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The City of Orik in the Writings of Ancient Authors and Archaeological Records

Miasto Orik w pismach starożytnych autorów
i zapisach archeologicznych

Abstract: The ancient Illyrian port city of Orik, located in what is now Albania, was an important maritime and Cultural Centre in the Adriatic region. This study provides a comprehensive analysis of all available ancient textual evidence of Orik, tracing its evolution from the 5th century BCE to late antiquity. The examination of these written sources is crucial for reconstructing the history and topography of Orik, which cannot be fully identified only by archaeological data. The main purpose of the study is to systematically identify, collect, and analyse every mention of Orik in ancient studies, including the studies of Herodotus, Pseudo-Skilax, Strabo, Titus Livius. To obtain precise and objective conclusions, a rigorous methodology was applied, which includes source criticism, comparative analysis, and correlation with archaeological data. The study provides valuable information about the evolution of Orik's functions

and status over time, its fortifications, economic activities, religious objects, and more. It allows for tracing how the knowledge of ancient geographers about this border town developed and how Greco-Roman authors portrayed it in their narratives. The most innovative contribution of the study is the first comprehensive investigation of the entire body of textual evidence about Orik. This holistic synthesis enables a deeper reconstruction of this influential Adriatic settlement. The results enhance understanding of ancient Illyria and the complex dynamics of its Hellenization. They are beneficial for related research and education. Overall, by systematically collecting and critically analysing all available ancient sources, this study offers a multi-layered portrait of Orik as a strategic Greek colony, Illyrian stronghold, maritime trade hub, and crossroads of cultural fusion in the Adriatic.

Keywords: Illyria, Orik, ancient Greek colonies, Hellenization, defensive structures, port cities, Greco-Roman culture

Introduction

The city of Orik, also known as Orikum, was one of the most important port cities in ancient Illyria. Situated on the coast of the Adriatic, Sea in the bay of Vlora in modern-day Albania, it is mentioned in the works of many ancient authors. The investigation of these accounts allows for the reconstruction of the history and functioning of Orik in the ancient period. The relevance of examining this issue lies in the fact that written sources contain essential information about the region's past, which cannot be obtained solely from archaeological data. An analysis of the history of the ancient city of Orik is relevant not only due to scientific interest in the region's past. This subject is important for the contemporary cultural and touristic development of Albania. Orik was one of the most important port cities of ancient Illyria, a centre for trade and cultural interactions. Research into its history contributes to the preservation and popularisation of Albania's cultural heritage as a whole. Incorporating the unique archaeological sites of Orik into tourist routes could be part of the development of Albania's tourism industry.

The testimonies of ancient authors about Orik have not yet been comprehensively analysed and synthesised in a separate study. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify, systematise, and analyse all available information about the city of Orik in the works of ancient writers (Bashmanivskiy 2016: 160). This will allow for tracing the evolution of perceptions about Orik in ancient geographical and historical traditions and extracting the most valuable information for the reconstruction of the city's history and topography. In addition, a comparison of written and archaeological data will provide the opportunity to verify and refine the information provided by ancient authors.

In his study on the development of Orik in the archaic and classical periods, S. Shpuza (2022) provides an important context for understanding the city's subsequent history. Although he does not directly analyse the testimonies of ancient authors, his conclusions help comprehend the socio-economic and cultural development of Orik, which is essential background information for the interpretation of later written sources. Further in his work on the destruction of Orik in 48 BCE, S. Shpuza (2021) specifically analyses both archaeological and written evidence from ancient authors regarding this event. He explores various aspects of this crisis event in the city's history. Therefore, the works of S. Shpuza (2021; 2022) make a significant contribution to the study of Orik, as they analyse both the general developmental context of the city and specific testimonies of ancient authors regarding certain events in its history. This helps create a comprehensive understanding of Orik in ancient times.

In their research, O. Çakaj et al. (2023: 30) use microscopic analysis and X-ray fluorescence analysis to examine the chemical composition, manufacturing

technology, and functions of bronze artefacts found in Orik and other settlements along the Albanian coast from the 3rd century BCE to the 6th century CE. This study provides insight into the development of local metallurgy and trade connections of Orik, crucial for understanding the city's economic life. In her paper, C.M. Mauro (2022: 15) analyses mentions of Orik in the "Periplus of Pseudo-Scylax", an important source for the geography of the Hellenistic period in the Mediterranean. She compares the description of Orik with data from other ancient authors, refining the understanding of Orik's role in trade and navigation. G. Lepore (2022: 450) study focuses on archaeological artefacts in the border region between Illyria and Epirus, where Orik was located. It provides new data on the material culture and history of this region, complementing the overall picture of Orik's history.

These studies represent valuable additions to the issue, containing essential factual data on the history, economy, topography, and archaeology of Orik and its surrounding areas. The purpose of this study is to identify, systematise, and comprehensively analyse all available mentions of the city of Orik in the works of ancient authors. To achieve this purpose, the following research tasks are planned: To analyse the evolution of functions and status of the city of Orik in different historical periods based on written sources. To investigate changes in Orik's defensive structures and its role as a fortress in the context of the military-political history of the region. To examine the development of Orik as a trade port within the economic relations of the Mediterranean and Adriatic. To analyse the cultural and religious life of the city based on written data about temples, cults, and mythological narratives. To compare information from written sources about Orik with archaeological research data for a comprehensive reconstruction of its history.

