

The Rizokastro near Aliveri, Euboea, in the context of Frankish castle architecture in Greece

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Περίληψη

Σκοπός της μελέτης είναι μια προσπάθεια προσέγγισης της οικοδομικής ιστορίας και της αρχιτεκτονικής ενός ελάχιστα γνωστού αλλά σημαντικού μνημείου της Φραγκοκρατίας στην Εύβοια, του Ριζόκαστρου που βρίσκεται κοντά στο χωριό Μηλάκι κοντά στο Αλιβέρι. Από τα διαθέσιμα ως τώρα στοιχεία φαίνεται ότι το Ριζόκαστρο ήταν η καθέδρα ενός τυπικού μεσαιωνικού φέουδου, η οποία περιελάμβανε ένα οχυρό, που χρησίμευε ως κατοικία του φεουδάρχη και των ανθρώπων του και ως χώρος αποθήκευσης των αγροτικών προϊόντων, και, αφ ετέρου, ένα μικρό οικισμό, στον οποίο κατοικούσαν οι πάροικοι / καλλιεργητές του. Το Ριζόκαστρο, ακολουθώντας τον κανόνα για τα φράγκικα φεουδαρχικά κάστρα στην Ελλάδα, είναι ένα σχετικά μικρών διαστάσεων κάστρο-κατοικία με έντονα οχυρωματικά χαρακτηριστικά, στοιχειωδώς εξοπλισμένο σε χώρους και ανέσεις και με κατασκευή αδρή, απλή και ανεπιτήδευτη. Το οχυρό ανήκει στον τύπο των φεουδαρχικών κάστρων με περίβολο και κεντρικό πύργο («enceinte et tour maîtresse»), ο οποίος επικρατούσε στην Ευρώπη κατά τον 11ο, το 12ο και τον 13ο αιώνα. Στην περίπτωση του Ριζόκαστρου ο κεντρικός πύργος («tour maîtresse», «donjon») φαίνεται ότι ήταν ενταγμένος στον περίβολο, ο οποίος δεν ήταν ενισχυμένος με πύργους, όπως συχνά συνέβαινε στα πρώιμα φεουδαρχικά κάστρα. Μια ακριβής χρονολόγηση των δύο ή τριών οικοδομικών φάσεων του Ριζόκαστρου είναι, υπό τις παρούσες συνθήκες, δύσκολη. Με βάση τα τυπολογικά στοιχεία αλλά και τη χαρακτηριστικά αδρή και, ίσως, κάπως βεβιασμένη, κατασκευή του, η πρώτη οικοδομική φάση του οχυρού θα μπορούσε να αναχθεί στον πρώιμο 13ο αιώνα. Οι τελευταίες οικοδομικές φάσεις του κάστρου μπορούν να χρονολογηθούν στον όψιμο 13ο ή στον 14ο αιώνα.

Introduction

The survey, documentation, study and consequent publication of monographs on individual monuments of a given spatio-temporal context are indisputably a prerequisite for the systematic study of the art and architecture of such a context. In such a way, this study can be correlated with both art and architecture, but also with human activity in general in this particular time period and region. Frankish monuments in Greece have long been studied by researchers, mostly historians, but also architects and archaeologists, in the context of efforts to interpret the art and architecture of this important time period.¹

1. Below is a list of the most important studies on Frankish monuments in the region of modern Greece: Andrews [1953]2006, 195; Athanasoulis 2013; 2006; Bintliff 2012; Bon 1937; 1966; 1969; Bouras 1989; 2001; Carpenter and Bon 1936; Cooper et al. 2002; Georgopoulou 2001; Gerola 1905-1932; Gerstel 2001; 2013; Gerstel et al. 2003; Grossman 2004; 2005; Kappas 2007; Kitsiki-Panagopoulos 1979; Kourelis 2003; 2005; Lock 1986; Lock and Sanders 1996; Louvi-Kizi 2003-2004; Mamaloukos 2012b; Traquair 1905-1906; 1906-1907; 1923; Williams 2003.

