

The *Dieu d'Amour* castle in Cyprus, from Byzantine settlement to Frankish palace.

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Abstract

The Castle of St. Hilarion, or “chasteau quy a nom Deudamor” (Raynaud, 1887, 45) as it was called in the XIII century, is located on the mountain peak named δίδυμος (double) at the height of 732 m. A first settlement in the area was that of a Monastery founded in the VII century by a monk after fleeing from Holy Land following the Arab invasion. Most authors describe the first fortified enclosure as built in the XI century during the Byzantine rule. The castle was part of a fortified *limes* together with those of *Buffavento* and *Candare* (Kantara) and was enlarged several times in Frankish times starting from 1228 (Jeffery, 1918, 263). Filippo da Novara, during the war opposing Frederick II to the balians of Ibelin, joined the defence and capitulation of the strongholds of *Dieu d'Amour* (1229), *Candare* (1230) and *Cherynes* (1233). The *chanson* recalls a mill (*moulin*), ovens (*fours*) and houses (*maisons*), describing an urban settlement more than a castle. The cistern of 2 million litres was therefore part of a hydraulic system, and the walled enclosure protected an urban settlement. The paper, reconstructing the history of the complex, dates the construction phases, witnessing the urgent conservation needs of this unique historical setting.

Keywords: middle ages, history, military architecture.

1. History and formation process

“car leur trébucher nous
fait nos fours trabucher si dedens,
murs et petreaus et créneauxet maisons”ⁱ

The name St. Hilarion derives from the saint to whom a hermit dedicated a monastery in the VIII-IX century close to a spring, even though the Byzantine church visible there today dates to the late XI cent. and thus cannot be identified directly with that first monastery. It is possible that after 965 AD, following the reconquer of Cyprus, the Byzantine Empire established there a military stronghold. We have notice of a

military settlement in that area in 1092 AD when Rhapsomates, a rebel king of Cyprus, built a fortification to defend himself from Ducas sent to Cyprus by the emperor of Byzantium Alexios I Komnenos to retake control of the island. (Dawes, IX, 217-218). According to Dreghorn (1985), the Byzantines did not conceive the castle to protect Nicosia from the northern coast, as Buffavento and Kantara, but to guard the coast itself. The complex consists of two separate walled enclosures, the lower enceinte and the upper enceinte. Petre (2012) distinguishes a lower ward or burg, an upper ward and a middle ward where the church is. As to the dating of the walls reported by Enlart, the castle is Byzantine in its walled enclosures



Fig. 1- The castle of St. Hilarion, drone view of the upper *enceinte*.

and towers, the church dates to the late XI, while the other parts were built in different phases during the XIII and XIV century. There has been a debate about the pitched roofs covering some of these buildings as an element for the dating to the XIV century even though there is no other similar pitched roof for comparison in the military architecture of Cyprus (Petre, 2012). We might say, following Enlart, that those constructions were not military but residential, the houses of the Royal family in the summer, so they should be compared with civil architectures. Analysing the morphology of the complex we can recognise its singular position in control of the mountain pass, dividing the two sides of the *Pentadaktylos* ridge and connecting the harbours of Kyrenia and Lapithos on the north, with the *Mesauria* valley where Nicosia and Famagusta are. The importance of this position on one hand takes into account its altitude, a place from where it was possible to see in advance ships arriving from Anatolia, on the other it acts as a control point along a route. To better say, the castle is in visual control of the several mountain passes across the *Pentadaktylos* ridge, the one where today runs the highway connecting Nicosia to Kyrenia, and the other two connecting Karmi with Agridhi. Furthermore, the upper enceinte was localised in

the position of a double rocky formation, in fact another local pass, connecting the two routes, one coming across *Koya Taya*, and the other one following *Arab Tashi*. It is reasonable that the place name *δίδυμος*, double or twins, originally referred to this site where two mountains enclose a natural stronghold and a pass. Following Petre (2012) who recognised the two enceintes as both dating to Byzantine times, we should state that the settlement takes the shape of a *castrum* and a *capitulum*, the stronghold in the higher part as a separate and independent precinct. These were the recommendations for the fortifications of cities since Roman times, providing a separate enclosure in the highest place (*capitulum*) where to hide in case the city was attacked. Within this first settlement, a walled enclosure of such dimensions could surround a small town, so it is reasonable to hypothesize not only the presence therein of soldiers but also civilians. Nicosia, as capital and bishopal seat, did not have a complete walled enclosure until the end of the XIV century, so the castle served as a refuge in case of attack. The historical phase of the establishment of the castle corresponds with what historians call “incastellamento” in other areas of the Mediterranean, in the X century when great numbers moved to hilltop fortified strongholds to defend from Arab raids.

