



# *Medieval Towns of Montenegro*



## Medieval Towns of Montenegro

Second edition

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## PARTS OF MONTENEGRO WHERE THE MEDIEVAL TOWNS ARE SITUATED

Coastal part of Montenegro

Skadar Lake

Central part of Montenegro

North of Montenegro

Fortified town



Minor  
fortification



Monastic  
complex



TYPE OF FORTIFICATION

Preserved,  
restored



Visible  
remains



Ruins, scarce  
remains



STATE OF PRESERVATION

By dirt road



By water



By footpath



ACCESSIBILITY

MAP OF MONTENEGRO WITH  
LOCATION OF MEDIEVAL TOWNS  
AND FORTIFICATIONS



# HISTORY

## AN OUTLINE OF IMPORTANT HISTORICAL EVENTS FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO THE MIDDLE AGES IN MONTENEGRO

Back in ancient times present-day Montenegro and its surrounding area was inhabited by the **Illyrians**. Before the Roman Conquest the territory was strongly influenced by the Greeks, but «The Illyrian State» already existed at the time of the first war between the Illyrians and Romans, which occurred during the rule of the Illyrian queen Teuta from 229-228 BC. The coastal towns of *Ulcinj*, *Budva* and *Risan*, as well as *Medun*, further inland, date back to this earliest period. The Illyrian State finally fell to the Romans in 167 BC when the consul Lucius Ancius informed Illyrian leaders in Skadar about the dissolution of the Kingdom.

From 11 AD onwards, the region of Montenegro, formerly part of Illyricum, became part of the **Roman province Dalmatia**. The consequence of this was the establishment of a certain amount of Roman administration. Town life that had previously existed developed still further during this period. However, tribal organization inland was not suppressed, and the Romans retained it in their districts. Pliny mentions *Risan*, *Kotor*, *Budva* and *Ulcinj* from within this territory as *oppida civium Romanorum*. It seems that *Risan* later obtained the rank of colony. In the inland, *Doclea* (Duklja) became a 'municipium'. Most likely, another 'municipium' existed where Pljevlja stands today. With the establishment of the province of Prevalis in AD 297, a strong administrative unit was formed for the first time covering the territory approximate to present-day Montenegro. The

capital of the province was Skadar (Skodra - today in Albania). The road connecting Skadar with Naron (Vid near Metković) branched in two directions via Montenegro. One branch led from Epidaurus (Cavtat), along the coast, to Ulcinj, via Budva. Along this route, a number of outposts developed, amongst which was a particular station called Rose. This became an important settlement in the Middle Ages. The other branch led inland via *Anderva* (later Anagastum i.e. Nikšić), *Alata* and *Birziminium*. One of the latter two later became Ribnica.

Between the 3rd-6th centuries, some important social changes took place. Following the division of the Roman Empire in AD 395, a border between the provinces of Prevalis and neighbouring Dalmatia also became part of the border between the Eastern and Western Roman Empires. This division was reflected

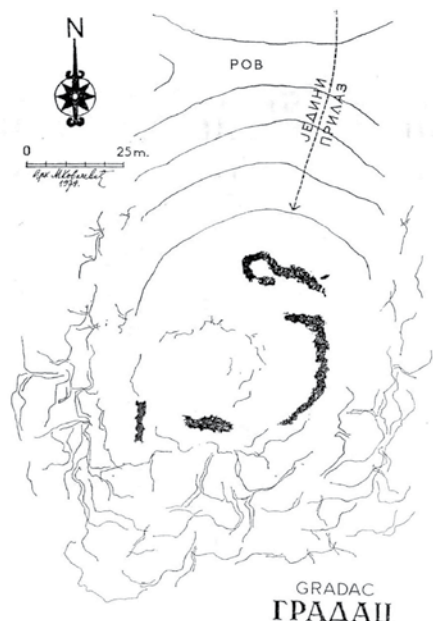


*Illyrian 'cipus'  
(cone-shaped tombstone),  
Boka Kotorska*



*Roman mosaics, Risan*





Map of Gradac (M. Kovačević 1975)

in the organization of the Church as well as in almost all fields of political, economic and cultural life.

In the late 5th and early 6th centuries there was a mass migration of people which resulted in the **Eastern Goths** holding a part of Prevalis, among other areas in the Western Balkans. Their fortification in *Nikšić* (*Anagastum*) has survived from this period.