These studies, despite their occasional interpretative shortcomings (several issues have been left unanswered and the subject is often clouded by ideological predispositions), have contributed decisively to the documentation and, in some cases, to an initial interpretation of the numerous Frankish monuments surviving today in central Greece, the Peloponnese and the Greek isles. Undoubtedly, though, more work needs to be done to attain a certain level of systematic study of most monuments.² It is imperative that this work consists of a methodical architectural survey, to the extent that it is possible, which includes both detailed measurement survey and reconstruction drawings, necessarily combined in most cases with additional archaeological research. Only through such a systematic survey, a study of unknown or previously overlooked monuments, as well as a revision of already known and studied monuments based on important recent discoveries will it be possible to interpret these buildings and then proceed to a study of the art and architecture of the period in general. The following study of a little-known, but significant, Frankish monument of Euboea, the Rizokastro near the village of Milaki in the vicinity of Aliveri, should be firmly situated in this context.

Bibliography and history

The Rizokastro near Aliveri has often received mention in various studies of the medieval monuments of Euboea.³ Still, most of these studies are mainly preoccupied with the identification of the monument, and at best they only include a short description, some photos and rough, inaccurate sketches.⁴ The following paper attempts to study the monument's construction history and its architecture based on a study, as far as is possible under current circumstances,⁵ of the remains of its structures and further study of their typological, construction and morphological characteristics.

Almost nothing is known of Rizokastro's medieval history. Koder and Hild have identified the castle with that mentioned in sources as Castle Protimo.⁶ During the Ottoman period the castle lost its importance as a fortress. Still, the castle played some role during the Greek War of Independence: the Greek insurgents under Nikolaos Krieziotis occupied it and used it as a stronghold and a detention centre for Turkish prisoners of war until November 1823 when, following the battle of Aliveri, the castle was captured by Omer Pasha.⁷ In the years following the Greek War of Independence the castle was completely deserted and left to fall into ruin.

Rizokastro is built on a steep, conical hill towering over the south side of the Aliveri Plain, near the village of Milaki (Fig. 1). Its position is truly imposing, as the castle overlooks the plain extending to the north, the passages to the south, and the nearby coastline, where the factories of Aliveri stand today.

The castle's ground-plan is trapezoid, with average dimensions of 46 x 30 m, occupying an area of roughly 1200 m² (Fig. 2). At the centre of the fort stands a tower (Figs. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11), with a rectangular plan, the exterior dimensions of which are 7.10 x 7.60 m, and maximum surviving height of which is approximately 11 m. The imposing structure today retains its north and west sides almost intact, as well

2. On the lack of documentation of Frankish castles in the Morea, see Athanasoulis 2013, 140.

3. Farantos 2010, 67 and n. 190, 89; Koder 1973, 105, pls. 35-37; Koder and Hild 1976, 246; Lazaridis 1961-1962, 17, dr. 2, pl. 168γ; Liapis 1971, 154-155, fig. 39 and pl. 156β; Lock 1996, 117; Skouras 1975, 335-337, figs. 8-9; Skouras 2003, 39-40; Vasilatos 1992, 29-30.

4. Lazarides publishes a rough sketch of the castle (1961-1962, drawing 2), while Liapis publishes an axonometric drawing, based on the previously mentioned plan drawing from Lazarides (1971, fig. 39).

5. This study is based on two visits to the castle, on February 22 and April 13, 2011, at which time the monument was photographed systematically and surveyed in a concise manner. The results of this study were presented in a simplified manner in Mamaloukos 2011.

