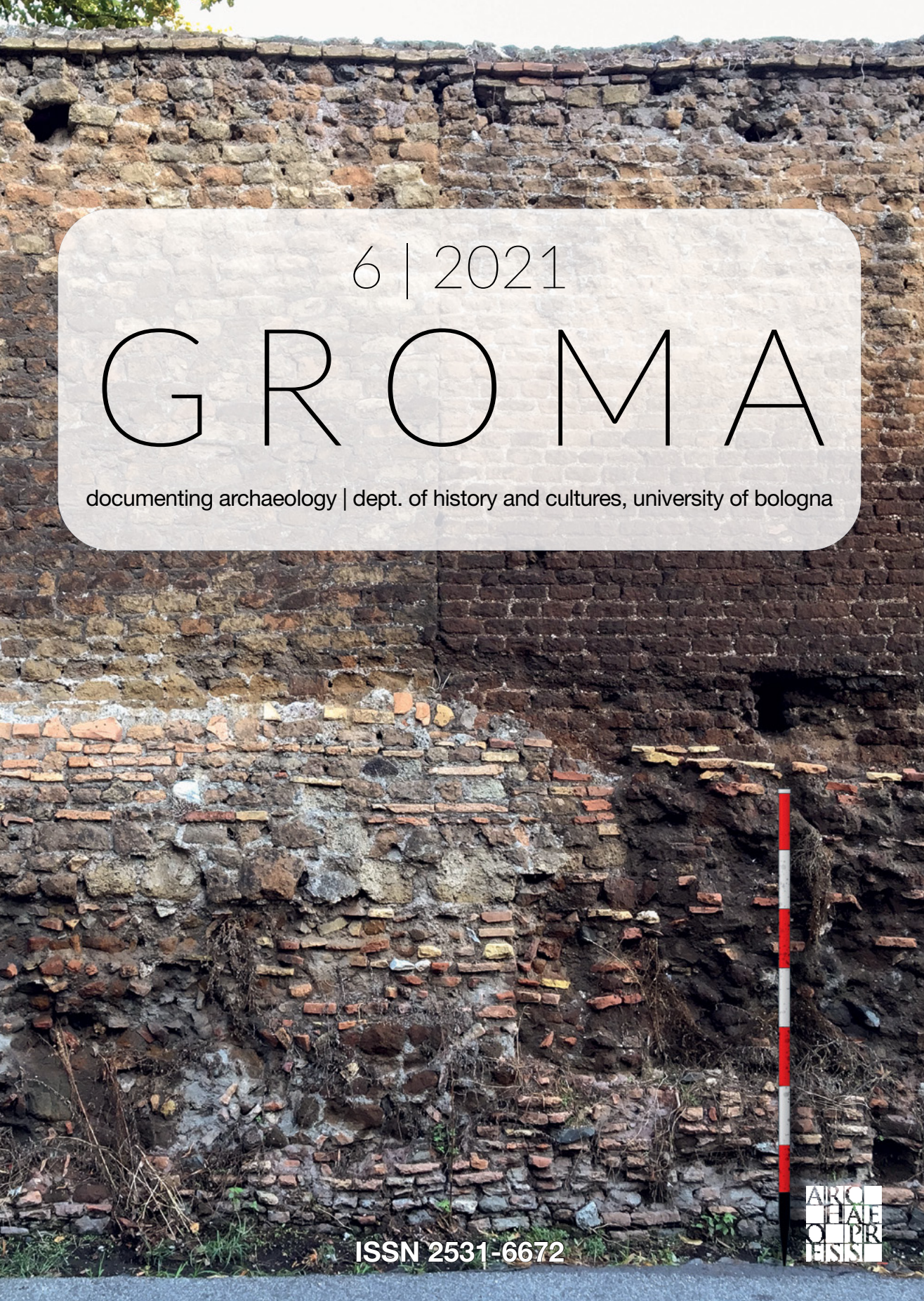

6 | 2021

GROMA

documenting archaeology | dept. of history and cultures, university of bologna

ISSN 2531-6672

GROMA. Documenting Archaeology
An open access, peer-reviewed journal founded by Enrico Giorgi and supported by the University of Bologna.

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GROMA

Issue 6 2021

Archaeopress Journals

Archaeopress Publishing Ltd
Summertown Pavilion
18-24 Middle Way
Summertown
Oxford OX2 7LG
www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-80327-464-5
ISSN 2531-6672

This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website www.archaeopress.com

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New considerations on the acropolis of Butrint during the Archaic age

Federica Carbotti

federica.carbotti@studio.unibo.it, University of Bologna, Department of History and Cultures

Abstract

The paper discusses the current state of research in relation to the archaic phases of Butrint (Southern Albania), one of the few sites of ancient Epirus with important archaeological evidence dating back to the Archaic period. The international archaeological missions that have investigated the acropolis of the site over the last century have brought to light few but clear traces of frequentation of the area. Pottery, an ash altar and roof tiles suggest that this was probably a cult place: the proximity and control of Corcyra over the mainland makes it plausible that the island had a role in shaping its appearance, however its features are still debated. The recent excavations and topographical surveys of the University of Bologna offer the opportunity for a new analysis of the historical and archaeological context in which Archaic Butrint is framed, as well as, at the same time, put forward open research questions that will need to be developed by future excavation campaigns.

Introduction

Butrint, ancient *Buthrotum* or *Bouthrotos*, represents a remarkable site in the context of ancient Epirus, located between northern Greece and southern Albania. Defined *polis* by Hecateus (*FGrHist* I, 106) as early as in the 6th century BCE and part of the historical region of Chaonia, Butrint developed on the terminal part of the Ksamili peninsula, surrounded by the Butrint Lake and the Vivari channel, which separates the promontory from the overlooking Vrina Plain. The centre was born in a favourable position for an easy access to the hinterland, rich in natural resources, for the connections with cities placed further north and for the control of routes and commercial traffic towards Greece and the Adriatic and Ionian coasts. Those few Greek sources that dealt with the region considered Epirus as semi-barbarian because of the social and economic organization of its population. Strabo (7.7.1-9) recalled, quoting the work of Theopompus of Chios, that there were several tribal groups (*ethne*), combined in *koina*, after which three regions were named. The leading ones were the Molossians, the most powerful koinon at the time of Theopompus, followed by Thesprotians and Chaones, who instead he believed to have held power before the Molossians (Hammond 1967; Sakellariou 1997). The *koina* were established on an ethnic basis and on warrior-pastoral communities settled in unfortified villages scattered all over the territory (*kata komas*), whose subsistence was based on a mixed agropastoral economy, comprising forms of intensive cultivation and husbandry of herds and cattle (Douzougli, Papadopoulos 2010, 9-14; Papayiannis 2017). It is nowadays difficult to reconstruct the history of Epirus, in particular during its first phases. That is where Butrint plays a fundamental role: its seamless occupation from the 8th century BCE until the 16th century CE makes it a privileged centre for the study of the Archaic history of the surrounding territory, albeit accepting the limits implied in this very uniqueness.