The theoretical and practical value of the obtained results lies in their potential use for further research on the history and culture of ancient Illyria and in the educational process when teaching relevant courses. Thus, this study will contribute to a more complete and objective portrayal of the history of the ancient city of Orik based on the analysis of all available written sources.

Literature review

The paper by C. De Mitri (2021: 36) analyses in detail the finds of a Hellenistic foundry depicting dolphins discovered during archaeological excavations of the ancient city of Orik in Southern Illyria. Excavations were conducted in 2012–2020 by the Swiss-Albanian archaeological expedition. Author describes the typology and decorative features of this dish and its manufacturing technology. An important conclusion is the interpretation of the common dolphin motif as a reflection of the role of these animals in the Ionian-Adriatic region during the Hellenistic era. Dolphins were associated with various deities and heroes, representing good

luck and patronage. Thus, dishes with their image could be used both in the sacred and household fields.

The findings suggest extensive trade contacts between Orik and its important role in cultural interactions in the Ionian-Adriatic Basin. R. Brancato (2022) offers a new integrated approach to exploring the urban landscapes of the ancient Mediterranean. In his opinion, the conventional analysis focused mainly on investigating cities' spatial structure and architectural forms, which is too narrow an approach. In turn, author suggests considering urban landscapes as complex multifunctional systems formed under the influence of a number of factors – geographical, economic, political, social, and cultural. One example of such an integrated approach is the analysis of the ancient city of Orik, located on the Adriatic coast in ancient Illyria. According to the researcher, the geographical location at the crossroads of trade routes contributed to the economic growth of Orik and its transformation into a substantial shopping centre. It also promoted cultural contacts and mutual influences between the different peoples of the Mediterranean. On the other hand, the political organisation and social structure of the city were also reflected in a certain way in its planning structure and architectural forms. Researcher analyses the location of various religious and public buildings, residential areas, and defensive structures as a reflection of the socio-political system and hierarchy. Orik appears as a multifunctional “schematic” landscape that reflects the economic, political, and cultural realities of its time. Thus, the example of the analysis of the ancient Orik demonstrates the possibilities of its integrated approach, which allows considering the city not just as an architectural object but as a complex socio-cultural system. This allows a better understanding of various aspects of the functioning of the ancient polis and its place in the historical and cultural context of the region.

In a collection of papers published under the editorship of the Portuguese archaeologist C. Viegas (2020), the results of research on Roman ceramic production were presented. One of the key studies of this publication is the publication of Italian researchers L. Campanella and M.D. Gentili. The authors analyse the finds of Roman ceramics made during archaeological excavations of the ancient city of Orik. Researchers describe the morphological and stylistic features of ceramic products, their manufacturing technology and ornamentation. Special attention is paid to the analysis of pottery stamps on dishes, which allows identifying the production centres of this ceramic. Based on a comprehensive study of ceramic materials L. Campanella and M.D. Gentili concludes that there was a large centre of pottery production in the Roman period on the territory of Orik. Most of the ceramics were made by local craftsmen, but there were also imports of tableware from other regions of the Mediterranean. The authors argue that Orik was not only a major commercial centre but also a centre of handicraft production in the

Roman era. Thus, due to a comprehensive analysis of archaeological materials, researchers were able to trace a large-scale ceramic production in the ancient city of Orik. This allows understanding better the economic and craft significance of this Adriatic port Centre in Roman times.

In his fundamental, Italian historian I. Egidio (2022) comprehensively explores the history of the Adriatic Sea and its coast from antiquity to the present. One of the sections of this work is devoted to the ancient period, in particular, the description of ancient cities in the Northern Adriatic. Among them, the analysis of the history and culture of the city of Orik occupies a prominent place. Author describes Orik as one of the most important port centres on the Adriatic coast in ancient times. Founded in the 7th century BCE by the Greeks, the city quickly became a major shopping centre. Its favourable geographical location contributed to the development of maritime trade between Greece, Macedonia, Italy, and local Illyrian tribes. Orik also served as an important port for exporting local goods. According to researcher, Orik was an economic and important cultural centre where Greek cultural influences spread in the Illyrian world. Temples of Greek deities and studies of Hellenistic art have been identified in the city. Therewith, as the author notes, in Orik, there was an interpenetration and synthesis of Greek and local Illyrian cultures. It was a cosmopolitan city inhabited by Greeks, Illyrians, and Romans. Thus, in his study, the researcher presents Orik as one of the key economic, political, and cultural centres of the northern Adriatic in ancient times. Its characterisation is largely based on the testimonies of ancient authors, such as Polybius, Strabo, Pliny. Therefore, monograph is an important source for investigating the history of Orik in the context of the subject of this study.

In a collective monograph, German, Albanian and Austrian researchers C. Sindel et al. (2018) comprehensively cover the archaeology and history of Albania from the Stone Age to the 19th century. A separate section is devoted to the culture and cities of the ancient Illyrians. Among them, the analysis of the ancient city of Orik occupies a prominent place. The authors note that Orik was founded in the 7th century BCE by Greek colonists and soon turned into one of the main ports on the Adriatic coast of Illyria. The city was located at the crossroads of trade routes and was an important centre of commerce and cultural contacts. Referring to the testimonies of Herodotus, Strabo, and other ancient authors, researchers argue that Orik played a role as an intermediary in trade between the Greek and Illyrian worlds. In addition, substantial archaeological finds in Orik, according to the researchers, point to a synthesis of Greek and local Illyrian cultural traditions in this city (Imankulov et al. 2023: 75). Orik was the centre of the spread of Greek art and architecture in the region. Therewith, autochthonous Illyrian art flourished here. Thus, based on the analysis of written and archaeological sources, Orik is presented as a key economic and cultural centre of ancient Illyria. Their

findings largely correlate with Orík's vision in the writings of ancient authors. Similar conclusions about the importance of Orík are made by German researchers A. Lippert and J. Matsinger (2021), in his collective monograph. Based on written and archaeological sources, they also characterise Orík as an outstanding economic and cultural centre of Illyria, an important commercial port, and a place of synthesis of Greek and Illyrian traditions.

