

STAVROULA SDROLIA

7th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities

The Castle of Velika and the defensive system of the coastal road of Kissavos.

The Castle of Velika is a fortified settlement of 21 acres, built in the first byzantine period at the southern edge of Kissavos mountain. It is identified with the ancient city of Melivoia, the most famous city of Magnesia at the coast of Kissavos, which has been also connected with the ancient castle at Skiathas hill, above the port of Agiokampos. This region formed a focal point in the defensive system of the coastal route of Thessaly, which also included the castles at Kastri- Loutro, Stomio, Kokkino Nero, still covered with vegetation.

During recent excavation by the 7th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities, with collaboration of the Municipality of Melivoia, the external circuit of castle of Velika was explored. The eastern and southern sides of the fortress wall were totally revealed, bearing two rectangular towers and two entrances. A series of buildings were connected with the external wall, which have been only partly excavated. These included military and residential buildings, warehouses with preserved pithoi in situ, and a three- isled basilica, the latter investigated with the collaboration of the University of Thessaly.

According to the major finds of the excavation, the fortification wall was built in the 6th century AD, partly based upon an ancient construction and enclosed part of the settlement, which extended to the eastern slope of the hill, near the coast. A large quantity of commercial amphorae, as well as other vessels of everyday life, show the importance of the settlement in the collection and distribution of agrarian products, mostly olive oil and wine, continuing with the tradition of ancient Melivoia, which specialized in the wine commerce.

Apart from the information on economical and every-day life aspects, the interesting architectural morphology of the fortress (wall height rising to 6m., preserved staircases and inner structure) lead to useful remarks about fortifications of the early Byzantine period in the Greek countryside.

During the years 2011-2013 the eastern and southern part of the fortress have been repaired with European funds through the Region of Thessaly.