Archaic Butrint between history and archaeological research

Most of the information related to Archaic Butrint and Archaic Epirus comes from contacts with the Southern Greek world. Greek colonisation of the Epirote coasts began early: the Corinthians settled in the area at least from the half of the 8th century BCE, founding Corcyra in 733 BCE (Th. 1.25.3; 1.38.1). The island did not wait too long before assuming an independent role from the *metropolis*, creating its own commercial empire and expanding its control over the *peraia*, the facing mainland. They probably controlled the area of the Kestrine region, extending from Lygia, near the promontory of Leucimme, to Butrint, closing the canal of Corcyra in the North (Carusi 2011). It was supervised by fortifications built along the coast, among which there were probably the so-called Dema Wall (Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 81-82, 248-249), Butrint itself, and Kalivo (Crowson 2020a; 2020b; Bogdani 2020) on the opposite side of the Vrina Plain.[1] The island had an economic and strategic role because its revenues came from trade, as well as from livestock, fishing, and salt production, which doubled thanks to the control of both banks of the canal, and which led to several contrasts with Corinth (Intrieri 2010; Carusi 2011; Psoma 2015) (Fig. 1 and 2).

Butrint was part of the *peraia* of Corcyra and so the city probably stayed under the control of the island at least until the 5th century BCE (Intrieri 2018). Despite the relevance of the Corcyrean presence on its territory, the status of Butrint as proper Greek colony is still to be confirmed. The first ceramic finds testify to a small settlement located on the acropolis between the late Bronze age and early Iron age, whose production is much closer to the indigenous Epirote world than to the colonial one, and similar to what is found in neighbouring sites, such as Kalivo and Çuka e Ajtoit.[2] The Archaic settlement in Butrint developed on the acropolis as well, on a terrace made with large irregular boulders dated between the 8th and 6th century BCE based on the proto-Corinthian and Corinthian pottery found in the Archaic walls, one of the few and best-preserved testimonies of the first settlement of Butrint.[3] L. M. Ugolini divided the Archaic wall in three different sections. First, the 'Pelasgian' one, the earliest segment on the southern side of the acropolis. Then, a second wall in 'Primitive polygonal' masonry, built immediately afterwards, expanding the terrace westward and occupying the southernmost side of this portion of the acropolis. Lastly, a third one, longer than the previous two, defined as 'large boulder polygonal' with an angular section. The dating of the acropolis walls has been debated for a long time. At the time of the discovery, Ugolini proposed a 6th century BCE chronology for their construction. He had also noticed how the construction technique, which uses blocks of local limestone, provided a single curtain, about 2 meters thick, with a kind of internal filling made of boulders to help in the construction of the rows (Ugolini 1942, 26-28, 39-44). Ugolini's proposal was revised by N. Ceka, who assigned the name of 'Butrint 1' to this circuit, dating it to the 7th century BCE (Ceka 1976). The excavations conducted by A. Nanaj from 1982 to 1986, followed by the Greek-Albanian Mission co-directed with C. Hadzis from 1989 to 1995 in the eastern stretch of the Archaic wall, the one considered to be the most ancient, had initially supported Ceka's hypothesis, but later moved the dating to the *terminus post quem* of 500 BCE based on the Corinthian and Attic pottery found during excavations (Arafat, Morgan 1995; Hadzis 1998). The research by the Butrint Foundation in

[1] In this so-called 'Butrint system', probably Karalibeu could be considered as a complementary site to the Dema Wall (Bogdani 2020, 40-46).
[2] Ugolini 1937, 67, 115; Hodges 2006, 54-77; Lima 2013, 49-63; Hodges 2013, 9, 10, 18.
[3] Hernandez 2017b, 245-250; Benfatti *et al.* 2020, 183-186; Giorgi, Lepore 2020, 163-174; Giorgi 2022.

Figure 1. Corcyra and the Epirote coast (Carusi 2011)

2006 confirmed the dating between the 7th and 6th century BCE, given the abundant presence of Corinthian pottery in site (Greenslade *et al.* 2013, 49.51; Hodges 2013). In recent years, the excavations of the Italian and Albanian archaeological project led by the University of Bologna and the Albanian Institute of Archaeology inside the filling of the westernmost section of the Archaic walls could once again underline the fully Archaic timeframe for their construction (Giorgi 2022; Giorgi, Muka 2023). It is still a matter of debate whether the construction of these Archaic walls can be linked to the Corcyrean presence in the area, since these have many

