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# THE FORTIFICATION OF SETTLEMENTS IN MEDIEVAL ALANIA

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## **Abstract**

The article considers the features of fortification in medieval settlements of western Alania by the example of large sites. Besides, the article describes the main types of defences. The conducted analysis ascertained three types of fortified settlements with common architectural and spatial regularities which probably show the world-view guidelines of patronymic society in medieval Alania during the period of intensive urban construction.

*Keywords:* fortification, fortresses, defenses, architecture, medieval Alania

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## **1. Introduction**

In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the military organization of Alania reached its fullest flourishing being a finally formed army under the king's command [1]. According to 'Hudud al-'Alam' – an anonymous tenth-century Persian source, the king's army was located in Hailan, and the rest part of the army was quartered in cities and fortresses in strategic sectors [2] including outlets to passes, the bounds of mountains and foothills, and the crossings of trade routes. In the above mentioned sectors, Alanian settlements amass with their peculiar fortification which gives them all the characteristics of fortified settlements.

The fortification of Alanian settlements consisted of natural and artificial defences. Natural defences included gorges, gullies, rivers, hard-to-reach peaks and tablelands with sheer slopes. Stone walls with towers and earthworks in the form of ditches and ramparts were the most widespread defensive installations [3].

## **2. Literature survey**

There is no any special research about the architecture of medieval Alania settlements and their fortification to date. However, the interest in the monuments of Alanian culture and other antiquities of the North Caucasus

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appeared in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The study of the Caucasus began at this time. It was conducted by the expedition of the Russian Academy of Sciences consisting of J.A. Guldenstadt [4], P.S. Pallas [5] and J.H. Klaproth [6]. They published the first information about some monuments of Alanian culture.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, researchers were mainly focused on Christian antiquities due to the policy for the revival of Christianity in the Caucasus pursued by the Russian Empire. Beginning with 1846, the research was performed by the Russian Archaeological Society (Saint-Petersburg). Its representatives – Naryshkin brothers [7], J. Bentkowski [8], Y.D. Felitsyn [9] and others – published records about some monuments of Christian architecture in the North Caucasus. In 1864, the Moscow Archaeological Society began to work. It was established by A.S. Uvarov. Its representatives – P.S. Uvarova [10], V.F. Miller [11], V.M. Sysoyev [12], D.M. Strukov [13], G.I. Kulikovskiy [14] and others – carried out many expeditions to the North Caucasus and issued a number of publications on the results.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many archaeological researches were performed by A.N. Dyachkov-Tarasov, V.F. Smolin, P.N. Shishkin, K.M. Petreleevich, T.M. Minayeva, Y.G. Pchelina, A.P. Runich, L.N. Glushkov, A.L. Nechitaylo, Y.P. Alekseyeva, P.G. Akritas, Y.I. Krupnov, O.V. Miloradovich, V.A. Kuznetsov, Y.A. Fedorov, G.Y. Afanasyev, I.M. Miziyev, A.V. Naydenko, K.K. Bidjiyev, G.K.-U. Tekeyev, V.B. Kovalevskaya, V.I. Markovin, I.S. Kamenetskiy, Y.I. Savchenko, V.N. Kaminskiy, I.V. Kaminskaya, Y.A. Milovanov, U.Y. El'kanov, M.P. Abramova, S.N. Korenevskiy, I.A. Arzhantseva and others.

T.M. Minayeva was the first archaeologist who began to investigate Alanian settlements in the upper reaches of the Kuban River in 1939. Over 40-60s, T.M. Minayeva inspected a large number of ancient sites in the river gorges of Karachai-Cherkessia. The findings are summarized in monograph 'On the History of Upper Kuban Alanians According to Archeological Data' published in 1971 [15].

The fundamental research on the history of medieval Alania was carried out by V.A. Kuznetsov. He published his findings in numerous papers among which one can single out two monographs: 'Alania in the 10-13<sup>th</sup> Centuries' [16] and 'The essays on Alanian history' (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. in 1992) [17]. He wrote a number of works about the Lower-Arkhyz ancient settlement. Monograph 'Lower Arkhyz in the 10-12<sup>th</sup> Centuries. On the History of Medieval Cities of the North Caucasus' was published in 1993 and summarized all the results of archaeological investigations of many years [18].