6. See mainly Koder 1973, 105, pls. 35-37; Koder and Hild 1976, 246.

7. On the history of the castle during the Greek War of Independence, see Farantos 2010, 67, 89.

as the greatest part of its south side and north corner, and finally the lower parts of its east side. The tower initially had two floors, and a 50-cm-wide crenellated parapet at the top, which still partly survives on the north, west and east sides. The ground floor was divided into two rooms by a 55-cm-wide wall, which is structurally unconnected to the exterior walls. Access to the interior of the tower was via an 80-cm-wide doorway, which is now almost destroyed, on the east wall. Light entered through three lighting slits carved in all of the other walls. On the upper floor, there appears to have been just a single space. The three surviving walls of the upper floor have two windows each, with rectangular stone frames. The tower walls, 90 cm wide on the ground floor and 70 cm on the upper floor, were built using local rubble limestone, of medium and, rarely, large size, together with small flat stones and bricks placed horizontally or slanted in the joints. A relatively weak lime mortar was used in this masonry. The upper level had a wooden floor that consisted of ten beams (15 x 15 cm) made of roughly hewn tree trunks. Based on surviving elements, one cannot say with certainty that the tower had either a pitched timber roof or a flat roof.

Of the walls that form the enclosure of the castle (Figs. 2, 3, 7, 8), those of the north and west sides are preserved in a better condition. Of the wall of the south side only its western portion is preserved. The east wall is mostly destroyed. The west wall extends almost straight for about 42 m. It is 1.20-1.30 m wide at the base, and 90 cm wide higher up. Along the wall, and adjoining it, there are the ruins of three, or maybe even four, ground-floor buildings, divided into two groups by a wall that extends from their east side all the way to the south-west corner of the tower (Figs. 2, 5, 8). The southern buildings are found on a lower level. The northern group of buildings consists of two spaces, each one with a barrel-vaulted basement that would have been used as a cistern. The southernmost of these two spaces is a large hall, 5.50 x 17.00 m, which was accessible from the courtyard through a wide and well-built doorway that is now half-destroyed (Fig. 12). Within the east wall of this building, to the right of this doorway, there is a narrow, steep staircase. The north wall of the castle is 26.75 m long. For about 9.95 m, its eastern part diverges from the straight line of the rest of the wall. The western portion of the wall is 1.20 m wide at the base, and 90 cm wide higher up. The eastern portion of the wall consists of two parts, of which only the 65-cm-wide external part survives. The internal, 80-cm-wide part was initially the wall of a separate building that was later enclosed within the castle courtyard. The east wall, of which about 35 m survive, diverged towards the west, starting at about 21 m from the northernmost end. Here also the walls were made up of two parts: an internal and an external part. The latter, with a width ranging from 35 to 80 cm, was obviously added to the internal part at a later date. At 9.50 m away from the point of divergence, the wall turned almost 90° to the east, incorporating an older, thinner wall. Finally, at a distance of about 3 m from the corner of the west wall, the southern part of the east wall starts; today, this wall survives in few places, and is in a very poor state of preservation.

The outer walls of the castle as well as the walls of the rest of the buildings were built using local rubble limestone, of medium and, occasionally, large size, together with small, flat stones and bricks placed horizontally or slanted in the joints. A lime mortar of variable strength was used in this masonry. The masonry was initially pointed, and the joints were quite wide. The pointing varied in several parts of the edifice. One must note an important differentiation between the form of the tower openings, the integral frames of which were constructed using rough-hewn limestone, and the only partially surviving but still recognizable doorway on the west wing, the integral frame of which is constructed with carefully cut stones. The vaults covering the cisterns were made of flat rubble limestone with plenty of mortar. The main hall had a wooden floor. It was made of large wooden beams, spaced roughly 1 m apart. The roofs of the other castle buildings were also undoubtedly made of timber. Their exact form is unknown.

A small unfortified settlement extended outside the castle walls, to its south and west sides, consisting of small humble houses whose average dimensions were 4 x 4-5 m, made of drywall rubble masonry, with timber roofs (Fig. 9).