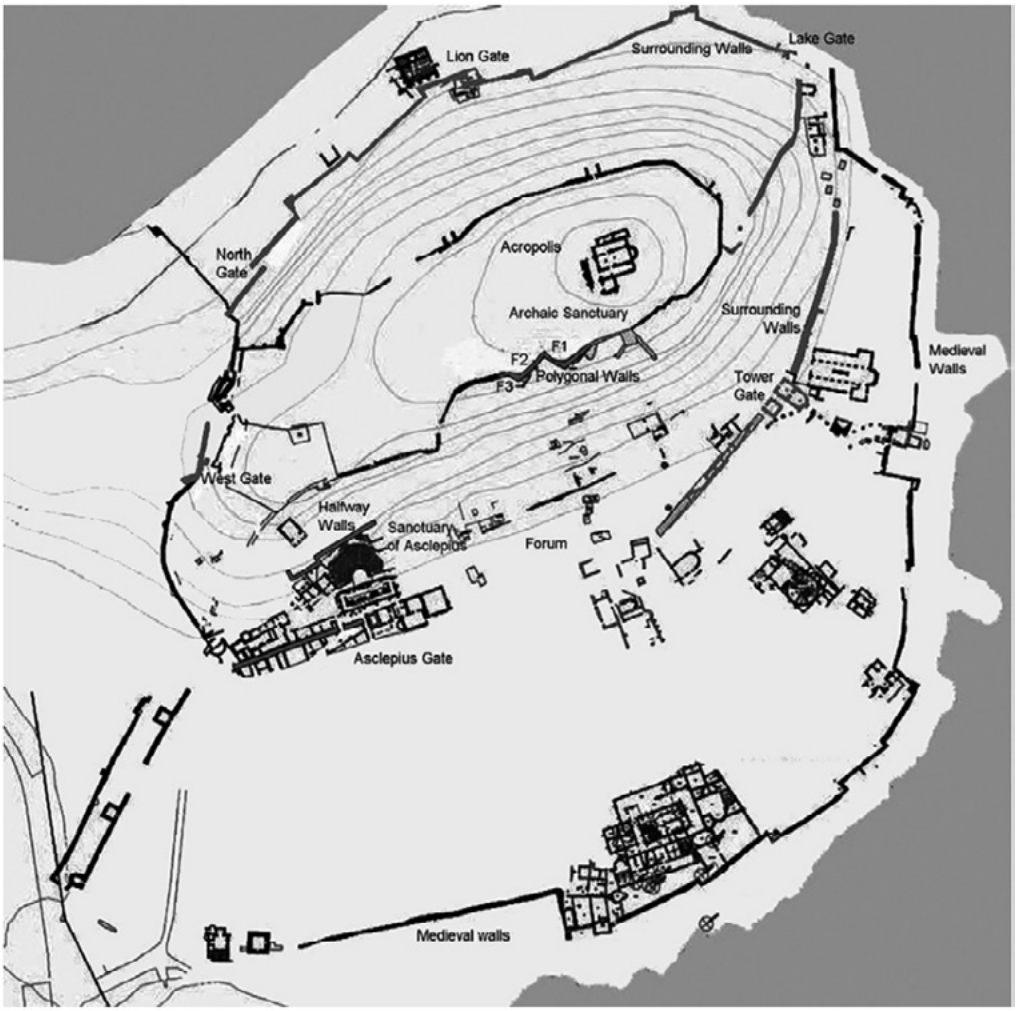

Figure 2. Plan of the city of Butrint (Giorgi, Lepore 2020)

features in common with other sites of colonial origin, such as Apollonia, whose Archaic walls are dated to the third quarter of the 7th century BCE, or Ambracia (Dimo *et al.* 2007, 166-171; Ceka 2010, 649-650). The absence of other similar wall sections on the rest of the acropolis of Butrint has led to the hypothesis that this might be a retaining wall rather than a defensive one, later incorporated into the Medieval circuit built in the 10th and 11th century. However, it is also possible to accept that it served both functions, considering that the city has gone through numerous phases of construction and destruction, which could have widely changed the appearance of the acropolis (Ceka 2008, 22-24; Giorgi, Lepore 2020, 171-172).

Other findings testify that the acropolis was frequented throughout the Archaic period. Among these, there is the so-called *bothros* found by D. Mustilli during his survey of the hill between 1938 and 1939 in the section between the Venetian Castle and the Acropolis Basilica. It was associated with proto-Corinthian and Attic pottery and numerous fragments of Corinthian

pottery with coloured bands, which led Mustilli to date the first occupation of the acropolis to the 7th century BCE.[4] Between 1982 and 1994, the campaigns directed by A. Nanaj and C. Hadzis near the inner side of the acropolis walls brought to light, albeit out of context, fragments of imported Archaic pottery, mainly Corinthian, dated between the 7th and 6th century BCE, but also Attic (5th-4th century BCE), Laconic and Orientalizing-period inspired pottery. Other relevant findings are the remains of yellow-fabric roof tiles of Corinthian production, inscribed sling shots, and a hearth used for at least one century as an altar, thus interpreted due to the presence of burned seashells and bones found on a bed of compact ashes[5] (Fig. 3). The same types of pottery were discovered in secondary deposition during the analysis of the deposits of the lower part of the city, once submerged by the waters of the lake, and which became accessible between the 4th and 3rd century BCE, leading to the expansion of the wall circuit at the base of the acropolis as well (Hodges 2013, 7-10; Aleotti 2015; Hernandez 2017b, 220-230).

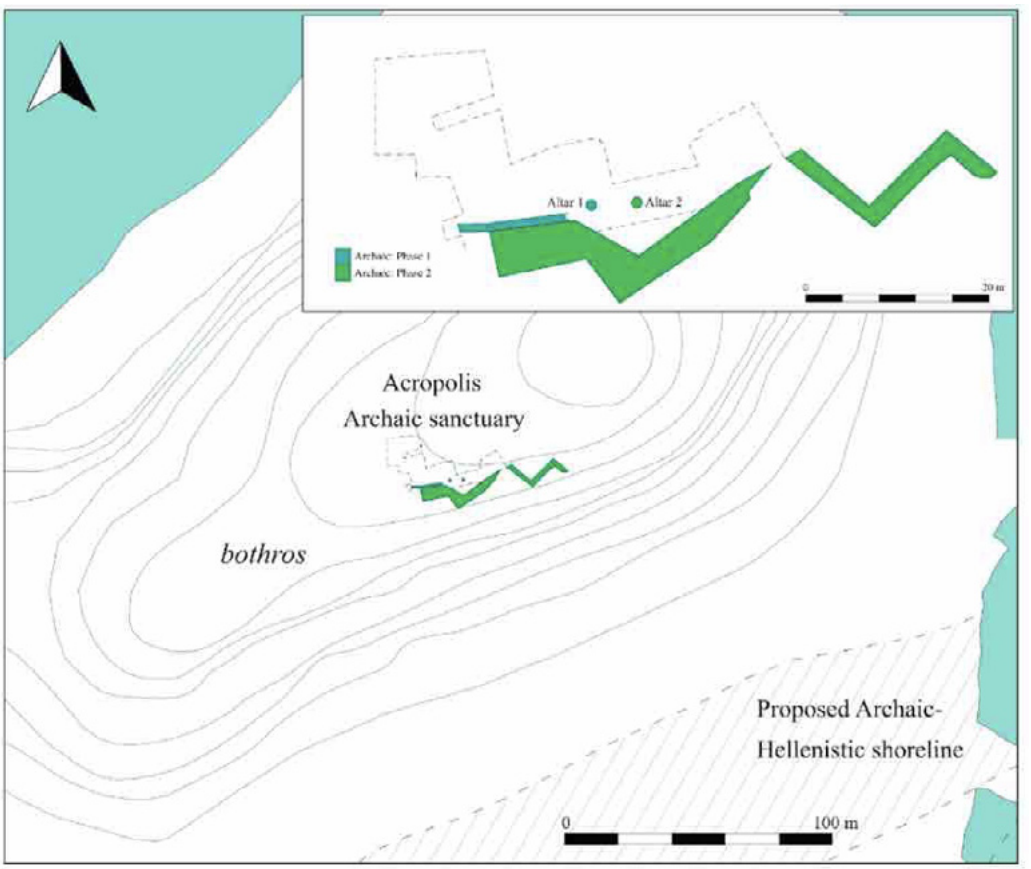

Figure 3. Location of the ash altar (Greenslade et al 2013)