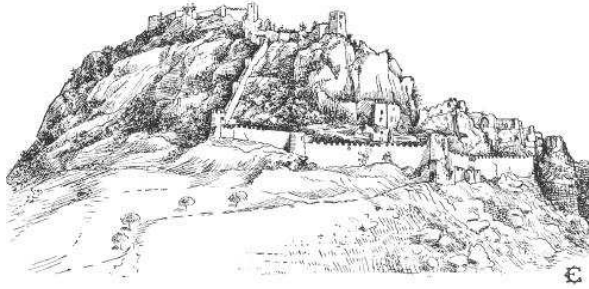


Fig. 2- View of St. Hilarion Castle from the south (Enlart, 1987, 431).

Very often even in Italy we can identify a clear duality between a valley-bottom urban Roman or late antique settlement, and a hilltop *encastled* medieval burg. St. Hilarion should be therefore interpreted as the *encastled* urban settlement of both Nicosia and Kyrenia. We know that in 1191 the duke Chir Isac moved his soldiers together with the civilians to a mountains village named Chilani to defend them from Richard Lion Heart who was attempting to take the island away from the Byzantine dominion (Amadi, I, 80). This migration from Nicosia to St. Hilarion happened also during the Longobard war, when the nobles of Nicosia moved there for security. Following the same process identified in fortified settlements in Latium (Strappa, Carlotti, Camiz 2016) in Cyprus, at the end of the XII century, the establishment of a lordship appears through the transformation of the military buildings into the private residences of the local lords. A similar example is *Palazzo della signoria* in Florence, started as a castle and later transformed into a Palace.

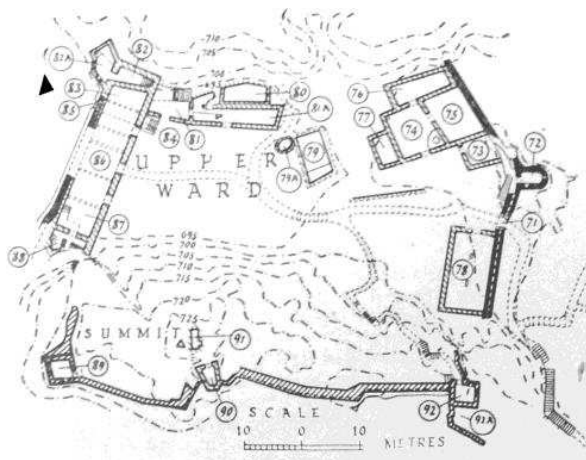


Fig. 4- Department of Antiquities Plan, detail showing the postern n. 83 (Megaw, 1963).

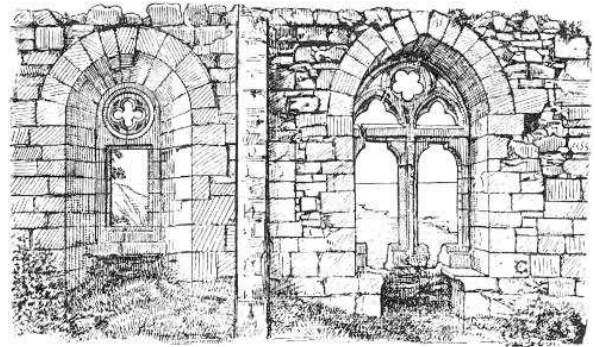


Fig. 3- Windows on the west side of the Great Hall, (Enlart, 1987, 436).

In St. Hilarion, using the morpho-typological analysis, we identified four distinct phases. The burg appears as the first settlement, being the pole of a route reaching the site from the northern coast, in the position where the church is. A postern (Figure 4, n. 83) testifies that path reaching the area from Karmi's surroundings. The church, pole of that route, represents the beginning of the *knotment* of a complex (the burg) in the form of a western Christian monastery, with the cloister on the side of the church. The cloister has a triangular shape for the morphology of the site and the *knotment* process is not complete in absence of a portico. At that time, the burg was not fortified even though it used the natural defences given by the rocky formations on which it was built. The second phase comprises the establishment of a fortified stronghold in hill top position, closing the route from Karmi and cutting off the passage from the sea. Finally, the lower enceinte was built to protect the routes arriving there from Nicosia.