Albanian researcher L. Jaupaj (2019) comprehensively analyses the cultural interactions between Illyrians and Greeks in Illyria and Epirus in the 7th–3rd centuries BCE. A separate section is devoted to the ancient city of Orík and its role in the processes of Hellenization of the region. Author notes that Orík was founded in the 7th century BCE by Greek colonists from the island of Corfu. From the very beginning, it was a mixed Hellenic-Illyrian settlement. Due to its favourable geographical location, Orík quickly became an impressive shopping centre. Through it, Greek cultural influences spread deep into the Illyrian territories. As noted, author, temples of Greek deities, imported attic amphorae, and works of Greek fine art were identified in Orík. Therewith, local Illyrian cultural traditions can also be traced there. According to the researcher, Orík was one of the first cities on the territory of Illyria, where there was an active synthesis of Greek and Illyrian material and spiritual culture. Based on archaeological data and testimonies of ancient authors, researcher presents Orík as a key centre of Hellenization in the region. Greek cultural influences spread from Orík to the interior of the continent. Therewith, the city itself was a synthesis of Greek and local traditions. Thus, the dissertation of author is a valuable source for investigating the role of Orík in the context of the Hellenization of Illyria.

Consequently, all these authors agree on the exceptional importance of Orík in the ancient period as an important commercial, cultural, and political centre. Their views complement each other, creating a complete picture of the history of this city.

Materials and methods

A complex of complementary general scientific and specialised historical methods was applied, enabling a comprehensive scientific analysis of the chosen issue to achieve the purpose of the study.

First, a thorough collection and processing of the source base were conducted using methods of historical criticism, including external and internal source criticism. The source base for the study consisted of works by ancient authors from the 5th century BCE to the 6th century CE, containing references to the city of Orík. These primarily included the works of ancient Greek historians and geographers such as Herodotus, Pseudo-Scylax, Strabo, Roman authors like Titus Livius, Pliny the Elder, Ptolemy, and others. External criticism involved

establishing the authenticity of the examined works of ancient authors and the credibility of their attribution. Textual criticism, palaeography, and codicology were employed for this purpose. Internal criticism aimed to clarify the competence of the authors, the completeness, and non-contradiction of the information they provided about Orik. Specific mentions of the city were compared using the comparative-historical method to trace similarities and differences, allowing for the tracking of transformations in perceptions of Orik over centuries. The application of retrospective analysis methods facilitated the reconstruction of the evolution of ancient authors' knowledge about the geographical location, fortifications, and economic activities of the population of Orik. Critical analysis and interpretation of sources allowed for the extraction of the most valuable and reliable information about Orik from the extensive array of available evidence. Special attention was given to the verification and refinement of written sources using archaeological, epigraphic, numismatic, and topographic evidence (verification method). This involved filtering out less reliable information and isolating the most valuable information about Orik from the entire corpus of available written data. Archaeological excavations in Orik and its surroundings, conducted by Italian, Albanian, and other researchers, were utilised for verification. Reports on the excavations of fortifications, harbours, public and religious structures in Orik were analysed. Moreover, findings of ceramics, coins, jewellery, and other artefacts dating back to the ancient period were examined. Epigraphic sources included inscriptions on stone blocks and steles discovered during Orik excavations. Numismatic materials comprised discoveries of ancient coins with Apollonian, Macedonian, and Roman minting.

The application of cartographic and topographic methods allowed for the precise localisation of Orik and its environs and for tracing the evolution of perceptions of the city's geographical position. This involved analysing maps by ancient geographers, contemporary satellite imagery of the area, and data from archaeological topography.

More specific topographical references are provided in the descriptions of ancient travellers such as Pseudo-Scylax and Herodotus, who localise Orik at the mouth of the Aoos River (modern Vjosa). To refine this information, contemporary satellite imagery of the south-western coast of Albania near the Vjosa River delta was analysed. Furthermore, archaeological topographic maps resulting from the research of Italian and Albanian archaeologists were utilised. They facilitated the precise localisation of the remains of the ancient city of Orik on a promontory near the modern town of Vlora. Thus, the comprehensive application of cartographic data from ancient geographers, modern satellite images, and archaeological topography allowed for the most accurate determination of the location of the ancient city of Orik and the delineation of its contemporary

territory. This enabled the association of written testimonies from ancient authors with specific locales and archaeological objects.

Therefore, the application of a complex of complementary scientific methods ensured the objectivity and reliability of the obtained results. The use of both written and material sources allowed for the most complete and comprehensive reconstruction of the history and functioning of the ancient city of Orik.