[4] Ugolini 1937; Mustilli 1941, 686-688; Ugolini 1942. During the 2021 campaign, the team of the Italian and Albania Archaeological Mission in Butrint (Butrint Project) was able to locate what Mustilli believed to be the stone block closing the *bothros*, thus narrowing the area of the Acropolis where it could have possibly been originally found. There are still numerous open questions about the real nature of the so-called *bothros* identified by Mustilli, whether it was the result of sacred and ritual actions, or a secondary deposition gathered over time due to the long attendance of the place.

[5] Nanaj 1985; 1986; 1988; 1995; Hadzis 1998; Arafat, Morgan 1995; Greenslade et al. 2013, 47-52; Giorgi 2022.

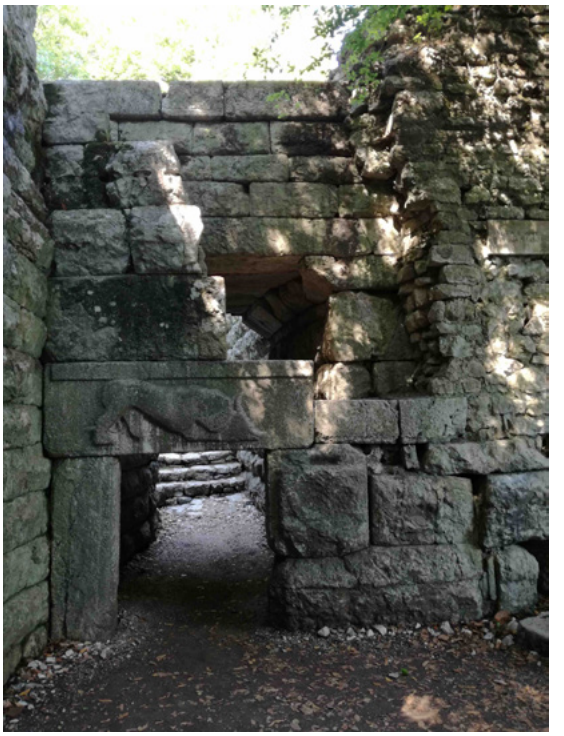

Figure 4. The Lion Gate (photo by the Author)

Nevertheless, these data cannot be used to put forward a concrete proposal for outlining the shape of the Protohistoric or Archaic city of Butrint, since no precise evidence has been recovered neither about the settlement nor about the necropolis related to these phases. According to K. Arafat and C. Morgan, the lack of other relevant findings reveals that Butrint was no other than a seasonal shelter during the initial phases of its life (Arafat, Morgan 1995, 31). On the other hand, it is plausible to think that, thanks to Corcyra's contribution, Butrint had quickly become an emporium and a cultural center of some importance, fundamental to ensure control of the other part of the strait, both for military and commercial reasons. After Hecateus, not only no other source will refer to Butrint as *polis*, but there is not any other exhaustive information on this site, even though it must have had a relevant role in the area. A more recent hypothesis proposed by D. Hernandez tries to reconstruct the appearance of Butrint during the Archaic age suggesting the existence of a temple on the top of the acropolis hill. D. Hernandez interprets the wall circuit on the acropolis as a *temenos* in defence of a sanctuary dedicated to Athena *Polias*, which would have been placed below the current Late Antique Basilica (Hernandez 2017b; Giorgi 2022). L. M. Ugolini had already supposed the presence of a temple on the acropolis on the basis of the frieze of the Lion Gate, depicting a lion biting a bull, which he considered to be Archaic (Ugolini 1942, 56-65) (fig. 4). D. Mustilli had found a ceramic fragment with the letters ΑΘΑ engraved on it in the so-called *bothros* during the 1938-1939 campaign. These findings were attributed to a cult dedicated to *Athena*, as well as few clay sculptures, an antefix decorated with palmettes and a female clay mask, all found around the *bothros* (Mustilli 1941, 686-688). D. Hernandez supports his reconstruction by recalling the relations between Athens and Corcyra, as well as an oracular lamella from Dodona, dated around the end of the 4rd century BCE by most scholars, mentioning the request of ἁ πόλις ἁ τῶν Χαόνων to Zeus *Naios* to know where to move and rebuild the temple of Athena Polias, which he believes has the city of Butrint as requester.[6] Another important part of this reconstruction is the similarity observed between the Lion Gate lintel in Butrint and the epistyle of the 6th century temple of Kardaki (park of Palaeopolis - Mon Repos in Corfu), whose construction meets the standards of the Ionian Sea Style (Fig. 5 and 6). Given the similarities

[6] Lhote 2006, 59-61, 11; Quantin and Quantin 2007, 177 with references for previous debates on the chronology of this oracular lamella; Hernandez 2017b, 242-244. It is important to underline that the problem concerning the chronology of this lamella is still open: while most scholars believe it to be dated around 330-320 BC, there are some discordant opinions, such as the one recently expressed by Meyer 2013, 20, n. 33, according to whom the lamella can be dated around the second half of the 3rd century BC.

Figure 5. The Kardaki Temple (photo by the Author)

Figure 6. The lintel of the Kardaki Temple (photo by the Author)

between the lintel of the Kardaki temple and the Lion Gate lintel, D. Hernandez deduces that the Butrint temple was built according to the characteristics and proportions of the Ionian Sea Style. The lintel depicting the lion and the bull would have been part of the frieze, therefore representing that union between Doric and Ionic elements which is one of the main features of the Ionian Sea Style. D. Hernandez proposes the reconstruction of the Archaic temple in Butrint as a Doric, peripteral, and hexastyle temple with 11 or 13 columns along its side, 21-26 x 11 metres long, built at the end of the 6th century BCE. Moreover, he supports his thesis with the discovery of several rock cuttings in the bedrock right under the Late Antique Basilica. He interprets these signs as revealing of the position and orientation of the Archaic temple, which he believes were the same of the later shrine and temple of Asclepius, as well as the Roman centuriation and settlement on the Vrina Plain.

