Architectural and spatial organization of fortified settlements in Western Alania

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Abstract. The article is dedicated to the medieval settlements architectural peculiarities revealing in Western Alania. These settlements were situated in the river ravines in the Karachay-Cherkessia territory. According to the planning criterion two types of settlements have been revealed: traditional and contaminated. The traditional type was formed during the pre-Christian period. Its three-part structure was the universe mythological model spatial manifestation. The contaminated type appeared during the Christian period. The peculiarities of its architectural and spatial organization are connected to the fact that its planning structure developed according to the byzantine Christian city scheme with the traditional Alan culture understanding. These types developed following the fortified settlement pattern, whose planning structure consisted of a citadel, a fortress and a fortified hillfort, but both types had different fortifications. According to the fortification criteria and the location in the landscape the above-mentioned types are united within a group of three kinds fortified settlements: the main fortresses (the vanguards), naturally protected settlements and guarded settlements (cultural and ideological centers, trade and craft centers).

Introduction
The research problem is the fact, that the fortification architecture development in Western Alania came in the context of traditional culture as a globalization and regionalization processes reflection. The processes of interaction between the introduced universals and cultural traditions in spatiotemporal development had always the most vivid reflection in fortification architecture. The study of the interaction between the processes of globalization and regionalization in culture and architecture is still important.

The first Alan culture monuments researches date back the second half of the XVIII c. In this period Russian Academy of Sciences organized an expedition to study the Caucasus; among its members were I. A. Guldenshtedt [1], P. S. Pallas [2], G.Y. Klaprot, who published the first information about some Alan culture monuments. Since the 1880s the study of the Upper Kuban region monuments was performed by Moscow Archaeological Society. Under its authority the monuments were studied by P. S. Uvarova [4], V. F. Miller [5], D. M. Strukov [6], G. I. Kulikovskiy [7] and V. M. Sysoev [8].

During the XX c. there were numerous archaeological researches of the North Caucasus, medieval monuments headed by A. N. Dyachkov-Tarasov [9], V. F. Smolin [10], P. N. Shyshkin [11], K. M. Petrelevich [12], T. M. Minaeva [13], E. G. Pchelina [14], A. P. Runich [15], L. N. Glushkov [16] A. L. Nechitaylo [17], E. P. Alekseeva [18], P. G. Akritas [19], E. I. Krupnov [20], O. V. Miloradovich, V. A. Kuznetsov [21], Y. A. Fedorov [22], G. E. Afanasiev [23], I. M. Miziev, A. V. Naydenko, H. H.
Bidzhiev [24], G. H. – U. Tekeev [25], V. B. Kovalevskaya [26], V. I. Markovin [27], I. S. Kamenetskii, E. I. Savchenko, V. N. Kamisky [28], I. V. Kaminskaya [29], U. Y. Elkanov [30], I. A. Arzhantseva [31] and others. In these scientists’ works there are the materials on the medieval Alania hillforts archaeology. Nowadays the archaeological works on the monuments of the North Caucasus are conducted by RAS Institute of Archaeology.

The first archaeological excavations of the Alan hillforts started in 1939 and were conducted during 1940-1960s., and they were headed by T. M. Minaeva. The results of the researches were published in her monograph in 1971 [32].

Since 1960 and for many years the archaeological researches of the Alan culture monuments, among which the Nizhne-Arkhyzskoye hillfort is of particular importance, were headed by V. A. Kuznetsov [33]. The scientist is the author of many basic researches, dedicated to the medieval Alania history. V. A. Kuznetsov revealed three local variants of the Alan culture (western, central and eastern) in the territory of the North Caucasus and discovered the territory between the river Bolshaya Laba and river Kuban, i. e. the western Alania part in the X-XII c. was under byzantine influence [34].

