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THESPROTIA EXPEDITION I
TOWARDS A REGIONAL HISTORY

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Cover: The Early Hellenistic fortress Agios Donatos of Zervochori seen from the south. Photo: Esko Tikkala.

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Contents

Thesprotia in the Context of Roman and Late Antique Epirus

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Roman Epirus

Archaeological research into Roman Epirus began with the wide ranging topographic surveys of travellers such as Hammond and the much more detailed surveys carried out by Sotiris Dakaris in Greece and Dhimosten Budina in Albania (all of which tend to focus their attentions on earlier periods).[1] This information has recently been enhanced by the multi-period intensive field surveys carried out in the hinterland of Nikopolis by Boston University in collaboration with the local Greek Ephorates, as well as that carried out in the hinterland of Butrint and the new Thesprotia project which is the subject of this volume.[2] Further detailed information has been provided by the rescue and research excavations carried out by the Ephoreias themselves, by the Albanian Institute of Archaeology, and by foreign missions particularly the University of Bologna's Phoinike project, the University of Ioannina/German Archaeological Institute's work at Kassope and the Anglo-Albanian project at Butrint.

These different sources provide intriguing and sometimes contradictory views of Epirus and Thesprotia in the Roman and late antique periods. Traditionally there has been a tendency to interpret excavation results within the context of a historical narrative determined by limited and problematic textual sources. This is particularly notable in the case of two key events in the history of Roman intervention within the region, namely Aemilius Paullus's destruction of the region's towns in 167 BC and the Nikopolitan synoecism shortly after 31 BC. Both of these episodes have become canonical in explanations of archaeologically detectable change in the late Hellenistic-early Roman period in Epirus.[3] While it is clear that there were very significant changes in types and patterns of settlement between the Hellenistic and Roman periods (notably the apparent desertion of many of the fortified hill-top settlements that characterised Hellenistic Epirus), it does not necessarily follow that these changes are directly associated with these two events. Although these events may well have been significant, we should at least admit the possibility that other forces may have been involved.

Aemilius Paullus's activities in the aftermath of the third Macedonian war reportedly involved the sacking of 70 *oppida* and the taking of 150,000 people as slaves.[4] According to Strabo, in his day Epirus, which had previously been "well populated, though mountainous", had become "a wilderness, with here and there a decaying village".[5] While rural decline and depopulation is a constantly recurring *topos* for Roman writers, it is

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[1] Hammond 1967, Dakaris 1971; Dakaris 1972; Budina 1971; Budina 1975; Other recent work is usefully summarised in Karatzeni 2001 and Lambrou 2006. All illustrations, unless otherwise stated, are by the author.

[2] The Roman phases of the Nikopolis survey are summarised in Wiseman 2001 and Stein 2001. For the Butrint survey see Pluciennik 2004.

[3] Dakaris 1971, 67.

[4] Polyb. 30.16; Liv. 14.34; Plut. *Aem*. 29.

[5] Strabo 7.327.

