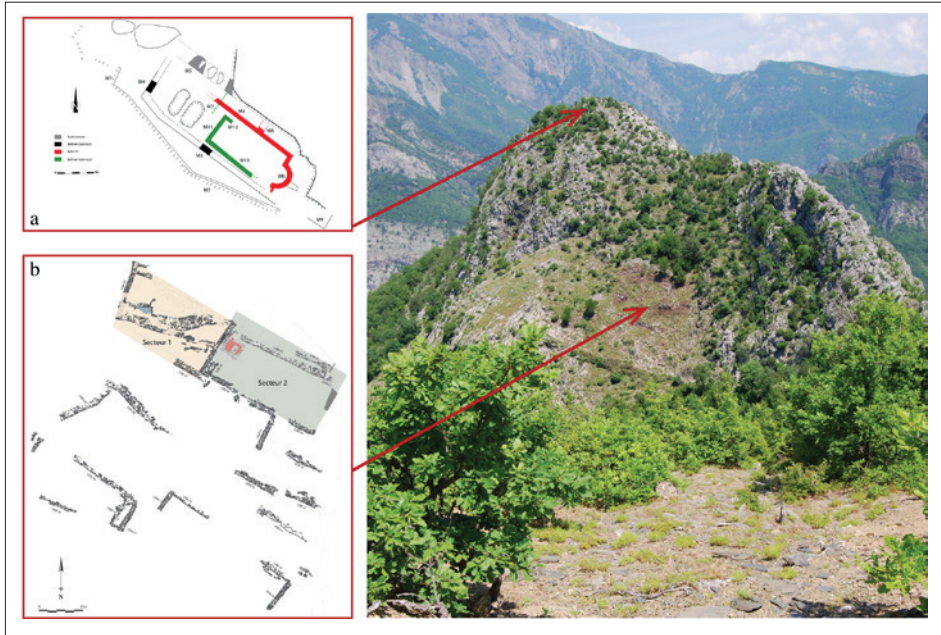


Figure 3. View of the western slope of the 'fortress' (E. Nallbani, C. Mathevot, M. Julien, KAP)

mission is still partial and concentrated in some of the quarters composing the settlement. What follows regarding the topo-chronology of the site and its landscape represents preliminary results and hypotheses that are being continuously updated. Surveys and excavations of the upper hillfort areas (from 2008) followed by a first survey of its surroundings (2014) reveal not only the large extension of the necropolis, but especially the vast and complex organization of the settlement, covering more than 40 hectares. Komani's topography is organized in several platforms and slopes, scattered at different heights, clearly in connection to each other. Surveys have recognized the extended chronology of the historical landscape, from the Hellenistic period to the 18th century, while the early Middle Ages to the 13th century mark the most expansive stage in the settlement.

Up to the 2014 survey of the surrounding area, the French-Albanian team recognized Komani as a mountainous site (fig. 3): the central area was only in the upper part of the hillfort, on the western slope, where living, defensive and ecclesiastical activities were concentrated; the hilly platform of the frontal elevation was occupied by the main cemetery; several churches were spread within and on the limits of these upper areas, attracting economic, craft and funerary activities. Remote burials and groups of burials were set up around churches and inside the living structures.



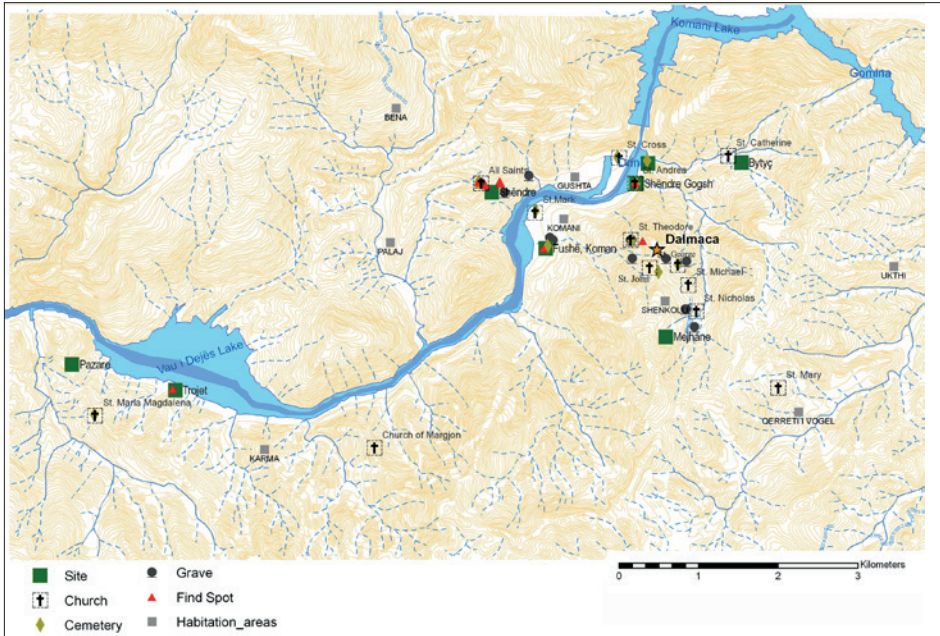


Figure 4. GIS Map of the Komani territory, 2014 (A. Miti, E. Serjani, KAP)

The field survey realized in 2014 considered the entire surrounding area of Komani covering nearly 16,800 km<sup>2</sup> focused on all levels (fig. 4). It was thus creating a first picture of almost the entire historical landscape. Together with the high erosion level of this pre-mountain region, the context of the lower surrounding landscape was mostly shaped during the second half of the last century. The Albanian state exploited the resources of the valley, by constructing copper mine sites (on both sides of the River Drin, at Karmë, Koman and Gusht-Palaj), and the largest hydropower stations and cascade of the country, during years 1970-80<sup>s</sup>. As a consequence, this rural territory with fertile field and terraces was transformed into an industrial area, submerged by the lake of Vau Dejës. It is quite possible that fields of the Fusha, Gusht and Gogsh quarters, extended on nearly 2.5 km of length, have been settled during the Roman period, as the field survey revealed. The disposal of huge layers of sand and river stones (up to 2 or 3 m high) during the construction of the Komani hydroelectric complex, have significantly compromised the possibility of an archaeological investigation. Several minor areas were flooded and the upper slopes (of Gogshi and Gusht-Palaj) were quarried and deforested for cultivation. Modern localities on both banks of the Drini River, including archaeological sites such as the most relevant medieval bishopric of Sarda, have been inundated.

Here, the cemetery, churches and extramural living areas are actually submerged, together with its satellite sites scattered on its territory.

The oldest occupation of Komani goes back to the Hellenistic period, although we do not yet know anything about its significance at that time. Only residual ceramics of the 3rd-2nd BC come out of the late Roman levels of the upper part of Dalmace (Area 1).

#### **4 Late Roman Period**

We recognize a first structuring of the site in the late Roman period, probably around the 4th century. The ongoing excavations have identified terraces receiving walls which have shaped almost the entire western slope of Dalmace hill. More than 50 walls (see fig. 3) have been identified up to now, some of them materialized on structures, make the foundations and the ground-floor of several buildings, east-west and north-south directions. The building area perches on the slope from the top to the bottom, to the junction with the other opposite hilly-platform of the main cemetery (Area 2). Such a system of unified espalier perched structures could serve for living and defensive activities, along the same lines as several late antique hilltop settlements on the secondary axes of Praevalitana and Epirus Nova (Bace 1976; Mijovic, Kovacevic 1975, 175-6).