The last mention of the Roman Doclea (Duklja) dates back to AD 602. Soon afterwards, Doclea was destroyed, like many other towns. The name Doclea itself remained as the name of the whole area in later centuries. From AD 610-641, during the reign of Emperor Heraclius, the **Slavs** permanently settled the territory of Montenegro. This was after the first wave of invasions by the Avars, which saw the destruction of several Roman towns. The Roman inhabitants took refuge in the

remaining towns and went on to build new ones. *Bar*, *Svač* and *Martinići* were probably built in this period. **Byzantine rule** over both the preserved and newly built towns on the coast is thought to have been formalized only in the 7th and 8th centuries. In the 9th century, 'archonties', i.e. autonomous regions headed by 'archons' (Greek 'ruler') were formed. In order to strengthen imperial power, new administrative-military regions called 'themes' were formed out of the 'archonties'. Bar and Ulcinj belonged to the 'theme' of Drač, while the Boka Kotorska belonged to the 'theme' of Dalmatia.

Over time, Slavic tribes became widely established in the region and began to accept influences from the Byzantium and Roman towns at the seaboard. A social differentiation took place. The tribal nobility became a ruling feudal class. This process was reinforced by the Christian Church spreading its influence among the Slavic tribes in the districts of Doclea. Christianization took place mostly in the 9th century, becoming further reinforced during the 10th century. In the mid 9th century (840-841) the Saracens laid waste Budva,



Duke Vladimir (Bar)

Rose and Lower Kotor, all situated within the territory of Montenegro. This devastation resulted in a change of relationships between the Slavs and Romans in the towns, which acquired a predominantly Slavic character. In the 11th century, the **State of Doclea** consisted of Skadar, Ulcinj, Budva, Kotor and the town of Doclea. The Byzantine emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus mentions another three inhabited towns in Doklea - *Gradac*, *Novigrad* and *Lug*. The locations of these towns have not been ascertained yet.

At the end of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century, the State of Doclea was ruled by **Duke Vladimir** who had his capital in *Krajina*, near the present-day village of Ostros, i.e. the *Church of Our Lady of Krajina*. Except for the remains of the church complex, nothing else has survived of this capital. In 1042, at the battle of Bar, Duke Vojislav and his sons defeated the Byzantine army, and finally won independence for the State of Doclea. From this period onwards, the region came to be known under the name of **Zeta**. Until 1082, Zeta was ruled by Mihailo, who took the title of king and was succeeded by a son Bodin, who was married to a Norman princess, Jacinta. Doclea, i.e. Zeta, comprised Raška, Bosna, Trebinje and Hum. During Bodin's rule, in 1089, the bishopric of Bar was raised to the rank of archbishopric. Following Bodin's death in 1108, Zeta suffered from dynastic struggles over the throne, which left the state weakened. At the same time, the Serbian medieval state

Raška grew in strength and in the 1180s Stefan Nemanja conquered Zeta, together with the coastal towns, annexing them to Raška.

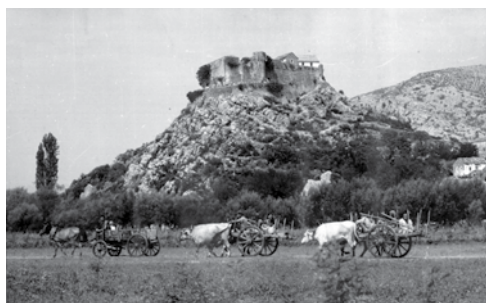
Most likely, the majority of towns, i.e. minor fortifications in the inland territory of Montenegro, had already been built by this period, if not as solidly built architecture, then at least, as wooden architecture. These towns were *Žabljak*, (*Lug*), *Spuž*, *Morača*, *Soko in Piva*, (*Međurječje*) *Bihor*, *Gradac* and *Plav*. Most of these were the centres of the Slavic districts. We can conclude that they were constructed in the early Middle Ages because very little or no trace at all of them has survived in the area. Probably by this time, Ratac had already been established on the coast, and was gaining in importance.

Stefan Nemanja gave Zeta and Trebinje to his son Vukan, who was then succeeded by his son Đorđe. Throughout the **Nemanjić period**, Zeta was ruled by dynasty members or heirs to the throne. During this period, Zeta always had a privileged position in relation to other parts of the state, because it was the most developed area, relatively speaking. The coastal towns, being the centres of trade and artisan activity, were self-governed and exerted a strong cultural influence on the inland regions.