The first small essay about medieval settlements and dwellings of Karachai-Cherkessia can be found in book 'The Ancient and Medieval History of Karachai-Cherkessia. The Issues of Ethnic and Socio-Economic Development' published in 1971 by Y.P. Alekseyeva [19]. Another work of this researcher named 'The Archeological Monuments of Karachai-Cherkessia' [20] deals with the systematization and mapping of studied and dated archeological monuments of the region known by 1985. The majority of them belong to the culture of medieval Alania.

V.B. Kovalevskaya studies the medieval monuments of the North Caucasus for many years. The results are set forth in 'European Steppe in Middle Ages' published in 1981 [21]. The fourth and eighth chapters of this paper cover the archaeology of the North Caucasus. Besides, research materials concerning Alanian settlements studied by V.B. Kovalevskaya are presented in her monograph 'The Caucasus and Alanians' published in 1984 [22].

K.K. Bijiyev wrote many papers on the research of medieval settlements located in Karachai-Cherkessia, Krasnodar Krai and Stavropol Krai. A thesis and two monographs are the fruits of study conducted for many years. Bijiyev's thesis considers the early medieval monuments of Karachai-Cherkessia and Central Fore-Caucasus from the viewpoint of interaction and interpenetration in the culture of Turkic nations that live in the North Caucasus [23]. Monograph 'The Humara Settlement' published in 1983 contains the results of long research carried out by the author in the Humara settlement. In the appendix of this book, one can find information about other ancient settlement sites located in Teberdin and Kuban gorges [24]. The second monograph – 'The Turks of the North Caucasus' – was published in 1993 [25].

So, at present, there is a huge volume of separate factographic materials concerning the monuments of Alanian culture containing information about more than 70 Alanian settlements located along the rivers of Karachai-Cherkessia and Krasnodar Krai.

### **3. Discussion and findings**

The topography of Alanians' settlements is represented by many fortresses and fortified habitations located in the gorges of the North Caucasus where part of the army was apparently quartered. The place for Alanian settlement depended to a large extent on the landscape and natural conditions and also on a sacral meaning. This component was connected with pre-Christian beliefs. Besides, the strategic significance of the place was very important.

The sacral component of natural environment determined the system 'sacred places' – forests, mountains, grove, and trees. They formed an original ecologic framework of the territory which regulated the degree of man's impact. This influenced the spatial location of settlements, determined their position in the system of 'sacred places' and the main routes.

The strategic significance of a place was evaluated by the fact whether it is convenient to conduct and control the main directions and trade routes. The majority of big settlements in the western Alania are concentrated in the gorges of such rivers as Teberdy, Big Laba and Big Zelenchuk where the main routes of the North Caucasian section of the Great Silk Way passed. These gorges cross all the western Alania from mountain passes to the outlet to the plain.

Alanians chose places with natural fortification for settlements and cities because the erection of defensive installations demanded much labour. The sites of ancient settlements that remained in these gorges are located mainly on mountain offshoots or tableland peaks at high altitudes. Such position made

them difficult to access and sheltered them deep in mountains against possible danger. Being generally hidden, fortified settlements formed groups with inner visual and spatial relations.

There are three groups of fortified settlements separated by their geographical position: steppe, piedmont and mountain ones. Steppe settlements consisted mainly of earthworks. Piedmont and mountain settlements, the majority of which are concentrated in the western Alania, were sites with stone defences. In piedmont settlements, the combinations of earth and stone defences were spread. Earthworks and stone installations together with natural defences formed the fortification system of Alanian settlements.

Such natural obstacles as gorges, gullies, rivers high peaks and tablelands with vertical sides were widely used. They eliminated the need to dig ditches and to erect walls.

Ditches and earth mounds were very popular in steppe settlements. Defensive walls and towers erected with a glance to the relief of the territory are typical for piedmont and mountain settlements. They were built without special earth smoothing [26].

In most cases, the structure of walls consists of squared gray sandstones of different sizes without mortar. Gray sandstone was the main building material and was quarried closely to the settlements. The diameter of stones reaches 0.65 m. The walls have thickness from 0.7 m to 2.5 m. Some walls are erected using back filling method. The front facades of walls are faced with huge squared boulders. The gaps between them are filled with small rocks. Other walls fully consist of squared stone.

As a rule, walls were erected between natural obstacles, in places that were open for invasion. However, there are some examples of settlements with fortified walls around the whole perimeter (Humara, Karakent, Indgurgatin and other settlements). Due to this, we can single out three types of wall fortifications.