New reading of the evidence on the acropolis

Although the presence of a cult place on the acropolis of Butrint during the Archaic age can be considered likely given the site topography and its role in the maritime trade of the Adriatic Sea, the reconstruction and position of this temple entail several questions of uncertain resolution.

D. Hernandez's proposal of the dedication of the temple to Athena could be taken in consideration, given the already mentioned inscribed fragment and the figurines found by Mustilli. Admitting that these could really be related to the cult of *Athena*, it is important to note that the goddess is attested and worshipped in Epirus and in other Corinthian colonies, like Ambracia, Apollonia and Epidamnus, already in the Archaic period. However, as P. Cabanes and S. De Maria and L. Mancini point out, these elements are not enough to conclude that the goddess was actually worshipped in Butrint as well (Cabanes 2007, n.189; De Maria, Mancini 2018; Aleotti et al 2020, 45-46).[7] Besides, the oracular lamella from Dodona quoted by Hernandez still raises numerous questions, like those linked to the so-called '*temples voyageurs*' of which this lamella brings an example. As carefully pointed out by S. and F. Quantin, the use of the verb ἀνχωρίζω (more precisely meaning 'withdraw', deriving from the military world) suggests that the *naos* was not intended to be moved over long distances, but on short ones, and that the choice of the formula ἀνχωρίξαντας ποεῖν implies that the real interest of the Chaones lied not in the replacement of the temple but in its reconstruction (Quantin, Quantin 2007, 177-182). A second point regards the identity of the *polis* asking to replace and rebuild the temple. This is interpreted not only as the actual city of the Chaones, but also their State, and Phoinike is the only centre which could fit the description, being apparently a relevant city for the *koinon* at the end of the 4th century BCE as the inclusion of the city in the list of the *theorodoki* of Argos shows. It is true that the cult of Athena has not been attested in Phoinike so far, however the latest excavations on the hill have shown a wide renovation of the city-centre in the 3rd century BCE, which could then justify the need to move and rebuild the temple (De Maria, Mancini 2018, 214-220; Rinaldi 2020, 26-46).

[7] Although this is an old theory that has not been further explored in later works, it is still worth recalling the opinion of other scholars, such as R. Hodges and I.L. Hansen, recently discussed again in De Maria, Mancini 2018, who believe that the temple on the Acropolis could have been dedicated to Zeus *Soter*, taking as evidence the later presence of his name in the manumission inscriptions found near the Theatre and the iconography on the first minting of the city. Hansen 2009, 10-11; Hodges 2013, 10. On the coinage, see Adby 2012.

Even so, this reconstruction becomes doubtful when the architectural aspect of the religious landscape of the region is taken into consideration. When considering the other Archaic temples in the area, the examples that come to mind are first and foremost the well-known monumental buildings in Corcyra, among which there is the already mentioned Kardaki temple. Their extraordinary shapes and dimensions are direct testimonies of Corcyra's wealth and power. Therefore, they do not find a direct comparison even with religious buildings discovered in other sites belonging to the Corinthian and Corcyrean area of influence along the coast of Epirus.[8] Few structures have been recognised as temples within the urban area or in the surroundings of these cities. Among them, it is worth mentioning the 7th century BCE building in Mastilitsa in Thesprotia (Tzortzatou, Fatsiou 2009, 24), and the late-Archaic Apollo temple in Ambracia (Tzouvara-Souli 2001, 233-235; Fantasia 2017, 6). From their remains it is visible that these temples had already undergone a process of monumentalization, however smaller than the Corcyrean ones.

On this subject, it is interesting to report the studies of L. Mancini, who has demonstrated, even though focusing mostly on Hellenistic building, that temples in indigenous Epirus tend to have smaller dimension (Mancini 2013; 2015; 2016). For what concerns Chaonia, these buildings can usually be found in the forms of prostyle or *in antis naiskoi*, without any trace of *peristasis*, as a consequence of their late development during the 4th century BCE.[9] Examples of this are visible, first of all, in Dodona, one of the most renowned oracular sanctuaries in the Greek world, whose main temple was an *oikos* building surrounded by bronze *lebetes* beside the sacred oak, and where the reconstruction of the so-called temples dedicated to Dione, Heracles, Themis and Aphrodite all led to small structures, in some cases prostyle tetrastyle and in others just with two columns *in antis* (Dakaris 2003, Mancini 2015, 62-138; Piccinini 2017). This peculiarity is also present in Butrint, where both the shrine and the temple of Asclepius are quite small buildings. Discovered by L. M. Ugolini in 1929, the sanctuary of Asclepius was the centre of the Hellenistic city, keeping its privileged position also after the Roman conquest, when it was enlarged and underwent a general process of monumentalization. The structures visible today are the reconstruction of the Roman period, however they preserve the same layout and internal divisions of the first buildings, as well as the small dimensions and the floor made of limestone slabs. The shrine is formed by two communicating rooms, an antechamber and another rear room slightly raised above the floor. It was in this room that the votive stipe, fundamental for dating the whole complex, was found.[10] It seems that before the Roman intervention the shrine had also two columns in front of the entrance. The temple, instead, which is located on the upper terrace, was probably a prostyle tetrastyle temple. Even

[8] There are also other examples of Archaic temples in the nearby Illyria, such as in Bonjakët (Davis *et al.* 2010) and the peripteral temple of Shtyllas (Quantin 1999), both in the territory of Apollonia. There are also the temples in Spitalla e Capo Palla (Pojani 2010) in the territory of Epidamnus. The first wave of Corinthian colonisers had moved away from the mother city before it completed the process of elaborating its own specific architectural language, and before many of the cults found in Corinth (as they are known for the Classical and Hellenistic ages) assumed definite architectural forms such as to be brought into the colonies and immediately recognisable as Corinthians. This also explains why it is difficult to find parallels in the urban arrangement between the colonies and Corinth (Hadzis 1997; Williams 1997, 40-41; Antonetti 2011, 54; Quantin 2011).

[9] In Mancini 2015, 380-381, it is underlined how temples in Thesprotia are usually built in the *oikos* form, while in Molossia prostyle and tetrastyle temples are far more common.