Structures are constructed with stones; terrace walls bonded with clay, while building walls are very solidly made with mortar. Roofs were partly covered with slate-slabs. Limited scale excavations have engaged only 20% of the entire built area, which has suffered important erosion. The steep slope up to 35-39 degrees makes it impossible to apply reliable chrono-typology methods for the evaluation of the entire built area. As a consequence, at this stage of research it is impossible to distinguish the late antique impact within the entire constructed area, with respect to medieval restructuring. We have proceeded up to now by favoring some of the available sectors.

There are late antique sequences materialized by the structures described above, in two of the sectors of the slope were the French-Albanian excavations program carried out intensive excavations during three campaigns. A platform has shaped the hilltop spur to obtain a long, rectangular (at least 25×5 m) and solid (walls of 1 m thick) late Roman building, constructed with stones and very rare bricks. The excavation, still ongoing, has partially revealed the rectangular plan, directed almost northwest-southeast while it's religious or military function still remains uncertain. Because of the later early medieval restructuring of the platform for the erection of churches, the building has been smashed, but the ceramics related to this first building contain Roman and late Roman local fabrics and rare imports. The second area where late antique buildings have been

identified is partly the excavated area of the mid-level slope (Zone 1A), mostly described above. Among the late antique living or probably defensive structures, on booth of the sectors, one reveals a special, 1 meter-thick, solid and arched wall.

Reliable excavated contexts, more significant in this densely occupied mid-level area (Zone 1A) compared to the top of the settlement, provided significant ceramics assemblages. There are local ceramics (mainly for cooking and storage) and a modest quantity of imports, dating from the 4th to the 7th century. The majority of the coarse fabrics are decorated by the technique called 'combed' on both sides of the recipients, and come from under an occupation level dating probably to the 6th century. Characteristic for a succession of late Roman hill-top sites on the Albanian Alps and on the slopes of white Drini River,<sup>13</sup> its occurrence integrates Komani even better into a late Roman context of hill-top settlements and fortresses (second half of the 4th-6th century), as it was also revealed in the northern Adriatic, the Alps, the region of Veneto-Friuli, and Slovenia's late antique fortresses (Lusuardi Siena, Negri 2007). The destruction context provoked by the crossing of the Noricum *limes* and the progress of barbarians into north could be put in relation with the same phenomenon in the 6th-century south Illyricum, materialized in several sites. It is still uncertain if the same phenomenon could be affecting Dalmace too, although there is evidence from the necropolis supporting a continuation of the site's occupation in the 6th-7th century. The chronology of the collapse of the walls in sector 1A of the living quarters is not yet clear enough to determine if there is any 6th-7th century destruction or temporary abandonment of this space. Certainly a wall collapse happened after the occupation of the space for funerary purposes (at the end of the 7th and the 8th century), and before another main restructuring of both sectors after the 9th century for living activities.

Simultaneously to the late antique structured living on part of the hill, the main Dalmace cemetery provides rare indications about the Roman period, but much more significant data on the 5th-6th centuries.

M.-L. Ugolini, the Italian archeologist who excavated Butrint in the 1930s, published in the journal *Albania* rings with antique gems and late Roman coins used as pendants, found among the grave items of Komani (Ugolini 1927). Roman (from the 3rd) and especially late Roman (5th-6th centuries) material comprises principally dress artefacts such as circular kidney-shaped openwork and penannular broaches,<sup>14</sup> bent stem bronze

13 Hoxha 2005-06, Jubani 1986.

14 Imperial roman kidney-shaped fibulas has been found in grave 5 of Dalmace without a clear context, see Spahiu 1979-80, 45, pl. IV/14, pl. V/11; on their classification, see Böhme 1972, 43, pl. 29, no. 1139.

fibulas and earrings (Spahiu 1979-80).<sup>15</sup> The closest parallels to the earliest imperial artefacts are dress items found from the fortified *castrum* of Danubian *limes* and the Roman fortresses of the Balkans (Bulgaria, Serbia and Roumania).<sup>16</sup> The most widespread item is the bent stem fibula, iron and bronze specimens of which are among the commonest dress accessories found on 6th-century sites in the Balkan hilltop forts and cemeteries (Uenze 1992, 149). Particularly significant is a small iron fibula, over-cast with silver leaf decorated in gold, which certainly belongs to a high rank 5th-6th-century woman's dress. The woman was buried with the fibula and an iron gilded hair pin, in a stone-slab grave somewhere in the main cemetery of Komani.<sup>17</sup> Based on specimens found in Histria and Nea Anchialos, such dress items were not restricted to the military population, and some have argued for the female character of the dress (Curta 2013), as the specimen in Komani seems to confirm. The 7th century increases considerably the number of furnished graves, using unified stone slab construction. They reach the highest extension in the cemetery, from the church of Saint John to the west, on the main cemetery platform, to beyond that of Saint George to the east. These are mostly first horizon reburials with grave goods: weapons, jewellery and dress objects, dating back probably to the end of the 6th and certainly the 7th century. Among the dress artefacts, the bent stem fibula, dated to the 7th-8th centuries is a distinguished heritage of the 6th century of the same type fibula and other common so-called 'Byzantine' belt-buckles, found in numerous contemporary sites in the Mediterranean region. The 6th-7th-century dress items and more generally grave assemblages from Komani display a late Roman Balkan way of dressing, with vast connections from Crimea to Italy and more closely to different Mediterranean and Adriatic areas (earrings, bracelets, broaches and belt fittings).

The extended survey of 2014 recognized that Dalmace upper part of the site does not represent a settlement isolated from the surrounding territory. Artefacts coming up from the survey suggest other small settlements occupying scattered areas. Imperial coins, late Roman ceramic gathered on the slope of Palaj and its early medieval reoccupation (Saint Andrea church and cemetery), suggest the existence of a modest 'mirror' settlement spread out on terraces, opposite Dalmace, on the other side of the Drini and in the valley through the Gusht quarter. The Gogshi quarter, on the northern Dalmace foothill, offers late Roman ceramics of the 6th

15 Grave items from the excavations of 1981-84 are still unpublished.

16 Böhme 1972, 43-4, Pl. 29/1138; Gomolka-Fuchs 1982, Pl. 55, no. 266; Ivanisevic, Nikolic-Dorđević 1997, 134, fig. 55/7.

17 Unpublished material.



century and a continuity of occupation with 7th-century grave artefacts.<sup>18</sup> The same can be said about two other areas down in the valley (Fusha and Saint Mark quarters), which are unfortunately currently under 3 m of gravel, making them inaccessible to research. It seems that there was also activity on the other slope of Dalmace hill, on the south, spread on terraces between Saint George and the Gogshi quarter. We ignore however their chronology and we know even less on their functioning. At this stage it is quite impossible to recognize and trace the organization and the hierarchy between central and satellite occupations of the territory of Roman and late Roman Komani.