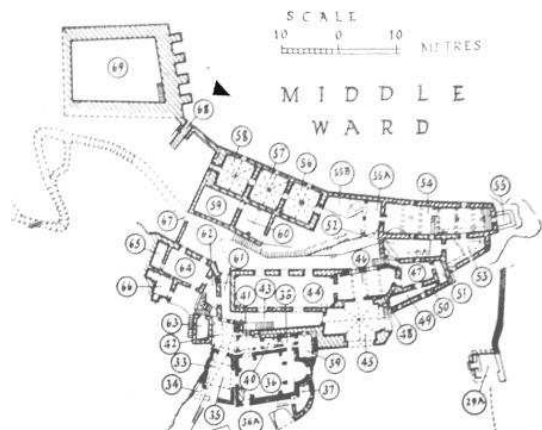


Fig. 5- Department of Antiquities Plan, detail showing the postern n. 68 (Megaw, 1963).

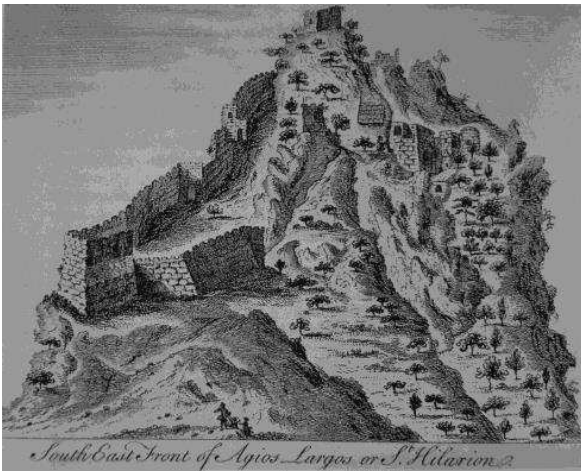


Fig. 6- Alexander Drummond, *South East front of Agios Largos or St. Hilarion*, 1754.

The lower enceinte took the form of an urban addition to the complex, it shows no relation with the natural cliffs as the other two precedent phases, but is conformed to enclose a larger urban settlement in hillside position. It is reasonable to imagine wooden constructions in that part, as only few stone buildings survive today, but we should consider the lower ward as an urban settlement protected by walls rather than a castle. Corner towers of the lower enceinte are open in the inside, showing that they were not to be defended in case of invasion like those of a castle, confirming this interpretation. Finally the fourth phase in which this fortified enclosure was transformed into a palace with the construction in different times of residential spaces. According to most authors, the huge cistern with ramparts was built in this last phase, during the XIV century (Fig. 5, n. 69). Its dimensions are 57 x 42 feet in plan and 30 feet in height. In meters 17,4 x 12.8 x 9,14 m, with a volume of 2035,7 cubic meters, equivalent to 2.035.700 litres (Mas Latrie, 1850, 510). We should not interpret a cistern of such capacity at this height as a watering device for the gardens (Petre, 2012) but rather as part of a complex hydraulic system supplying water mills. A postern positioned on the east side of the cistern (Fig. 6, n. 68) testifies a path coming out of the enceinte in that point and probably connecting the mills with the castle. We have recognised a very similar apparatus in the Colonna (now Theodoli) Castle at San Vito Romano (Strappa, Carlotti, Camiz 2016).



Fig. 7- H.H. Kitchener, *Survey of Cyprus*, Sheet 4, Morphou, 1885, detail.

The *chanson* composed by Philippe de Novare in 1232 also refers to houses and mills. “Abatu est le molin et le four; d’attendre plus ne seroit pas grans sens. Traï nous ont les baus de Deudamor, et ont menti vers nous leur sairement” (Raynaud 1887, 65, 28-31). In 1349, during the plague, King Hughes IV took refuge at St. Hilarion to avoid the infection (Newman, 1948). Starting from 1489, the Venetians dismantled or rather abandoned the castle not having enough soldiers to guard it. Without this stronghold, a place from where they could control the island, one century later the Venetians failed in defending the island from the Ottoman conquer.