Construction history

Attempting to reconstruct the form of the castle before it was deserted poses several difficulties since the archaeological research that would elucidate certain key issues has not yet been carried out. Moreover, some of the remaining ruins are covered in vegetation and rubble, further obstructing adequate study. Based on available data, it is nonetheless possible to make a first attempt at reconstructing the castle complex (Fig. 10), and to develop several working hypotheses on its layout and function. It is evident that the castle had two main fortified enclosures. The inner enclosure occupied the northern and larger part of the castle, and had a relatively spacious courtyard. The south side of this courtyard was enclosed by a wall, which incorporated the tower. The gate to this courtyard appears to have been at the corner next to the south-east side of this tower. The west, north and possibly also east sides of this courtyard were lined with one- or two-storeyed buildings, adjoined to the perimeter walls. The building along the west wall was undoubtedly the main hall of the castle. The aforementioned narrow staircase within its east wall must have led to some kind of rampart on the level of its roof cornice.

To the south of this inner, main enclosure there must have been a second, outer enclosure that had secondary functions and would also have served as a first line of defence. Reconstructing this enclosure is nigh impossible, as all of its south side has been completely destroyed. It seems that this enclosure had a narrow L-shaped courtyard, along the west side of which there was an accessory building that probably served as a stable or guard quarters. The gate to this outer enclosure must have been at the recessed corner formed by the ruined but still discernible wall. It is also possible that a barbican existed in front of this gate.

A first study of the successive building phases and the morphological and construction elements of the various buildings reveals that Rizokastro's final form emerged through a series of successive modifications, additions and restorations, which can be grouped into two or three construction periods. Thus, it seems that first the tower and some accessory buildings (such as the initially isolated north-east building) were erected, together with a weak enclosure wall. Then, the more heavily fortified walls were added, incorporating the first wall. At the same time, or later on, the rest of the castle buildings, such as the main wall on the west wing, were erected or drastically modified. For the time being, it is not possible to chronologically correlate the adjacent settlement with the building phases of the castle.

Discussion and conclusions

As was already mentioned, available sources offer no evidence that could elucidate the castle's history or assist in dating its structures. Hence, any efforts to discern its initial function and its construction history must be based solely on the study of the buildings themselves, as well as on comparisons with similar structures, the function and dating of which is already known.

Available evidence leads to the conclusion that Rizokastro in Milaki near Aliveri was the stronghold of a typical medieval fief, which included a fortified feudal residence for the feudal lord and his men that served also as storage space for the fief's agricultural production, as fortification against any enemies, as a symbol of his power, as a means of displaying his social standing, and as a small settlement where his tenants lived. There are several examples of such settlements corresponding to the introduction of Western-style feudalism in the East during Frankish rule in Greece.⁸ Some of these settlements included relatively small castles with strong walls, which were often further fortified with

8. Bintliff 2012, 419-423. Examples of such structures in Frankish occupied Morea have been catalogued and partly studied by K. Kourelis (Kourelis 2002a; 2002b; 2003).

towers, and usually (but not always) a larger keep inside, free-standing or incorporated into the walls. Others had just a simple tower, surrounded by a fortified courtyard. Sometimes the settlement outside the castle was unfortified and other times it was fortified by an obviously weaker wall than that of the castle itself. It is difficult to categorize these settlements with respect to their use and function, or their date, as a systematic study based on methodical archaeological research has not yet been carried out.

Rizokastro follows the norm for Frankish feudal castles in Greece,⁹ being a relatively small castle-residence which was heavily fortified but which had only rudimentary accessory buildings and amenities that were constructed in a rough, simple and ingenious way. The castle belongs to the type of feudal castles with a courtyard and a central tower (*enceinte et tour maîtresse*), which dominated in Europe during the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries, after which time a new type of castle with concentric courtyards ('concentric castle' or 'double-skin castle'), developed in the Middle East during the second half of the 12th century, was gradually adopted.¹⁰ In the case of Rizokastro (Fig. 10), the central tower (*tour maîtresse, donjon*) was incorporated into the courtyard, which lacked other fortification towers, as was the usual practice in early feudal castles.

