

## B. Forsén (ed.), “Thesprotia Expedition IV. Region Transformed by Empire”

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The Thesprotia Expedition Project is a long-term landscape archaeology project of the Finnish Institute at Athens, conducted since 2003 in agreement with colleagues from the Ephorate. At the time the project began, Thesprotia was still one of the least known and least studied regions of ancient Greece in terms of landscape archaeology. Despite the construction of the new Via Egnatia that had led to a number of important archaeological discoveries, scholars' attention was mainly focused on major archaeological sites such as Elea, Gitana, Phanote and Dymokastro, while a large-scale intensive survey project capable of providing an overall reconstructive picture was still lacking. Some projects involving archaeological surveys were being carried out in various parts of ancient Epirus, but they mainly involved analysis at a site-scale and the immediate environs. An integrated landscape archaeology project such as that of the Finnish Institute at Athens, which would study a sub-regional area such as the Kokytos valley was therefore still lacking. The Thesprotia Expedition, which is still ongoing, is programmatically proposed as a project capable of combining archaeology, historiographic and epigraphic sources and ancient geography. The method involves intensive archaeological and geo-archaeological surveys, excavation trials and palynological studies located in some areas of particular interest for the reconstruction of the ancient landscape. The focus is on the Kokytos valley, in the heart of Thesprotia, a region of ancient Epirus. The chronological range is wide, in line with the *longue durée* which is a common approach in the archaeology of Mediterranean landscapes. The research questions are answered in the timely publication of the volumes included in the Monographs of the Finnish Institute at Athens, starting with the first volume published in 2009 edited by Bjorn Forsén and entitled ‘Thesprotia Expedition I. Towards a Regional History’, which presented the project, beginning with the methodological approach and the broad chronological framework. The second book (Thesprotia Expedition II), published in 2011 and edited by Bjorn Forsén and Esko Tikkala, is dedicated to Environment and Settlement Patterns. The third published in 2016

(Thesprotia Expedition III), edited by Bjorn Forsén, Nena Galanidou and Esko Tikkala concerns landscapes of nomadism and sedentism.

The attention and the accuracy in the regular presentation of the results to scholars is enough to understand the importance that this project has gained over time to become an indispensable source for landscape archaeology studies in this region of ancient Greece.

Further merits include the skillful balance between the most innovative methodologies of archaeological investigation and the consistently high regard for more traditional approaches that do not neglect the study of historiographic and epigraphic sources or even stratigraphic archaeological excavation. The very effective collaboration with Greek archaeologists and in general with other colleagues, specialists in other various disciplines, is also one of the strengths of the project.

The latest issue of the series follows the same path. The main subject of the book is the transformation that characterized the Thesprotian landscape in Roman times, entitled 'Region Transformed by Empire' edited by Bjorn Forsén, currently director of the Finnish Institute at Athens, and published in 2019. The book is focused on the Hellenistic and Roman periods and also includes reports of excavations at the sites of Mazarakia, Ladochori, Gouriza and Agios Donatos. There are also numismatic studies and an important summary of the fortifications of Epirus.

As in previous publications, the editor's first paper, named 'Disruption and Development: Tracing Imperial Vestiges in Epirus', presents a summary of the entire volume and provides the status of the research project, with an extremely useful overview (pp. 1-48). The brief historical framework, highlighting how Thesprotia was dominated over time by a series of empires (first Macedonian, then the Roman, followed by Byzantine, the Venetian and the Ottoman), introduces the section focusing on 'Macedonian Influence' (pp. 4-12). The author notes that, from the early Iron Age onwards, a settlement pattern developed in the Kokytos valley, which is stable at least until the end of the Third Macedonian War (167 BC), but which also shows some dynamics of persistence thereafter, even up to the Roman Imperial period (I-II AD). This settlement pattern, which finds a comparison in the Ioannina basin in neighbouring Molossia, was based on clusters of small sites, separated from each other by 1.5-2 kilometres, which can be interpreted as non-nucleated villages or scattered villages sometimes surrounded by farms, presumably inhabited for centuries by the same family groups. The spread of agriculture and the proximity of pastures contributed to the stabilisation of the regional settlement. During the Hellenistic period (4th-3rd BC) there was a sharp increase in population and, alongside the scattered villages that continued to exist, fortified sites were also established on the hilltops. Among these, only a few emerge that have a real urban development and become cities included in the lists of participants in the Panhellenic games of Delphi and Epidaurus. This dynamic does not appear to be

the result of synecism but of demographic increase, since traditional scattered populations continues to persist. In the Hellenistic period the most significant change is represented by the rise of hilltop fortifications and the establishment of planned urban settlements in some of these sites, such as Elea, Kassope, Orraon and Gitana. Great attention was also given to the defense of the harbours: they were connected with walls to the cities (Amphipolis/Limnaia), or fortified (Argos Amphiloichion, Thyreion) or protected with small forts at the harbour mouth (Palairos and Oiniadai).