2. Archaeology and restoration

Archaeological remains, as material culture, are essential for the understanding of history. St. Hilarion, as many other heritage buildings in Cyprus, is waiting for conservation and future restoration to preserve it and pass it on to the future generations. We should keep in mind that its former restorations were not easy because of the difficulties in accessing the location. In the minute papers of the Department of Antiquities, there is notice of the accommodation of custodian in 1935 (State Archive, ANTQ1, 75, 1935 May-1936 Feb, 44/35). The “gatehouse was rebuilt as a custodian’s office” in 1947 (Colonial Annual Reports Cyprus 1947, 1948, 46).



Fig. 8- Byzantine Church of St. Hilarion. (Khafizou, 2017).

In the next year, “conservation work continued” (Colonial Annual Reports Cyprus 1948, 1949, 43). A survey was accomplished in 1950 (Republic of Cyprus, State Archive, ANTQ1, 978, 1950 August, 20/38). In 1953 the Antiquities Department made some repairs within the structures of the castle (Colonial Reports Cyprus, 1953, 1954, 117). “The repair of the apse of the Byzantine chapel and the reconstruction of the east piers supporting the dome” were completed in 1958 (Cyprus 1958, 1959, 88). In 1959 works were done to reconstruct “the arches and vaults on the chancel piers” in the Byzantine Church (Cyprus 1959, 1961, 86). Beside the location of the repairs and reconstructions, in the Reports there is no detailed information on the materials used. We could not find any published sources on archaeological excavations at St. Hilarion Castle during this research. An asphalted road to St. Hilarion was finished “with a Grant under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act” December 10 1948 (Colonial Annual Reports Cyprus 1948, 1949, 43). New areas were opened to the public, and barriers and “railings at dangerous points” were installed. According to the Colonial Annual Reports in 1949 the number of visiting tourists was 7.147 in 1947. As a result of the new improvements, the number of visitors increased to 10.318 (Colonial Annual Reports Cyprus 1949, 1950, 46). In 2016, 157.078 people visited the site (The Department of Antiquities and Museum’s Activity Report 2016). Today the monument is the northern part of Cyprus, it is open to the public and it is possible to visit it in scheduled hours and days.

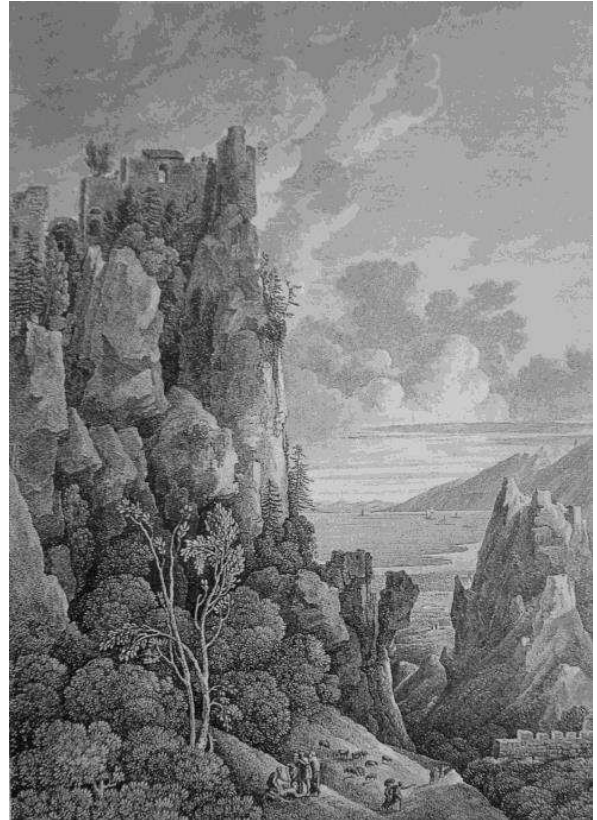


Fig. 9- Louis François Cassas, *Ruins in the landscape*, 1799.