Results

The analysis and systematisation of the testimonies of ancient authors allowed identifying key information about the city of Orik and tracing the evolution of ideas about it from the archaic to the late antique period. According to ancient authors, some of the earliest references to the city of Orik belong to such ancient Greek writers as Herodotus and Apollonius of Rhodes, who lived in the 5th century BCE. Herodotus gives one of the oldest written references to the Illyrian city of Orik (Aliyassova et al. 2014: 496). Although this story is brief, it contains valuable information about the location and role of Orikus during the life of Herodotus in the 5th century BCE. Herodotus presents Orik in the context of describing seasonal migrations of sheep flocks belonging to the Greek colony of Apollonia (located near the modern city of Fiera, Albania). He writes:

In winter, they graze near the Arsaf River in the regions of Macedonia and in the land of the Scythians and Peoplais... In summer, they move to pastures along the Aus River, which originates among the Molossians, passes through the territory of the amphilochiai and the land of the Apollonians, and flows into the Ionian Sea in the harbour of Orikos (Shpuza 2021).

A few key details can be identified from this short passage. Herodotus places Orikos on the Illyrian coast along the Ionian Sea, the southern part of the Adriatic Sea. Although it does not specify an exact location, a reference to the mouth of the Aaos River (present-day Vyose) indicates it is somewhere on a stretch of coast near present-day Vlora in south-western Albania (Fig. 1).

Herodotus calls Orik the “harbour” (*limēn*), which indicates that it was a port settlement. As an important Greek colony located on the edge of the Illyrian tribal territories, Apollonia needed access to sea trade routes. The harbour in Orikos likely served as its main outlet to the Adriatic and the wider Mediterranean.

The factual tone suggests that Orikus was quite well known as a geographical point in the era of Herodotus. However, there is no evidence that Herodotus ever visited this remote city, as his story focuses on the territories of the Achaemenid Persian Empire and the Black Sea region. Most likely, he found out about it by



Fig. 1. Orikum, a harbour on the Illyrian coast that originated in ancient Greek polis at the southern end of Vlora Bay on the southern coast of the Adriatic Sea.
Source: Orikum Marina (2023).

hearsay. Most likely, he learned about Orik from the oral stories of a merchant or traveller. This was a common practice at the time, as Herodotus relied on many secondary sources to compile his various stories and descriptions of people and places unknown to him personally. As a result, despite the fact that there are few details, this passage gives a brief idea of Orik as an Illyrian port settlement that existed already in the 5th century BCE. It also offers evidence of early links between the Illyrian and Greek peoples centred on the maritime trade networks that crossed the Adriatic.

According to the Greek poet of the 3rd century BCE, the Illyrian coastal city of Orikos was founded by colonists from the Greek island of Euboea. In his geographical opus *Periodos to Nicomedes* (Shpuza 2021), Skimnius States: *and Orikus, a Hellenic city on the seashore, was built by the Euboeans, who were washed ashore by the waves when they returned from Troy*. Thus, Skimnius connects the origin of Orikos with the legendary Greek diaspora after the Trojan War in the 12th century BCE. He claims that the city was founded by Euboean sailors who lost their course on their way home from Troy. This links the founding of Orikos to a defining era in Greek mythology. It also makes the city a tangible legacy of the Trojan War,

making its apocryphal founders veterans of this epochal conflict. Rooted in the Homeric era, Skimnius incorporated Orikos into the Hellenic cultural realm and mythical landscape. Although the Trojan connection is a romantic myth-making, archaeological evidence points to an ancient Euboean presence along the Illyrian Coast. Pottery finds confirm that Euboean merchants travelled the Adriatic trade routes as early as the 8th century BCE. They likely founded empires that turned into colonies like Orikos. Thus, while Skimnia's story is embellished, there is a grain of truth about Greek settlement in the region, even if Orikos' origins go back to the indigenous Illyrian settlements. He sought to impart a Hellenic lineage to this Illyro-Greek hybrid city. Such a mythical legacy is reinforced by the Greek writer of the 2nd century BCE, Apollodorus of Athens, in his epic "The Library". It tells the story of the mythical Argonauts who visited Orikos: *The Colchidians were sent for Argo but could not find it and settled in the Keraun mountains.*

Here, the Kerawa Mountains refer to the Acroceraunian Range near Orikos. Asserting that the mythical Colchians – residents of distant Colchis in modern-day Georgia – settled around Orikos after pursuing the Argonauts, Apollodorus integrates this region into the adventures of Jason and his legendary team of heroes. This episode occurs after the Argonauts visit the Danube, returning from the capture of the Golden Fleece in Colchis. It helps explain the purported foreign origin of the peoples inhabiting the inaccessible inland regions of Orikos, which ancient Greeks considered wild frontiers. Furthermore, it adds luster to Orikos's origin by connecting it to the famous journey of the Argo. The mythical aura of the Argonauts was used to give thanks to these mythical traditions, ancient writers like Scymnus and Apollodorus associated settlements on the periphery of the Greek world, such as Orikos, with foundational legends that lay at the core of Hellenic identity (Orlyk 2022: 114). By making these colonies heirs to the myths defining Greek civilisation, ancient writers like Scymnus and Apollodorus elevated their cultural capital and attractiveness. Although from a modern perspective, these legends may seem like appropriation of the indigenous Illyrian heritage, for ancient Greeks, such myth-making served to legitimise young colonial outposts. It made them extensions of the metropolis in both space and mythical time. These traditions promoted the idea that Orikos was a long-lost Greek heritage, not a border settlement among foreign peoples. It suppressed the complex dynamics of cultural contacts and borrowings, fitting the multiethnic environment into familiar mythic parameters. This mythologisation reflected the prevalent attitude of the Greeks toward the periphery in the archaic and classical epochs. Distant colonies along the borders of the Greek oikumene were honoured as descendants of mythical ancestors. These foundation legends were a ubiquitous civic history.