Scholars have proposed Komani as the station of a military garrison during the late Roman period (Curta 2006); as the site which housed refugees from the late Roman neighboring localities during the migrations of the 6th-7th (Wilkes 1992); or as the settlement of new Slavic incomers (Korosec 1953). I would think that Komani certainly has to be closely considered as part of the late Roman defensive system of the Drini Valley, and as an important post in the Roman economic network of Praevalitana and Dardania. Quite possibly a garrison reoccupied the hilltop during the Roman period, as part of the protective system, but the history of the settlement displays a much more complex evolution. The Drini valley turns out to have been densely occupied during the late Roman period. In consequence, several sites exhibit well organized living spaces after the end of the Roman period as important centers for local transactions and production.

## 5 Medieval Topography of Komani

The archaeological investigations of the French-Albanian program based on the massive information from the ancient excavations of the cemetery have recognized a real expansion of the Komani settlement from the 7th century onwards. The scattered occupation could be found in several quarters of residence, production, churches and cemeteries, organized in different heights and slopes, from the top of the hillfort, down to the Gogshi quartier in the north, near the Drini River.

<sup>18</sup> Iron spearhead, stem-bent bronze fibula and bronze torque, found fortuitously in the years 1980 haven't been published.

## 5.1 Funerary Occupation

We recognize that funerary occupation followed the scattered settlement organization. The main cemetery area, which inherited the oldest inhumations from the 5th-6th centuries, separated at its origin from the living structures, extended to almost 4 ha (Zone 2), already from the 7th century. The generalization of the inhumation practices from the end of the Roman period, favors in this case, the exhaustive anthropological study of the population, following chronological phases and according to social groups. Unfortunately we don't dispose any equivalent anthropological evaluation from former Albanian excavations (of 270 burial structures). This is one of the main reasons why the French-Albanian project has engaged new excavations on the funerary areas with the aim of conducting anthropological analyses, to fill the lack of paleopathological evidence on the Komani inhabitants: their state of health, the biological homogeneity of the groups, and the evolution of the demographic structures considering the demography of births, deaths and migrations. Combined with the grave goods, such a study will allow deep investigations on the socio-economic aspects, as well as on the variety of dress codes and the social hierarchy of the holders.

From the 7th century the cemetery spread on the south and east slopes, further east from the ruins of Saint George, with a special concentration of 7th-9th-century grave assemblages. Burial structures of this area are generally standardized, more slate-slab rectangular boxes and fewer structures built with stone walls; covered by the same slate-slabs, occasionally roof shaped covers reminding late Roman 'cappuccino' tile graves.<sup>19</sup> The main cemetery seems to be in function until around the 12th century, judging only from the burials with grave goods. However the 13th century inhumations have been concentrated up to now in the western area of Saint George church and leaned beside the apse of the church in the zone 1B.<sup>20</sup> Very often the same family buried its members in the same burial structure, as did the same clans reusing one burial structure for several generations.<sup>21</sup> Very often, they fitted out the burial structure's interior with well-structured ossuary boxes at its edges. The recycling of burials is not peculiar only to Komani. It is typical of medieval communities in the

19 See burial 302, Nallbani 2010, 481, fig. 10; Spahiu 1979-80, 27, fig. 4.

20 Radio carbon dating.

21 One of the outstanding cases is the burial 321 (excavated in 2011), in the living slope of the so-called fortress, arranged with an ossuary to receive ten individuals, which even though were of clearly remote origins, it belonged to the same clan. See below: The evolution of 'fortress'.

western Balkans, which used the same funerary space for centuries.<sup>22</sup> Such a reuse complicates the archeo-anthropological study of the buried population. Komani's inhabitants buried their dead dressed, with objects and everyday life items such jewelry, tools, weapons and offerings, throughout the early Middle Ages. The majority of 6th-9th centuries' burials have been found with deposits, despite the fact that burial violation and looting seem to be continuously practiced (Nallbani et al. 2015).<sup>23</sup> Compared to the occupation of the 5th and 6th centuries, it is undeniable that the number of inhabitants on the territory increased in the 7th century. Such growth had a direct impact in the prosperity of the Komani settlement.

Among the mass of Byzantine or Mediterranean belt-buckles, earrings, bracelets, wore by inhabitants, some of the 7th-century dress items achieve a regional aspect without interruption through the following 8th century. The fibula with bent stem, the torque with bell and cross pendants, the belt-pendants, the armlets and several types of earrings) display a unified technique of production and quite probably a local craft). We may consider these artefacts in the framework of the 6th-7th-century local continuity in relation to the early Byzantine sphere.<sup>24</sup> That is probably why Komani's inhabitants, like several communities from Montenegro to northern Albania, display a permanent demand during the 7th-8th century for such productions. As a consequence, the horizon of 7th-8th-century grave assemblages in Komani may reflect the growth of a clustered settlement inside secure Byzantine territories with inhabitants resettled from rural and modest defensive sites, mostly because of the arrival of the Avars and the Slavs from the end of the 6th century (Lemerle 1954; Avramea 1997; Vida, Völling 2000). Throughout the 7th and 8th centuries, Komani, like a certain number of north Albanian funerary sites, reflects a deep integration with the Byzantine network, very closely related to other areas of Adriatic, such as northern Croatia, southern Italy and Sicily. The closest relations of Komani in the regional framework are mainly with the inhabitants of Kruja and of the lagoon city of ancient Lissus. While Kruja 6th-7th

<sup>22</sup> Buchet 2014; Nallbani, Buchet 2008, 259. About several medieval cemeteries in Albania, see: Durrës (Tartari, 1984), Sarda (Komata 1979-80), Bukël (Anamali 1971), Prosek (Doda 1989).

<sup>23</sup> See for an obvious case of stealing the privileged burial, which lies next to the east of Saint George's aps. The disruption of one of the skeletons can be identified to the feet, the pelvis and the neck, were dress items and jewelry are usually placed, see Nallbani, Buchet, Metalla 2015: <https://cefr.revues.org/1416> (2016-10-10).

<sup>24</sup> Very well-known Romanized fibula with bent stem, widespread in the western Balkans (Dalmatia and Albania), around the Danube *Limes* (several forts in Bulgaria, Rumania and Serbia), was commonly worn by the inhabitants of Komani (for the bibliography, see Curta 2013; Curta, Gandila 2013; Nallbani 2004; Uenze 1992; Popovic 1984; Vinski 1974; Spahiu's report of Komani excavations during 1981-84, the Archive of the Institute of Archaeology, Tirana).



Figure 5. Bronze belt fittings of the 8th century from Komani cemetery (photo E. Nallbani, KAP)

century displays more elite burial assemblages, Lissus had a larger access to Mediterranean early medieval dress and items, and naturally more luxury goods.<sup>25</sup> Grave assemblages of the cemetery of Lezha contradict the former opinion about the desertion of the coastal towns because of the arrival of the Avars in 582. Bishop John of Lezha emigrated to Scullace in Calabria (Popovic 1975, 452-3), but the inhabitants seem to have continued living in the town during the 7th century and to have maintained strong contacts with the Byzantine lands of Greece and Italy. Komani, on the other hand, displays dense continental relations particularly with Panonian and Danubian material culture, as well as the increase of long-distance trade artefacts such as glass and rock crystal beads (Greiff, Nallbani 2008, n. 8).