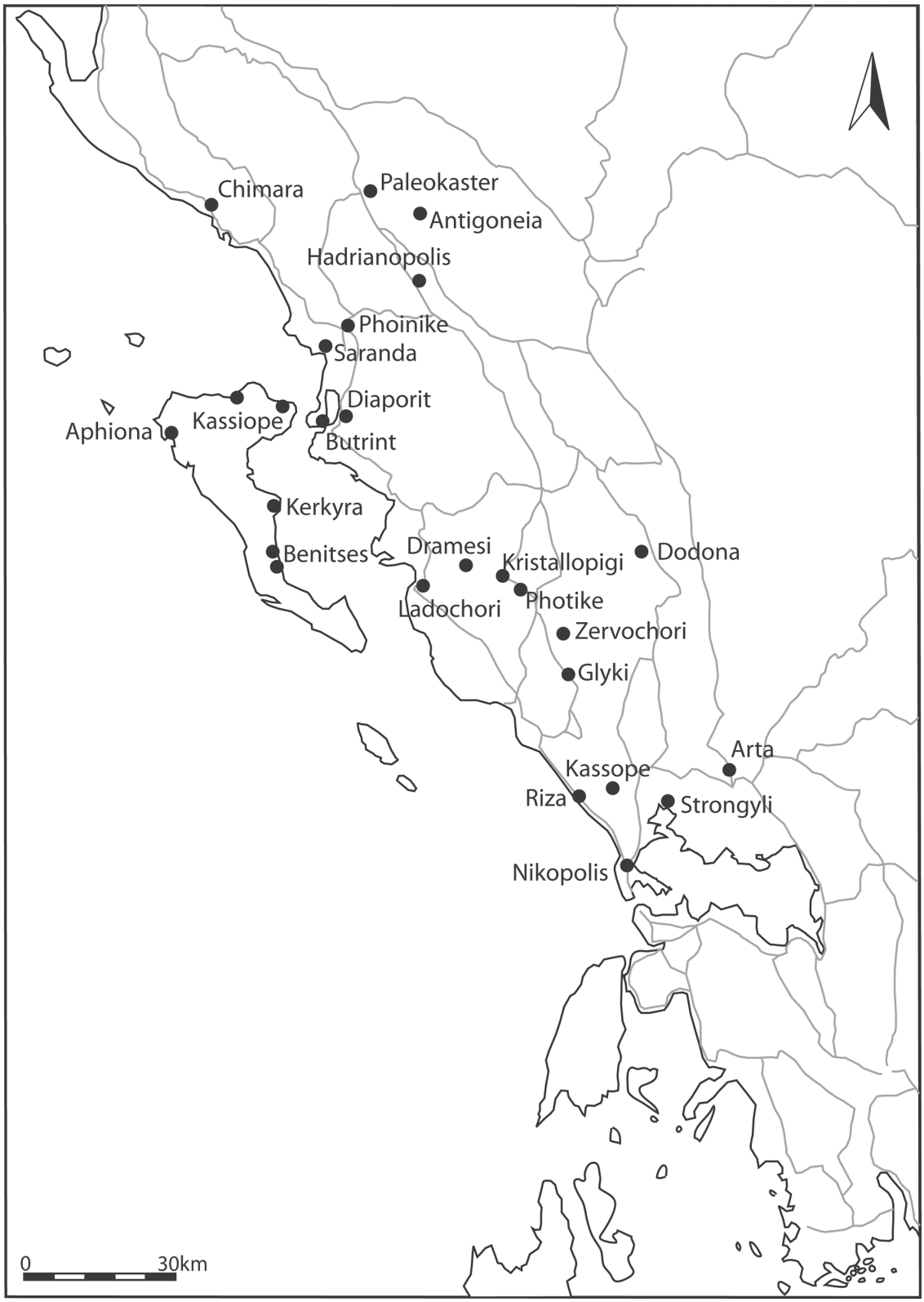

Fig. 1. Map of Epirus, showing sites mentioned in the text.

clear that land-holding patterns and the distribution of wealth changed quite significantly between the third and first centuries BC. This is apparent, for example, from the evidence of the manumission inscriptions from the theatre at Butrint, which show a marked increase

in the number of individual manumitters in the later part of this period, in contrast to the earlier inscriptions in which individual slaves were freed by all the members of one or more families acting collectively.[6]

The rise in individual manumitters suggests that wealth became more concentrated in the hands of individuals than previously. It is likely that this change from collective to individual ownership may have extended to land-holding, and this may have been a factor in the process which saw the senatorial aristocracy of Rome establish major land holdings and estates within Epirus, the first area outside the Italian peninsula where this occurred to a significant level. These were the "Epirote men" noted by Cicero and Varro, of which the most famous was Titus Pomponius Atticus, Cicero's correspondent and archivist, who owned an estate in the territory of Butrint.[7]

Under the Julio-Claudians further major changes occur in Roman Epirus (Fig. 1). Colonies were established by Caesar at Butrint, a colony that was later refounded by Augustus, and possibly Photike near Paramythia (discussed in greater detail below) for which Rizakis has proposed a Caesarian foundation date.[8] The most famous Julio-Claudian foundation is of course, Nikopolis, the victory city founded in the aftermath of Augustus's victory at Actium, which seems to have had dual status as a colony and as a *civitas libera*.[9] These colonial foundations may have had a fundamental effect on the urban and rural landscapes of Epirus, although as with other historically or epigraphically attested events we should be cautious about making direct associations with archaeological detectable phenomena.

At Butrint, the epigraphic and sculptural record indicates that the sanctuary of Asklepios was reshaped into the political heart of the city, focused around members of the Julio-Claudian dynasty who became patrons of the colony. It is likely, though by no means proven, that the town's aqueduct and forum date to this period. Subsequently during the latter part of the first century AD, the city expanded beyond the peninsula that it had occupied since its foundation, and an area of suburban villas covering more than 8 hectares developed to the south (Fig. 2). The development of these villas is paralleled by the villa at Diaporit on the shores of the Butrint lake, which was substantially enlarged between AD 40-80 (see below). It is worth noting that this expansion in residential development is not contemporary with the foundation of the colony (as was originally hypothesised).[10] A late first-century increase in site numbers was also noted by field survey in the hinterland of Patras, where new building had also traditionally been linked with the foundation of the colony.[11]

The changes wrought by the foundation of Nikopolis of course were profound, involving a process of synoecism in which the inhabitants, deities and sculptural decoration from numerous nearby settlements were more or less forcibly co-opted into the new settlement which also included colonists. This episode, known primarily from Strabo and Pausanias, is often cited as the cause of archaeologically detectable change

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[6] Cabanes 1997, 126.

[7] Cic. *Att.* 1.5, 2.6; Varro *Rust*. 2.1.1-2, 2.2.1.

[8] Rizakis 1990, 271-272.

[9] Purcell 1987.

[10] The extra-mural area at Butrint, identified through geophysical survey, was originally thought to be a planned suburb relating to the Augustan colony (Bowden, Hodges and Lako 2002). Extensive excavation has now refuted this hypothesis. On the colony at Butrint see the papers in Hodges and Hansen 2007.

[11] Petropoulos and Rizakis 1994, 192.

Fig. 2. Reconstruction drawing of Roman Butrint, showing suburb on south side of Vivari Channel (Studio Inklink).

within the region, for example at Kassope and Ambrakia (Arta), although excavations at the latter have shown that activity in the town continued into the fourth century AD.[12]

In Thesprotia itself we know far less. We have very little understanding of Photike, which remains unexcavated with knowledge of the town and its inhabitants restricted to epigraphic sources. At least 37 inscriptions relating to the town are known.[13] Apart from a few chance finds almost nothing is known of the topography of Photike, although most scholars agree on its approximate location in the area of Liboni slightly north-west of Paramythia. S.S. Clarke noted that "here clearly stood a Roman and Byzantine town" and Hammond also noted scatters of pottery and building remains, although little is visible now.[14] This area is also associated with the *ad Dianam* mentioned on the Peutinger Table on the basis of the discovery of an inscription dedicated to Diana together with a small statue of the goddess, perhaps suggesting the presence of a sanctuary.[15]

The colonial foundations at Nikopolis and Butrint also involved fundamental reorganisations of the landscape. This process of centuriation saw large areas of agricultural land divided into regular plots of land for the colonists. Traces of centuriation have also been detected around Arta giving some evidence as to the extent of this landscape reorganisation, while similar programmes of land organisation have been suggested in the surroundings of Hadrianopolis and Phoinike.[16] It is highly likely that the landscape around Photike would have also have undergone a programme of centuriation and it will be interesting to see if the new survey work can shed any light on this.