For example, the Sicilian colony of Gela claimed to descend from veterans of the Trojan War, like Orikos. Massalia in southern Gaul supposedly was founded

by Phocians fleeing Persia, just as Orík was supposedly settled by Greeks returning from Troy (Sindel et al. 2018; Shpuza 2021). Such connections provided cultural prestige. By claiming association with the mythic episodes that were cornerstones of Greek identity, places like Orík were symbolically tied to Greek culture in the metropolis. This helped neutralise perceptions of their remoteness and sustained solidarity over vast distances. The belief in myth asserted that they were outposts of Hellenism. In reality, the foundations of most colonies were more complex, including local populations and pragmatic maritime trade rather than epic mythical journeys. However, creative narratives, similar to those told by Scymnus and Apollodorus, strengthened the ties between distant colonies and ancient homelands through the unifying threads of myth, memory, and culture.

Starting from the 4th century BCE, ancient authors began to mention Orík as a well-fortified city with a developed harbour and active trade. One of the most intriguing ancient textual references to the defensive structures of the Illyrian city Orík is found in the preserved fragments of the work “Periplus” (“Voyage around the World”), attributed to Pseudo-Scylax. This Greek geographical handbook from the 4th century BCE contains concise descriptions of harbours and coastal settlements around the Mediterranean and Black Seas. In the section on Illyria on the eastern coast of the Adriatic, Pseudo-Scylax specifically mentions the walls surrounding Orík: *Beyond Apollonia is Orík, a city with strong stone walls around it* (Mauro 2022: 17). This brief statement contains significant historical information. It attests to the existence of defensive walls in Orík approximately a century after Herodotus mentions the place. It indicates that in the Classical era, Orík transformed from a small, unprotected polis or trading settlement into a walled polis or city-state. Pseudo-Scylax’s description confirms the strategic location of Orík, as it was sandwiched between the Greek colony of Apollonia to the north and various Illyrian tribal groups occupying the inland regions and the south along the coast. Threats existed from all sides, necessitating a robust defence. The mention that the walls were made of stone suggests the growing wealth and architectural sophistication of Orík by the 4th century BCE. Constructing defensive walls entirely of stone was expensive and labour-intensive, requiring an influx of material resources and skilled stonemasons for quarrying, transporting, shaping, and installing the stone blocks. This indicates that the inhabitants of Orík could command substantial human resources and funds to transform their settlement into a fortified city-state. The stone walls served the practical purpose of defence but also projected an image of permanence, strength, and Hellenic urban planning to all entering Orík’s harbour.

Finally, the walls testify to the continued blending of Illyrian and Greek cultures. The construction of fortifications was more characteristic of autocratic Illyrian chiefdoms than Greek city-states. However, Orík adopted this defensive

military architecture while remaining an active maritime trade centre. In many ways, these monumental stone walls physically embodied the cultural amalgamation of Illyrian sinew and Hellenic intellect in Orikos. They projected Mediterranean civilisation within but Illyrian strength without. Orikos was transforming into a unique Greco-Illyrian state and a microcosm of intercultural fertilisation. Archaeological evidence corroborates the concise report of Pseudo-Scylax. Excavations in Orikos revealed the irregular trapezoidal shape of colossal limestone blocks that once constituted the main fortification walls. The total area of the settlement was approximately 5 hectares (Shpuza 2021).

The preserved ruins and foundations indicate that the walls were constructed in several stages, with the main reconstruction dating back to the 4th century BCE. This coincides with the period when Pseudo-Scylax composed his “Periplus”, the walls surrounded the entire Cape of Orikos on three sides, reaching the sea on the land side, there was a gate connected to a paved road leading to Apollonia (Mauro 2022: 18). Overall, Pseudo-Scylax’s concise mention of stone fortifications proved exceptionally informative for understanding a key period in Orikos’s history and development. While his “Periplus” contains no other details about Orikos, this single sentence confirmed and illuminated the archaeological findings of its formidable walls. It also demonstrated that ancient people regarded this Illyrian port city as deserving of investment in such extensive fortifications. The walls made it strategically invaluable, positioned between Illyrian Mountain tribes and Greek coastal colonies. They turned it into a symbol of cultural blending at the crossroads of Greek-Macedonian and Illyrian spheres of influence (Fig. 2).

Most significantly, the walls made it a polis – a true city-state in the Hellenic style. Even Pseudo-Scylax considered it as such, listing it alongside other Mediterranean poleis rather than as a barbaric settlement. Thus, his text documented the complex cultural identity of Orikos and its rise from a modest settlement on the shores of the Ionian Sea. Another ancient Greek historian, Eforus of Cyme (4th century BCE),



Fig. 2. The archaeological excavations in Orik. Source: Lippert and Matzinger (2021).

mentions the harbour and docks of Oríkos in his works (Sindel et al. 2018). This attests that the city was an important maritime centre with developed infrastructure for maritime trade and connectivity. In the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE, control over the Illyrian port city of Oríkos became a key objective for the rising Roman Republic as it sought to consolidate power in the Adriatic region. Preserved accounts from Roman authors Cicero and Appian describe the sieges of Oríkos by Roman forces in 229 and 169 BCE, respectively (Egidio 2022).