The cemetery of Komani has yielded inhumations with dress artefacts dating from the 8th and 9th centuries. Some connections with the Caucasian regions from the second half of the 7th to the 8th century are revealed especially through women's dress.<sup>26</sup> During the same period, from the end of the 7th century and throughout the 8th, the presence of Carpathian mid- and late Avar belt garnish is significant, providing military male dress. Especially important from the unpublished excavations is an all-bronze openwork tendrils belt of the second half of the 8th century considered mid- and late Avar objects (fig. 5). Bronze gilded and enameled belt garnish with lion, founds in 2011, from Saint Georg probably disturbed

25 *MoyenÂge en Albanie, Komani-Lezha*, Exhibition brochure, 4-15 December 2012, at the National Historic Museum of Tirana.

26 See below the grave 321.



burials found parallels to the belt garnish in the Vrap treasure, dated to the 8th century.<sup>27</sup> Komani graves (ex. grave 17 of 1980s unpublished excavations) have provided small belt strap ends in characteristic among mid- and late Avars (end of the 7th-beginning of the 8th century); another floral motifs (open work tendrils) belt garnishes, from the second half of the 8th-beginning of the 9th century (Garam 1995); wild boar representations to the end of the 8th-beginning of the 9th century (Fancsalsky 1995, 192). Other than in Pannonia, such belt garnishes are found in Dalmatia among the Avar-Croats, and few in Serbia, on the left bank of the Danube. Scholars explain the very few late Avar finds south of the Danube, by the presence of the Avars as mercenaries in the Bulgarian army when they prepared for the defense from Byzantium, before the clash with the Franks in 827 (Bugarski 2008, 88-90).

As for female jewellery, the 8th-9th-century earrings with star-shaped pendant are integrated into a much extended area, from regions of the Southern Alps to Russia, popular in Avaria and Bulgaria, which suggests itinerant Byzantine goldsmiths working for several regions. In the 10th-11th centuries, the cemetery yielded jewelry very similar to both the so-called Carantanian sphere (Sagadin 1988) where the considerable number of crescent-shape earrings dominates, and the central Balkan Byzantine tradition (Cilinska 1975, 70-2; Mesterhazy 1990; Ercegovic-Pavlovic 1967). During those centuries there is a renewal of grave assemblages in the site, with no more dress and accessories, but a large presence of jewellery, earrings and fingerings.

During the whole early middle ages, dressed inhumation displays a familiar gestation, in which the church institution interferes very late. Nevertheless, the cemetery and group burials offer a very precious source of information on the progression of Christianity in the administration of funerary spaces in Komani, through social status, mentalities and ways of dressing.

In spite of the dense continuity of occupation, Komani as well as other neighbor sites, such as Lezha and Sarda, knew the break in early medieval coinage circulation from the mid-7th to the mid-9th century, like all other Balkan provinces of the Byzantine Empire (Morrison, Popovic, Ivanisevic 2006, 71-3). We have data about the renewed monetary activity in Komani in the mid-9th century. A small treasure of seven silver *miliaresia* minted by Michel III (842-867), has been discovered at the entrance of the church of Saint George.

27 See the catalog: *The Avar Treasure* 1981; Garam 2000; Fancsalsky 1995, 197, pl. 1/1.

## 5.2 Cultic Buildings and their Relation to the Evolution of the Settlement

An impressive number of religious edifices were erected in different sectors organizing the settlement throughout the Middle Ages and to the 18th century. Their toponyms partly survive in the memory of current inhabitants, despite their ruined state. While the church of Saint Nicolas in the southern outlying district was in function during the 17th century,<sup>28</sup> medieval Dalmace had already disappeared from the memory of its inhabitants. Apparently there was some break before the late medieval peripheral transfer of the settlement.

Seven churches have been recognized to have the closest relation with the early medieval settlement. Such an increase of the ecclesiastical buildings testifies to the exceptional extent of the clergy's investment as a distinctive feature for Komani topography, already in the 8th century. Indeed the Christianization of the early medieval settlement's topography is not a phenomenon specific to Komani. The territory of present-day north-west Albania and south-west Montenegro underwent a dense Christianization. What still remains unknown is the degree of Christianization achieved in the 6th century and the church organization of the area during the following century. The arrival of the Slavs into the region broke Christian tradition and delayed the process for almost two centuries. Yet as a general phenomenon, the series of hilltop sites inherited the late antique churches, and so did coastal cities in several areas of the western Balkans, which remained under byzantine control (Bavant 2004).

From late antiquity onwards, urban topography in the Balkans is deeply marked by the ecclesiastical structures, which were the main poles of organization of several aspects of life.<sup>29</sup> The early medieval towns, especially episcopal centers such as Sarda, Suacium, or Lissus had an extraordinary concentration of churches within their protected territory. As we can see, the topographic organization in a way displays the preservation of the late antique town organization. In Sarda, from the 9th to the 12th century alone, fourteen churches were erected, within 4 ha of space protected by two rings rebuilt in the 9th century after Karaiskaj (first protected in the 4th-5th century, after Karaiskaj 1975, 140-1, or in the 6th after Spahiu, Komata 1975 and Popovic 1984). Life, crafts and the economy were organized by sectors, which were marked in general by ecclesiastic buildings. All at once, the church was managing the funerary aspects, *intra* and *extra-muros*. Texts relate that Sarda was already the seat of a bishop in the 9th century.<sup>30</sup> In the 11th century, it became the latin bishopric of

28 Zamputi 1965, no. 24.

29 Sodini 2007, Bavant 2004, Bowden 2003.

30 A. Alb., I, 42.

Pulatum Minor, under the archbishopric of Antivarum of the diocese of Duklja (Karaiskaj 1987, 73-9). An ancient bishopric of Pulatum, whose location remains still unknown, was shifted to raise the position of 11th-century Sarda. Other suffragant centers, which passed from archbishopric of Dyrrachium under that one of Antivari in the 11th century would be Ulqinj, Svać, Kotor, Scodra, Drivast, Pula (Polatum), Serbia, Bosna and Trebinje (Sufflay 1916; A. Alb. I, 60, 69). Before and within this new ecclesiastical reorganization texts ignore the position of Komani (Dalmace). The question in our case is what did Komani represent in the 8th and 9th centuries? Did it rise to the level of bishopric by chance already the 9th century within the reorganization of the Themes? In that case, could we hypothetically propose that Komani was the earlier location of the archbishopric of Pulatum, transferred to Sarda later, during the 11th century? Let us continue with the evolution of the medieval topography of Komani and the organization of the churches.

### 5.3 Churches in Relation with the Cemetery

Two of the churches, Saint John and Saint George, bordered the main cemetery. Saint John, a double-apse small church, probably a *martyrium*, surrounded by a distinguished group of graves, was erected on the western limits of the cemetery, with a view on the Drini valley. Currently it is completely razed to the ground. While Saint George seems to have organized a large portion of the south-east cemetery area. Another church, presumably a very small chapel, and probably a family foundation, stands among a group of burials on the way relating Dalmace hill to Saint Nicholas on the south. Two of the damaged graves rescued there contained reinhumations: the damaged burial with roof-stone slabs can be hypothetically dated to the 8th-9th century, while the other one, with a modest architecture, contained several bodies with few grave goods dating from the 9th to the 11th century.