The construction of a castle in phases is very frequent. This is due not only to rapidly changing conditions and requirements: often, even when there is a master plan from the beginning, it is realized gradually, in order to address the most urgent defensive needs of the place and the castle itself as fast as possible. A similar case is the Mila castle in Messinia, where the towers, which were notably heightened later on, were erected before the curtain walls, even though there is conclusive evidence that the construction of both was planned from the very start.¹¹

In the first construction phase, it appears that the central tower was the main, if not the only, residence of the feudal lord (Fig. 11), something also frequently found in the Frankish feudal castles in the Morea.¹² The large number and size of windows in the upper-level hall were obviously meant to improve living conditions in the tower, at the expense of fortification of course. This particular element, which is not found in later isolated medieval towers in Euboea that also served as residences,¹³ renders this particular building a kind of a tower-house, with somewhat limited defensive potential.

It is difficult to accurately date the various construction phases of Rizokastro under the current circumstances. Based on its typology and the characteristically rough, and somewhat hurried, construction, the first phase could be situated in the early 13th century, the era at the beginning of Frankish feudal settlement in Euboea. A date in the 14th century, suggested by Johannes Koder,¹⁴ based on historical evidence, may better correspond to the later construction phases of the castle, judging from the construction of the south walls and the form of the doorway of the main hall (Fig. 12), which is identical to the type of doorways with integral frames, encountered in late 13th- and 14th-century buildings in the greater area.¹⁵ It is also impossible to date the adjacent settlement owing to the lack of systematic archaeological research. Still, it is probable that its inhabitants settled next to the castle soon after it was built.

As is evident from the above analysis, Rizokastro is undoubtedly a significant monument of Frankish military architecture in Greece. Further systematic study based on *in situ* archaeological research, and a comparison with similar examples, will add much to the study of Frankish architecture in Greece.

9. Particularly on the Frankish castles in Morea, cf. Athanasoulis 2013, 140.

10. On the development of feudal castles in Europe, see Brown 1985; Mesqui 1991; O'Neil 1977. See also Kennedy 1994, mainly 21-97.

11. Kappas and Mamaloukos 2011.

12. See Athanasoulis 2013, 140; Kourelis 2003, 421-422.

13. On the towers of Euboea, see Lock 1996.

14. Koder 1973, 105.

15. Mamaloukos 2012a, 23-24.

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Figures

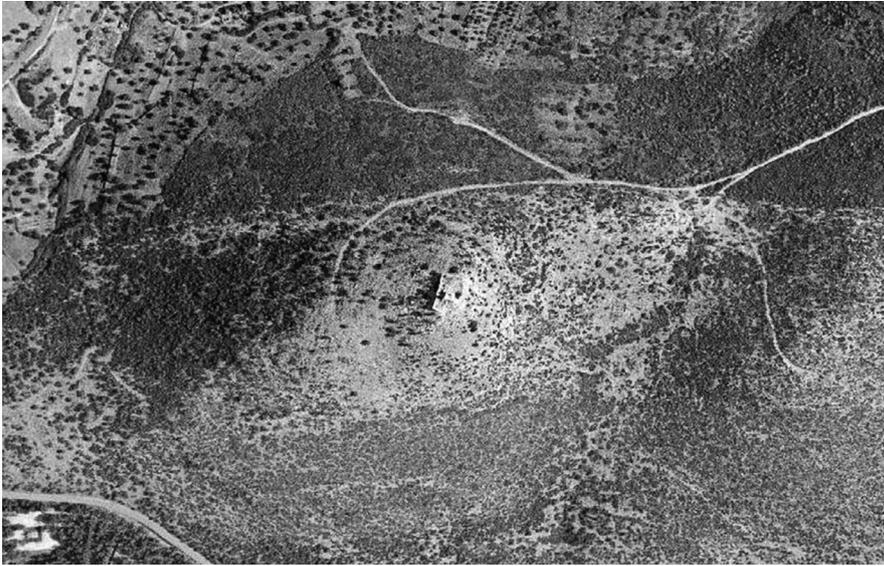


Figure 1:
Rizokastro, aerial view
(Ktimatologio AE).