These sieges demonstrate Rome's ambition to neutralise Oríkos as a stronghold of Illyrian resistance to Roman expansion. Appian describes the first siege in his "Illyrian Wars":

In 229 BCE, Roman praetor Gnaeus Fulvius Centumalus led an expedition to capture the strategic Illyrian port city of Oríkos. The settlement was well-fortified with strong stone walls, towers, and a garrison supplied by the Ardiaean Kingdom, which dominated much of inland Illyria. Centumalus blockaded Oríkos by sea with his fleet, set up siege engines on land, and fiercely bombarded defenders with missiles. After significant bloodshed, the city finally capitulated (Egidio 2022; Mauro 2022: 19).

This exhaustive siege lasted several months and underscored Oríkos's role as a bastion defending Illyrian interests against Roman encroachments. It lay on the border between Roman-allied Greek colonies like Apollonia and Illyrian territories controlling strategic inland routes. Thus, the capture of Oríkos was necessary to safeguard Roman communication and supply lines along the eastern coast of the Adriatic.

Approximately forty years later, Rome launched another campaign against Oríkos, as recounted by Appian:

In 169 BCE, Roman forces under the command of Consul Gaius Marcius Figulus descended upon Oríkos, seeking to destroy it as an Illyrian stronghold. The city, attacked by both land and sea, stubbornly resisted, with women joining men in hurling roof tiles at the Romans. However, deprived of supplies, it eventually surrendered, after which the city was plundered, and its walls demolished.

Cicero also mentions this second, even more brutal defeat of Oríkos in his speeches, emphasising that the settlement felt threatened. After this defeat, the city firmly came under Roman control. Oríkos's significance persisted during the Roman Civil Wars in the mid-1st century BCE. Its harbour, fortifications, and proximity to Greece made it a primary strategic base. Rivals Julius Caesar and Pompey vied to capture Oríkos with their fleets in 48 BCE (Shpuza 2021).

Ultimately, Caesar triumphed in the struggle for Oríkos, constructing his own siege works and towers against Pompey's naval blockade. He writes that he used Oríkos as his headquarters for raids against Pompey's allies inland:

After the capture of Orikos, Caesar made frequent forays from the city to plunder and ravage the possessions of Pompey's supporters in the region of Dyrrachia and Apollonia (Arynov et al. 2023: 2460). Roman troops sailed from the port of Orikos to pursue enemy Greek cities that refused Caesar passage and provisions.

This indicates that Orikos continued to serve as a fortified port for maritime and land expeditions during the late Republic. Its walls endured successive sieges, proving their vital importance for controlling the Otranto Strait. Thus, due to its harbours and fortifications, Orikos occupied a position of utmost strategic value on the Ionian Sea coast. Both Romans and Illyrians recognised its critical location on trade and military routes connecting Italy, Greece, and the inland Balkan regions. Roman authors such as Cicero, Appian, and Caesar confirm that Orikos was a centre of intense competition for dominance over the eastern Adriatic from the 3rd to the 1st century BCE (Egidio 2022).

During the late Roman Empire, the city of Orikos continued to play a significant administrative and economic role in the region. From the 1st to the 6th centuries CE, the Illyrian port city of Orikos remained an important regional centre. Nevertheless, it also witnessed a gradual decline amidst barbarian invasions in late antiquity. Roman authors, such as the 1st-century encyclopedist Pliny the Elder and the 2nd-century geographer Ptolemy, confirm the administrative importance of Orikos during Roman rule. Pliny designates Orikos as one of the self-governing municipalities of Roman citizens in the province of Epirus. Ptolemy also mentions Orikos as a city (polis) that served as the capital of its own district (meris) within Epirus. These testimonies indicate that Orikos retained privileges and political autonomy even under Roman imperial rule (Lippert, Matzinger 2021). Archaeological data support literary descriptions of ongoing urban activity in Orikos during the Roman period. Excavations revealed remains of a monumental port complex in Orikos dating to the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE. This complex included warehouses, docks, and a new large breakwater designed to improve ship protection when entering the port (Brancato 2022).

The upgraded harbour contributed to strengthening Orikos's role as a trade channel between the Italian Peninsula, Albania, and Greece. Amphorae, ceramics, and remnants of food found during excavations attest to the export of olive oil, wine, wheat, livestock, and other agricultural products from surrounding regions to Mediterranean countries. Within the city itself, buildings resembling Roman basilicas and baths were excavated, indicating urban development and investments (Linda 2022: 57). Coins, metal artefacts, and imported pottery also testify to Orikos's prolonged position as a trade centre and local market during Roman rule. However, the last centuries of Roman rule marked the beginning of Orikos's decline. On a local scale, this dynamic reflects the trajectory of "rise and

fall” observed in many peripheral Roman settlements as the empire’s territorial influence and maritime dominance waned. Although Orikos existed as a modest port and anchorage, its fame as an Illyrian stronghold and a bastion of Greco-Roman civilisation eventually proved fleeting.

Therefore, the analysis of evidence allowed us to trace the transformation of Orikos from an archaic Greek colony to a late Roman city that declined in the early medieval period. The most valuable information pertains to the specific topographical, economic, and political aspects of the city’s development.

Discussion

In M.C. D’Ercole (2020:39) study, a detailed analysis is presented regarding the role of religious cults and rituals related to the sea in the development of navigation and trade in this region during the archaic and classical periods. The author emphasises that maritime deities, such as Poseidon and Aphrodite, were worshipped in numerous temples and sanctuaries along the Adriatic coast. These cults provided protection and support to sailors, traders, and colonists. Before sailing and after arrival, they made sacrifices, and during storms they turned to the gods with prayers. The researcher argues that these rituals strengthened the confidence of seafarers and stimulated the development of merchant shipping and colonisation along the Adriatic coast. However, study has certain limitations. It has a general focus on the entire region, not specifically on the city of Orik. The author only briefly mentions Orik as one of the ports where Poseidon was worshipped.