The conditions of the buildings are acceptable, but some structures have lost their original resistance and are in danger of collapse. St. Hilarion’s preservation status, hence its mountain top position, is strongly conditioned by local weather conditions. During the summer, very hot temperatures impact on the materials and the thermal gradient between day and night causes continuous differential stress to the structures. Some decayed ashlar are weakening the inner core of the walls consisting of rubble stones, threatening the structure and the integrity of the buildings. One advantage of being at 700 meters’ height is that of not having any air pollution effect. However, the north wind is carrying marine salt resulting in a severe honeycomb deterioration on the calcarenite. Once deteriorated the ashlar lose their retaining properties transferring loads to the core of the walls causing severe collapse dangers. Biological growths of lichens, creepers, and ivy may add to the romantic ruin perception but in some cases do threaten the stability of walls, and therefore should be removed during ordinary maintenance operations.



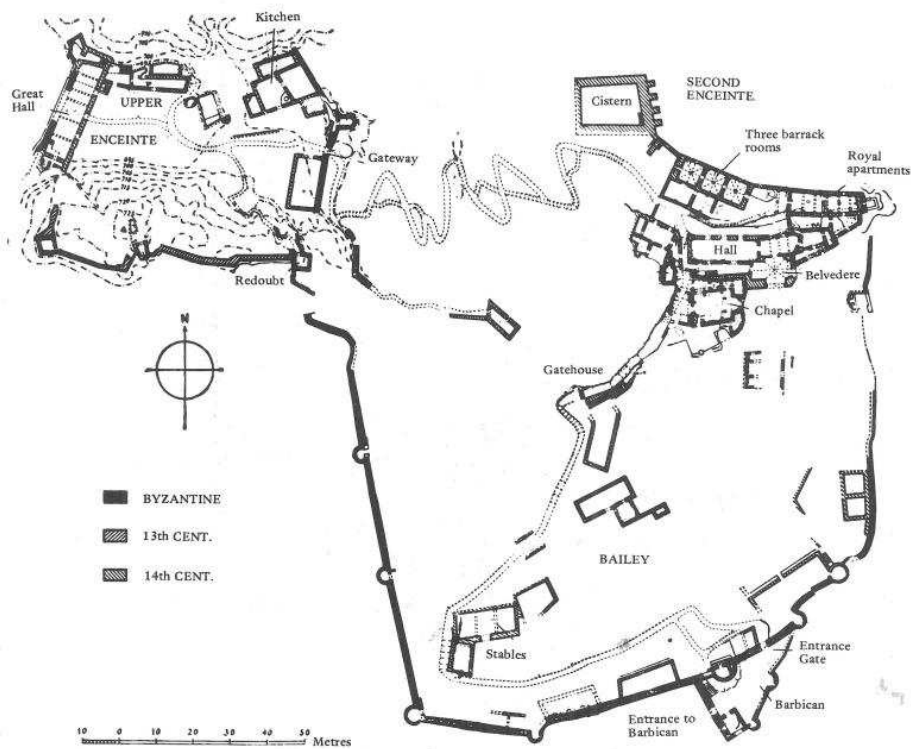
Fig. 10- Gothic windows with tracery framing the surrounding landscape.

Vandalism is another problem at this site, writing and scratching on stones is very frequent. We recommend urgent maintenance and conservation for the unique cultural, historic and touristic value of this monument. A detailed survey with modern technologies and non-invasive archaeological surface recognition is required. A complete restoration is necessary, removing the inappropriate interventions that used modern materials and replacing the missing stones. All the paths in should be secured, and a small museum on site is necessary. Finally, it is possible to experiment some reconstructions of the wooden structures.

3. Conclusions, future projects

The typical sequence that characterises most of the medieval hilltop urban settlements in the Mediterranean area is clearly recognisable in St. Hilarion. The monastic foundation, polarizing a matrix route that defines a proto urban tissue in a promontory position can be seen the middle ward, VIII-IX century. The castral foundation as

a protection of the undefended side of the promontory, which in St. Hilarion corresponds to the upper ward is datable at the end of the X century. The following urban *castrum*, or “incastellamento” phase, is here tentatively dated to 1092. All the Byzantine structures were reinforced, transformed and repaired continuously during the Lusignan rule. The construction of the big cistern and its underlying hydraulic cistern should be dated in the beginning of the XIII century. Hence, the construction of the two sides of the upper ward in the form of a palace following the rocky formations, the complex changed its function from military to noble’s residence. As a conclusion hoping in future cooperation, we are willing continue the research activities within the framework of the International Centre for Heritage Studies of Girne American University, with the help of all the Institutions in Cyprus and abroad seriously interested in the study and preservation of such *chef d’oeuvre* of medieval military architecture.