The extent of these colonial foundations and their effect on the surrounding landscape may be partly the reason behind the fact that the survey results from Epirus appear to be slightly different from those from elsewhere in Greece. The general

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[12] For Kassope, see Schwander 2001 and Gravani 2001. Recent work at Arta is summarised by Karatzeni 2001, 167-168.

[13] Samsaris 1994. For other evidence relating to Photike, see Triantaphillopoulos 1984.

[14] S.S. Clarke, Diary for Monday April 30th 1923 (Archives of the British School at Athens); Hammond 1967, 73-74.

[15] Hammond 1967, 693. Hammond argues against the *ad Dianam* identification.

[16] See Bowden 2007a with references.

picture from surveys in Greece suggests a densely populated classical countryside was replaced by a more sparsely populated landscape in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, before an apparent explosion in site numbers during the late Roman period.[17] However, in Epirus the early Roman landscape seems to be quite densely populated. This was indicated by the results of the Nikopolis survey, which suggested similar levels of occupation in both the early and the late Roman periods.[18] It could be suggested that the foundation of Nikopolis had a significant effect on the levels of population in the surrounding territory, and we may surmise that the colonial foundations at Butrint and Photike had the same effect. However, in the absence of detailed chronologies for these rural sites this remains to be demonstrated. At the villa of Diaporit near Butrint (discussed below), the sequence produced by excavation was radically different to that derived from the surface assemblage, suggesting that survey results in isolation should be used with considerable caution.[19]

We can at least say that the landscape of Thesprotia in the first and second centuries AD is likely to have been fundamentally different from that of the early Hellenistic period. The hinterlands of towns such as Butrint and Photike and Nikopolis probably contained a variety of different types of sites in the early Roman period. Although we know little of the small and medium sized farmsteads, we do know of a number of very substantial villas, the most extensively excavated of which is that at Diaporit noted above (Fig. 3).[20] This was a major complex, situated on the edge of a lake within sight of the town of Butrint. It was occupied from as early as the third century BC, although its most grandiose period started between AD 40-80 and continued until the start of the third century, after which it was seemingly abandoned. It was built on a system of terracing and had a good natural supply of water. It was augmented with a substantial bath-house featuring a hexagonal room. These features (terracing, water supply, major bath-house with polygonal room) are repeated at villa sites throughout the region. The well-known bath-hose at Riza is certainly attached to such a complex, as was the bath-house at Strongyli on the Ambrakian Gulf, and the bath-houses at Benitses and Acharavi on Corfu. It is like that the extensive remains at Ladochori near Igoumenitsa also belong to such a complex.[21]

All the villa sites noted above are in coastal locations, and can probably be classified as *villae maritimae* with the principal function of luxury residence rather than productive centre. Certainly, the excavations at Diaporit produced no evidence of productive activities. It would be important to investigate what types of sites existed around an inland town such as Photike. It is certainly likely that rich suburban villas existed in the region of the town, and it has been suggested that the remarkable if disparate collection of bronzes, found at Liboni near Paramythia, some of which are now in the British Museum, come from a private shrine associated with such a villa.[22]

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[17] For an overview, see Alcock 1993, 48. For more recent comment on the situation in Epirus, see Bowden and Përzhita 2004, 414-415.
[18] Wiseman 2001, 57.
[19] See below and Bowden and Përzhita 2004.
[20] Bowden, Hodges and Lako 2002; Bowden and Përzhita 2004.
[21] Bowden and Përzhita 2004, 424 with references.
[22] Swaddling 1979.