The first type includes walls with rectilinear configuration. Such wall looked like a section with the length determined by the shortest distance between two natural barriers. For example, the defensive walls of Lower-Arkhyz settlement crossed the valley in transverse direction from the foot of the ridge Uzhum to the river Big Zelenchuk.

The second type includes walls with curvilinear configuration and the uninterrupted perimeter extent is determined by the shape of occupied area of the plateau. For example, the defensive walls of Humara settlement surrounded the Kalezh plateau and the fortress placed on it.

The third type includes walls with curvilinear configuration and interrupted extent determined by the presence of natural insurmountable obstacles and areas without natural defences. For example, the defensive walls together with vertical rock slopes formed the fortification system of the Amgata settlement.

The natural landscape environment determined the scheme of artificial fortification for settlements and fortresses. The defensive qualities of relief influenced the position of a citadel, the system of fortified walls and towers. A special attention was given to the place and fortification of the road to the settlement and its gate.

Big settlements had 1-2-3 defence lines. One of them was the base of the citadel. Others surrounded the city area [22, p. 3]. K.K. Bijiyeu detected three types of fortified settlements. The first type includes one-part settlements which usually are found in foothills. The example is a settlement located near the village of Sadovoye in Adygei-Khabl region. Rectangular settlement of 30 ha was surrounded by fortified walls in the western part where it was a gate. To date, a crumbling bank with width of 2.25 m and height 1.5-2 m is the only thing that remained from the walls. The second type includes settlements with a two-part structure consisting of a citadel and an urban area siding with it. Indgurgatin, Amgata, Krasnovostochnoye, Balashovskoye, Kol'tsegorskoye and other settlements belong to this type. The third type includes three-part settlements mostly spread in western Alania. They consist of a citadel, a fortress and an open urban area siding with them. Such settlements as Pervomayskoye, Karakent, Humara, Adiyukh, Kyafar, Baytalchapkan, Uchkur, Kyzyl-Kalin, Kurluk, Klyan-Yar and others belong to this type [25, p. 137].

It should be noted that, in the 10-12<sup>th</sup> centuries, a patriarchal clan system of social organization was used in Alania and the whole North Caucasus. Patronymic relations together with worldview guidelines inherent in North Caucasian peoples were connected with ancestors' cult and clan ties. These views were expressed in spatial form and reflected in the settlement system. The mythological consciousness of a clan man determined the mythological character of spatial images. The mythological image of a world tree and the worldview model of the Universe were reflected in the house building of North Caucasian peoples. The main components of a dwelling were opposed: a symbolic centre and a periphery; inner and outer; left and right [27]. The three-part vertical structure of the world tree as an image of harmony and perfection gave a sacral meaning to number three. The magic of this number was expressed in the house-building art of mountain dwellers [28].

The spatial arrangement of western Alanian settlements was analyzed by comparing some of its features with the features of mountain settlements of the 13-14<sup>th</sup> centuries which were thoroughly studied by several scientists [29]. This comparison became possible thanks to the pronounced similarity of Alanian culture and the traditional culture of mountain peoples that lived in North Caucasus.

One can suppose that the above stated patronymic guidelines and mythological spatial images were expressed in the unwritten laws of spatial arrangement in a house. Apparently, these laws were spread not only in the dwelling of a patronymic family but also at the level of the whole settlement because patronymy was connected with a certain area within which it existed and developed on a scale of a separate settlement.

If we analyze the three-part settlement structure found by K.K. Bijiyeu, we can suppose that it is a spatial incarnation of these laws. One can trace in it a symbolic centre, in the form of a citadel and an open settlement as a periphery. The inner and outer space is separated by fortified walls. The connection between the inner and outer space was carried out through a gate. The architectural and spatial organization of a citadel, fortified walls and a gate – the main components of settlement fortification in western Alania – were formed considering the symbolism of the area determined by the mythological consciousness of patronymic society. Probably, this strengthened the defensive qualities of a fortified settlement. Now let us study the features of settlement fortification in western Alania by the example of large sites.

The Amgata settlement spread over three peaks of a mountain ridge interconnected by a saddle. This settlement was safely sheltered deep in the Burush-Syrty range located on the left bank of the Teberdy River. The citadel of the settlement was placed at the eastern peak of the ridge faced to the Teberdy gorge. Such position of the citadel allowed, on the one hand, controlling the gorge and foresee possible danger and, on the other hand, being hidden in mountain landscape. The citadel stands on a natural horizontal ground 11 to 38 m rose to a height of 5 and surrounded by cliffs. In spite of natural impregnability, this ground was enclosed with fortified walls over the perimeter in the northern part of which there was a gate. One could ascend to the citadel territory by stairs hewn in the rock. A single-apse church was at the citadel territory. Fortified settlements stretched on the other two peaks of the ridge located equidistant from the citadel and opposite each other.