Preliminary archaeological surveys and cleanings may confirm that these Christian funerary sanctuaries continued to function during the whole period when the cemetery was in use. Saint George's church, where extensive archaeological excavation has been ongoing from 2011, at the same time helped to renovate the character of the occupation. Within the funerary services, related to two very distant funerary horizons (probably of different communities), the church, quite probably at the end of the early middle ages, became the pole of the economic activity (Nallbani, Buchet, Mathevo 2013).

#### 5.4 The Evolution of the 'fortress'

Intensive archaeological excavations in several sectors of the Dalmace hill show the persistence of the late antique residential area on the western slope of the hill (Zone 1A) as described above. At this stage of the investigation, we do not know the impact of the late antique investment compared to the medieval phases. What can be assumed is that the area was still in use and was restructured once again, not before the end of the 9th century, at least in both the sectors we excavated. After a massive collapse, concentrated in sector 1, of very unclear date, the same sector received burials. One of them reused a good-quality rectangular funerary chamber (2.40×0.85 m), leaning against the largest late antique bent and arched wall, before the definitive collapse of the south-east retaining walls. The ossuary fixed inside the eastern corner of the grave contained almost nine reduced inhumations, very interesting because of the diversity of their origin, belonging probably to a clan, as the anthropological analyses suggests. The last individual buried was a woman wearing rich jewellery, silver Mediterranean earrings, hearings, a torque, a finger-ring, a big chatelaine, as well as a knife and 250 different glasses and amethyst beads (fig. 6). It seems that the assemblage of the lady's artefacts consists of a mix of late 7th- and 8th-century Byzantine jewellery and Caucasian models (Garam 1987, Pletneva 1989). The C<sup>14</sup> dating of the anthropological material suggests a short chronology of the whole event, situated in the 8th century. Outside the structure tree juveniles were buried in front of the former access, between these two built sectors, suggesting thus difficult moments for the 8th century inhabitants of Dalmace.

With the restructuring of both of the sectors, new walls of north-south direction were erected creating new rooms, blocking the access between the two sectors and reorganizing a vast rectangular area of the sector 2 (whose length was probably divided by perishable material). A large baker's oven was set up, probably at the end of the 9th or the 10th century, in the south-west corner of the vast rectangular area still under examination, pointing to domestic and cooking activities. Ceramics in the sector can be dated from the 7th to the 12th century, with a few imports of Otranto amphorae of the 12th century, while the cooking ware found in the oven cannot suggest any precise date. The other space in the north-west (sector 1) was paved with stone slabs immediately over the destroyed walls which cannot be dated before the 9th century. The northern wall of this sector covers the western end of the important funerary chamber dated to the 8th century. This room received a fire place in the corner, molded with white stucco. The privileged character of this large residential sector has been reinforced also by the results of archaeo-zoological analyses. The first evaluations of the late antique and medieval contexts suggest a very well-organized food supply, with breeding in the peripheral areas of



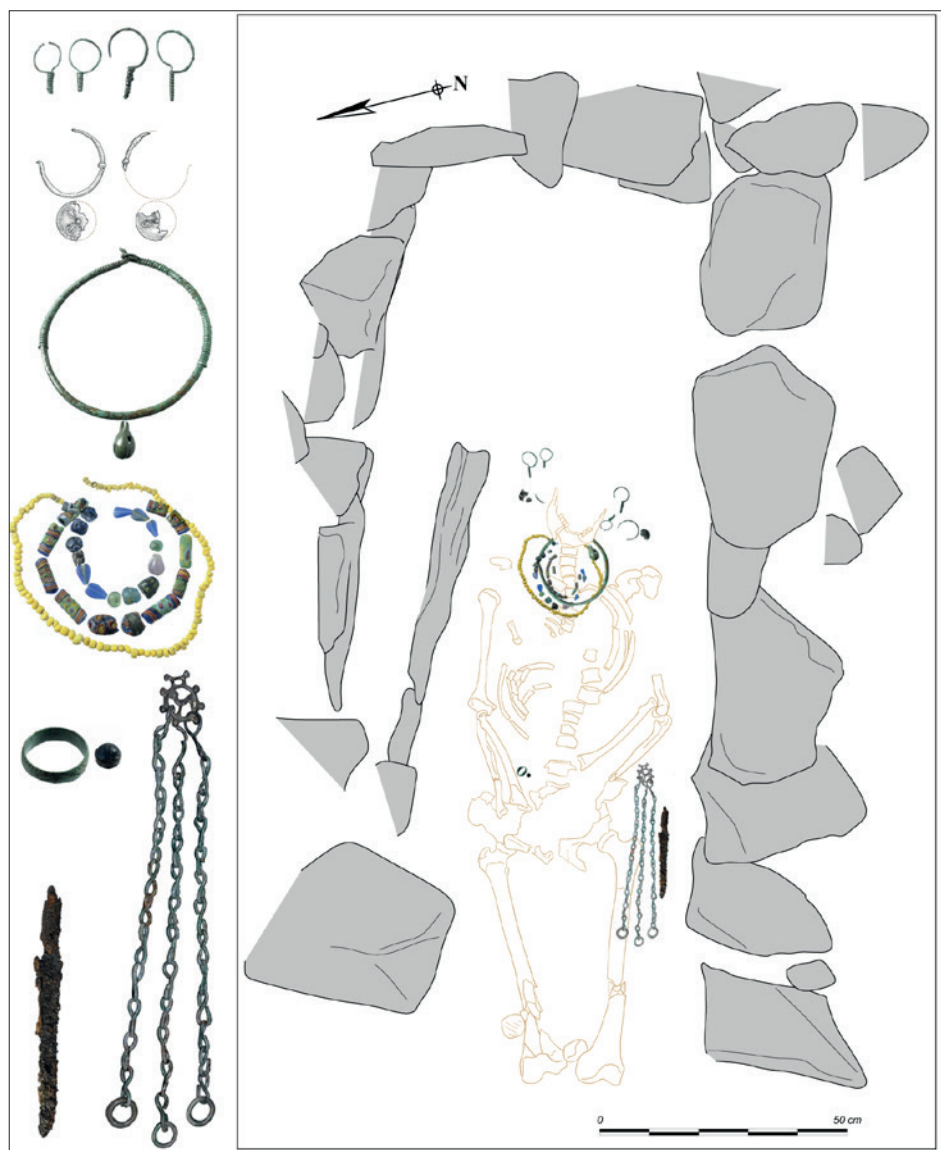


Figure 6. Grave 321. Last inhumation with grave goods (F. Cenolli, D. Dubois, S. Vatteoni, KAP)

the settlement. The end of activity of this sector could be suggested to lie between the end of the 12th and the 13th century, based on the find of Komnenos billons in the destruction levels, while the reasons of the abandonment are still to be known.