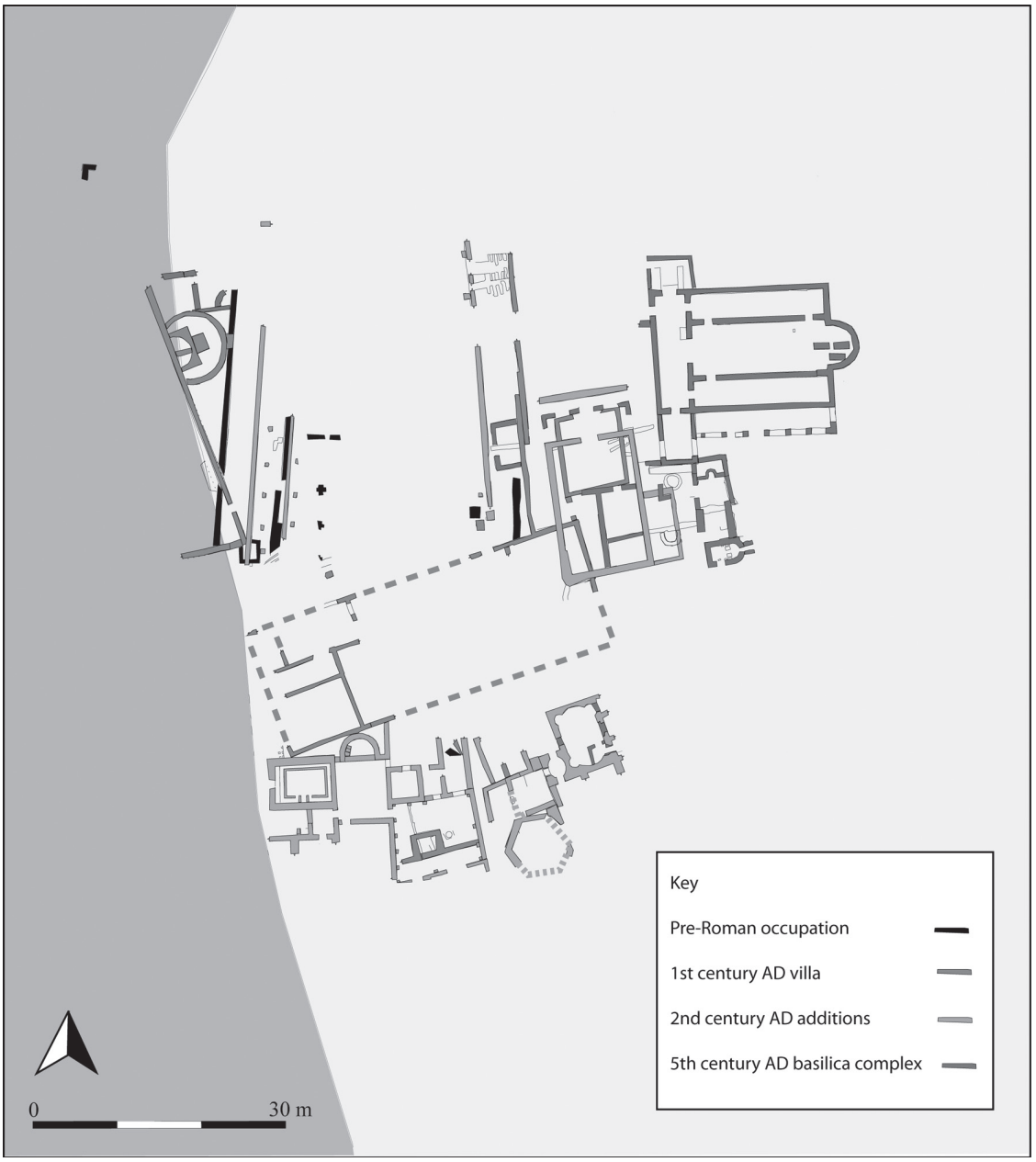

Fig. 3. The Roman villa and early Christian site at Diaporit. All structural phases are shown.

Late antique change in Epirus

Although many models of late antique transformation see change, or to use a loaded word, "decline" from the fourth century, the evidence from Butrint at least suggests that there was a major shift during the third century, which saw the abandonment of much of the new suburb of the town that had developed during the latter part of the first century AD.[23] It is also possible that public areas in the heart of the city, including the forum, lost their monumental appearance around this time.[24]

[23] Crowson and Gilkes 2007.

[24] This change, originally suggested in Bowden 2003a, 40, has now been indicated by excavations in the forum area (Hernandez pers comm.), although further work is required to clarify the sequence.

The villa at Diaporit near Butrint was also seemingly abandoned as a luxury residence at the start of the third century. The great apsidal room of the bath house was turned into a kitchen, with an oven inserted into the corner. Meanwhile a mosaic room on the upper terrace was turned into a pottery workshop with a series of associated wooden structures. These activities can all be dated to the first half of the third century after which the site was abandoned until the fifth century.[25]

We have little in the way of closely dated archaeological sequences for the third and fourth century from elsewhere in Epirus. Nonetheless, the evidence from Butrint for a third century contraction of occupation is overwhelming, and it is unlikely that this is an isolated occurrence. Extra-mural cemeteries at Phoinike and Nikopolis, show little sign of activity after the fourth century, suggesting that there were fewer people to be buried or that burial was occurring elsewhere, perhaps within the towns themselves.[26]

The major centres certainly show little evidence for public building in this period. Perhaps our most interesting source is the panegyric delivered by Claudius Mamertinus eulogising the Emperor Julian in the 360s for his works to restore the cities of Epirus, particularly Nikopolis. Mamertinus notes that:

> The city of Nicopolis, which the divine Augustus had built like a trophy as a monument to the victory of Actium, had fallen almost totally into lamentable ruins: the houses of the nobles were torn apart, marketplaces were without roofs, everything was full of dirt and dust since the aqueducts had long since been destroyed. The unseemly cessation of business during that sorrowful time had allowed the public games customarily observed at every lustrum to lapse.[27]

It is tempting to view this text as an accurate reflection of Nikopolis as at first sight it appears to be compatible with what happened in many late Roman cities, reflecting a decline in public architecture and a decline in civic life. Equally it appears to be compatible with the evidence found at Butrint. However, imperial action towards the restoration of cities was also a traditional literary *topos*, with imperial help towards the cities forming a convenient rhetorical device through which a writer could praise an emperor. Consequently we should not assume that this text reflects significant restorative action either at Nikopolis or anywhere else, or indeed that restoration was required to the extent described by Mamertinus.[28]

The major building activity in the fourth century seems to be very much in the sphere of private building. This is certainly the case at Butrint, where excavations of a large area of the city adjacent to the channel side revealed traces of a peristyle house, now known as the Triconch Palace, which became progressively larger during the fourth century (Fig. 4). In its final phase, which dates to between about 400 and 420 it was expanded onto the adjacent building plot, with a massively enlarged peristyle courtyard and the creation of a substantial three-apsed *triclinium*. This final phase however was never finished, and the whole complex was abandoned as a luxury building between about 425 and 440.[29]

This type of grandiose luxury residence is typical of the late empire, when private residences effectively replaced public buildings as the focus of elite display. Private

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[25] Bowden and Përzhita 2004.
[26] Lepore 2005, 150-151 (Phoinike); Chrysostomou 1984 (Nikopolis).
[27] *Pan. Lat.* 3.9.2. transl. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 408.
[28] See Bowden 2006; Bowden 2007b.
[29] Hodges, Bowden and Lako 2002. Final publication of the Triconch Palace excavations is now in preparation.