The study of these coastal settlements implies the reconstruction of the important environmental changes that characterise river mouths and inland basins, where significant changes in the coastline can be observed, with the sea reaching several kilometres further inland in ancient times. Such changes in the landscape are also fundamental to understand the fortified site at the so-called Nekyomanteion (Figs. 2, 3, pp. 9-11), at the mouth of the River Acheron.

The site, traditionally interpreted as an oracle of death by the renowned Greek archaeologist Dakaris, is now being reassessed in the light of more recent studies as a 'fortified trading station', built to protect the port as in the case of Lygia at the mouth of the Kalamas river, recently re-examined by Spandimos. The last major development in this period was the expansion of the Molossians, first under Alexander I, with the help of Philip II of Macedon, and then under Pyrrhus, who promoted the development of cities, palaces and fortification systems until the end of the Aeacid monarchy (232 BC).

Later developments are analysed in the paragraph entitled 'Hit by Romans wrath' (pp. 12-17). This is the period of the Republican Federal State of Epirus, which brought together Molossians, Thesprotians and Chaones. During this period, Epirus suffered raids by Illyrians (130 BC) and Aetolians (219 BC) and was involved in the clash between Rome and the Macedonians. After briefly reviewing the behaviour of Epirotes during the Macedonian Wars, the author compares the ancient historiographical tradition, which places great emphasis on the destruction of cities and the deportation of the population ordered by Lucius Aemilius Paulus after Pidna (167 BC), with archaeological data.

It is a careful critical re-reading of ancient written sources that are reconsidered in the light of demographic observations and the most recent studies by historians and archaeologists. Of particular interest, also in terms of method, is the consideration that some traces of destruction found by archaeologists in Molossia and Thesprotia have been linked to the actions of the soldiers of Lucius Aemilius Paulus in a way that is sometimes too uncritical, due to the conditioning imposed by the tradition of ancient writers. In some cases, such as Kastritsa and Magalo Gardiki, also in the Nekyomanteion itself, the destruction operated by the Romans seems clear. By contrast, in other cases a more careful critical review requires taking into

account even more recent earthquakes and other war events that may have caused such destruction (footnote 78, p. 14). Moreover, it seems that several towns resumed their life and were not completely abandoned, albeit with different outcomes and forms of settlement. Nevertheless, the author must accept that in the Kokytos valley the decline in population is evident and the landscape certainly became more desolate (Fig. 4, p. 15). Before Pidna the valley was dominated by the city of Elea, supported by at least three other clusters of scattered rural sites (*komai*) and subsequently several sites were abandoned including Elea itself, which was however later partially resettled. The changes that characterise the following period under the Roman rule are analysed in the paragraph entitled 'The years of wild capitalism', as well as in the following named 'Colonisation and Restructuring' (pp. 17-31), in which the survival of the Epirote communities within the Roman provincial system is analysed. The real change now seems to be determined by the arrival of Roman entrepreneurs. The author recalls that it has long been assumed that these *negotiatores* were mainly engaged in trade, whereas we now know that they also invested heavily in land and animal husbandry, in order to meet the demand of Rome's markets. The Roman villa built on the site of the Hellenistic fortified settlement of Agios Donatos also refers to this class of entrepreneurs, called *Synepirotai* or *Epirotici Homines*. The other moment of great change is related to the Augustan colonisation after Actium (31 BC) to which the Roman colony of Photike, in the upper Kokytos valley, is also linked. Finally, the last paragraph, entitled 'Turning into a frontier region', deals very briefly with the dynamics that transformed Epirus into a frontier region up to the Middle Ages and the threshold of the modern era.

Among the other contributions that complete the volume is Mikko Suha's important study on the fortifications of Epirus, which concludes a series of papers he has already devoted to some of the main sites, such as Elea itself, both in the previous volumes of the same project (Thesprotia Expedition III) and in other publications. It is a work of great interest because it uses a great deal of data resulting from field surveys and organises them into an overall view that focuses on poliorcetic techniques with wide reference to specialist bibliography (pp. 49-102).

In addition to the study of coins from three sites in the Kokytos Valley by Tuukka Talvio (pp. 171-176), broad space is given to the Roman villa of Agios Donatos, already subject of important studies in previous books (Thesprotia Expedition I and II). This remarkable Roman residential structure is being reconsidered in the light of the latest research. It is a villa built on high ground overlooking the middle Kokytos valley on a series of three terraced levels, immediately after the battle of Pidna (second half of the 2nd century BC), using the remains of the earlier fortified site from the Hellenistic period. The building was later re-modelled (mid-1st century BC) and finally damaged by an earthquake (70 BC), which led to its decline until it was abandoned due to a second seismic event (4th AD). Among the finds