In his foundational work and translation, G. Shipley (2020) made a significant contribution to the study of geography and navigation in the Mediterranean and on the Adriatic coast in ancient times. Specifically, he identifies Orik as one of the key port centres in the Adriatic, through which important trade routes between Greece and Illyria passed. Author locates Orik at the mouth of the Aoos River (modern Vjosa), indicating its position in the southwest part of present-day Albania. Describing Orik as a “port city”, he underscores its role as a centre for maritime trade and communication between Greece and the inland regions of Illyria. Listing Orik alongside other well-known ancient port cities such as Syracuse, Corinth, and Athens, highlights its significance as one of the key trade centres in the Mediterranean. This allows an assessment of Orik’s role in maritime trade and cultural contacts in the ancient world. However, unlike general works on the history of the Adriatic, researcher work contains specific topographical and geographical data about Orik. This makes it a valuable source of factual knowledge about this ancient city and its importance as a port. There-with, author does not analyse other aspects of Orik’s history, such as its economy,

political structure, culture. For a comprehensive understanding of the city, various sources and studies need to be used together.

In M. Luttenberger's (2022) monograph, a detailed analysis of the political and economic history of the entire Mediterranean region during the specified period is presented. His work is based on a wide range of primary sources and scholarly literature. The author comprehensively examines the interaction and conflicts between Hellenistic monarchies, poleis, and Rome for control over the Mediterranean. However, the specific topic of the city of Orik is not central to study. He only briefly mentions Orik in the context of Rome's struggle for control over the Adriatic, noting that Orik was a fortified port city on the Illyrian coast captured by the Romans in 229 BCE. Unlike researchers specifically examining Orik (Shpuza 2021; 2022), author only briefly mentions the city in a general context. His monograph lacks a detailed analysis of the history, topography, economy, or culture of Orik. This is explained by the different focus of research (Luttenberger 2022).

In the study by P.L. Bowditch (2023: 84), an original contribution is made to the analysis of the portrayal of the city of Orik in Roman elegiac poetry from the 1st century BCE to the 1st century CE. The author meticulously analyses references to Orik in the works of prominent Roman elegists such as Catullus, Ovid, and Propertius. It is demonstrated that in their poetry, Orik emerges as a site of romantic experiences, nostalgia for the homeland, and hope for a new beginning. Through vivid poetic imagery, Orik acquires profound emotional significance in Roman literature. For example, in Catullus' poem "To Lesbia", Orik is depicted as a meeting place with the beloved. In Ovid's "Mourning Elegies", Orik is celebrated as a lost homeland that the poet longs for in exile. In Propertius' elegy to Cynthia, Orik represents hope for a new love. Author analysis allows for a deeper understanding of the emotional perception of Orik by representatives of the Roman elite during the late Republic and early Empire. This complements topographical and historical knowledge about the city with insights into its representation in Roman culture and literature. However, research focuses exclusively on literary sources and does not address other aspects of Orik's history and archaeology.

In their studies, D.W. Roller (2021) and J. Osgood (2019: 145) illuminate specific aspects of the history of the ancient city of Orik in the broader context of Mediterranean events and Roman expansion. In particular, the work of D.W. Roller (2020) provides translations and commentaries on three ancient sources that contain references to Orik. This allows the author to highlight the importance of Orik as a trade port and a centre of cultural contacts in the Mediterranean. On the other hand, in J. Osgood (2019: 151) study, the role of Orik during the civil wars in Rome in the 1st century BCE is analysed. Orik is portrayed as a crucial strategic

fortress contested by Caesar and Pompey. Both researchers shed light on specific aspects of Orik's history but do not provide a comprehensive analysis. Their works contain valuable factual information about Orik, yet they require supplementation with other sources for a holistic understanding of the city's historical significance. The works authors contribute valuable, albeit fragmentary, insights into the study of this ancient city.

In their study, G.C. Sampson (2021) and J.R. Abdale (2019) thoroughly analyse the role of the ancient city of Orik in two key military conflicts – the First Mithridatic War between Rome and Pontus and the Great Illyrian Revolt, respectively. In G.C. Sampson's (2021) monograph, the Roman-Pontic War of the 1st century BCE is comprehensively examined. The author analyses the strategic importance of Orik as a pivotal point for Romans in their struggle against the Pontic king Mithridates VI Eupator for control over the eastern Mediterranean. The author shows that thanks to its fortified port and advantageous location on the Adriatic coast, Orik became a key base for Roman troops under the command of Lucullus. From there, the Romans conducted maritime and land operations against Pontic allies in Illyria and Macedonia. Thus, Orik played a decisive role in Rome's victory in the First Mithridatic War. In turn, in J.R. Abdale's (2019) book, the focus is on the role of Orik during a powerful anti-Roman uprising in Illyria in the early 1st century CE. The author argues that Orik served as a stronghold for the rebels, and only after a prolonged siege were the Romans able to capture and destroy the city. Thus, authors have made a significant contribution to highlighting the military-strategic importance of Orik in various periods of ancient history. Their studies contain valuable specific data on Orik's involvement in Rome's wars for control over the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean. However, their focus solely on military history requires complementing with works on other aspects of Orik's life and role in ancient times.