[10] The construction of the sanctuary of Asclepius is dated at the end of the 4th century BC (Melfi 2007), however recently others (De Maria, Mancini 2018, 210-214, and Aleotti *et al.* 2020) have expressed new considerations on the subject. Their new analysis of the pottery and ritual objects found in the favissa has highlighted that these findings can be dated mostly to the 2nd century BCE, thus re-opening the discussion on the arrival of the cult of Asclepius in Butrint and the beginning of his worship in the city.

though little can be said about its elevation since it is badly preserved, four assizes of the back wall of the cell are still visible, reaching the height of 1.52 m. Moreover, on the floor of the cell is possible to recognize two different phases of floor preparation: the Hellenist mosaic, with a tessellated emblem depicting a coiled snake, the discovery of which confirmed the dedication of the building to Asclepius, and the Roman one, depicting white and black geometric motifs (Melfi 2007; Mancini 2015, 304-326).

This brief digression on the Butrint religious landscape of the Hellenistic Age leaves room for new considerations. The physical proximity and the influence of Corcyra on Butrint could easily support the idea that its ruling class could have built here a peristyle temple similar to the ones found on the island or in other Corinthian-Corcyrean colonies in order to stress their control over the peninsula. Given these premises, the solution to the questions regarding the appearance of the Butrint Archaic temple probably lies on considerations about the degree of Corcyra's influence and the status of Butrint in relation to it. In other words, the presence of a peristyle temple in Butrint could be legitimate, given that the city was considered part of Corcyra's *peraia*, which was a direct prosecution and extension of the island on the mainland. However, this cannot be taken for granted for several reasons, starting with the fact that the independence of the local Epirote tribes and the ways they interacted and influenced the Corcyreans with their own culture, society and politics is still to be determined for this time period. Moreover, the complete absence of findings related to the building is equally relevant and poses a series of questions regarding its actual monumentalization or whether it could have been more similar to the structures assembled with clay and straw common throughout Epirus.[11] The lintel of the Lion Gate is only by convention and tradition considered part of an ancient temple, however it is not possible to demonstrate anything other than its rearrangement on the gate where it is located today. Ugolini had already expressed his doubts about its origins, stating that the iconography of the lion biting the bull has a certain rigidity in the forms and a conventional approach in the execution that could be linked to a craftsmanship of Archaic inspiration, rather than a production dated directly to the 6th century BCE (Ugolini 1942, 63). The architrave has been seen by Hernandez as a symbol of the relationship between Corcyra and Athens, however the image of the lion biting a prey (especially a bull) is actually very common and widespread throughout the Archaic age, therefore not necessarily implying a direct inspiration from the Athenian Acropolis. Examples of this iconographic motif within the Archaic age production can be found on Proto-Corinthian, Corinthian, Boeotian and Attic black-figure pottery starting from the 7th century BCE (Hofsten 2007, 13-18). Consequently, the inspiration for the Lion Gate subject may as well have come from many different cities of the Greek world that came in contact with Butrint thanks to the trade routes crossing the channel.

A final issue is represented by the position of the temple of Athena Polias. Scholars who have dealt with the subject, starting from L. M. Ugolini, believe in the existence of a temple on the acropolis of Butrint during the Archaic age, since the pottery findings claim as undeniable that the area was visited for religious purposes. However, they have not always agreed on its location. On the one hand, there is the opinion of those, such as D. Hernandez, who locate it on the top of the hill, below the Late Antique Basilica, because they believe the rocky outcrop

[11] The Acropolis, the Museum, and the area of the Sanctuary of Asclepius have been searched for possible remains and re-employments of columns, capitals, blocks or decorations belonging to the Archaic temple both during the 2018 and 2021 campaigns of the Butrint Project, however the research has been unsuccessful so far.

has been worked to house the foundations of the temple (see also Martin 2004, 81). Speaking of which, it must be considered that the acropolis has been one of the most frequented parts of the city. It was subject to several phases of reconstruction in ancient times, and it was also deeply involved in archaeological excavations, so it is an area of the city that has widely changed over time. The Basilica was restored several times, and between the 14th and 15th century CE a Venetian fort was built om top of it, which makes it even more difficult to state which actions visible on the bedrock could belong to the Archaic period and which not. On the other hand, however, many scholars believe that the temple is located on the central terrace of the acropolis, near the area excavated first by the Albanian Mission in 1980s and then by the Greek-Albanian Mission in 1990s (Greenslade *et al*. 2013, 50; Hodges 2013, 10). This last theory is supported by more concrete evidence such as the remains of the Archaic walls, which may also have delimited the *temenos* of the cult place, and the findings, including the altar and the Corinthian roof tiles. The results obtained from the excavations of the Late Antique Basilica by the Butrint Foundation are quite relevant on this matter. The 2008 investigations had suggested the presence of a previous building, described as temple dedicated to Zeus *Soter*, on which the basilica would have been built (report of the Butrint Foundation 2009, 10). However, the results of the 2009 excavation campaign declared that, apart from some fragments of archaic pottery, no remains of buildings prior to the Basilica were found, although their existence is believed to be possible (report of the Butrint Foundation 2010, 11). Consequently, it seems more plausible that the temple was located on the lower terrace, given the greater number of findings supporting this hypothesis.

The archaeological remains on the Acropolis: a review

In 2018 the team of the Archaeological Mission of the University of Bologna and the Archaeological Institute of Tirana in Butrint (Butrint Project) decided to focus part of their efforts on the study of the acropolis of Butrint and unveil the traces located by D. Hernandez in order to better understand the stratigraphy of the upper plateau of the hill (Fig. 7).[12] The first set of these rock cuttings is located in the left aisle of the Acropolis Basilica, close to the apse, where Hernandez recognises cuttings that would allow to reconstruct the size of the blocks forming the walls of the Archaic building, oriented NW-SE, and which would represent the east side of the temple (Fig. 8). A second similar and parallel set of cuttings is located southwest, in the central nave, close to the narthex, which would be the west side of the temple (Fig. 9). Finally, a third set of rock cuttings, parallel to the previous two, is located outside the area of the basilica, not far from it, on the top of a large boulder, which could have been part of the *temenos* of the temple, or the foundation for its crepidoma (Fig. 10). There are two other evidences identified by Hernandez, although less relevant for the purpose of reconstruction: a small room on the north side of the basilica, connected to the left aisle, with a rocky surface which he interprets as part of the temple or *temenos* (Fig. 11); and a cavity carved into the bedrock, perhaps used for drainage, on the side of the right aisle. The