Mining centres inland developed during the Nemanjić period, as well. *Brskovo* and possibly *Koznik* were probably founded during this time.



*Coat-of-arms of the Balšić family*



*Žabljak - the seat of the Crnojevićs*



Following Emperor Dušan's death, the great feudal state of the Nemanjić dynasty crumbled. At the same time, the nobility in certain regions became more influential. From 1361 onwards, the **Balšić brothers**, who held Bar and Budva, were mentioned in Zeta. They expanded their territory, so that in 1373 they were holding lands from Dubrovnik to Prizren. At that point, a feudal lord of Upper Zeta, Radič Crnojević, rebelled. At the same time the Turks were advancing towards Zeta through Albania. Having sought assistance from Venice that never arrived, Balša II, the ruler of Zeta, opposed the Turks on his own and was killed in 1385. He was succeeded by a nephew Đurađ III Balšić, who lost some southern lands with Skadar, Drivast and St. Srđ, but managed to regain some of the lands of the rebellious and independent Crnojevićs in Upper Zeta, following the death of Radič Crnojević. The son of Đurađ, Balša III tried to recover the parts of Zeta previously taken by the Venetians, but since he had the Crnojevićs against him, he was forced to give up. After contracting an illness, he repaired to Serbia, to his uncle, Despot Stefan Lazarević, where he died in 1421. He left all his lands to Despot Stefan.

*The monasteries on the islands of Skadar Lake were built as minor, fortified entities during the Balšićs rule.*

Following the dissolution of Emperor Dušan's empire, the present-day North and North-western areas of Montenegro belonged, first, to Bosnian **King Tvrtko I**, and then to Sandalj Hranić Kosača. (Grand Duke of Hum). During the time of King Tvrtko, the town of *Novi* (later *Herceg Novi*) was built in Dračevica district in 1382. We cannot conclude with any certainty whether or not the town was newly built. It is possible that it was built on the remains of an older fortification which was thus reconstructed after many centuries.



*Coat-of-arms of the Crnojević family*

Despot Stefan and Despot Đurađ waged wars against Venice over the lands in Zeta, but following the fall of 'Despotovina' (the Serbian Despotate) in 1439, a way was opened for Venice to conquer the whole coastal part of Zeta. The **Crnojevićs** were submitted to the supreme rule of Venice.

The revival of 'Despotovina' in 1444 meant the revival of conflicts between Despot Đurađ and Venice. For a time, the Crnojevićs sided with the Despot, but when a peasant's revolt against Venice broke out in Grbalj, they joined Venice and crushed the rebellion. The struggles between the Despot and the Crnojevićs were brought to an end by the Turks who, after conquering Medun, brought under their control the remaining lands belonging to the Despot in Zeta. The **Venetians** held the coast and controlled the territory of Stefan Crnojević in Upper Zeta. The North and North-western areas of Montenegro were held by Herceg Stjepan Vukčić Kosača (Grand Duke of Bosnia) at that time, but not for long. The Turks posed a constant threat to the Crnojevićs, and Ivan, the son of Stefan Crnojević, after failing to receive any assistance from the Venetians, turned against them and attacked their land. Through the mediation

of Herceg Stjepan and because the Turks posed an immediate threat, he made peace with the Venetians. Meanwhile, in 1479, the Turks took Skadar and Žabljak, the latter of which was the capital of Ivan Crnojević. Since the Venetians had made peace with the Turks, Ivan was forced to leave the country and seek refuge in Italy. At that time, the **Turks** put Zeta under their control. In 1481, following the death of Mahmud II, the circumstances were convenient for Ivan to continue his struggles against the Turks and set his lands free. However, in the end, he was forced to recognize Turkish supremacy and to surrender Žabljak with its plains and to retreat to Cetinje. Ivan's sons Đurađ and Stevan ruled as Turkish vassals. Đurađ was forced to escape to Venice because Stevan had revealed to the Turks his intention to take part in an uprising against them. Stevan continued to rule on his own, but in 1499 the Turks sent him to Skadar and annexed Montenegro to the Skadar sanjak.

The towns of *Soko near Štitari, Kom, Đurđevac, Obod* and *Cetinje* all existed during the Crnojevićs' rule, although it is possible that some of them had been built even earlier, during the Balšićs' rule, prior to the rebellion of Radič Crnojević.