In 1970-1990s. H. H. Bidzhiev conducted archaeological excavations of Humarinskoye, Kyafarskoye, Pevomaiskoye, Krasnovostochnoye, Baytalchapanskoye, Lrasnogorskoye, Klevtsovskoye, Terzinskoye, Amgatinskoye, Kurlukskoye, Balashovskoye, Indzhur-Gatinskoye, Kyzyl-Kalinskoye and other hillforts. H. Bidzhiev discovered and researched many settlements, situated in the upper reaches of the Kuban, the Teberda, the Kuma, the Podkumok, Bolshoy Zelenchuk between the Teberda city and the Verkhnyaya Teberda aul H. [35]. H. H. Bidzhiev created a classification of the Karackay-Cherkessia medieval settlements which divides all the settlements in two groups according to “the planning and the complexity of fortifications”: settlements and fortified settlements. H. H. Bidzhiev divided the fortified settlements into three groups. The first – one-part fortified settlements. The second – two-part private hillforts, which consist of a fortress and an open settlement. The third – three-part settlements: a fortress, a hillfort and an open settlement. [36]

The work on systematization and generalization of the historic and archaeological legacy of Karachay-Cherkessia was presented by E. P. Alekseeva in her monograph in 1992 [37].

The goal of this work is to reveal the Western Alania fortified settlements architecture peculiarities as a spatial manifestation of the traditional Alan culture.

The objectives of the research are to reveal the territorial and spatial carcass of the Alan culture western local variant: to reveal the fortified settlements architectural and spatial structure; to determine the settlements fortifications peculiarities.

Discussion

The Western Alania Territory was situated in the western part of the North Caucasus within the basin of the North Depression, situated between the Rocky and Side mountain ranges. The Alans expansion topography is presented with numerous fortified settlements, situated in the ravines of the rivers Bolshaya Laba, Urup, Kyafar, Bolshoy Zelenchuk, Malyi Zelenchuk, Kuban, Teberda, Gilyach and others. Nowadays we know about 70 fortified settlements. Archeological researches took place in Nizhne-Arkhyzskoye, Leso-Kyafarskoye, Humarinskoye, Karakentskoye, Indzhur-Gatinskoye, Pervomaiskoye, Andiukhskoye, Gilyachskoye, Amgatinskoye, Kubinskoye, Terezinskoye, Klevtsovskoye, Balashovskoye, Kurlukskoye hillforts.

The ravine natural and spatial structure defined the Alan culture western local variant territorial and spatial carcass development. It was reflected in the expansion fortification and strategic scheme. The territory of the basin is a group of ravines, in which the settlements are concentrated. The mountain ranges functioned as impenetrable natural barriers, limiting the territory of the basin. The only vulnerable places without natural defense were the entrances to the ravines, where the main fortresses of Western Alania were located.
The settlements’ location also depended on a number of factors, linked to the Alan culture spatial display peculiarities. The factors are: the society patronymic structure, natural and sacral topography, traditional nature use.

The society patronymic structure influenced the living space, characterized by territorial continuity and spatial isolation. The families within one patronym created territorial unity which was defined by the territory of the settlement or the territory of the block if there were several patronyms in one neighborhood. Spatial isolation was defined by the limits of the natural and landscape object (a mountain plateau, an offshoot, the ravine of a river), where the settlement was located, or by the fortification walls which surrounded a patronymic block limit.

Natural and sacral topography is emphasizing sacral objects in the form of sacred mountains, trees, houses, groves, springs, lakes, rocks, caves etc. within a natural and landscape setting. The settlements were symbolically under the aegis of these sacral objects. Their location in relation to the sacral objects could be defined by the limits of visibility, the patronym influence limits, natural and landscape limits.

The traditional nature usage by the Alans in the context of lack of territory influenced the choice of the place for a settlement, which weren’t located on the territories suitable for agriculture and cattle breeding.

The traditional Alan culture together with Alan-Byzantine intercultural blending in the X-XII c. spatial manifestation influenced the settlements’ architectural and spatial organization peculiarities development: at the settlements’ planning structure level; at the fortification system level. 