The entrance to the settlement territory was possible from north-east and south by two mountain paths leading from the gorge. Fortified walls appeared just in these places. In the south-eastern part of the settlement, at the bottom of the citadel, there is a complex of fortified walls which cross the saddle. Thus they limit the access to the settlement from the south. There is one more fortified wall in the north-eastern edge of the settlement, which looks like a horizontally developed lowland 180 to 300 m enclosed between the northern and eastern parts of the ridge. This wall goes around the perimeter of the lowland ground from the citadel bottom to the foothill of the northern peak and closes the north-eastern direction.

The Gilyach settlement has a typical location. It is placed over the gorge of the Kuban River on a range spur cut off by Gilyach gully from the south and by the Small Gilyach mountain channel from the north. The territory where the settlement is placed has an evenly growing level difference by an inclination from the east to the south-west. The maximum difference is about 170 m. The settlement citadel was at the top of the spur directed to the east and facing the Kuban valley.

The ascent to the settlement is possible only from the south-west by the gentle part of the slope which goes away deep into the Small Gilyach gully. In the south-western part, there was an entrance. An ancient route beginning in the Kuban valley led to it. The gentle south-western part of the settlement is fortified

by walls limiting the access in places where the relief does not have natural defences.

From the Kuban gorge, one can see an inaccessible mountain with vertical rocks with the citadel on its top. It should be noted that the only entrance to the settlement was placed in the most distant point several kilometres from the exit to the Kuban valley. The position of the entrance cannot be traced from the river gorge. Such masking in the relief and making an illusion of inaccessibility are one of the typical traits for Alanian fortification.

At the border of mountains and piedmonts, on the opposite banks of the Kuban River, there are two fortresses opposite to each other – Humara and Karakent. These fortresses were very significant in western Alanian fortification because they appeared in a strategically important place – at the border of mountains and piedmonts, at the intersection of trade routes.

The Humara fortress is placed on a plateau on the right bank of the Kuban River at a height of about 200 m above the valley. This plateau has the Greek name Kalezh ('the old fortress'). It stands out in surrounding landscape due to its grandeur and the perfection of its shapes. The façade of the Kalezh Mountain directed to the river valley has an expressive trapezoid shape. The plateau is cut through by the deep Inal gully from the north-west and cut off from the range by the Shugara gully in the south-east.

The Humara settlement has three parts – a citadel, a fortress and an open urban area. The citadel is located on the north-eastern outskirts of the plateau, on a hill. The slopes of the plateau consist of inaccessible cliffs and gentle earth surfaces which did not provide a full protection against invasion. Thus the whole perimeter was enclosed with fortified walls ending at the top of the citadel. The wall is strengthened by 12 towers along the whole length.

From the north-eastern side of the citadel, there was the second fortified wall which crossed the isthmus between the Inal and Shugara gullies and continued up to the precipice. Beyond the wall there was a ditch with a width of 7 m denoting the artificial nature of the hill under the citadel. It seems that the hill and ditch appeared simultaneously since the earth extracted to arrange a ditch was used for the citadel embankment.

From the citadel height one can view the whole territory of the fortress on the plateau, its outskirts including both gullies, the open urban area from the side of the Inal gully, and also the Kuban valley and the Karakent fortress on the opposite riverbank.

The main gate of the fortress is from the side of the Inal gully. They are frontal towards the citadel. This ensured a good visual and spatial connection. At the same time, the gate is almost invisible from the road that walks up the gully from the Kuban gorge. Besides, the main entrance was completed with a tower above the gate. Its architecture was similar to the other towers of the Humara fortress. So, the gate was inaccessible to invasion because their location cannot be traced from outside. Beside the main entrance, there were several auxiliary ones. One of them looked towards the Kuban valley and was accessible only visually since it was made in the wall above the cliffs and had no any approach

road outside. Probably, this entrance had to attract attention from outside and mislead an enemy who intended to besiege the fortress. Another auxiliary entrance is located from the side of the Shugara gully in the second fortified wall which served as a forward defensive wall and complicated the access to the main wall and the citadel. At the same time, this wall created a closed space. That is why the entrance in it with a width of 5 m could be a trap for an enemy.