[12] The Butrint Project (https://site.unibo.it/butrint/en) is an Albanian-Italian research project by the Department of History and Cultures of the University of Bologna and the Albanian Institute of Archaeology in agreement with the Albanian Ministry of Culture and Butrint National Park and with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the University of Bologna. The project was established in 2015 with the aim of conducting degradation mapping and topographic survey with laser scanning technology of the sanctuary of Asclepius and the wall circuit. Starting in 2018, these activities have been joined by the stratigraphic excavation of some sections of the Hellenistic wall circuit and later in 2019 of the Acropolis area. Giorgi, Muka 2015; Muka, Giorgi 2017, 2018; Benfatti *et al.* 2020; Giorgi, Lepore 2020; Giorgi 2022; Giorgi, Muka 2023.

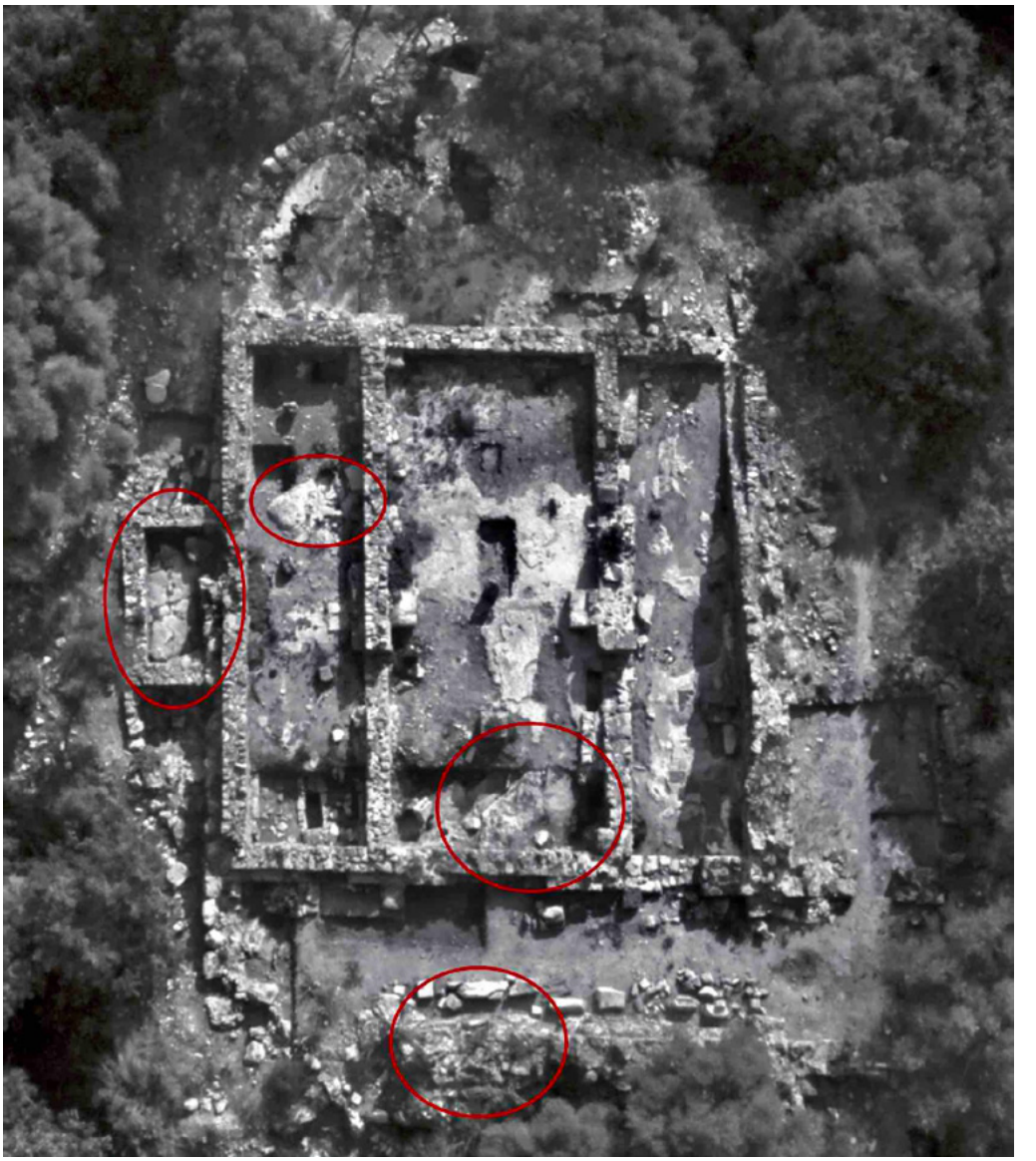

Figure 7. Acropolis Basilica plan with the area interested by the 2018 topographic survey of the Butrint Project (Greenslade et al. 2013, modified by the Author)

area investigated was restricted to the first three set of evidence identified by Hernandez, which means that only the bedrock already involved in the excavation campaign conducted here in 2009 was exposed, without involving neither other areas of the Basilica nor the whole extension of the bedrock on the summit of the acropolis.

The data were collected mostly manually on site, and compared, at a later time, with the data acquired using the Laser Scanning technique. Since the very beginning in 2015, the Butrint Project focused its efforts on the topographic survey and documentation of the remains of the city with a Leica P30

Figure 8. Cuttings on the left side of the Acropolis Basilica (photo by the Author)

Figure 9. The area interpreted as west side of the temple by D. Hernandez (photo by the Author)

Figure 10. The so-called temenos/krepidoma (photo by the Author)

Laser Scanner, an environmental time-of-flight scanner particularly recommended in the architectural documentation of cultural heritage.