Fig. 4. The triconch palace at Butrint during excavations. The triconch triclinium is located on the far side of the complex.

residences began to take precedence as the environment in which the aristocracy could display status to one another and their clients. The use of apsidal spaces is taken directly from imperial architecture, with the apse forming a dramatic space from which the owner could greet his guests and clients.

There are few other examples of this sort of architecture from Epirus, although the so called nymphaeum excavated at Nikopolis by Orlandos may also form a *triclinium* or reception hall of a similar building, while the so-called Bishop's Palace at the same site may represent the same sort of social phenomenon.[30] This is a particular problem in Epirus, in that our examples of domestic architecture are so limited that it is almost impossible to make judgements regarding changing forms of residential architecture in the province except by inference drawn with comparison from other areas.

The lack of excavated domestic buildings in Epirus (and in Greece as a whole) is partly due to the fact that archaeologists working on the late Roman period within the region have tended to devote their efforts to the excavation of early Christian churches. The early Christian basilica is the ubiquitous type fossil of late antiquity in Epirus, where more than 50 early Christian churches have been noted through one means or another. The resulting typologies of building plans, mosaics and architectural sculpture are easily accommodated within the passive art-historical methodologies that characterise classical archaeology in Greece. However, the treatment of these buildings in isolation has led to a

[30] Bowden 2003a, 46-53.

number of questionable assumptions regarding early Christian churches.[31]

First, in tandem with urban fortifications like those of Nikopolis, they are seen as indications of renewed civic prosperity. In fact there is no explicit connection between church building and civic prosperity. Churches are simply a reflection of what people were spending surplus resources on during a relatively short period between the mid-fifth and mid-sixth centuries. While during the third and fourth centuries (judging at least from other areas) resources had been spent on private architecture, by the mid-fifth century this had stopped and church building rather than opulent private residences became the means through which elites competed with one another. As with the public building inscriptions of the first and second centuries, donors recorded their benefactions to churches, with inscriptions sometimes commemorating multiple donors. Examples from Epirus include the Church of the Forty Martyrs from Saranda, the small triconch church at Antigoneia and the newly discovered Vrina Plain church at Butrint, dedicated by "those whose names are known to God".[32]

As well as there being no connection between prosperity and church building, there is no direct connection between the spread of Christianity and increased church building. Churches were not being built to cater for increased congregations (although they may have encouraged them) but were instead being built as public demonstrations of elite status. Christianity had long been one of the ways in which the wealthy had demonstrated identity and status, but prior to the middle of the fifth century they had done it in the context of private residences, as with other aspects of elite identity. In Epirus, this can be seen in the splendid stone windows from the Triconch Palace in Butrint dating to around 400-420, in which *chi rho* monograms are displayed in the lunettes.[33]

Dating churches is difficult and almost all churches in Epirus have been dated through stylistic criteria, through comparison of mosaics, sculpture and building plans. There are only three exceptions to this that I am aware of. One is the church built above the remains of the villa at Diaporit (Fig. 5), dated by pottery and coins from above and below the narthex to the second half of the fifth century – probably around 490. A second is the Church of the Forty Martyrs in Saranda, dated to the second half of the fifth century by Phocaean Red Slip ware and Tunisian amphorae used to form some of the letters of a tile inscription recording the name of one of the donors.[34] The third is that recently discovered on the Vrina Plain at Butrint, where coins of Leo I (457-474) and Libius Severus (461-465) from a make-up level beneath the mosaic provided a *terminus post quem*.[35] Nonetheless even applying stylistic criteria, it is very difficult to demonstrate that any churches date to before 450 and after 550.

Thesprotia in fact has a relatively limited number of churches, but there are a number of important buildings relatively close to the Thesprotia project's survey area. The proposed early Christian church at Glyki is particularly interesting, as this is a building that demonstrates the problems of church archaeology and the need to examine church dates very carefully. The putative church at Glyki underlies a ruined later Byzantine

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[31] See Bowden 2001; Bowden 2003a, 21-33.

[32] Mitchell 2004 (Church of the Forty Martyrs); Mitchell 2006 (Antigoneia); Greenslade *et al.* 2006 (Vrina Plain).

[33] Bowden, Hodges and Lako 2002, 207.

[34] Bowden and Përzhita 2004, 425 (Diaporit); Mitchell 2004, 159-162.

[35] Greenslade *et al.* 2006, 403.