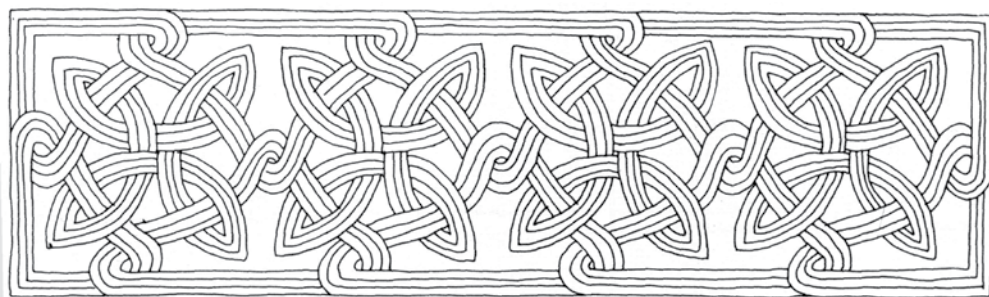
The towns of *Budoš, Ostrog, Norin* and *Susjed*, at the border of Herceg Stjepan's



*Old Bar*

lands with Zeta, were all built in the first half of the 15th century at the latest, probably even before the Herceg's time.

After 1499 the Turks held the majority of towns in Montenegro. Throughout several centuries, they reconstructed and rebuilt the ones they inhabited. Some of them had already fallen to ruin by the 16th century. In the coastal towns held by the Venetians, extensive construction of defensive architecture, designed to accommodate the use of increasingly efficient cannons, was undertaken throughout this period.



*Stonework decoration, Martinići (drawing: V. Korać, Martinići, 2001)*

# MEDIEVAL TOWNS OF MONTENEGRO



KOTOR



HERCEG NOVI



RISAN



ŽANJICA-OUR LITTLE LADY



PERAST



ĐURĐEVAC



BUDVA



NEHAJ



RATAC



OLD BAR



OLD ULCINJ



CETINJE



KOM



STARČEVA GORICA



MORAČNIK



TOPHALA



KRAJINA



SVAČ



ŽABLJAK



OBLUN





RIBNICA



SOKO NEAR ŠTITARI



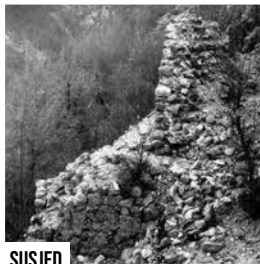
MEDUN



SPUŽ



MARTINIĆI



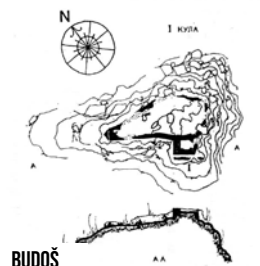
SUSJED



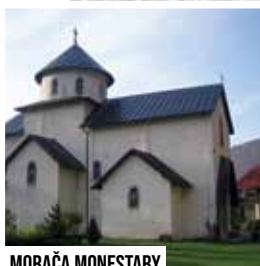
NORIN



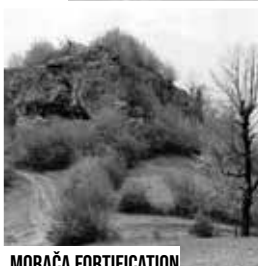
ONOGOŠT



BUDOŠ



MORAČA MONESTARY



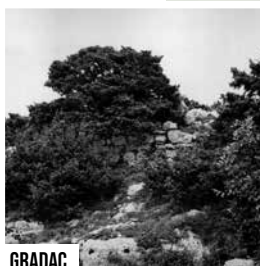
MORAČA FORTIFICATION



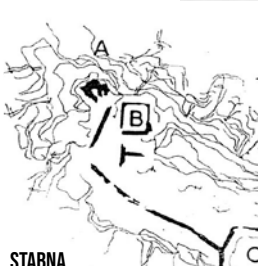
BIHOR



BRSKOVO



GRADAC



STABNA



SOKO IN PIVA



KUKANJ



KOZNIK

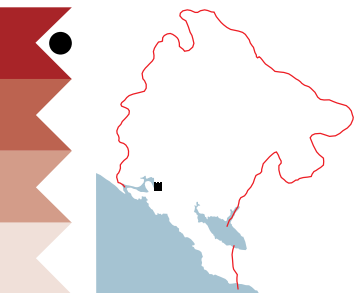


PIRLITOR



ULCINJ

# KOTOR



Kotor is one of the best preserved medieval towns both in its urban structure and its continuity of life. Measured by the area encompassed within its walls, it is the biggest medieval town in Montenegro.