### 5.5 Ecclesiastical Buildings Related to the Evolution of the Fortified Area

Two churches, one inside the other, restructure the hilltop platform (see fig. 3), formerly occupied by the late Roman rectangular building. The older church was bigger, over 15 m long by 6 m wide, single-aisle, probably with a narthex, built with stones and lime mortar. It was painted with frescoes, paved with bricks and probably decorated with grazed tilling. Only some soundings to understand the main architecture sequences have been engaged until now, but excavations are still proceeding. A smaller so-called church was apparently built later on, inside the ruins of the first one, although we completely ignore their topo-chronology.

A third church, the most important one found up to now, leans against the polished rocky cavity of the so-called low level of the habitat. It is established in another quarter (Zone 1B) recognized since 2012, spread over almost 400 m further on the west slope of Dalmace hill. The western border of the quarter is delimited by strong and large stone walls (up to 1.40 m thick and 17 m long); we are probably dealing with a lower defensive line of the settlement. The church and a rectangular building to the east, of equal size, thus occupy only one portion of this quartier. Ongoing excavations and stratigraphic analyses hesitate, just like in the case of the upper platform, about the presence of two churches, again one inside the other. The oldest one was probably razed during the construction of the new one, of which only portions of the hypothetical apse remain.

Because no memory has survived about the toponym, it is probably among the oldest churches of the settlement, destroyed before the definitive abandonment of the site. The church was entirely buried by rocks fallen off the mountain cliff. It is a single nave church (nave 15.20 m long and 6 m wide) with a circular apse and a collateral to the north (fig. 7). It reveals two major construction phases: first a single-nave church with open arches on wall pilasters to the northern collateral. In this phase, the nave's and sanctuary walls were already covered by painted plaster. The second main phase closes the north arcade, separating the nave from the northern collateral with a wall. The nave was entirely repainted, this time with frescoes. The most important liturgical element of the church is the sanctuary, with a *synthronon* of two rows of clergy seats and a bishop's throne (fig. 8); there were adjoining liturgical basins, on either side of the chancel, itself probably surmounted by a *ciborium*. The entire stone sanctuary complex was covered by white very fine plaster, and decorated

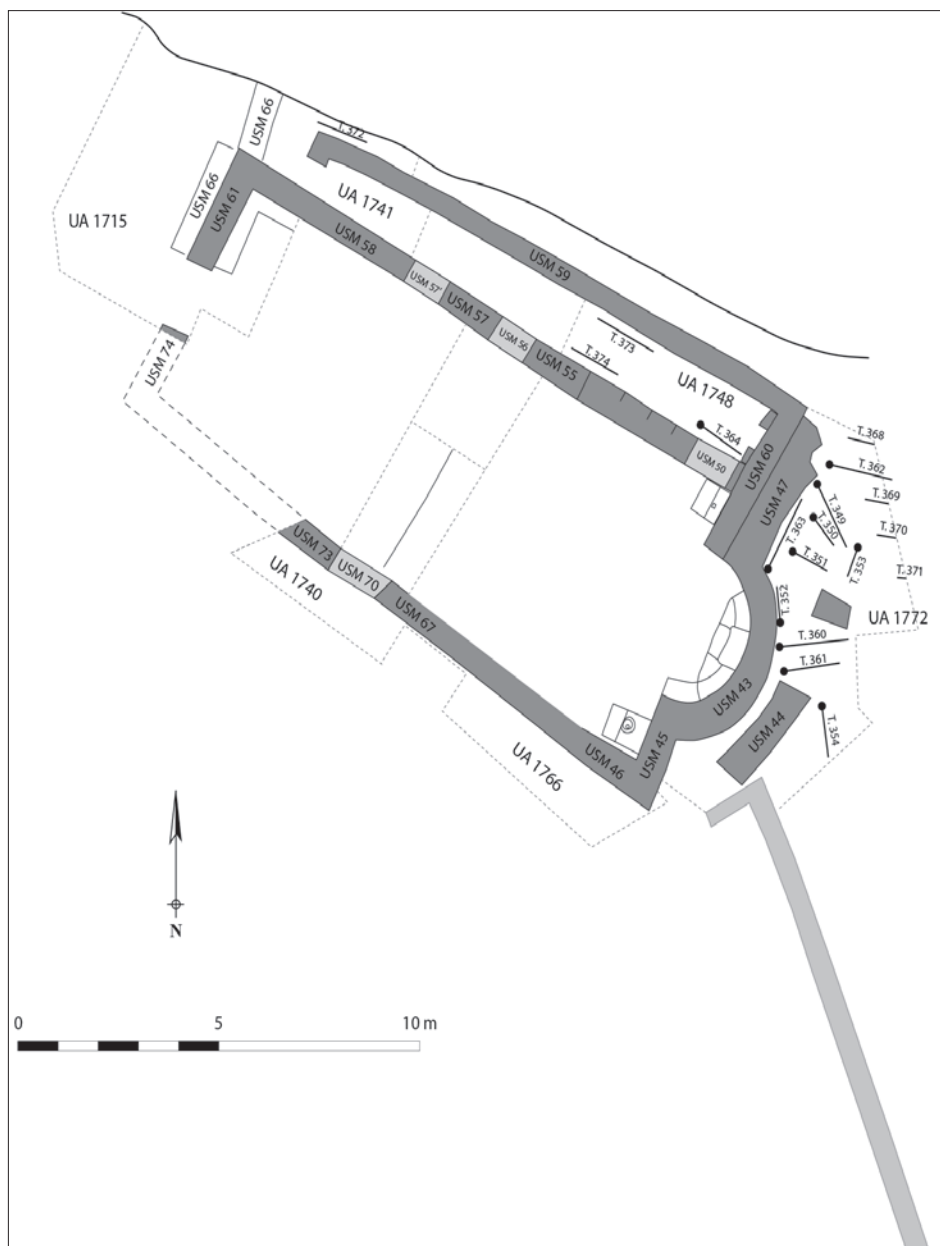


Figure 7. Lower sector of the 'fortress'. Plan of 2015 (S. Vatteoni, KAP)



Figure 8. Synthronon with the throne in the middle of the apse. Ongoing excavation (photo K. Lilo, KAP)



Figure 9. St George's sector, view from the south (photo L. Buchet, KAP)



with floral and geometrical stuccos. We still do not know whether the *synthronon* is related to the first or the second phase of the church. Up to now, light lamp glass and a 9th-10th-century bronze encolpion have been found in the demolition levels related to the church. A fragmentary 8th-century lunar pendant is an important find from the collateral regarding its dating, although we have to wait until the church is fully uncovered before we can give a more accurate account of its origin.

The outstanding density of burials in the northern annex of the church and the entire space behind the apse indicate its function was mainly funerary, at least during the medieval phases of the church. Although much of the church is still unexcavated, the number of recognized burials is impressive; burials behind the apse are superimposed. The burial architecture reveals rectangular slab boxes of the first horizon burials, which testify to the continuity of burial architecture beyond the 7th-8th centuries up to the 13th century. Vast chamber burials covered by slabs take up almost the entire collateral, and are still unexcavated. The worship of sacred space used to bury after the destruction of the temple, as a child inhumation deposited along demolitions.

