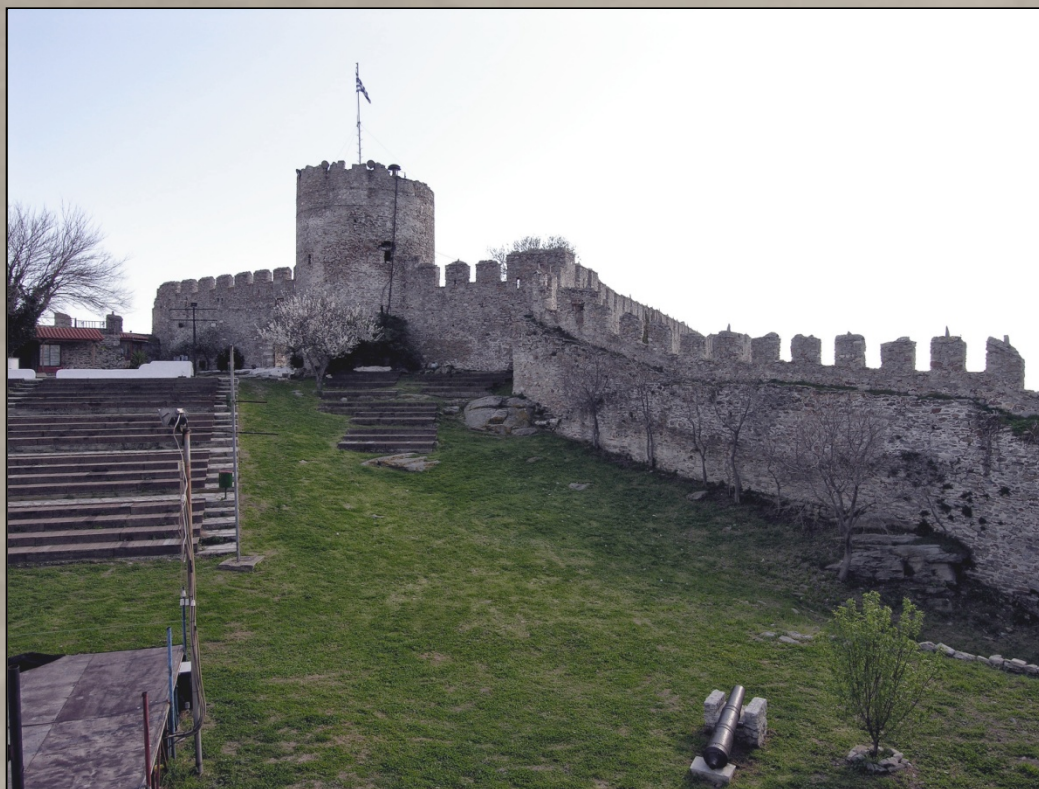


Byzantine Castles in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, Greece

A great expansion of the fortification architecture (castles, city walls) occurred in Byzantium during the late Byzantine period (1204-1453).

The Byzantine Castles, which were located in the area of Macedonia and Thrace, had a particular role, that of the defensive “wall” of the Empire. They functioned as the connecting knots of a network in order to protect the capital, Constantinople (Istanbul). They were located along Via Egnatia, the principal road artery that connected Constantinople with Dyrrachion, as well as in the inland area, in an average distance of 35-40 kms (distance of a day trip at the time) to each other. From Kastoria and Serbia, Thessaloniki and Kavala, to Didymoteichon and Pythion – just to mention a few examples- there were numerous fortified settlements in the role of a castle. Their exact number cannot be calculated with precision, but according to Procopius (Byzantine writer, 6th c. AD), there were at least 600 fortifications in the Balkans at his time. In the 10th century the term ‘κάστρον’ (castle) was used to denote fortified towns; the latter were transformed into castles for the safety of their inhabitants. Many of the castles of the area were Hellenistic and Roman towns transformed into habited fortification in order to protect the country population. Others were erected at the time of the emperor Justinian (527-565), they were completed in the 10th c. and 11th c. and they were strengthened in the Komnenian period (11th – 12th c.). Some new fortifications were erected during the Paleologan era (13th – 15th c.). They were stone-built constructions and various literary sources of the Late Antiquity and Byzantine times (e.g. ‘Stratigikon’ of Maurikios, 6th -7th c.; Taktika, of Leon Sofos, 9th c.; ‘Stratigikon’, of Kekaumenos, 11th c.), provide instructions for building, besieging and defending castles.



The Castle of Kavala

The castle of Kavala or Fortress, as the locals use to call it, is located on the peninsula of Panagia (Virgin Mary). The outer walls surround the peninsula by following the coast line on three sides and only a part of them declines. The top of the peninsula is occupied by the Acropolis (citadel). The formation of both the external walls and the wall of the Acropolis, follow the natural terrain formation and slope, having in some places an elevation of 10m.