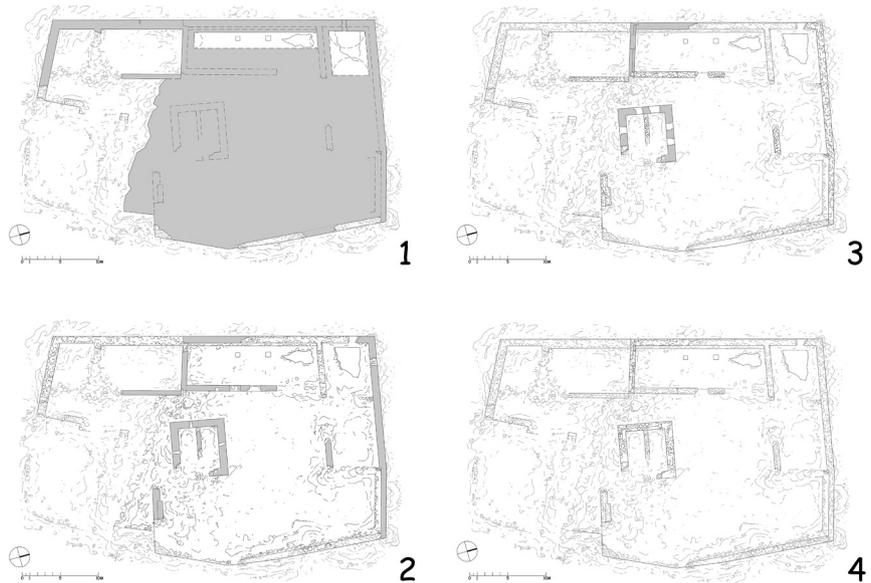


Figure 2:
Rizokastro, castle. Plans
from sketch survey
(February-April 2011):
1) level 1, 2) level 2,
3) level 3, 4) level 4.



Figure 3:
Rizokastro, castle.
General view from
the west (February 2011).



Figure 4: Rizokastro, castle. View of the interior from the outer enclosure towards the north-east (February 2011).



Figure 6: Rizokastro, castle. View of the tower from the south-east (February 2011).



Figure 5:
Rizokastro, castle. View of the interior from the great hall towards the south-east (February 2011).

Figure 7:
Rizokastro, castle. View of the interior from the tower towards the north (February 2011).





Figure 8:
Rizokastro, castle.
View of the interior
from the tower towards
the south-west
(February 2011).



Figure 9:
Rizokastro, settlement.
Partial view from the east
(February 2011).



Figure 10:
Rizokastro, castle.
Plans. Reconstruction:
1) level 1, 2) level 2,
3) level 3, 4) level 4.
A) barbican, B) outer
courtyard, C) stables
(?), D) cisterns,
E) inner courtyard,
F) tower, G) great hall,
H) residences and
warehouses.