## 5.6 Other Churches and Settlement Areas

Still on the west side of the Dalmace hill, Saint Theodore, whose dedication was preserved by the locals, describes another island further down, marking the north-western limits of the site's border line. Surveys have recognized an almost 16 m long church with southern additions, graves in its vicinity and several lines of walls and structures surrounding the remains of the church. Another modest single-nave chapel, disappeared from living memory, is located further west, on the way down to the modern village of Komani. Two of the graves rescued there, containing inhumations with simple silver ring earrings, are typical of the 9th-11th centuries. If the long portion of the wall mentioned above in the lower Zone 1B was indeed a defensive line, both of these churches would be positioned *extra-muros* and would extend the closest settlement territory further down west.

## 5.7 Saint George's Area

As was mentioned briefly above, the area of Saint George has been the subject of extensive ongoing excavations by the French-Albanian archaeological mission since 2011 (fig. 9). The isle marks the eastern limit of the main cemetery area (Zone 2); more precisely it was used for burials from the 7th century onwards, like most of the eastern slope from the crest of the main graveyard to the east rocky pick of Saint George. The same rec-

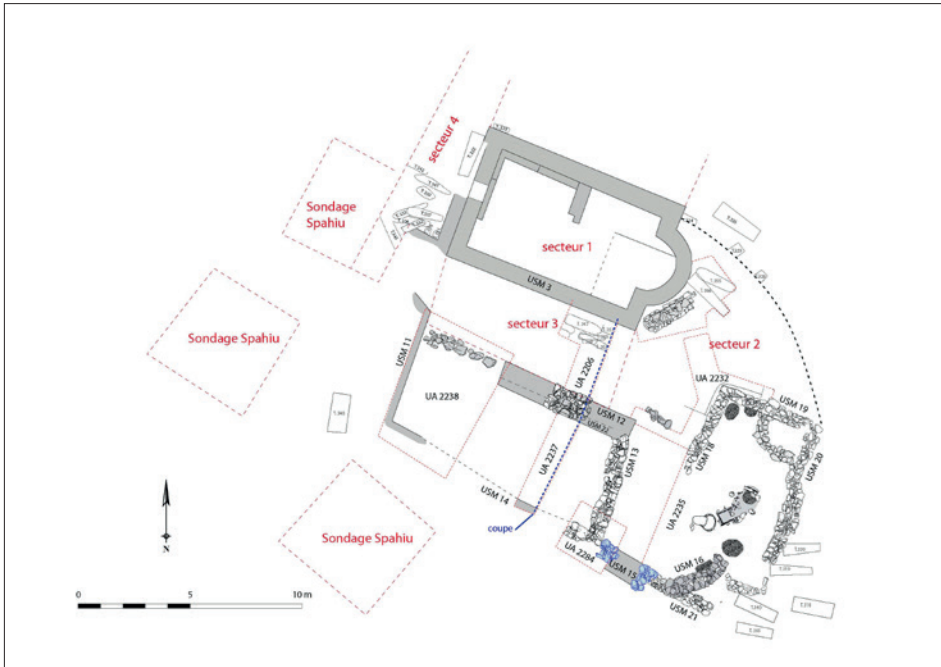


Figure 10. St George's sector (church, burials, workshop, storage building) Plan of 2014 (S. Vatteoni, KAP)

tangular box slate-slab burials occupy the area, containing inhumations with mostly rich grave goods dating from the 7th to the 9th century. Burials 319 and 318 contained jewellery and dress items, (bronze belt hangings, bronze stem fibulas, trapezoidal-star earring, finger-rings with pentagram and several types of glass beads), dating between the late 7th to the 8th century. Both of the burials were already despoiled. Generally this horizon of rich inhumations with grave gifts was disturbed during reburials and by ancient looting. We still have no solid data which could determine with certainty the chronological relation between the church, a possible older altar inside it, and this first cemetery.

The thick leveling of a shale and clay platform partly structured the south-east of the sector, aiming to reorganize the quarter. On it were built the church of Saint George and a building complex to its immediate south-east. The church (partly destroyed by 1984, cf. Spahiu soundings) is a modest single-nave structure, with a rustic and massive sanctuary built of stone-slabs and mortar, painted *al fresco* and lit with glass lamps. If at this stage of research we cannot judge whether the installation of the graves in the church was planned, it is certain that some of the 8th-9th-century graves lean against the northern wall of the church. A more precise date

is provided by the small treasure of silver coins from the 9th century found in front of the church entrance, also used as a funerary area.

The reorganization of the quarter, by the construction of the thick leveling platform, involves another rectangular building to the south-east of the church. This building, excavated in 2012, is a blacksmith's workshop constructed quite probably in the 13th century. Its foundations destroyed this portion of the cemetery, while residual material coming from the relevant graves dates to the 8th-9th centuries (fig. 10). The workshop was built with stones and mortar, covered by stone slabs, like all medieval constructions of Komani. Pits and furnaces were fixed on the ground, where several small portions of iron slag at the bottom of three of the pits were found, together with some glass slag. Other areas of the settlement provide consistent fragments of iron slag. We also hesitate on the interpretation of two modest furnaces established in the immediate eastern vicinity of the bishop church (Zone 1B), again close to the stone slabs of a small cemetery behind the apse.

Ecclesiastical authority thus becomes, as is common in the other medieval cities, the pole of economic and productive activity, establishing the craft production during the 11th-13th centuries.<sup>31</sup> Another spacious building made of big blocks of stone and clay surrounds the southern area of the Saint George quarter, and was probably used for storage or seasonal activity, as this first stage of the excavations suggests.

It is interesting that two quite different funerary features make use of the Saint George area: a first - and most probably the earliest - layer of 7th- to 9th-century stone boxes with furnished reburials spreading more irregularly on the slope and to the south-east of the church; the second one, dating to the 13th century, but very dense, occupies only the west of the church. These latest inhumations are without any construction or goods, and could be of the same horizon as the blacksmith workshop dated by C14 in the 13th century, as well as the most recent occupation of the big southern construction (dated during the 13th-14th centuries by stocking recipient and few glazed imports).

## 5.8 Gogshi Quarter

Important to note is the reuse of the lower quarter of Gogshi during the 7th-8th centuries and probably later on. We have no information on the quarter's organization. Except a few late Roman ceramic fragments from the survey, and the identification of the ruins of Saint Ndreu (Andrew) and

<sup>31</sup> See the blacksmith installed *intra-muros* in Sarda close to one of the churches, Spahiu, Komata 1974, 320, pl. VII.

a cemetery, we have not yet undertaken any excavation. Former soundings (during the 1980s), still unpublished, had discovered grave assemblages of the 7th- 8th centuries. Texts of the 17th century mention the presence of an earlier Roman road track still used in the middle ages, together with a medieval stone bridge, now smashed by the Komani dam. It is quite possible that Gogshi represented a lower quarter, serving as a station, if we consider its position close to the left bank of the Drini, the road tracks, and the bridge as part of the settlement's territorial composition, on the way to rich medieval Bytyç with Saint Caterina and the abbey of Kabash, on the way to western Kossovo.

The ecclesiastical architecture of Komani, as well as that of the eastern necropolis of Lezha, the churches of Sarda, Dagnum, and Drivastum, from late antiquity to the 13th century, follows in general a simple plan, a single nave often surrounded by a courtyard or preceded by a narthex. This type of architecture characterizes more the north of the Adriatic and is quite common in northern Albania and Montenegro. It differs from the early and middle Byzantine churches of Epirus, whose rich plan and lavish decorations matched pure Byzantine tradition. Despite its regional aspect, the architecture also reflects the modest financial power of the elites, as is clearly the case for the territories of northern Albania.