After cleaning the area, it became evident that part of the bedrock had been subject to human action, as it can easily be seen both on the flattened surface of the cuttings within the Basilica area, in the side room, and on the three parallel cuts on the boulder just outside the Basilica, which are too sharp to be the product of natural erosion. Nevertheless, at the present state of knowledge, there are no means of assigning a precise chronology to them. It is not possible to define their eventual purpose or to date them to a specific human

Figure 11. The room on the north side of the Acropolis Basilica (photo by the Author)

intervention, that is the levelling of the hill for the construction of the Archaic temple, the construction of the Late Antique Basilica or the construction of the Venetian fort. Consequently, this uncertainty can be extended to the rock cuttings identified by Hernandez. Even deciding to set aside the different orientation of the cuts of the so-called east and west sides and the ones of the lateral room and on the boulder — which would pose some complication in the reconstruction of the sacred area already by themselves — there is still the obstacle of their different heights. The presence of a significant difference in height between the parts involved had emerged already on site during the cleaning operations preceding the topographical survey, and it was confirmed during the re-elaboration of the data obtained from the Laser Scanner point clouds. The difference is particularly evident between the highest of the cuts on *temenos*/*krepidoma* boulder and the set of cuttings of the so-called east wall (difference of 0.50 m), as well as between the latter and the cuttings of the so-called west wall (difference of 0.70 m). A similar situation is also present between the room on the side of the Basilica and the so-called east side, in fact the surface of the latter is 1.02 m higher than the floor of the room. It is not clear how this difference in altitude could be fitting into the construction of a temple, since it would have implied the presence of a base of some kind, whose remains are not visible as well. These considerations highlight how it is not possible to directly relate the actions seen on the bedrock to the construction of the Archaic temple, while they can be equally linked to the phases of the Late Antique Basilica or the Venetian fort.

Also in 2018, the Butrint Project team decided to survey and measure the remains of the Kardaki temple as well. According to Hernandez's reconstruction, the Butrint temple would have been built in its likeness, however this statement is only based on the resemblance of the architraves of the two temples. Comparing the dimension of the blocks forming the *krepidoma* in Kardaki and the trace of the block that Hernandez believes to have located on the Late Antique Basilica bedrock in Butrint would still not be enough for a solid reconstruction, since the dimension (both length and width) of the former change along the entire perimeter. As already mentioned, the Kardaki temple falls under the architectural type of the Ionian Sea Style: Corcyra's temples, in particular the *Artemision*, are considered one of its finest examples, so it comes as no surprise that Kardaki too could be described as such. After all, the simple succession on its famous architrave of the *astragalus*, a wider and convex band and, finally, another narrow and slightly protruding band, approximately the same height as the *astragalus* at the top, is considered a perfect expression of the attention reserved to the horizontal decoration of the trabeation in this style, which, however, does not have illustrated scenes on the architrave (Dinsmoor 1973, 169) (fig. 6). At the present state, the presence in Butrint of the Ionian Sea Style cannot be confirmed. The Lion Gate lintel could belong to it, even though as an exception because of the presence of the eponymous scene. It seems so far that the Ionian Sea Style was identified only in the Peloponnese, on Corcyra, and in the Achaian colonies of Magna Graecia, while there is no evidence of it in Epirus and, more generally speaking, along the Ionian coasts (Barletta 1990, 45).

Given the importance of the Acropolis for understanding the first moments of life of the city, between 2019 and 2022 the Butrint Project has worked on a new series of excavations on its southern plateau near the Archaic walls, between the Venetian Castle and the Late Antique Basilica.[13] The 2019 campaign brought to light much of the Roman-Imperial and Medieval

[13] These excavations focused on an area that had already been partially investigated by the archaeological mission led by A. Nanaj first and then together with C. Hadzis in the 1980s and 1990s, followed by the Butrint Foundation in 2006 and 2009. Cfr. Greenslade, Leppard, Logue 2013 for history and results of previous excavations on the Acropolis.

contexts with large quantities of Archaic pottery in secondary deposition, which nonetheless confirmed once again the frequentation of the area during the Archaic age. The 2021 campaign focused attentively on the area right next to the westernmost section of the Archaic wall, where intact and sealed Archaic stratigraphies and fine pottery were found within the filling of the Archaic wall. This direct connection between the stratigraphies of the Archaic wall and Archaic materials in a closed context confirmed that this section of the Archaic wall can be assigned to a timeframe starting from the beginning of the 6th century BCE. In addition, shapes and types of pottery found inside the *emplekton* gave a confirmation of the presence of a sacred area on the Acropolis of Butrint during the Archaic age, although its appearance is still to be determined.

Discussion: questions for an open problem

Data collected so far help us define what Butrint could have looked like before the Hellenistic growth. After the appearance between the end of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age of what K. Arafat and C. Morgan describe as a small seasonal shelter, during the Archaic age Butrint entered the Corcyrean *peraia*. The absence of other references in historiographical sources beyond the mention of Hecateus of Miletus underlines that although the city was possibly born as an indigenous settlement, during the Archaic age Corcyra's control was extended over the mainland, including Butrint as well. The city could leverage on its favourable geographical position, which was an excellent access point for trade with the hinterland and the exploitation of its resources. The commercial importance of Butrint is reflected by the archaeological research; in fact numerous fragments of Archaic pottery of various shapes and origins were found during the excavations on the acropolis: amphorae, cups, fragments of *lekythoi*, *hydriai* and craters, in addition to both local and Corinthian pottery used for cooking (Nanaj 1986; 1988; 1995; Aleotti 2015; Hernandez 2017a, 220-230). Archaeological finds also provide evidence for the presence of a sacred area on the Acropolis, which could justify Butrint as an 'emporic' sanctuary in this phase, fuelled by the commercial appeal of Corcyra, as well as the rest of the Epirote coast. At the present state of studies, however, there is not much information, neither from an architectural nor from a socio-cultural and political point of view, that could help to easily trace the appearance of the Archaic temple on the acropolis. Determining whether it was a peristyle or a smaller temple is just one of the questions arising during the analysis of this open problem and of all the (meagre) sources regarding Archaic Butrint. It is likely that the temple was located on the central terrace of the acropolis, as it is suggested by findings. Although much is still left to say about the appearance of the acropolis itself, the 2021 campaign of the Italian and Albanian Butrint Project on the Acropolis has brought to light further evidence related to the occupation of the hill during the Archaic age. The hope is that future studies and excavation campaigns will provide more data in order to answer the questions regarding the dedicatory deity, the development and dynamics of the cult place and the settlement, the influence of both Corcyra and Epirote *ethne* on Butrint, as well as the causes that led to the disappearance of any reference to this sacred area, which would probably also help explaining the gaps in evidence dating between the half of the 5th century BCE and the beginning of the Hellenistic age. After almost one century from its discovery, numerous excavation campaigns and research projects, Butrint displays once again its potential for the study of the history of both the ancient city and, on a wider view, Epirus itself.

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