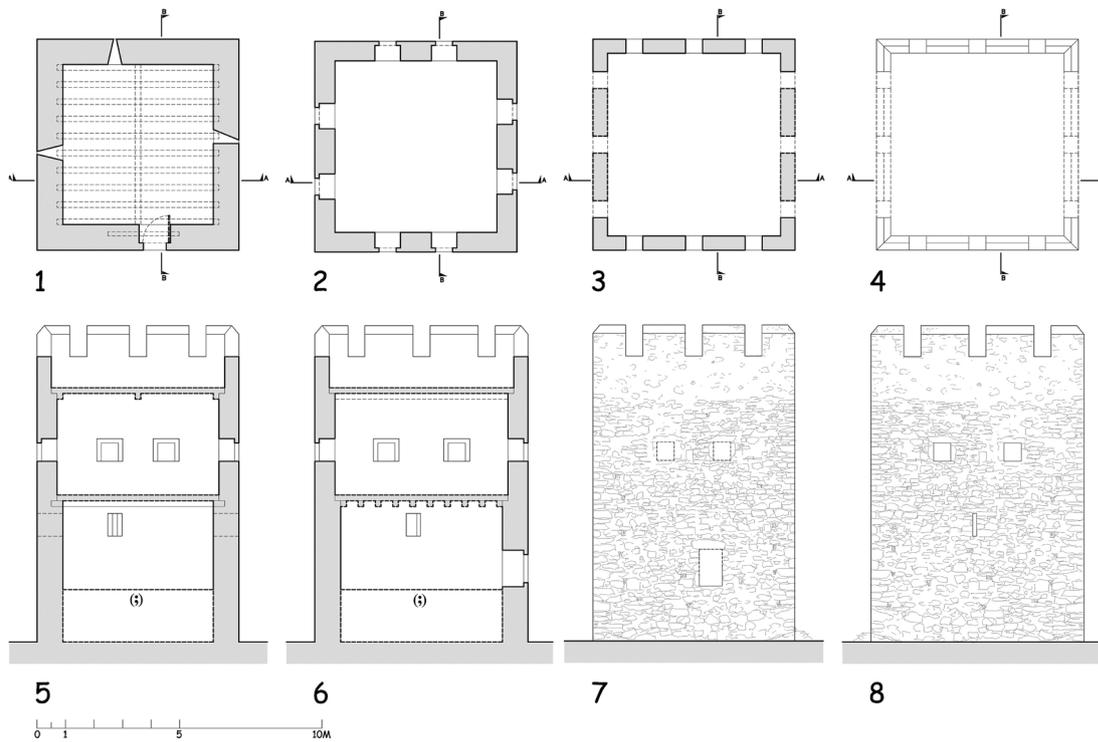


Figure 11: Rizokastro, castle. Tower, reconstruction: 1) plan 1, 2) plan 2, 3) plan 3, 4) plan 4, 5) section AA, 6) section BB, 7) east elevation, 8) north elevation.

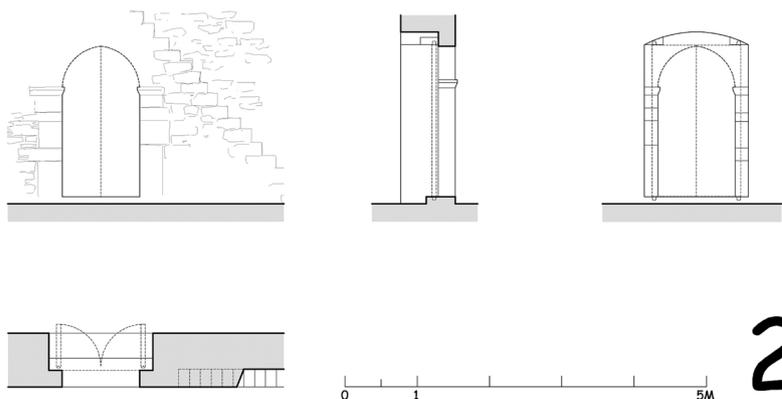
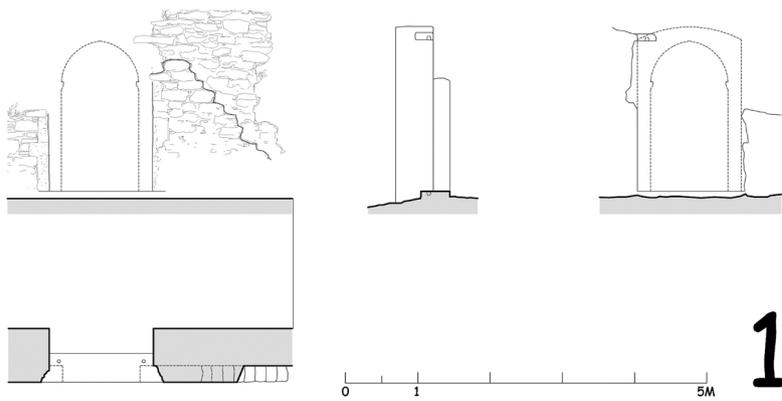


Figure 12:
Rizokastro, castle.
The door of the great hall.
1) Survey (February 2011),
2) Reconstruction.