Plan VII. St. Hilarion Castle.

Fig.11- St. Hilarion castle, plan (Enlart, 1913, VII).



Fig. 12- Plan cavalier du chateau de St. Hilarion dans l'ile de Chypre (Rey 1871, XXIII).

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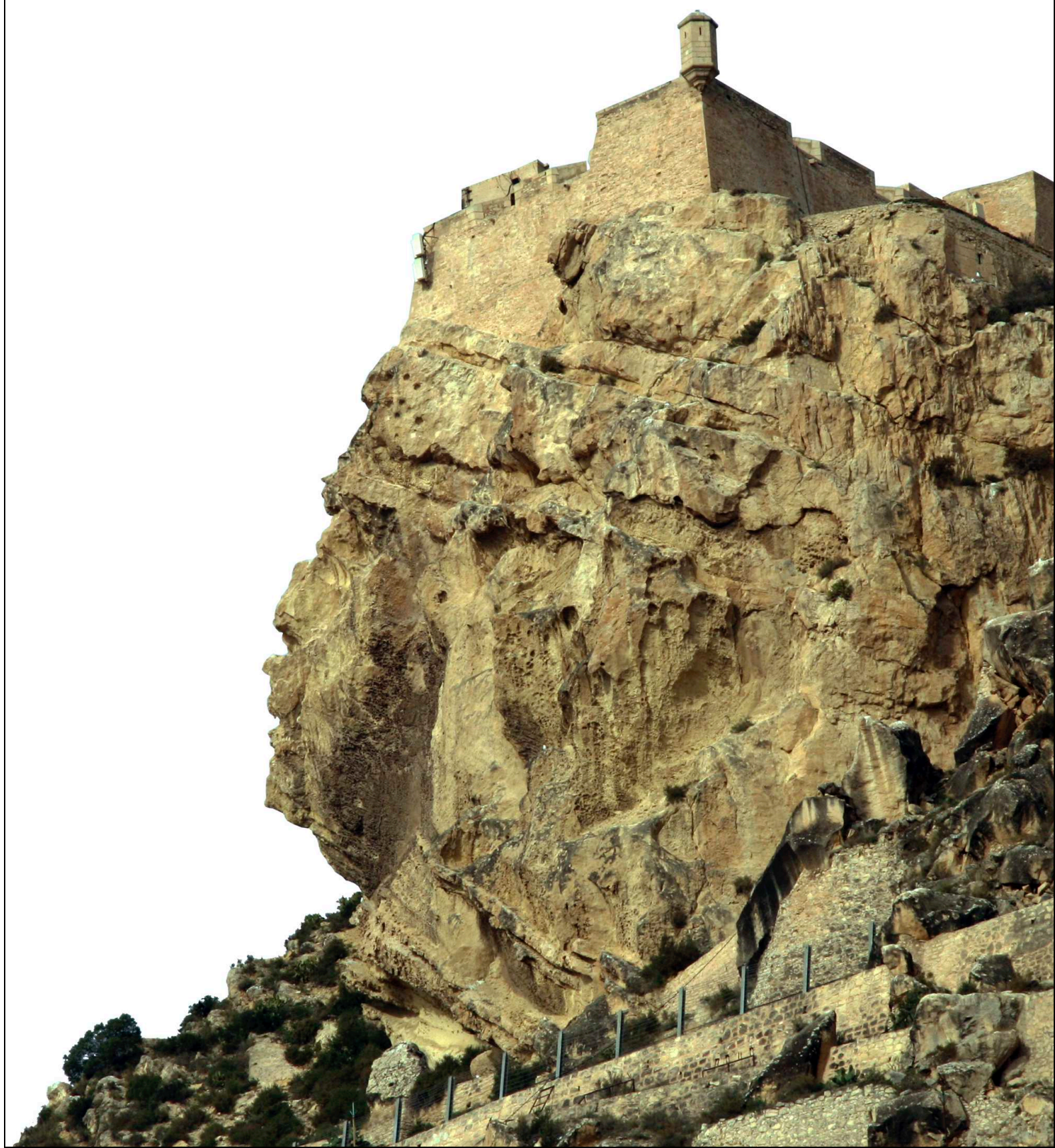
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ⁱ Philippe da Novara, *Chanson RS 1990a* (Raynaud 1887, 65).

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