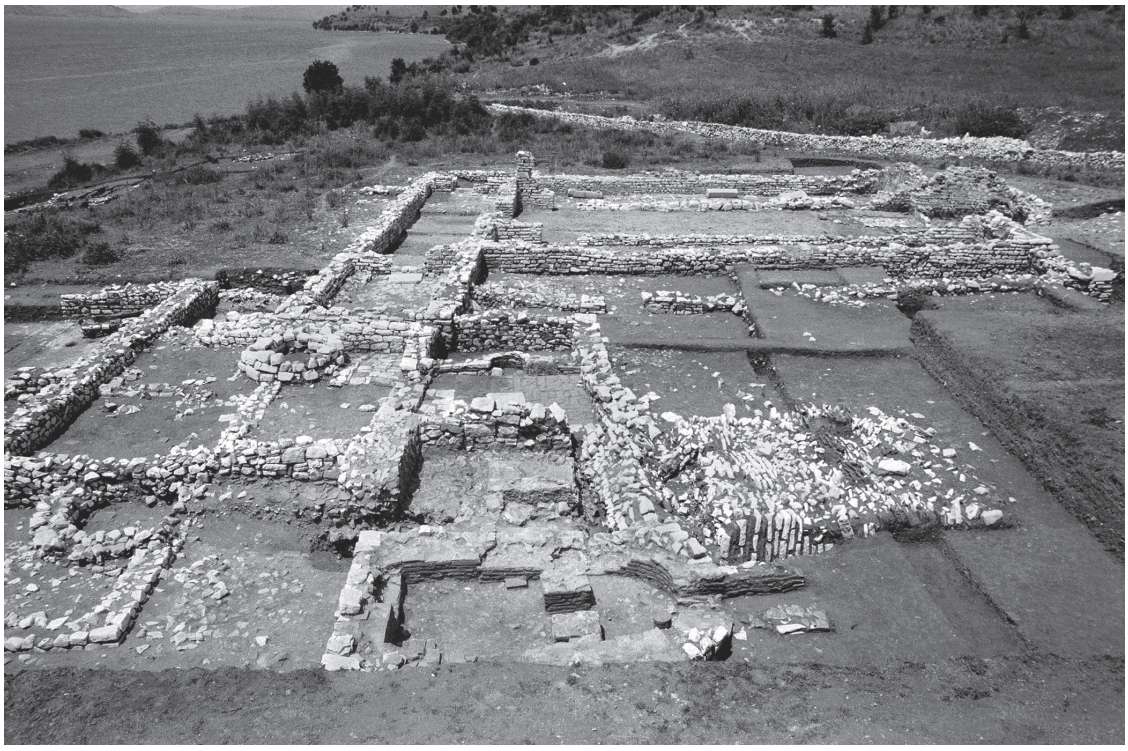

Fig. 5. The late fifth-century church and associated complex at Diaporit.
On the south side of the church (in the immediate foreground) were a bath-house,
a tower (of which one fallen wall can be seen) and a small chapel.

church dedicated to Agios Donatos. In the fourth century Donatos was bishop of the thus far undiscovered town of Euroia which was also described by Prokopios of Caesarea.[36] Pallas has optimistically suggested that Glyki was the site of the church that Donatos was supposed to have built during the reign of Theodosius I, and that Glyki was thus the site of Euroia.[37] This remains extremely debatable but the identification of Euroia with Glyki now threatens to become canonical, with the very doubtful existence of this fourth century church used as evidence to discount other possible sites for Euroia that are perhaps more compatible with Prokopios's description of the site. This illustrates the hazards of the application of church dates to larger archaeological problems.

Four further churches lie in the vicinity of Paramythia. To the northwest of the town is the substantial ruin known appropriately as Palioklissi (Fig. 6), while a further church has recently been discovered at Kristallopigi. To the south of the town is the triconch church at Veliani, while a further early Christian church with a baptistery has recently been discovered at Zervochori around 10 km to the south. The discovery of further architectural elements in the ruined Byzantine church of Panagia Labovethras could suggest a further Early Christian basilica. Other possible traces of early Christian buildings were noted at the ruined middle Byzantine church of Ag. Photeines and at Dramesi to the northwest of Paramythia. This marked concentration of churches which are otherwise relatively rare in Thesprotia indicates the continued importance of the Paramythia region and the Kokytos valley as a line of communication.[38] Indeed Photike

[36] Procop. *Aed*. 4.1.39-42. For Donatos and other bishops of Euroia, see Soustal 1981, 158.
[37] Pallas 1977, 139-140.

Fig. 6. The church at Palioklissi slightly to the north-west of Paramthyia.

was one of the ten cities of Epirus Vetus mentioned by Hierokles, while Bishop Diadochos of Photike is recorded as opposing the monophysites at Chalcedon in 451. The names of two further bishops, Ilarios and Florentios, are also recorded in the sixth century.[39]

It seems that the period of major church construction was over by around 550. There may have been a number of reasons for the cessation of church construction including changing fashion, but it is also clear that other changes were occurring. The ceramic assemblage from the Triconch Palace at Butrint shows a significant decline in the presence of Tunisian products after *c*. 550, which Paul Reynolds has suggested may indicate that Butrint did not participate in the western Byzantine supply networks that developed following the reconquest of North Africa.[40] At the same time the nearby site at Diaporit was apparently abandoned perhaps only 60 years after the construction of the church.[41]

It is likely that Epirus became increasingly insecure during the second half of the sixth century. Even taking into account the problematic nature of the sources regarding barbarian raids into the province, there were marked changes as earlier hilltop sites were reoccupied and refortified. Numerous small islands off the Epirote coast also show signs of occupation in this period (Fig. 7).[42] In Thesprotia there is a particularly interesting

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[38] Tsigaridis 1969; Pallas 1977, 141 (Palioklissi); Vasilikou this volume (Kristallopigi); Pallas 1971, 236-237; Triantaphillopoulos 1984, 582 (Veliani); *ArchDelt* 2003 in press (Zervochori); Triantaphillopoulos 1984, 580; Papadopoulou 1988, 322-323 (Panagia Labovethras and Ag. Photeines); Vokotopoulos 1972, 473-474 (Dramesi).

[39] Soustal 1981, 236.

[40] Reynolds 2004, 240-242.