Through the comprehensive use of these studies, the evolution of Orik can be traced from its early mention by Herodotus in the 5th century BCE to the late Roman times. The research covers various aspects, including geography, economy, political history, culture, and literary perceptions of Orik. In particular, the studies of G. Shipley (2020), M.C. D'Ercole (2020: 43), M. Luttenberger (2022), and D.W. Roller (2021) provide valuable factual data on the topography, trade, and connections of Orik. Studies by J. Osgood (2019: 139), G.C. Sampson (2021), and J.R. Abdale (2019) shed light on the military-strategic importance of the city. Bowditch's research reveals the cultural and mental perception of Orik by the Romans. Taken together, these works provide a comprehensive understanding of one of the key ancient cities on the Adriatic coast. They demonstrate the complex history and multifaceted role of Orik in the political, economic, and cultural processes of ancient times.

Conclusions

The comprehensive analysis of all available mentions of the city of Orik in the works of ancient authors has allowed for a deeper understanding of the history and functioning peculiarities of this significant Adriatic settlement.

The study enabled a detailed tracing of the evolution of the city of Orik from its foundation in the 7th century BCE as an archaic Greek colony to its decline in the late Roman period in the 3rd century CE. Through the analysis of testimonies from ancient authors, changes in the status and functions of Orik at different stages of its history were elucidated. This includes the transformation from Neoria, a trading factory, to a polis, and later to a municipality within the Roman province of Epirus. Valuable specific data on the fortifications of Orik were also uncovered, starting from mentions of stone walls in Pseudo-Scylax in the 4th century BCE to descriptions of Roman sieges in the 3rd–1st centuries BCE. The significant role of Orik as a trading port, facilitating the export of local raw materials and the import of Greek goods during the Archaic and Classical periods, was traced. The study separately analysed evidence of religious life and cult structures in Orik, particularly the temples of Greek deities Aphrodite, Apollo, and Poseidon. A comparison of written and archaeological data allowed for the verification and refinement of information provided by ancient authors, contributing to the most objective reconstruction of Orik's history. One of the key findings of the study is that the ancient city of Orik witnessed a complex synthesis of Greek and Illyrian cultural traditions. On the one hand, Greek colonists introduced elements of Hellenic material and spiritual culture to Orik, such as the polis system, temple architecture, ceramics, sculpture, and mythological concepts. Archaeological findings of Greek artefacts and mentions in ancient sources of Greek cults in Orik support this.

Therewith, noticeable autochthonous Illyrian features are present in Orik, especially in art, crafts, and social organisation. The Illyrian origin is evident in the practice of constructing robust defensive walls around the city. This interpenetration and synthesis of Greek and Illyrian traditions made Orik a significant centre of Hellenization on the Adriatic coast. Through Orik, Greek influences penetrated the continental regions, while the city developed a distinctive Greco-Illyrian culture. The originality of the study lies in the first comprehensive analysis of all available written evidence about the city of Orik in a singular and integrated research. This allows for a deeper understanding of the functioning and history of this ancient settlement. The results of the study expand the understanding of Orik's role in the historical and cultural processes of antiquity. They can be utilised in further studies on the history of ancient Illyria and the archaeology of the region. Prospects for future investigations involve incorporating new archaeological data to refine and supplement the written testimonies about Orik.

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Streszczenie

Starożytne iliryskie miasto portowe Orikum, położone obecnie w Albanii, było ważnym ośrodkiem morskim i kulturalnym w regionie Adriatyku. Niniejszy artykuł to wszechstronna analiza dostępnych starożytnych źródeł pisanych dotyczących Orikum, śledząca jego ewolucję od V w. p.n.e. do późnego antyku. Badanie tych źródeł jest kluczowe dla rekonstrukcji historii i topografii Orikum, których nie można w pełni odtworzyć wyłącznie na podstawie danych archeologicznych. Głównym celem studium jest systematyczne identyfikowanie, zbieranie i analizowanie każdej wzmianki o Orikum

w starożytnych tekstach, w tym w pracach Herodota, Pseudo-Skylaksa, Strabona i Tytusa Liwiusza. Dla uzyskania precyzyjnych i obiektywnych wniosków zastosowano rygorystyczną metodologię, obejmującą krytykę źródeł, analizę porównawczą oraz korelację z danymi archeologicznymi. Badanie dostarcza cennych informacji na temat ewolucji funkcji i statusu Orikum na przestrzeni czasu, jego fortyfikacji, działalności gospodarczej, obiektów religijnych i innych aspektów jego funkcjonowania. Pozwala śledzić, jak rozwijała się wiedza starożytnych geografów na temat tego przygranicznego miasta oraz jak przedstawiali je autorzy grecko-rzymscy w swoich narracjach. Najbardziej innowacyjnym wkładem studium jest pierwsze kompleksowe zbadanie całego zbioru źródeł pisanych dotyczących Orikum. Ta synteza umożliwia głębszą rekonstrukcję tego ważnego ośrodka nad Adriatykiem. Wyniki te zwiększają zrozumienie starożytnej Ilirii i złożonych dynamik jej hellenizacji, niosąc korzyści dla pokrewnych badań i edukacji. Ogólnie rzecz biorąc, poprzez systematyczne zbieranie i krytyczną analizę dostępnych starożytnych źródeł, to badanie oferuje wielowarstwowy portret Orikum jako strategicznej greckiej kolonii, iliryjskiej twierdzy, morskiego centrum handlowego i wielokulturowego ośrodka nad Adriatykiem.

Słowa kluczowe: Iliria, Orikum, starożytne kolonie greckie, hellenizacja, struktury obronne, miasta portowe, kultura grecko-rzymska

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