The citadel is built on top of the old district of Panagia, which is the most inaccessible part of the peninsula and also a strategically critical position. A transverse wall in Northwest-Southeast direction separates the citadel into two parts, the inner (south) and the outer (north) yard. In the centre of the transverse wall there is a round tower and a gate. The inner wall fortifies the highest point of the peninsula, which is located about 70m above the sea level; it is almost flat and it has a natural fortification on three sides. Its average size is 49x30m. This enclosure protected the tank water, over which later was built a small mosque, which has now collapsed, the arsenal, the accommodation of the guards and the central cylindrical tower. The outer (north) wall of the citadel, which surrounds the lowest and therefore more vulnerable hillside, has an irregular shape and links the inner wall with the land section of the Byzantine walls of Panagia's district. It has an average length of 65m and a width ranging from 17 to 58m. This wall dates later (1530-1536) than the inner courtyard. It has three towers, two on the northern corners and one in the east, a bastion in the south and two gateways. The doorway of the northwest corner does not function nowadays, while the other which is located just at the opposite side, is the main entrance to the castle until today.



As of typology, the castle of Kavala belongs to the medieval fortified yards of the so called “white era”, meaning the years that the use of gunpowder had not yet dominated; a point confirmed by its relatively weak defensive system. Therefore, in the subsequent years the castle of Kavala did not have a great defensive force. For the construction of the castle were used stones from local granite mixed with pieces of brick and marble. Mortar was used as a binder.

The castle of Kavala was a fortress of great importance for the region and its inhabitants. According to the preserved findings, the site of the citadel, because of the enhanced security that guaranteed, has been the administrative and military centre of each conqueror. Today the citadel is an archaeological site open to visitors, where various cultural events take place under the auspices of the Municipality of Kavala. The castle is preserved in a good condition. At the area of the Acropolis many interventions were made by its various rulers at different stages of its history. During these interventions however, the same method of construction was used and consequently today it is not easy to distinguish the different phases. Since 1964, are carried out restoration and preservation works of the fortification, while the restoration and preservation of the Acropolis started in 2007.

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The Castle of Kavala...continued



In its current form, Kavala's castle was built in the first quarter of the 15th century. It occupied the position of the earlier Christoupolis' Byzantine citadel, destroyed in 1391, which in turn stepped on the fortifications of the ancient city of Neapolis. Sections of the later from the early 5th century B.C., which was constructed of large blocks of granite, are now preserved at the base of the downstream later outer wall on the east, north and west sides of the peninsula.

The second phase of the castle dates to the late Roman period (3rd -6th century AD). Traces of this phase are preserved on the coastal outer wall of the castle, especially on the northern edge of the western part and at the Imaret area, in front of the southern wing. This phase is characterised by the binding material between the stones, the coarse tile, which is a characteristic of late Roman fortifications in the region. The traces of the following chronological phases are visible only at the citadel of the castle. The central circular tower, the tank in the inner yard and the northwest gate of the outer yard, are probably dated in the Middle Byzantine and Late Byzantine era.

During the occupation of the Turks, according to reports, in the citadel there were four more turrets except the central, wooden constructions that used as machicolations and wooden routes, destined to join the spaces between the towers. Circa 1425 a short period of Venetian occupation followed, which lasted only a few months. During this period the new rulers built a large outdoor shelter of boulders, from which no remains are available today. In August of the same year the Turks re-conquered the castle, rebuilt the inner yard and constructed the external enclosure, linking thus the citadel with the walls of the peninsula. After the 16th century, Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566) built the arsenal and the pantry, the so-called "prison", with different masonry from the rest of the castle. In the next two centuries, city of Kavala evolved flourished. As a result many pirate attacks occurred, a situation that brought changes in the castle. More specifically, in the southwest corner a door was opened connecting the citadel to the new city, while in the southeast corner a bastion was created for placing artillery. Moreover, the battlements at the northwest corner became triangular, giving at the bastion its current polygonal form. In the 18th century, the citadel lost its defensive character. The arsenal was then used to imprison citizens of the Sultan and since then this location is known as "prison". The last use of the citadel is placed in the Second World War, when the occupying forces stormed the area and built two operating rooms as offices in front of the outpost. Traces of these rooms are the only that remains today as they were demolished after the war. The castle was a place of residence for the inhabitants of Kavala until 1864, when the Sultan gave permission to the Greeks to build houses outside the walls. The area of the citadel served as the administrative centre of Kavala, hosting Turkish officials until 1885 when the administrative and military forces evacuated the site. In 1964, the Egyptian government sold to the Municipality of Kavala the area of the citadel, of a total area of 5.575m² for the amount of 40.000 drachmas.

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