The Karakent settlement has three parts like the Humara settlement. Its area is a mountain spur which consists of three terraces one above the other. The citadel is traditionally placed in the highest part on the upper terrace which looks like a horizontal ground with cliffs. On the middle terrace, around the citadel, the fortress stretched with defensive walls around the whole perimeter of the plateau. On the lower terrace, at the height of about 100 m above the Kuban valley, there was an open urban area. One could ascend to the settlement only from the south-west by the Karakent gully or from the north-west by the Kumysh gully. There were external defensive walls in these places. They blocked the gentle part of the slope.

As opposed to the previous examples, the Humara and Karakent fortresses were not masked in relief. On the contrary, they looked like a kind of gate at the border of mountains and piedmonts. The fortresses are on the same height above river valley at a distant enough for visual signal transmission. Thanks to this, we can suppose that there were visual and spatial connection between the two fortresses.

In the gorge of the Big Laba River, there is another group of fortresses forming a gate at the border of mountains and piedmont. These are the Pervomayskoye and Podskalnoye settlements located on the Misimian Way.

A special attention should be given to the gorge of the Big Zelenchuk River and the Low-Arkhyz settlement inside it. Unlike the majority of Alanian settlements, this one is placed in the low-lying part of gorge – in the river valley.

The fortification of the Lower-Arkhyz settlement is a combination of natural and artificial defences. Natural obstacles include the mountain chain of the Uzhum range. This is an inaccessible natural barrier which closed the settlement territory from the south-east. From the north-west, the settlement had even two natural defences: a mountain river called Big Zelenchuk and the Mytseshta Mountain behind it. The north-eastern side of the settlement and two gorges crossing the Uzhum range and opening the valley from the south-east remained unprotected. These gorges are called the Church gully and the Podorvannaya gully. Artificial defences appeared just in these vulnerable areas. Thus, four defensive lines were built on the plain territory of the settlement to block the north-eastern direction. The most extreme wall was the thickest (2.5 m) and the longest (295 m) one. The two gorges were blocked by bridge walls. Besides, separate watchtowers were built on the slopes of the Uzhum range.

In the opinion of A.A. Slanov [1, p. 125], The fortification of the Lower-Arkhyz settlement is quite primitive as it does not have an integral defence system and the relief did not ensure the full protection against invasion. We can agree with this opinion if comparing the fortification of the Lower-Arkhyz

settlement with the above considered examples of defended settlements and fortresses. The defence system was really not integral since one of the walls belonged to the Alanian Archdiocese. Another two were placed inside the urban area. The fourth one is at a too large distance (about 500 m) from the nearest buildings. At the same time, the Lower-Arkhyz settlement played a very important role in the life of Alania. This is confirmed by the Alanian Archdiocese and three of five cross-domed churches. The researchers think that here there was the Alanian capital – the Maas City ('pious'). Probably, the walls in urban area surrounded the blocks where the royal clan lived.

The gorge the royal clan lived in had a big sacral significance for the whole nation. For example, the royal clan Tsarazonta lived in the Alagir gorge located in the eastern Alania. Deep in the Tsey gorge (the south-eastern branch of the Alagir gorge), there is Rekom – the sanctuary most revered in Ossetia. Its sacral importance is directly connected with the Tsarazonta clan [30].

If the Big Zelenchuk gorge had a status of special reverence and significance, it had to be thoroughly protected along the whole length from passes to the outlet to the plain. Indeed, one can see fortresses and fortified settlements concentrated at the border areas of the Zelenchuk gorge. In the place of outlet to passes, near the source of Big Zelenchuk, where three rivers (Arkhyz, Kizgich and Psysh) interflow, on rock spurs, there is a group of fortified settlements headed by the Morg-Syrty fortress. Besides, there are many fortresses and settlements on the other side of the gorge, at the border of mountains and piedmonts, where the Kyafara River flows into Big Zelenchuk. These are two fortresses near the Novoispravny hamlet and the Klevtsovskoye and Kurluk settlements between which there are visual and spatial ties. The whole gorge with its defensive qualities was an object of protection, and the Lower-Arkhyz settlement located in its depth was safely shielded against invasion and didn't need its own integral defensive system. However, this example is a unique exception for the fortification of western Alanian settlements.