As a result of the research a traditional scheme of architectural and spatial organization of Alan settlements have been revealed; the fact that its three-part structure was a spatial manifestation of the mythological model of the universe, which was similar in the Alan culture and other Caucasian cultures has been found out.

The traditional settlement type has a three-part planning structure characterized by: linear disposition of all the parts along one axis in a strict order: a citadel, a fortress, a fortified hillfort; compositional development of the planning structure in vertical direction; the absence of meaning of the geometrical center of a settlement in the city-building composition of a settlement. The citadel was a settlement symbolic center which was considered to be the center of the universe located at the world’s end. That’s why the citadel was usually located at the edge of a mountain in its highest part so that the fortress and the fortified settlement were in front of it and symbolized the front light world mythological image; an abyss symbolizing the idea of the back world full of dangers and obscurity was behind it. The position of a settlement on a mountain is also symbolic because a mountain was a natural and spatial manifestation of the mythological image of the World tree, which, according to the Caucasian mythology, links all the worlds and corresponds to the vertical universe axis. So, a mountain which bottom is on the ground and top is in the sky links the three parts of the mythological world model (dungeon, ground and skies), and the three part of a settlement linearly positioned on this mountain symbolize the mythological universe model. All the three parts are connected by the main street, which could be a spatial manifestation of the universe axis.

It is known that by the middle of the X c. there was the contaminated type of settlement, which appeared due to Alan-Byzantine intercultural contacts and blends in Western Alania together with the traditional type. This type had both the traditional features and the byzantine culture features.

The traditional features in the contaminated type are: the configuration of the settlement plan, defined by the natural shape of the territory (the shape of a plateau, a ravine etc.); the three part planning structure of a settlement; a side shift of the symbolic center of a settlement in relation to the geometrical center of the architectural and building composition; linear development in the settlement planning structure; the patronymic system of expansion in the living territory spatial organization.

The contaminated type features which differentiate it from the traditional type are: in architectural and building settlements composition appear figural and symbolic focuses in the form of Christian temples, whose location corresponded to Byzantine Christian topography; in the planning structure the public center of the city in the form of a square with a temple appear, to which the main street led;
there are three major streets which ran into one main street leading to the public center in the planning structure. Alan-Byzantine intercultural blends were presented in the most vivid way in the architectural and spatial organization of the Nizhne-Arkhyzskoye hillfort.

Summary
The traditional and the contaminated types of settlement had fortifications but with different fortification works level. Thus, it is possible to divide all the fortified settlements into three groups:

– main fortresses (vanguards), which protected the whole Alania territory. These fortresses situated in mountain ranges at the entrances to mountain gorges and formed a sole defense system together with natural barriers to protect the territory between the mountains and the Alan settlements in this territory form invasion. The fortresses weren’t disguised in the natural landscape, they towered over the gorges, had an integral fortification system, which provided and demonstrated their greatness, power and strength. In spite of the natural inaccessibility of the location, the fortified settlements fortification system of this group was presented with the walls of continuous perimetal configuration and armed towers. The best examples of fortified settlements of this type are Humarinskaya and Karakenskaya fortresses were situated in the western Caucasian part of the Great Silk Way and creating a gate on the mountains and foothill border;

– naturally protected settlements where the defense function had local meaning within the borders of these hillforts. The fortification system of settlements, was located in the mountain landscape, consists mainly of natural fortifications. The settlements were also protected by the curvilineal configuration walls and were discreet, which was reasoned by the presence of natural inaccessible barriers together with naturally unprotected areas. This type of settlements was the most popular one in Western Alania

– guarded settlements (cultural and ideological centers, trade and crafts centers) which didn’t have an integral fortification system, but were situated and guarded gorges, and were venerated, and had importance. This group included cultural and ideological centers and centers of trade and crafts hidden deeply in gorges, access to which was controlled from the fortified settlements of the first group. Their fortifications consisted of wall of minimal length, defined by the shortest distance between two natural barriers. An example of the group if Nizhne-Arkhyzskoy hillfort, situated in the Bolzhoy Zelenchuk ravine.

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