Science has not yet answered the question whether present-day Kotor lies at the site of ancient *Acruvium*. The Ravenna Geographer makes reference to present-day Kotor as *Dekadaron* or *Dekadoron* in the 9th century,



*Old Town of Kotor with its ramparts, view from the sea*





*Fortress of St. Ivan - San Giovanni, view from the village of Špiljari*

when it belonged to Byzantium. Byzantine rule, real or in name, existed in this area with interruptions, until the late 12th century. In AD 841, the Saracens ravaged Lower Kotor. The Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus describes this event in the 10th century and refers to the town as *Dekatera*. At the end of the 10th century, Emperor Samuilo burned down the town.

Kotor became part of the Slavic Doclea in the second half of the 11th century, and, according to the Byzantine historian Ioannes Skylitzes, Doclean King Mihailo held his court there. In the 1160s, as far as foreign politics was concerned, Kotor assumed the position of an independent town. In 1186, it entered into the constitution of the Slavic Raška under the Nemanjić dynasty and for almost two centuries of their rule, it enjoyed favour and held a special, privileged position within the state. From 1371 to 1384 the town belonged to the Hungarian-Croatian King Ludovic I and from 1384 to 1391 to the Bosnian King Tvrtko I. For a brief period, from 1391 to 1420, Kotor was an independent city-republic, but in 1420, it placed itself under Venetian rule, which was to last for almost four centuries. The town experienced

the greatest prosperity between the 12th and the early 15th centuries.

The position of Kotor in the furthest recess of Kotor Bay (Boka Kotorska) is perfect for a harbour sheltered from the strongest of winds. Indeed, this must have been one of the main reasons for establishing the first settlement. In the case of Kotor it is easy to see how all available natural advantages were used to the maximum in positioning the town and planning its defense: its position by the sea, two water courses in the lower part of the town (the Škurda River to the south and Gurdić



*Gothic three light window at the Drago Palace*



*Portal on the south façade, Cathedral of St. Tryphon*

spring to the north), while the upper part, with its fortification at the top of an inaccessible cliff, named after St. Ivan and 260 metres high, is separated from Mount Lovćen by a deep gorge.

According to the Kotor Statute, dating from the early 14th century, the town already occupied its current site, even at that time. Meanwhile its fortification system was being gradually constructed throughout the period from the 9th to the 19th centuries. The oldest preserved parts of the medieval ramparts can only be seen in two localities in the southern part of the town, near the sea and near the

north town gate. The remaining parts of the ramparts located by the sea, and those in the hillside, are exactly as they would have looked during the Venetian period.

Kotor has largely preserved its urban layout from the Middle Ages. The network of streets is irregular and somewhat indented. Within the town walls, very little medieval architecture from the period before Venetian rule has been preserved. The oldest Book of Notaries of Kotor, covering the period from 1326 to 1337, documented 17 churches and monasteries in the town. Six of them have survived until today: the Cathedral of St. Tryphon (1166), the Church of St. Luke (1195), St. Mary on-the-river or St. Mary's Collegiate Church (1221), St. Paul's (1263), St. Anne's (the end of the 12th and beginning of the 13th century) and St. Michael's (14th century) Churches. Of secular architecture, only parts of older buildings have been preserved, inserted into new structures mainly in the street leading from the north gate of the town to the south gate, along the very foot of the hill. There are also the remains of Buća and Drago Palaces dating from the medieval period.



*Kotor with its ramparts, view from the north, late 19th or early 20th century*



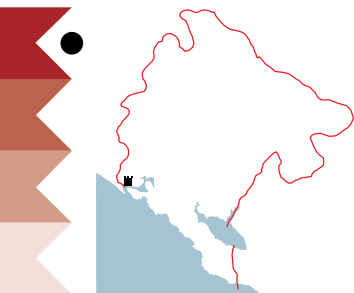
*Urban layout of Kotor from the Middle Ages*



*Map of Kotor, cadastral plan*



# HERCEG NOVI



In 1382, the Bosnian king Tvrtko I laid foundations to a new town in the territory of Dračevica district. He named it St. Stefan but soon afterwards the town was renamed Novi. It has kept that part of the name to date, later, acquiring the addition of 'Herceg' Novi, after Herceg (Duke) Stjepan Vukčić Kosača.