from the excavation are a number of bricks marked with three different inscriptions, one of which (COS), referring to the *gens* of *Cossinii*, a family of equestrian rank mentioned by Varro and Cicero with possessions in Epirus and commercial trading interests in the Mediterranean. They are believed to be members of the Roman entrepreneurs, known as *Synepirotai*, who settled in the region after the Roman conquest. The presence of archaeological remains that may be related to horse breeding also sheds light on their possible commercial activities. Remains of similar stamps of the *Cossinii*, together with others belonging to the *Curtii*, another family of equestrian rank close to Cicero with commercial interests in the eastern Mediterranean, were found at the mouth of the valley of the Acheron River at the Nekomanteion. As mentioned above, this fortified farm, built in the Hellenistic period in order to control the port, was sieged and conquered by the Roman army, as shown by the levels of destruction, the remains of catapults, projectile and *pilum* heads. It was later reoccupied and turned into an important hub of a commercial network in which they had to be involved. Goods arriving or being exported through the harbour of the Glykys Limen had to pass through here.

The archaeological investigation in the area of the Villa of Agios Donatos is the subject of an extensive report by Eava-Maria Viitanen (pp. 243–274), while Agneta Freccero presents the study of the fragments of wall paintings found during the excavation, which allow us to recognise and date the second building phase of the complex (pp. 275–298). Bjorn Forsén and Mikko Suha themselves provide a detailed stratigraphic description of the Early Hellenistic Tower located in the eastern part of the fortress, which was also reused in the entrance system of the Roman villa (pp. 299–316). The finds from this excavation are also the subject of specific studies. Paul Reynolds, with the contribution of Janne Ikaheimo, presents a study of the late Hellenistic and Roman pottery from the tower deposit enriched by an important catalogue. The same Bjorn Forsén, Paul Reynolds and Kalle Korhonen publish two studies on the small finds (pp. 387–412), bricks stamps and graffiti (pp. 413–428).

Two papers are focused on the site of Gouriza. The first article concerns the excavation of the kiln presented by Tommi Tummo, who also carried out the survey of the same site in the previous volume (pp. 103–169). The Hellenistic kiln (4th BC) remained in use until it was replaced by a later structure that also yielded a rich foundation deposit (ca. 325–33 BC). In a second paper, Voula Tritsaroli presents research on the Early Ottoman Cemetery found in Gouriza (pp. 441–480).

The studies of the necropolises are enriched by Atalanti Betsiou's paper on the Roman Mausoleum of Zavali near Ladochori (pp. 199–221) and Ourania Palli's study of the Early Roman cemetery of Mazarakia (pp. 177–197). The Mausoleum of Zavali is part of a larger Roman necropolis already identified with the construction of the Archaeological Museum of Igoumenitsa and is linked to a wealthy Roman family that must have lived in a nearby villa. With regard to the necropolis of

Mazarakia, a new cemetery area is presented that was recently discovered in a site already partially known in the past. In particular, it deals with a grave monument and the tomb with the epitaph of *Polinicus*.

Overall, the fourth volume of the Thesprotia Expedition Project adds another important step not only in the studies of the Kokytos valley but, more generally, in the understanding of ancient Epirus. As previously noted, when the project was launched there were few systematic studies of landscape archaeology in Epirus. Today these have grown but the Thesprotia Expedition has maintained its role as a reference point for other scholars. As in previous volumes, the various contributions provide scholars with an update on the work carried out within the framework of the project of the Finnish Institute at Athens, but together they constitute a monograph, this time focusing on the transformation of the landscape in Roman times. This is made possible thanks to the great consistency in the progress of the research, which keeps faith with what has been promised since the first publication, offering a broad historical and geographical reconstruction aimed at a long-term analysis. This view, thanks also to the excellent methodological approach, is always anchored in precise archaeological data collected in the field and presented in an analytical way. These data dialogue with all other sources, starting with the written epigraphic and literary ones and ending with environmental analyses. At the same time, certain contributions, starting with the introductory one by the editor of the book, also provide a key to interpreting the broader context, presenting all the information in the project's path and more generally in the regional archaeological framework, with a wealth of up-to-date bibliographical references. This volume, in particular, develops some themes of particular importance almost as internal sub-themes. These include the study of Epirus fortifications, the studies shedding new light on Hellenistic-Roman necropolis archaeology in Epirus, and the research on the Roman villa of Agios Donatos. There are also some transversal themes, such as the reinterpretation of the dynamics of continuity or discontinuity of the Epirus population after the end of the Third Macedonian War. We also note some pages that offer an excellent synthesis of studies on some particularly problematic sites such as the so-called Nekomanteion.

In conclusion, it is possible to state that contemporary archaeology cannot study and understand the whole context of Epirus without these volumes and the introductory synthesis written by their editors for each of the four volumes of the Thesprotia Expedition Project. This consideration applies even more in this case, because this last book compares the data collected by Greek archaeologists in Molossia and Thesprotia with those of the Kokytos valley, leading to an incisive reconstruction of ancient Epirus' landscape during Hellenistic and Roman times.