[41] Bowden and Përzhita 2004, 430-431.

example of this with Prokopios' account of Justinian's relocation of the town of Photike to a fortress of Agios Donatos (usually associated with the rocky crag above Paramythia itself). Together with Phoinike, Photike is accorded one of the longest descriptions of any of the forts of Old and New Epirus mentioned in the text. Prokopios describes the two towns as follows:

> These two towns, namely Photike and Phoinike, stood on low lying ground and were surrounded by stagnant water which collected there. Consequently the Emperor Justinian, reasoning that it was impossible for walls to be built about them on walls of solid construction, left them just as they were, but close to them he built forts on rising ground which is exceedingly steep.[43]

At first sight this description appears plausible. The site of Photike at Liboni is low-lying and marshy (as are parts of Roman Phoinike). However, as I have argued elsewhere, triumph in the face of difficult natural terrain is a traditional *topos* of panegyric (as is fortification construction as a whole) and is used throughout the text of the *Buildings*. In this instance, as elsewhere in the text, it is being used as a device to praise Justinian and should not be taken as an accurate description of the topography of Photike. Nor does it provide conclusive evidence for a Justinianic date for the fortress of Agios Donatos. Indeed Book IV of the *Buildings* cannot be taken as evidence of a sustained imperial plan for the defence of Epirus. Instead, the *Buildings* must be read as a work of panegyric, like the earlier writing of Mamertinus in relation to Nikopolis. It was intended to praise the emperor through the recognised rhetorical *topos* of fortification building, rather than provide a detailed or accurate description of actual imperial activity.[44]

Whoever was actually responsible for building the hilltop and island fortresses of Thesprotia and Epirus, their occupation appears short-lived. Indeed after the mid-seventh century there is little unambiguous archaeological evidence for occupation of the province until the late ninth century. The one exception to this appears to be the early medieval cemetery at Aphiona on Corfu, which apparently represents the revival of furnished burial in the area, similar to that noted in the so-called 'Komani' cemeteries of central and northern Albania.

Some indication of the situation in Thesprotia by the early seventh century is given by the dispute of 603/4 recorded in the correspondence of Gregory the Great. This records how John, the Bishop of Euroia, had fled to Kerkyra with his clerics and the relics of Agios Donatos, and established an independent seat for himself at Kassiope, much to the disgruntlement of Bishop Alkison of Kerkyra who was also the (possibly reluctant) host to a further 3 Epirote bishops. The *Miracles of St Demetrias* records further apparently devastating incursions in 614-616, noting also the names of some of the tribes involved. One of these tribes, the Baiounetai, is thought to have established itself in the region known as Vagenetia, which extended approximately from Chimara in the north to Margariti (slightly north of Parga) in the south. Certainly the widespread occurrence of Slav place-names in the area points to a significant presence in the area, although the significance and chronology of these toponyms has occasionally been disputed.[45]

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[42] Bowden 2003a, 173-190.
[43] Procop. *Aed.* 4.1.37-39.
[44] Bowden 2006.
[45] The historical and archaeological evidence for the Slav incursions into Epirus is summarised in Bowden 2003a, 25, 197-198.