Following Tvrtko's death in 1391, Sandalj Hranić ruled Novi until 1435. Herceg Stjepan

held it until 1466. His son Vlatko had to defend it from the Turks in 1475. At the end of 1481, the Turks seized the town and occupied it for the following two hundred years, with one exception - it was temporarily taken by the Spaniards in 1538, only to be regained a year later.

At its inception, the town consisted of two parts «a fortress on the water and a fortress on the hill».



*Panorama of Herceg Novi with Forte Mare Fortress*

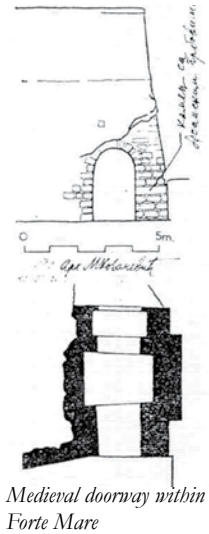


Engraving of Castelnuovo (Herceg Novi), Vincenzo Coronelli, 1688



Map of Herceg Novi (M. Kovačević 1975)

Today, only a few remains of the medieval walls are visible, in the seaward part of the fortification. The walls and towers looking out to the sea from Forte Mare (Sea Fortress) to Mezaluna tower, belong to the earliest period of construction in this area. According to written sources, work on the construction of Herceg Novi began in 1382. However, analysis of the construction technique applied to the lower segments of the Mezaluna tower, to the part of the wall with two towers and analysis of the overall style correlate to the remains by the sea, thus leading to the conclusion that they were built in a period well before 1382.



From this location, a transport service to Rose might have been running in Roman (or later) times, so that it is possible that King Tvrtko used the ruined and neglected remains of such a staging post on which to build his town. Neither can we exclude the possibility that these may be the remains of *Traiectus*.

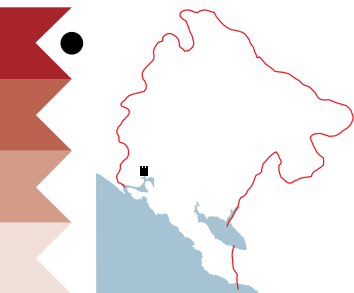
Other walls, towers and gates are mainly from the Turkish and Venetian times. The Kanli Tower (Bloody Tower) is from the Turkish era, as are the west and east gates. Forte Mare originates from the later Venetian period.



King Tvrtko I



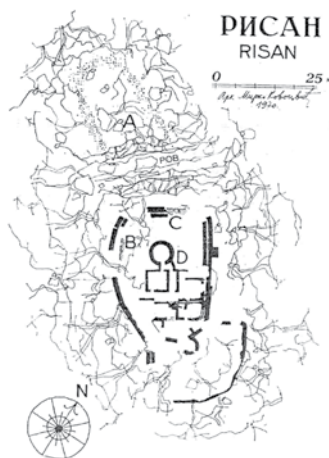
# RISAN



The earliest mention of Risan (*Rizon*) dates back to the 4th century BC. During the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC Risan (*Rhizon*) was the main fortress in the Illyrian state in which Queen Teuta took refuge. In Roman times, Risan is documented under the name Rhizinium as an «*oppidum civium Romanorum*». The invasions of the Avars and Slavs left Risan deserted. The last reference of a bishop in Risan dates back to AD 595. The Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus includes Risan among the inhabited towns of Travunia, while the Priest of Doclea considers *Rissena* to be a district.

In the Middle Ages Risan lost the significance it used to have in ancient times, when the whole Bay of Boka Kotorska had been called *Sinnus Rhisonicus* (the Bay of Risan) and two Roman routes had led through it. In the mid 15th century, Risan was referred to as the town of Herceg (Duke) Stjepan Vukčić Kosača. In 1466, the Venetians offered to give Brač Island and a palace in Split to Herceg Stjepan, in exchange for his two towns (Risan and Novi) in the Bay of Boka Kotorska. The Turks took Risan, together with Herceg Novi, from Herceg Stjepan's son Vlatko in 1482.

In present-day Risan there are no elements to suggest a connection to the medieval town. Risan by the sea was probably just a settlement. However, on the Gradina hill, above the famous archeological site of Carine, there is a fortification containing the remains of an Illyrian-Greek acropolis and the remains from medieval and Turkish period. The position of the fortification was excellent, particularly for the control of the Risan–Onogošt route, as the hilltop itself was inaccessible.



Map of Risan (M. Kovačević 1975)