An ancient mountain path connects the Lower-Arkhyz settlement with the Kyafar settlement – one of the largest cities of western Alania. It has about 200 stone buildings inside. Researchers conjecture that a residence of Alanian ruler Durgulelya the Great was located here in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. His name repeatedly mentioned in Byzantine and Georgian sources. The city of Khailan mentioned in the Persian anonymous work was probably located in this area with the ruler's army quartered in it.

The settlement is situated in the gorge of the Kyafar River near the place its confluence with the Krivaya River, on the Shpil' Mountain which has a narrow and oblong shape like the range with a gentle crest stretched parallel to the Kyafar River. The settlement consists of three parts: the upper and lower sites and an unfortified riverside settlement.

The fortification of the Kyafar settlement includes both natural and artificial defences. The settlement spread over the gentle mountain crest. The slopes of this mountain, with the exception of the north-eastern side, are the

cliffs that provide a natural fortification against invasion. Defensive installations in the form of two fortified walls cross the north-eastern gentle part of the mountain from the side of the Krivaya River. One of the walls went by the border of the upper site. The second one went by the border of the lower one. There were entrances in both walls through which an ancient road passed.

The citadel of the settlement was located in the highest part of the range, on its south-western outskirts. In the centre of the citadel there was a single-apse church surrounded by dwellings and utility structures. Probably, a royal residence was located in this part of the settlement. To the north-east from the citadel, there was a fortress with an urban area where the ruler's army could live. The citadel and the adjoining fortress placed in the upper site were separated from the lower site with urban area by the first fortified wall. The second fortified wall went by the bounds of urban area.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Summarizing the above, we can note that the majority of settlement in western Alania of the 10-12<sup>th</sup> centuries had defensive installations. At the same time, they differed in fortification qualities which were determined by their location and the system of defences. The conducted analysis revealed three types of fortified settlements.

The first type includes fortresses where the defensive function prevailed over the other ones. These settlements appeared in strategic sectors, such as in the entrances to gorges or on the intersections of trade routes. Their locations can be easily traced in mountain landscape. They had an integral fortification system which demonstrated and ensured their might, grandeur and inaccessibility. In spite of the fact that they were difficult to access for natural reasons, the fortification system of these settlements mostly consists of uninterrupted fortified walls around the perimeter. The most vivid examples of this type are the Humara and Karakent fortresses located at the fork of the Misimian Way, on the border of mountains and piedmonts. They form a kind of gate at the entrance to the Kuban River gorge.

The second type includes well-fortified settlements masked in natural landscape. These settlements are located at high altitudes, in the depth of mountain range. That is why their location cannot be traced from a distance. Due to their inaccessibility, natural defences prevail over the artificial ones in their fortification system. This type of fortified settlements is mostly spread in western Alania.

The third type includes settlements without strong fortification but located in guarded gorges. These settlements most likely served as cultural and ideological centres with symbolic and sacral meaning for the whole nation. As a rule, they were hidden deep in a gorge the access to which was thoroughly controlled by the fortified settlements of the first type. The most typical example of this kind was the Lower-Arkhyz settlement located in the gorge of Big Zelenchuk.

One can identify a number of common regularities in the structure of fortresses and fortified settlements described above. These regularities were probably the reflection of patronymic worldview guidelines connected with pre-Christian beliefs. Besides, they provided a reliable protection against invasion. A special attention was given to the interior and spatial arrangement of three fortification components – a citadel, a system of fortified walls and defences and an entrance gate.

The citadel had to be built in a special place with sacral significance because it was a clan symbol and settlement core. It was placed in the highest part of a settlement to provide a maximum view of surroundings and to ensure the inaccessibility. As a rule, this was provided by building the citadel on a natural eminence with cliffs and fortified walls.

The structure of fortified walls was closely connected with the character of natural defences since the combination of natural and artificial defences formed the integral fortification system of a fortress or settlement. Walls appeared in places did not fortified by nature. Simultaneously, the inner territory of a patronymic settlement had to be isolated from the outer environment.

The construction and position of gate had to provide its inaccessibility due to masking because gate was the most vulnerable link in fortification system. The connection between the inner and outer space was carried out through it.

The conducted analysis of many Alanian settlements allowed detecting several regularities and supposing that a number of canonical demands were put forward on the settlement construction. These demands were not aimed at changing or transforming the environment but using the available landscape conditions. This influenced the choice of the place for building a settlement or fortress.

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