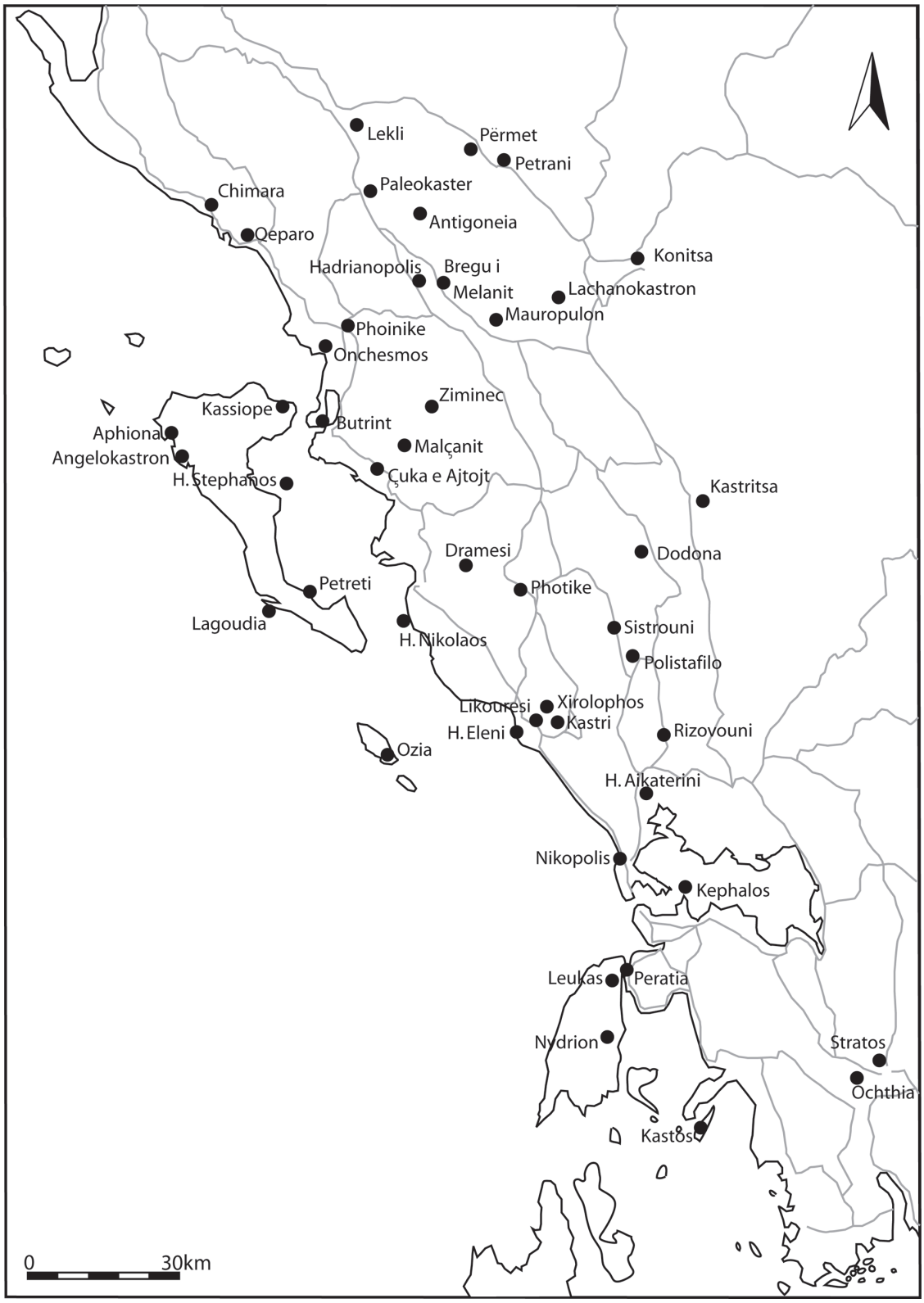

Fig. 7. Hilltop sites and islands in Epirus occupied in late antiquity.

Interpretations of this period are heavily influenced by the nationalist ideologies which underpin archaeology in both Greece and Albania. In both countries a historical narrative has been developed in which the native population (either Greek or Arber/

Illyrian) survived in remote hilltops or behind the walls of cities like Nikopolis, living separately from the Slavic settlers.[46] However, this view of a bipolar society divided on ethnic lines is dependent either on ancient literary sources that depend on the construction of a non-Roman barbarian other, or modern ideological values based around post-nineteenth century concepts of nations and ethnicity. Instead we should perhaps imagine a much more fluid society based around constantly shifting allegiances and with groups coalescing in a tribal fashion around individuals. It cannot be coincidence that the settlement patterns of the late sixth and early seventh century, in which occupation was concentrated anew on inhospitable hilltops and promontories, appear to resemble those of the tribal societies of the early Hellenistic period and before. Ethnic identity – a sense of being Roman or Avar, Epirote or Sclavene – was just one element of the equation, to be used when the occasion demanded but ignored when it was not required. This idea of ethnicity as a fluid and flexible construct, appears to be a more useful way of understanding post Roman Epirote society.

Conclusion: filling in the gaps

How can we fill in the holes in our knowledge of Roman and late Roman Thesprotia? It is partly a question of how we find our evidence and partly one of how we use it. There is a clear need for projects where clear research agendas are established. It is important to understand how the establishment of the colony at Photike affected the nature of land-use and occupation within the region. Equally, it is important to gain greater knowledge of the colony at Photike comparable with that at Butrint and the *colonia/ civitas libera* Nikopolis and use this knowledge to shed further light on the ideology of the Julio Claudian involvement in the region. A wider question relating to Photike and to Thesprotia in general concerns the nature of communications and how the distance of the region from the dominant sea-born routes of communication affected its fortunes. How, for example, does the material culture of the Kokytos valley compare with contemporary coastal areas? Was the region participating in the same Mediterranean networks as can be discerned at Butrint, and how did this involvement change over time?

Can field survey answer these questions? In recent publications I have expressed doubt as whether field survey can present us with sufficiently refined detail to really answer questions relating to historically defined periods in a country such as Greece, where in so many areas we have major lacunae in our understanding of material culture.[47] For the Roman and late Roman periods we remain too dependent on fine wares for understanding site chronologies. At the excavations at Diaporit, it was notable that for some periods, fine wares were almost entirely absent, and it was only knowledge of coarseware sequences constructed through large scale excavation at a variety of sites that really allowed us to construct detailed archaeological sequences. It was also noticeable at Diaporit that the picture derived from the surface assemblage was significantly different to that derived from subsequent excavation. Field survey did not identify the Hellenistic phases of the site and crucially it did not identify the lacuna in occupation between the mid-third and

[46] Bowden 2003b.
[47] Bowden and Përzhita 2004.

late fifth centuries. The field survey data led us to postulate continuous occupation at the site in direct contrast to the discontinuity that we eventually found, with all that this implies for the history of the settlement.

The same caveat applies to the post-Roman Dark Age, which has until now entirely eluded survey archaeologists despite occasional claims to the contrary. As well as the lack of identifiable ceramics we face the problems of massive post-Roman erosion and deposition that has buried sites in valley bottoms (where for example many Slav settlements are most likely to be situated). Perhaps a more fundamental problem relates to the unwillingness on the part of many archaeologists working in Greece to fully engage with this problematic period and develop methodologies which will advance our understanding of it.

Nonetheless, with the preparation of detailed ceramic type sequences at Nikopolis by the staff of the local Greek Ephorates under the guidance of John Hayes and with Paul Reynolds' publication of the Butrint ceramics, significant progress is being made towards understanding these previously neglected periods in Epirus. The work of the Finnish Institute in Thesprotia also represents a major step towards a greater understanding of this region. The Thesprotia Expedition will both answer existing research questions and set new ones, advancing the agenda for archaeology in this region. In particular, it is projects like the Thesprotia Expedition that will enable our understanding of the region to move beyond the confines of a narrative history defined by fragmentary ancient texts and modern national ideologies.[*]

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