## **6 Conclusions**

Although definite interpretations on the settlement and its closest territory can be provided only after the finalization of the excavations and the study of stratigraphy and the finds, some preliminary observations and general hypotheses can be proposed.

I would consider the first structuring of Komani at the end of the roman period, closely related to the roman economic network of the western Balkans. Well positioned above the important natural axe of the Drini River, the site was quickly integrated into the defensive role of the valley. It became a key point on the secondary roman roads relating Dardania plain with Shkodra plain and the Adriatic. Mining resources of Dardania and its hinterland needed a well-organized territory, whose importance rose from the 3rd century, while defenses were strengthened from the 4th-5th centuries.

Noteworthy interesting reveals the closest territorial occupation, which testifies the scattered structure of the settlement already from the end of the roman period, assuming at once rural, stationing and defensive role. Very important is the identification of the late antique perches building area from the top to the bottom of the Dalmace hill (Area 1), used for living and probably for defense, although only 10% of it has been excavated. Together with the 5th-6th inhumation burials of the main cemetery, both

areas define Komani (Dalmace) as a characteristic hilltop settlement, inhabited by people displaying typical late Roman Balkan way of dressing, with vast connections in terms of material culture from Crimea to Italy and more closely to different Mediterranean and Adriatic areas. From the end of the 6th and the 7th century onwards, from a modest settlement extended mainly on the hilltop, Komani (Dalmace) knew a real expansion. The widening of the main cemetery and the multiplication of the groups of burials in several dispersed areas, demonstrate a strong consistence of the population and a dynamic building activity. The quarters of residence and production and almost seven churches, involving different heights and slopes, from the top of the hillfort to the bottom on the Drini River, reveal an important growing of the settlement throughout the 7th-8th centuries.

In fact, in several areas and sites of the Balkans we deal with the phenomenon of site's desertion, destruction or processes of ruralization, occurring especially around the end of the 6th and the 7th century. This is the framework of the Slav and Avar destructions (582 AD) followed by the Slavs settled in the region (Lemerle 1981). At once several sites display a certain degree of continuity. Archaeological data affirms the continuity of byzantine control of several parts of the east Adriatic, mostly the coastal areas, especially at the beginning of the 7th century, although the phenomenon has a variable chronology. In the case of Komani, positioned as a mid-'Drini gate' to the plains from Shkodra to Dyrrachium, archaeology confirms continuity of the settlement through the constructed living structures (the western hill-slope) and especially the widening of the 7th century cemetery. If we judge only from the material culture from the furnished burials in Komani, a major group of inhabitants can be distinguished, among others. They hold the late Romanized 'dressing', particularly observed by the bent stem fibula, jewellery (silver earrings and bracelets) and byzantine belt-buckles. It is quite possible that this 7th century late roman Balkan 'dressing' growth, as a physical presence, is due to the new incomers from the adjacent regions, in the framework of the movement of populations during the second half of the 6th-7th centuries. As a consequence of the demographic Central and Northern Balkan collapse of the 7th century, archaeology provides a very regional framework in the western Balkans sustaining thus the regrouping of different communities in some near coastal areas. Hypothetically, a major part of the 7th century inhabitants moved from neighboring settlements into the more secure territories, as in the case of other settlements of the Drini valley (Sarda and Lezha) as well as numerous other north Albanian hill-top settlements.

Preliminary observations reveal the persistence of this late antique 'fashion' throughout the 7th-8th centuries. At the same time, the presence of late Avar belt fittings of the 8th-9th centuries (open work tendrils, gold-guided lions and wild boars), hypothetically has to be related to this destruction phases observed in the main living western slope of the so-



called fortress. Such a phenomenon requires more precise analyses on the chronology and the finds, in way to define the date and the framework of such an important presence. The 8th-9th century central Europe and north-west Balkan 'fashion' are common among the woman jewelry of Komani, mostly inspired by the high level of byzantine silver jewelry. The extraordinary concentration of luxury grave goods demonstrate a wealthy population, involved in a long distance well organized trade, fully integrated in a much wider area that we thought in the beginning. This is the case from the 7th to the 12th century. The undeniable northern elite incidence is manifested by strong connections with Carpathian and north Balkans areas, as well as byzantine Greek lands.

From the 7th century, Komani and the Drini River valley make a perfect case study of the mechanisms distinguished in the creation of medieval regrouping settlements in western Balkans. It reflects already how new settlements, mainly located on hill tops, grow in the framework of the decline of the classical urban phenomenon, transforming the traditional urban hierarchies. Komani is based on a long term distinguished social hierarchy of the settlement and on a local hierarchy where the main living area was surrounded by satellite quarters, each dedicated to different activities.

The identification of numerous churches that structure the settlement is the main archaeological achievement. Although their chronology has to be precise, we may assume that the establishment of some of them already in the 8th century testifies the outstanding clergy investment in each main quartier and activity, at least from that century. Does Komani inherit a late antique ecclesiastic organization, as it normally has to be the case for a presumed Christian population? Or the process of Christianization has to be seen as a conversion among the growing number of inhabitants, of different origin and faith? If not from the late antiquity, it would be difficult not to consider Komani as a bishopric center already in the 9th century, as it was the case of Sarda. We have hypothetically suggested a 9th century Pulatium archbishopric, shifted and probably transferred in the 11th-century to Sarda, with the split of the Churches in 1054 and the conversion of local elites to the roman Christianity. Pulatium was one of the suffragan dioceses, under the archbishopric of Antivari. The reorganization of the territory from Byzantium in military Themes in the 9th century constitutes an undisputable moment in the reorganization of local powers. That the ecclesiastical authority represents the main reference to all the aspects of life, is clearly testified by the persistence of three of the churches in the core of the settlement up to the 13th century, and their role on the gestation of funerary space presumably up to the end of life at the site. This significant role of the church remains the same even during the following centuries.

Of an outstanding interest is the identification of a renewing medieval

phase, still hypothetical around the 10th-11th centuries, all over the settlement: cemetery, living spaces in the slope of the fortress with two of the churches and the Saint Georges quarter. The inhabitants abandoned the burial costume, except for jewellery, which persist and demonstrate the integration in the north Adriatic and Byzantine sphere. Among them are to be distinguished significant luxury jewels. Inhabitants continued to bury inside and around churches. Iron crafting, tools and food supply seems to be re-organized while imported ceramics suggest south Italian amphora. Ecclesiastic received another restructuring (paintings and new structures) during the 11th-12th centuries. Still without solid chronological evidences the whole phase can be probably put in relation with the expansion of Doklea during the 10th-11th century and its Latin conversion. The 12th century Komnenian resumption seems to intensify the life of the site, crafts, ecclesiastic and long distance trade. Some sectors of the settlement, such as the main area (Zone 1A) decrease at the end of the 13th, although seasonal activity and glazed recipients testify the living at Saint Georges quartier during the 13th-14th century. Other peripheral areas of Komani persist up to the 18th century.

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